

RUTH BARTON AND SIMON TREZISE (EDS.), *MUSIC AND SOUND IN SILENT FILM: FROM THE NICKELODEON TO THE ARTIST* (New York: Routledge, 2019). ISBN: 9781138245358, 214 pp, £34.99 (Softback), £120 (Hardback), £31.49 (E-book).

This new collection of essays devoted to music and sound in silent film—published as part of Routledge’s Music and Screen Media Series—is an indication of the healthy state of research in this area. *Music and Sound in Silent Film: From the Nickelodeon to The Artist* contributes to scholarship on topics that have attracted particular attention in film music studies thus far, notably silent film music within the American context and enduring questions around the synchronization of image and sound, while also covering emerging areas of interest. The series, to which the present publication belongs, has been ongoing for a little over a decade, comprising collections of specialized case studies connected by genre that are aimed at both scholars and students of audio-visual media. Previous topics have included music and sound in documentary film; music in comedy television; music in video games; and music in science fiction television. As is usual for a publication in this series, the style and layout are accessible, with each chapter comprising a discrete case study categorized under connecting parts.

‘An Historical Introduction’ by co-editor Simon Trezise sets the stage, describing the turn from ‘common sense’ and folk memory accounts to archival approaches in the study of music in silent film. Indeed, the importance of archival research is a recurring thread throughout the book, strongly in evidence in several chapters. The introduction presents a brief history of silent film sound, highlighting key points of focus in existing scholarship, such as the importance of film’s exhibition spaces and the range of accompaniment practices. While providing a strong foundation for the collection, the introduction might have also usefully included a brief outline of the chapters to follow—a feature of some other publications in this series—although perhaps this is somewhat mitigated by the employment of the part headings that follow. *Music and Sound in Silent Film* is divided into four parts: The Evolution of Sound and Performance Practices; The American Experience; The Evolution of Sound and Performance Practices: The Global Experience; Synchronization and Scoring: Historical Practices; and Synchronization and Scoring: Contemporary Reworkings.

Part I comprises three chapters, ordered broadly chronologically and connected by their shared foundation in archival research. Allison Wenthe and James Buhler’s chapter, “‘Better Music at Smaller Cost’: Selling Mechanical Instruments to American Motion Picture Houses in the 1910s’, focuses on advertisements for mechanical musical instruments in trade papers to illuminate how the manufacturers of such instruments appealed to motion picture houses’ desires to reduce costs and attract

larger audiences. Wentz and Buhler provide a fascinating glimpse into materials rarely seen and the chapter includes some eye-catching figures of the advertisements discussed. More significantly, they present a compelling argument for the mechanical instruments as preparing the ground for the eventual mechanization of sound film exhibition.

The importance of the cue sheet is well established but in chapter two, 'Cue Sheets, Musical Suggestions, and Performance Practices for Hollywood Films, 1908–1927', Kendra Preston Leonard enriches our understanding of how cue sheets were actually *used* by accompanists at some of the largest picture palaces of the 1920s, nuancing existing ideas of their being adhered to in a fixed manner. Referring to contemporary discussions of musical cues and modifications to cue sheets in the trade press, the author analyses the archives of three female professional accompanists in North-American collections to illustrate how individualized and creative musical choices could be, depending on the accompanist's own prior experiences. Furthermore, the chapter's focus on three women provides interesting insights into female accompanists' positions as arbiters of taste and morality before 1920.

The final chapter in part I, Malcolm Cook's 'Sing Them Again: Audience Singing in Silent Film' explores an aspect of silent film that might seem alien to contemporary audiences, namely cinema singing. The chapter demonstrates the importance of cinema singing in early moving picture performances, looking at a range of practices including illustrated songs in the nickelodeon, animated songs, and community singing. Cook challenges the notion that illustrated songs died out with the arrival of narrative-driven cinema, showing that audience singing can in fact be traced into the sound era and even to television in the 1950s.

The two chapters in part II turn our attention to developments in Irish and British silent film. In chapter four, Denis Condon focuses on music in Irish picture houses in the 1910s, exploring the role of women and foreign-born musicians working in Dublin picture houses, noting the prominence of female orchestras and concert soloists who would often play separately advertised solos. Condon's research chimes with themes noted in Preston Leonard's earlier chapter concerning the respectability of women musicians working at the cinema. The impact of political events on music in the cinema and the picture house's role as a place where the public could hear a range of quality music in an accessible form is likely to be of broad historical interest. Condon's chapter is well paired with the following chapter by Laraine Porter, since the reader can draw a comparison with the situation in contemporary London.

In chapter five, Porter discusses the opportunities for working women musicians in British silent cinema from 1909 to the arrival of sound, arguing that women were integral in the exhibition industry, the development of cinema music and its

vocabulary, and that their employment feminized the cinema space. The status of the cinema enabled women to break into roles in a way that would not have been possible in the concert hall and, in turn, the cinema space exposed audiences to a range of music. As in Condon's chapter, the impact of political events looms large, with World War One opening up space for female agency, an agency that was 'curtailed somewhat' with the increasing employment of male musical directors after the war.

Parts III and IV centre on questions of synchronization and scoring, with part three devoted to historical practices while also identifying techniques that were developed further during the sound era. In chapter six, Gillian B. Anderson draws on her own experiences as a conductor, inflecting the historical research with practical perspectives. Two 'mute' films, *Ben Hur* (1925) and *Wings* (1927) comprise her main case studies; both films employed combinations of composed and compiled scores and are shown to have functioned differently from the scores of the previous decade. Drawing comparisons with the score for *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) and the arrangement of Bizet's music for *Carmen* (1915), Anderson demonstrates that the later scores were closely synchronized to their respective films and had similar functions to those that would be developed in the talkies and that continue to be recognizable in contemporary films.

Also exploring connections with later sound film, Fiona Ford analyses the music of Edmund Meisel (perhaps most famous for his score for *Battleship Potemkin*) in chapter seven. Ford focuses on the composer's score for *Der heilige Berg*, framing it as a testing ground for Meisel to try out his ideal scoring techniques including leitmotifs and Mickey-Mousing, familiar to us as the language of golden-age Hollywood. Indeed, through judicious employment of musical examples, Ford presents a convincing argument that this score was intended for intricate synchronization in live performance in a way that prefigures Classic Hollywood techniques.

Part IV centres on enduring questions of synchronization and scoring in an exploration of contemporary engagements with silent film; two of the chapters foreground the practitioner. In chapter eight Trezise interviews composer Carl Davis, well known for his television scores, who shares his rich experience of creating music for silent films. Davis discusses the differences between his approach to working on a silent film and on a contemporary sound film, reflecting that with silent film, the composer writes 'more fully [than when composing for a contemporary film], because you're providing the atmosphere for the setting, for the emotions; you have to bridge dialogue you can't hear or that you have to read' (p. 154). Further insight into such compositional considerations is provided in chapter nine by Ed Hughes who has composed scores for multiple Japanese silent films directed by Yasujiro Ozu. This chapter follows nicely from the preceding interview with Davis because Hughes

demonstrates a similar understanding of his role, helping audiences relate to the themes of silent films. Indeed, Hughes reveals even more detail about his personal approach to developing a musical language sympathetic to the director's distinctive filmic language; for example, developing musical episodes to match spaces rather than using a leitmotif approach.

The focus shifts to the audience again in chapter ten, where Emilio Audissino engages in an activity encountered by many who teach silent film music, that of comparing different DVD editions of classic films. Audissino compares three editions of F.W. Murnau's 1922 classic film *Nosferatu*: one edited to adhere as closely as possible to the original with a reconstructed musical score and following conventions of earlier photoplay music; the second combining a high quality copy of the film with a new score similar to both contemporary film music and influenced by the composer's experience scoring Hammer horror films; and the third is a version that pays little heed to the original aesthetic or narrative design. Audissino's experiment emphasizes that the silent film repertoire is not as stable as the sound film repertoire and that music in particular is likely to differ from one release to another—a salutary call for careful consideration when selecting a film for close study.

Chapter eleven by Nicholas Brown discusses the popular phenomenon of new electroacoustic scores for silent films, which, as noted in the chapter, can be a contemporary audience's first encounter with silent film. Brown's case studies include the score for Sjöström's *The Phantom Carriage* (1921), a musical collaboration between Peter Rehberg and Stephen O'Malley, and selected scores from the BFI publication *Fairy Tales*, where artist-musicians from the experimental music company Touch worked on early colour stencil films by Pathé. Brown suggests that the choice and nature of such electroacoustic scores render new insights into their respective films while also drawing attention to the very technical-mechanical heart of silent film.

The final chapter by James Wierzbicki, 'The "Silent" Film in Modern Times', prompts the reader to take a step back since the author poses the general question of why there has been a resurgence of interest in the silent film during a period when silence is not a technological limitation. Moving from discussion of classic films by Al Jolson and Charlie Chaplin to more recent films *about* silent film—Mel Brooks's *Silent Movie* (1976) and Michel Hazanavicius's *The Artist* (2011)—Wierzbicki closes with reflections prompted by a list of numerous 'serious' contemporary silent films. The chapter considers whether such films that dispense with spoken language mark a return to treasured aspects of the silent film experience, such as the enjoyable loss of reality and sense of entering a dream world, leaving the reader with much food for thought.

There are many positive aspects to this insightful and enjoyable collection, and it will likely be added to reading lists for many university courses on music for film. The contributors bring silent film music to life for the reader and it is the balance between musicological and film studies scholarship alongside contributions from practitioners that make it particularly valuable. Furthermore, the inclusion of research into contemporary reworkings of music and sound for silent film is very welcome, as is the way in which several chapters in the book illuminate social and political questions around women and their agency in a period in which they have been traditionally overlooked.

There is little to fault here, but one or two minor issues centre on the volume's scope. For instance, the 'global experience' label of part II is unfortunately somewhat misleading, since this part comprises just two chapters (focusing on the evolution of sound and performance practices in Ireland and Britain). This might be simply a case of mislabelling but the part could have included some additional case studies of other geographical areas alongside the rich research by Condon and Porter.¹ Also, the book's case studies largely comprise narrative fiction films, with other categories less in evidence. Yet, perhaps these issues can be partly explained by the collection's depth in its focus on silent film. These minor shortcomings aside, I would encourage readers to engage with this important collection and I am quite certain that the quality of the research presented here will inspire future students and scholars of silent film music and sound to continue the exploration of this field.

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¹ Readers interested to explore global practices further might also read: Kathryn Kalinak, 'Performance Practices and Music in Early Cinema Outside Hollywood' in David Neumeyer (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Film Music Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 611–19; Martin Miller Marks, *Music and the Silent Film: Contexts and Case Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Claus Tieber and Anna K. Windisch (eds), *The Sound of Silent Films: New Perspectives on History, Theory and Practice* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).