

Hans Keller: Essays on Film Music

• Introduction by Christopher Wintle, King's College London

That the great era of British film-making in the 1940s and early '50s was a great era for British film music too is by now well enough known: in *The Best Years of British Film Music, 1936–1958*,¹ Jan G. Swynnoe shows how the great English composers of the day 'went into the cinema' almost to the man, how they were supplemented by a band of dedicated film composers (such as William Alwyn) and how they were joined by a handful of distinguished foreigners (of whom Georges Auric has yet to receive his due). Hardly known at all, however, is the pioneering effort made in the field of film music criticism by a single and no less outstanding figure, Hans Keller (1919–85). Although he wrote copiously about film music throughout the second half of the 1940s and most of the 1950s, Keller's writings were scattered, and until now there has been little sense of how they formed an oeuvre. To redress this, in 2005 Plumbago Books is publishing a selection of these under the title *Film Music and Beyond*. The publication is supported by the Cambridge University Library, where the Hans Keller Archive is housed, using funds from the William Alwyn Trust. In advance of this event, some of Keller's best film music pieces are reprinted below.

But who, though, was Hans Keller, and why is he so significant? In the last two or three years, a number of studies of the 'Hitler émigrés' have drawn attention to the contribution of the refugees from Nazi-occupied Europe to British musical life. They have consistently given pride of place to Keller. Keller fled Vienna for London in the wake of the *Kristallnacht* of 9/10 November 1938 and stayed there for the rest of his life. He became an outspoken, provocative and combative thorn in the Establishment flesh, a household name through his countless broadcasts (he was on the BBC staff from

1959–79), a highly respected music critic (or self-styled 'anti-critic'), a chamber-music coach, and an entertaining football columnist. Indeed, Rodney Milnes, doyen of the opera establishment, recently described him in *The Times* as 'late, great, cantankerous, but absolutely essential'.

Keller's intellectual character and stance owed to an unusual mix of interests developed in the 1940s: he was a violin player, a highly gifted follower of the music and theory of Arnold Schoenberg, and a deeply cultured writer on artistic, social and political issues whose crystalline style was grounded in aphorism. Above all, he was a passionate and learned *aficionado* of psychoanalysis. He understood Freud as well as anyone in his day; he knew personally many of the leading British figures of the 1940s – Ernest Jones, J. C. Flugel and Edward Glover – and worked for 4 or 5 years with a sociologist, Margaret Phillips, on the psychodynamics of small social groups. Like his brilliant contemporary, Theodor Adorno, he was attracted by the media – radio, film and television; and also like Adorno he was unsparing in his condemnation of the deleterious side of mass culture, above all of Hollywood. All this emerges clearly from a collection of his early writings, *Music and Psychology*.² But it is the style of the writings that commands attention: Keller consistently maintained a balance between the platonic – the indication of a general principle or Idea – and the particular – a review of a work, a performance, or whatever. By assembling the Ideas addressed over a particular cadre of writings, especially as expressed in the opening paragraphs of an essay, it is possible to assemble a coherent stance with regard to an entire field. It is just this that gives his film music criticism its distinctive quality.

Even his earliest pieces preserve this balance. In *Contemporary Cinema*, for example, he at once sets out his stall:

The most burning problem for the observer of film music is whether good film music ought also to be good music, or whether, on the contrary, self-sufficing music is liable to be bad film music . . . The present writer suggests that film music should be good music, consciously and intelligently appreciated.³

Other articles explicitly or implicitly develop this theme. 'Film Musical Atmosphere', for example, begins:

Film music can help to foreshadow and establish the atmosphere not only of particular (groups of) sequences, but also of the film as a whole. Thereby, both background music and featured music can indeed play an essential role in that unification of emotional, spiritual and formal structure that is the *sine qua non* of an artistic film. Now the chief danger confronting attempts at such unification is that monotony may easily creep in where unity was intended. At the present, extremely youthful stage of film music's development, many film scores yield to this danger because they tend to tautologise, to over-establish the atmosphere – just as the child, as seen by adult eyes, is over-repetitive.⁴

Two paragraphs on *Open City* move fluently between the general and the particular:

The incidental music to the Italian film *Open City* [*Roma – città aperta*, 1945] is by Renzo Rossellini, a name new to me (probably related to the director of the film, Roberto Rossellini?), but one indeed to be remembered, for he has grown that rare plant, a good film score. The title-music contains a dramatic-tragic Leitmotiv [a recurrent, characteristic musical figure], or rather a Leit-pattern with a Leitmotiv (literally) on top of it, which, however, is only once used later on *in its original form*, i.e. at the arrest of Father Don Pietro by the Gestapo. Here as elsewhere the composer's capacity for achieving climactic effects by economic means is apparent; and in respect of economy as well as with regard to his very idiom, quite especially in lyrical passages, Signor Rossellini strongly reminds us of that

distinguished French film composer, Georges Auric (*Dead of Night*, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, *La symphonie pastorale*, *Hue and Cry*), with whom he has furthermore a common tendency towards simplicity and lucidity. It is owing to this tendency that background music proceeding behind talk is distinguishable, or at least inferable without special effort on the part of the listener.

The unconventional method of consistently employing silence or non-musical sound at tragic climaxes, and of letting the music (whether incidental or what is called 'realistic') follow immediately afterwards, is used with artistic skill. Indeed the whole formal structure of the sound track, with its rigid economy of the total amount of music and its strong but unified contrasts is logical and emotionally impressive. It is true that the music is not outstanding by purely intra-musical standards, but it is certainly better than, according to some foolish theorists, good *film* music (*italics theirs*) ought to be.⁵

Confronted with bad film music, on the other hand, he could emit a *cri-de-coeur* every bit as pertinent to our times as his:

It was sad, for instance, to hear an outstanding British contribution, *Antarctic Whale Hunt* (*This Modern Age*, No. 12, music anonymous), being spoilt by 19 minutes of incessant euphony. Why? Is there a single person among the millions of filmgoers who would protest if background music were introduced more sparingly? Do we not all agree that if the music is bad it should not be there, and that if it is good it should not be pushed into a vague background position by the commentary? Why cannot the music stop when the commentary starts? What precisely is the point of music behind factual comments? Of what, indeed, is such music a *document*?⁶

In other contexts, Keller developed these themes. Towards the end of a pamphlet for the BFI on *The Need for Competent Film Music Criticism*, he proposed, possibly with an eye to future employment, that *The Times*, or some other publication, should appoint a designated Film Music Critic (unsurprisingly, the proposal came to nothing). He wrote:

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The first beneficial effect . . . of the film music critic's work will be to stimulate audiences' interests in sometimes becoming 'spontaneously and voluntarily conscious' of significant parts of musical perceptions that would otherwise wholly float about in the twilight of the preconscious.⁷

A group of four articles for *Sight and Sound* included two pieces on, respectively, opera and 'featured' classical music (Benjamin Britten's *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*);⁸ and a study of 'Theme Song and Leading Motif' for *Film Monthly Review* established technical issues among his topics.⁹ But apart from a handful of



- Hans Keller, 1948 (Milein Cosman).

striking contributions to *Music Survey* (1949–52), a vital little journal he edited with Donald Mitchell,¹⁰ some isolated contributions to other journals (such as William Glock's *The Score*)¹¹ and some later pieces for the *Musical Times* (1955–56),¹² the bulk of his film music criticism came in a sporadic column of his own, 'Film Music and Beyond'. This appeared in *Music Review* between 1948 and 1959.¹³ As before, the writing is a remarkable blend of dutiful attention to the film scores of the day, whether good, bad or indifferent, and a host of topics in a necessarily improvised theory of the relation of sound to sight. Indeed, its 28 articles provide an unparalleled source for the intelligent reception of film scores of the day, both British or foreign. A list of all these writings appears in 'Hans Keller: a Memorial Symposium' from *Music Analysis*.¹⁴

The following selection divides into those pieces where the emphasis is (1) more on the topics, and (2) more on the composers. In 'From Auden to Hollywood' Keller defends the integrity of music in film; at the same time he picks a fight with a figure much in the news through his collaboration with Stravinsky on *The Rake's Progress* (the opera had received its premiere only months before). In 'The Psychology of Film Music' he turns his Freudian sensibility to a medium that includes 'the most conspicuously psychological music of all time' and demonstrates the 'elemental' psychological subtleties of scores by Arthur Benjamin and Georges Auric. By showing in 'Noise as Leitmotiv' how recurrent sound effects may be incorporated into the overall design of a film in a quasi-musical way, he anticipated Gilles Deleuze's idea of a sonic 'continuum':¹⁵ elsewhere he wrote similarly of 'musicalized' speech rhythms. Still along the same lines, in the next two items he considered from both artistic and psychological points of view whether there can be any justification in film for 'Quotations' from classical music. The second of these is a reply to the Italian composer Pizzetti who had responded to a paper of Keller's given to the international film music congress held in Florence in May 1950.

The first of the 'composer' pieces shows Keller in typically combative mode, distributing

brickbats and bouquets to the by no means ungifted William Alwyn. Typical too is the fact that the 'bad' section is almost as praiseworthy as the 'good' one. The assessment of Bernstein's excellent score for *On the Waterfront* is also a reassessment of the equation of Hollywood with *Kitsch*, and represents Keller at his best: his powers of attention, memory, and aural perception (he had perfect pitch) were always phenomenal, and were more than matched by the crystalline clarity of his judgement. The final essay is his wittiest: arguing that 'the art of love can tell us something about the love of art', he draws on psychoanalysis to explain why 'The Harry Lime Theme' from *The Third Man*, which is apparently so meagre, is in fact unforgettable.

Notes

- 1 Jan G. Swynnoe, *The Best Years of British Film Music, 1936–1958* (Woodbridge, Boydell, 2002).
- 2 Hans Keller, *Music and Psychology: From Vienna to London, 1939–52*, ed. Christopher Wintle (London, Plumbago, 2003).
- 3 'Film Music: Its Filmic and Musical Value', *Contemporary Cinema*, Vol. 1, No. 11 (December 1947), 355–56.
- 4 'Film-musical Atmosphere', *Contemporary Cinema*, Vol. 1, No. 9 (October 1947), 277–79.
- 5 'Open City', *Contemporary Cinema*, Vol. 1, No. 7 (August 1947), 181.
- 6 'The Edinburgh Festival', *Contemporary Cinema*, Vol. 1, No. 10 (November 1947), 307–11.
- 7 *The Need for Competent Film Music Criticism: a Pamphlet for Those Who Care for Films as Art, with a Final Section for Those Who Don't* (London, BFI, 1947).
- 8 *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 15, No. 60 (Winter 1946/47); Vol. 16, Nos. 61, 62 and 64 (Spring and Summer 1947 and Winter 1947/48).
- 9 'Theme Song and Leading Motif', *Film Monthly Review*, January 1948.
- 10 *Music Survey. New Series 1949–52*, ed. Hans Keller and Donald Mitchell (London, Faber, 1981).
- 11 'On the Waterfront', *The Score*, June 1955, pp. 81–4. See also contributions to *British Film Review*, May 1948 and *Musical Opinion*, July 1954.
- 12 See *Musical Times*, May, July, August, September and October 1955, and January 1956.
- 13 *Music Review*, August and November 1948; February, May, August and November 1949; February, May, August and November 1950; May and November 1951; February, May (two entries), August and November 1952; February and November 1953; May and November 1954; May

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1955; February, May, August and November 1956; May 1958; and August/November 1959.

- 14 'Hans Keller (1919–1985): A Memorial Symposium', *Music Analysis*, Vol. 5, Nos. 2–3, 1986, 341–440. See especially 437–38.
- 15 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image* (1985) (London, Athlone Press, 1989), pp. 234–41.

I. Topics

• From Auden to Hollywood (Through Route)

[*Born to be Bad*]

In an imaginative but, strictly speaking, unmusical and illogical article, W. H. Auden says:–

Because music expresses the opposite experience of pure volition and subjectivity (the fact that we cannot shut our ears at will allows music to assert that we cannot choose), film music is not music but a technique for preventing us using our ears to hear extraneous noises and it is bad film music if we become consciously aware of its existence.¹

To Auden, music is about Choice: 'a succession of two notes is an act of choice.' *Non sequitur*, the reader may say, but the inference (from the latter to the former proposition) is Auden's. And where, anyway, did he get his curious premise? Possibly from or through Stravinsky, if one may judge from both *The Rake's Progress* [1951] and from what, very aptly as far as this music is concerned, he recently pronounced in Venice: 'I don't create. I just sniff about and discover musical truffles.' Shall we say, then, that for the *com-poser* music is about sniffing, while for the creator it is about must-ing?² (Stravinsky is capable of being either.) In and behind the face of love and creation, 'must' changes from an auxiliary into a full verb. As Eva sings to Sachs ([in Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*]Act III):–

Doch nun hat's mich gewählt
Zu nie gekannter Qual;
Und werd'ich heut vermählt,
So war's ohn' alle Wahl:

Das war ein Müssen, war ein Zwang!
Euch selbst, mein Meister, wurde bang.³

But then Wagner, poor old romantic, never knew the delights of serene sniffing.

Allowing for either a literal or any possible transferred meaning of Auden's paragraph on film music, one takes his proposition to imply either that music is composed in psychological view, conscious or unconscious, of the fact that the listener cannot shut his ears, or that he would perceive music as something different from what it is if he could. Either implication presupposes that from the musical point of view there is an essential difference between the imagined possibility of shutting one's ears and the real necessity of switching off the wireless or escaping into the bar or (if one is capable of it) thinking of something else. Since a reason for this presupposition is not readily imaginable, Auden might have bothered to give his.

The proposition that film music is a technique for preventing us from hearing noises – again emerging as a *non sequitur* with a wrong premise on top of it – shows Auden's desperate attempt to call film music something, anything, except music and names, but does not contain any truth worth knowing (though in did in the days of the silent film) or any untruth worth controverting.

The equally confident assertion, on the other hand, that 'it is bad film music if we become consciously aware of its existence' has to be fought to its death. Who is we? *Pluralis majestatis*, I hope, for I wish to be excluded. I pointed out four years ago that "'unobtrusive" was the magic word painted on every film specialist's wall, though to the musician its meaning must remain vague'. To me it has no meaning at all: I am incapable of hearing music without listening to it, except when it is far away and I am talking. I never heard any film music of whose existence I did not become consciously aware.

I remember once having lunch with Buxbaum, the late cellist of the Rosé Quartet and principal cellist of the Vienna Philharmonic, and with another, at the Regent's Park Hotel. The band

started to play and our unnamed companion continued to talk. Buxbaum, though very interested, waved him aside: "I can't take in what you say while they're playing." They were playing something unobtrusive. Notwithstanding his philosophy on open ears, Auden can shut his while he can't shut ours.

The problem he poses is of the first aesthetic and moral magnitude. I said in the last issue [of *The Music Review*] that the anti-artistic influence of Hollywood's music was the most tenacious enemy of musical culture in the history of our civilization. Much of the enemy's success is due to his hitting the majority of filmgoers – even musical ones, even composers – below the belt of consciousness where, according to Auden, film music ought to hit. I thought I had exploded this idea in my above-quoted effort, but see now that I have to repeat myself:–

The first beneficial effect of the film critic's work will be to stimulate audiences' interests in sometimes becoming spontaneously and voluntarily conscious of significant parts of musical perceptions that would otherwise wholly float about in the twilight of the preconscious. Let no one tell us that film music depends for its artistic effect on its not emerging into the conscious. Any so-called process or device that has to shun the light of consciousness is suspect in the extreme. Artistic processes have to satisfy the mind on all levels, the unconscious, the preconscious and the conscious ones, and in each of its aspects, i.e. its orectic [pertaining to desire] as well as its cognitive ways. Thrust, in parts, from the unselective preconscious into open consciousness, into an aural close-up, film music will be heard for what it isn't worth.

Born to be Bad is an RKO picture. RKO never mentions its composers on its programmes for the press; it must know why. In this instance, however, the music is by Frederick Hollander. Not that you would recognize him in *Born to be Bad*: he was born to be good, but nowadays composes Hollywood music instead. The title gives the sort of bad film music of which Auden would become consciously aware. The first intra-filmic entry gives the same sort of bad film music of which, however, Auden would not become

consciously aware, because this unnecessary saccharine waltz proceeds behind the dialogue and is in fact partly indistinguishable. As everyone will overhear who knows something about the structural functions of Hollywood music, the waltz is there because it leads up to a kiss. Thence it runs into something that has been lifted, complete with instrumentation, from Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. The educated listener will again immediately recognize this as an impending motto, first because by Hollywood standards memorability depends upon your having heard the tune before you hear it for the first time, and secondly because it occurs at the change from the first to the second sequence of the film, and Hollywood's mottos always stick sequences together.

The second entry gives a historical survey from Wagner to Hollywood and leads up to the second kiss. The third entry attaches the Gershwin to the same shot of New York as the first entry, using it again as putty. The fourth entry leads down from the third kiss. The fifth entry leads up to the fourth kiss. Afterwards, Hollander's individuality emerges for a moment in an intelligent, *threatening* treatment of the always-quoted Wedding March of Mendelssohn. The sixth entry gives the only other indication of Hollander's imagination, a tense emotional atmosphere being foreshadowed by *lyrical* means. The last kiss, unaccompanied, represents the only point in the film where an emotional culmination is not underlined by a musical tautology. The tenth entry follows with the initial waltz and the Gershwin motto, and ends the film in the home key of E flat.

I am pretty sure that the only bit that Auden would have spontaneously noticed, i.e. the menacing variation on the Mendelssohn, would have been the only bit he would have approved of if he had made himself listen to the entire score. Where indeed are the times when he wrote obtrusive, quasi-musical film poetry (for the G. P. O. Film Unit pieces *Coal Face* and *Night Mail* of 1936, for both of which he collaborated with Benjamin Britten)?⁴ Grierson described *Night Mail* to Roger Manvell as a kick in the belly: the belt of consciousness had been lowered for

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the purpose. But then, at that time Stravinsky created his music, too.⁵

Notes

Source: *The Music Review*, Vol. 12, No. 4, November 1951, 315–17.

- 1 W. H. Auden, 'Some Reflections on Opera as a Medium', *Tempo*, No. 20, Summer 1951. (*The Observer* of 16 September, 1951, reprinted the article. By way of punishment, the Editor should be forced to explain it.)
- 2 [Ed.: Arnold Schoenberg followed Wagner in drawing the distinction between 'can' and 'must' to differentiate between artisan and artist in his *Harmonielehre* (1911).]
- 3 [Translation by Irene Auerbach: But now it has singled me out / to [endure] a torment I have never known before, / and if I am to be married today, / then it was without any choice [in the matter]: / it had to happen, there was a compulsion! / [Even] you, my master, were getting worried.]
- 4 [Ed.: Keller had written briefly about *Night Mail* in: *Music Survey*, 2/4, Spring 1950, 250–51.]
- 5 Roger Manvell, *Film* (London, 1946).

• The Psychology of Film Music

[on Arthur Benjamin and Georges Auric]

Introduction

The psychology of music is the most difficult branch of applied psychology, but the psychology of what we might call applied (as distinct from absolute or pure) music offers a comparatively easy approach to the musico-psychologist. The reason, therefore, is clear. Whereas in pure music we encounter processes which, at any rate on the surface, bear little relation to such mental phenomena as have already been elucidated by psychological analysis, the processes that make up applied music, though in themselves as mysterious psychologically as those of pure music, are at least definitely related to extra-musical mental processes that have already been successfully subjected to scientific research.

But although 'the elements of art are not limited to the world of art,' though 'they reach into life and whatever extraneous knowledge we

gain . . . may quicken our feelings for the work itself and even enter legitimately into those feelings,'¹ it would be disastrous for the musico-psychologist to assume, however silently, that as soon as he has explained the relation between applied music and the ideas to which it is applied, he may proceed to explain away music as such merely in terms of its extra-musical relations. This fallacy has often been committed by the psychologically-minded as well as by those who think that they are musically-minded. On the other hand, it will not, of course, do to brush aside the study of applied music's avowed association with extra-musical ideas just because such endeavour is not likely to furnish a master-key to the psychology of music. The history of science has not yet revealed a single master-key, but has, on the contrary, shown that quite a number of alleged master-keys turn out, upon examination to unlock not even a single door.

Of all branches of applied music, film music is the youngest. It has, indeed, been born into, and also out of, a psychological age, and for that reason alone it ought to be of particular interest to the psychologist, once he has noted its existence, which, so far, he has not.² Film music, far more than many another art form, has a well-definable psychological function: while art in general aims primarily at representing the beautiful (which sometime may be the ugly, not because the artist does not believe in beauty, but because he believes in the beauty of ugliness), film music aims to an unusual extent, indeed, often primarily, at suggesting psychological truth – thus an essential part of the psychological functions, or of the psychotechnics, of film music.

The development of the psychological, as distinct from the aesthetic aspect of music, has been going on for a long time; it indeed reached peaks before the advent of film music. Mozart was a unique figure in this as in many other respects, in that he succeeded in uniting, to the highest degree, an unsurpassed artistic-psychological insight with an unsurpassable aesthetic sense. He would not, however, have seen any point in beauty-less music; for him, indeed, music that was not primarily beautiful

ceased to be music. At a later stage in the development of psychological music, however, the scales shifted: "Music", said Mussorgsky, "is a means of communication between men, and not an end in itself – the pursuit of beauty alone, in the literal acceptance of the word, is a childish stupidity, a rudimentary form of an art," and Cecil Gray declares Mussorgsky "the greatest musical psychologist of all time,"³ a pronouncement which, to be sure, is disputable. It would not be wrong to see in a considerable section of film music the most stressedly and most conspicuously psychological music of all time. In the following two examples, some of film music's psychotechnics can without difficulty be analysed:

1. Master of Bankdam (1947) adapted from the novel The Crowthers of Bankdam by Thomas Armstrong, produced by Walter Forde and Edward Dryhurst, and directed by Walter Forde. The music is by Arthur Benjamin, who wrote incidental scores, inter alia, for the films The Scarlet Pimpernel (1935), Wings of the Morning (1937), and An Ideal Husband (1947). This is the story of Bankdam, a Yorkshire mill. Around 1860 it prospers under its old master, but later goes through several crises under his sons Zebediah and Joshua, who tend in opposite directions. Joshua dies in a mill collapse; eventually Zebediah, himself fatally ill, entrusts Bankdam not to his own son, but to Joshua's son, Simeon, who, as Zebediah realizes in the last reel, will make Bankdam prosper again.

Now the musical score centres on, and develops a theme song ('The Fire of Your Love'), which is sung, in A major, near the beginning of the film, i.e. where Joshua courts his future wife, Annie. Expressing a woman's love, the song amounts to a projection into the external world of Annie's love for Joshua. And like every theme song of Leitmotiv, 'The Fire of your Love' remains associated throughout the score with the idea that it originally suggests or underlines. Thus, for instance, it is worked out in the orchestral background to the film while Annie, after Joshua's death, is haunted by memories of

her marriage. Thereby, it is true, the theme song does not make a specific, psychological contribution to the film: it does not furnish much psychological news that is not furnished by the film itself. Yet, by its constant association with Annie's love for Joshua, the song prepares for its communicating, at the end of the picture, a psychological truth which is not suggested by the visual alone. For at the end, where the dramatic situation compels the spectator to identify himself with Annie and to look at events from her point of view, we get the theme song – now, be it noted, in E major – as orchestral background to young Simeon's accession to the mastership of Bankdam. The psychological implication is obvious, at any rate to the psychologist: '... the parent whose sexual emotions and tendencies have but little opportunity for discharge will be apt to lavish a greater amount of affection on his children than one who is leading a more active sexual life. Thus it is that widowers, widows, and those who are unhappily married frequently display a more than normal degree of attachment to their children, the latter receiving, in addition to the love that would ordinarily fall to their share, *the displaced affection which would otherwise find its outlet in the love of wife and husband.*'⁴ The final appearance of the theme song, then imparts this piece of exact psychological information: Annie has eventually overcome her grief by displacing her cathexis of the (internal) object-imago of her husband on to an actual (external) object, i.e. her son. The fact that this final version of the theme song is in E major, i.e. the dominant of the key in which it is originally sung (*vide* above), adds a subtle finishing touch to the music's psychological significance. For the dominant, which appears of course after the tonic in the harmonic series, is the tonic's offspring, its 'child'. The reader is asked not to be misled by the expression 'dominant' for the fifth degree of the diatonic scale, for, in point of fact, as he may know from his musical experience, the tonic dominates the dominant, and not vice versa.⁵

II. La belle at la bête (1946; first shown in this country [UK] in 1947), written and directed by Jean Cocteau. The music is by Georges Auric, a member of the famous group of 'Les Six' (Auric, Durey, Honegger, Milhaud, Poulenc, and Tailleferre). He contributed to incidental music, inter alia to Alibi (1938), Dead of Night (1945), Caesar and Cleopatra (1944–45), Hue and Cry (1946), La symphonie pastorelle (1946) and It Always Rains on Sunday (1947) which contains the best music [of his] I know, though not the most psychological.

This is the well-known fairytale of the Beauty and the Beast. The two complementary psychological processes on which the story centres are, (a) decomposition,⁶ and (b) (re-) condensation.⁷ In simpler words, the action is psychologically based on, and aesthetically unified by, the idea of three different individuals (the Beauty's suitors: The Beast, Avenant, and Ardent) who, from the point of view of depth psychology, are but three, partly conflicting aspects of a single personality (the Beauty's father substitute). Indeed, at the end of the tale, Avenant and the Beast die and dissolve into Prince Ardent, who thus resumes his identity that he had temporarily lost through a spell.

Auric and his friend Cocteau have handled the integration of music and visual with formal mastery, by which I here mean the employment of the simplest unifying, and at the same time contrasting, formal means for the purpose of suggesting the visual's deepest emotional and spiritual content. The simplest structural device in the present case was *to link every musical entry with either Avenant, or the Beast, or Ardent*, to have no music on the soundtrack that was not associated with one of these three individuals. Thereby a double psycho-technical gain is achieved: (a) music being the servant of the orectic⁸ (emotional) rather than the cognitive aspect of the film, the exclusive distribution of the musical entries to the three suitors enhances the sensitive spectator-listener's awareness of the fact that the tale's deepest affective centre lies in these three figures; (b) the linking of the music with nothing but one or the other of the suitors

points to the fundamental oneness of these three versions of the Father.

The unifying function of the music also applies aesthetically, for the simple reason that the artistic unity of the tale is based on the condensation with which it ends: it is this final event which, retrospectively, shows up the unidirectional current that flows through the film. The broad, unifying frame given by the music offers, of course, at the same time, ample opportunity for psychological-musical contrasts which correspond to the conflict that lies at the root of the present, as of any other, case of a mythologically 'decomposed' personality.

Now it might be suggested that Auric's plan of musical distribution is a rather obvious affair, which does not merit so much comment. Faultless psychologico-artistic method, however, is always obvious once one has noticed it, and the elemental, when recognized, is merely considered elementary. Yet I am not aware that anybody who has seen the film – the most perspicacious critics included – has shown a sign of his being intellectually alive to the organization of musical entries (though I am sure that emotionally the integration of film and music has achieved its effect). In art, as in science, the simplest thing is to scorn simplicity, the most difficult thing is to attain it.

Notes

Source: *World Psychology* (1948), pp. 23–6. The author is described as 'Hans Keller, L. R. A. M.' Keller returned to *The Master of Bankdam* and its music in 'Arthur Benjamin and the Problem of Popularity', *Tempo*, 15 (Spring 1950), 4–15, and to 'Georges Auric at Film Music's Best' in his column 'Film Music and Beyond', *Music Review*, 15/4 (November 1954), 311–13. In another review, 'Britain versus France', *Music Review* (November 1952), 310–12, Keller writes:

For the British musician, it is, for the rest, interesting to hear from Auric that when working on *La belle et la bête*, he had written continuous music for several concluding scenes, but that Jean Cocteau, the director, 'had the excellent idea to have the music interrupted by intervals of complete silence. Thus Cocteau has made me realize the significance of silence, and I am very grateful to him.' But we in Britain – and this shows the extent to which Auric's confrontation of the two film lands is still relevant – still think *La belle et la bête* severely overstuffed with (admittedly often excellent) music.

- 1 Lionel Trilling, 'Freud and Literature', *Horizon*, Vol. 16, No. 92.
- 2 Hans Keller, *The Need for Competent Film Music Criticism* (London, British Film Institute, 1947).
- 3 Cecil Gray, *History of Music* (London, 1928).
- 4 J. C. Flugel, *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Family* [6th edition] (London, International Psychoanalytic Library, Hogarth Press, 1939).
- 5 Arnold Schoenberg, *Harmonielehre*, Leipzig/Vienna, 1911 (translated as *Theory of Harmony*, by Roy E. Carter, London, Faber, 1978).
- 6 Ernest Jones (*On the Nightmare*, London, International Psychoanalytic Library, 1931).
- 7 Sigmund Freud, *Die Traumdeutung* [*Interpretation of Dreams*], *Gesammelte Werke*, 11/111 (London, 1942).
- 8 J. C. Flugel, *Man, Morals and Society* (London, Duckworth, 1945).

• Noise as Leitmotiv

[It Always Rains on Sunday, Uncle Silas, Great Expectations and Brighton Rock]

Concordia discors

Horace

1 Definition of Leitmotiv

The Romantic Leitmotiv technique is one of film music's stock stratagems. Obviously so: it is the easiest way out of the disunity which threatens a film score's bits and pieces, disconnected as these are at least in time. Not that the easiest way out is necessarily the wrong way out. There are a few composers whose Leitmotifs do not make you think that the 19th century is as dead as it is unburied. Take [Georges] Auric's rain motif, a simple E minor quaver figure, in *It Always Rains on Sunday* [1947].¹ Announced at the outset in a beautifully sad piece, this Leitmotiv felicitously symbolizes the 'rainy' emotional significance of the film. In the hands of most film composers, however, the Leitmotiv technique seems outworn. As a recent American observer puts it:

Unfortunately . . . the Hollywood score is so frequently organized by the method of the Wagnerian Leitmotiv that a good deal of the spontaneity and modernity of [film music]

as a whole suffers.²

Which goes for other than Hollywood scores, too, if to a lesser extent. It even goes for French ones, though French film music is sometimes as good as French films are always said to be. Remember, for instance, [the sentimental love Leitmotiv] in *L'ange de la nuit* (music by Maurice Thiriet)?³ Though it is true that [this Leitmotiv] remains sentimentally unused in places where no Hollywood track would dream of foregoing its assistance.

Now while the musical Leitmotiv technique is being overdone, or at any rate misused, there is another kind of Leitmotiv technique, a thoroughly contemporary one, which has hitherto too rarely been applied. I am thinking of extra-musical, acoustic Leitmotiv – if one may apply this technique to *such natural sounds as assume the role of a musical Leitmotiv in the total structure of the film.*

What we have so far had of this noise-Leitmotiv technique has not yet been made the subject of critical discussion, for film critics are not seldom normal human beings who tend to have eyes rather than ears. It therefore falls to us musical animals to examine this extra-musical technique, though it is true that [Roger] Manvell once got near the aesthetic concept of the noise-Leitmotiv, i.e. in his discussion of the trains' significance in *Brief Encounter* [1945].⁴

It was in this connection, too, that he pointed out that –

the possibilities of the dramatic use of sound are endless: they depend on the director's integrity of imagination, his common sense and his courage in experimentation.⁵

It would seem that noise-as-Leitmotiv offers a possibility of the dramatic use of sound *par excellence*, both because the Leitmotiv technique is in itself (or ought to be) essentially dramatic, and because the noise-Leitmotiv can combine dramatic symbolism with dramatic realism. One wonders, then, why the noise-Leitmotiv is so rarely put to use. The answer appears to be that it is not easy to bring the discordant tendencies of Romanticism and Realism into concordance,

tendencies which must needs strongly contribute to the noise-Leitmotiv technique. For natural sound is realistic, and the Leitmotiv is Romantic.

2 Its Romanticism

In order successfully to employ natural sound as Leitmotiv, you will have to possess and use all the qualities enumerated by Manvell, and in addition a good nose for what is art and what isn't. It is old-fashioned today, as distinct from last night, to speak of 'art' in connection with the cinema – which merely testifies to our growing uneasiness about the fact that after all the use of this word may be more premature than we like to admit.

A striking example of a noise Leitmotiv that does not bridge the difficulties inherent in the conflict between Romanticism (read here: melodramatic sentimentalism) and Realism, and that produces monotony instead of unity, is the storm in *Uncle Silas* [1947].⁶ In your whole life you have not experienced the amount of storm that Caroline, the heroine of the tale, endures within the span covered by the film. Nor are your hopes justified that when she leaves 'Silas's sombre decaying mansion' for Switzerland, she will leave the storm behind. For being associated not only with Silas's sombre mansion, but also, more symbolically, with his evil intentions (as if these were not clear enough without a symbol), the storm pops into the sound track in Switzerland, too. Repetitive, tautologizing 'symbolism' here scores an easy victory over realism: instead of bringing to light a deeper significance [in] reality, this application of the noise-Leitmotiv technique destroys reality; the storm motif is an *idée fixe* not only in the musical sense of the term (meaning: a single Leitmotiv, or motto theme [as found, for example, in Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* (1830)]) but also in its acceptance. It is only fair to add that the sound track's – indeed the whole film's – sole asset is the music by Alan Rawsthorne, which disproves, *in concreto*, a persistent theory according to which you can't write a good score to a bad film.

In *Great Expectations* [1946], it is also the storm that is used as noise-leitmotiv, but here Romanticism and Realism come to terms with

one another: the motif is employed sparingly, and without sentimentalism. Associated with Magwitch, the escaped convict, it is used at the beginning of the film, when Pip helps the criminal; it reappears when Magwitch returns from Australia, and finally prior to Pip's attempt to smuggle Magwitch out of the country. Particularly successful is the entry of the storm motif at Magwitch's unexpected return to Pip, which it foreshadows [at the same time that] it prepares the way for Pip's initial encounter with Magwitch. A sensitive spectator-listener, even if he has no idea of the story, will understand that the second appearance of the storm Leitmotiv means that Magwitch is about to return. But though the motif undoubtedly contributes to the structural unity of the film, it does not after all contribute a great deal to its content; while both realistic and symbolic, the noise-Leitmotiv technique here remains elementary.

It is at the same time noteworthy that *Great Expectations* is honoured with a musical score (by Walter Goehr)⁷ that contains that rare ingredient, a love Leitmotiv without saccharin which, moreover, is economically distributed over the film: altogether it is only quoted 5 or 6 times. I seem to remember an especially suitable inversion of its B major version after Pip had kissed Estella and leaves her to start his new life. At those points in the film where the more conventional composer would busily stress his love-Leitmotiv in order to repeat what, anyway, is said on the screen, Mr. Goehr does not use his motif at all, i.e. neither when the grown-up Pip says: "I love you, Estella," nor when he goes to Satis House and discovers that Estella has adopted Miss Havisham's mode of living, nor at the happy end. I think the Leitmotiv last appears, in C sharp, when Pip meets Estella again after the two have grown up.

Or am I complimenting Mr. Goehr too much – is the absence of the Leitmotiv in the later part of the film perhaps merely due to his intention to have the motif only associated with Pip's love for the *child* Estella? In any case, however, both the musical and the extra-musical (noise-) Leitmotiv techniques are here applied in a tasteful way, which no doubt is pure coincidence. One looks

forward to the day when musical and extra-musical Leitmotiv principles will not just run in parallel, but will collaborate, producing – to borrow from sociological terminology – not merely like effects, but common ones. By this I do not necessarily mean *simultaneous* effects; the simultaneous use of [both] musical and noise motifs spells disaster for sensitive ears unless a master-hand is at work.

In *Brighton Rock* [1947] we get a noise motif whose Leitmotivic function may not have been consciously intended, but which in effect represents a more advanced stage in the development of the noise-Leitmotiv principle than the storm in either *Uncle Silas* or *Great Expectations*.⁸ It will be remembered that when Ida Arnold, 'concert artiste' and self-appointed sleuth, visits the disreputable lawyer Prewitt who falsely [bore witness] to Spicer's death having been accidental, Prewitt's fright at being found out takes the form of his furiously banging on the wall to stop the noise of the jazz music next door.⁸ While this knocking on the wall forms a regular practice of his, the jazz noise becomes particularly unbearable for him, and his reaction is particularly intense, under the stress of Ida's sleuthing. A few sequences later, Ida cross-examines Rose, the wife of the 17-year-old gang leader and double murderer Pinkie. Frightened at the consequences of this examination, Pinkie rushes to the window and bangs it down in order to shut out the enervating noise of a crying baby.

Unlike the above-described storm motifs, the present noise-Leitmotiv does not consist of a particular noise, but rather of a particular abstraction of noise, namely, noise-that-gets-on-the-nerve: jazz music in the first episode, the baby's crying in the second. It is for this very reason – the 'noisy' significance of the jazz music – that I permit myself to discuss this piece of realistic music as if it were extra-musical sound: from the point of view of the film this has no musical significance.

There is far more integration here between the noise-motif and the visual-cum-dialogue than in *Uncle Silas* or in *Great Expectations*; indeed one ought perhaps to give the title 'Leitmotiv', not to

jazz and baby noises alone, but to the concert of noises and the visible and audible reactions to them. There is also an impressive degree of integration (whether deliberate or not) as between the two entries of the motif. In both sequences, that is to say, we get the impact of noise upon the mind of one of the criminals, either of them being alarmed at Ida's successful sleuthing.

So much for the purely formal aspect of this noise-Leitmotiv. As for its content, we have to distinguish between (a) the common significance of the jazz and baby noises, and (b) the particular significance of either noise in the light of their common significance.

(a) The common significance of the noises and their consequences is not just nervousness and anger due to fear. Underlying this surface meaning of the Leitmotiv, the more subtle suggestion of the criminal's perverted or, psychologically speaking, 'displaced' aggression may be sensed: the object of his aggression, i.e. the noise, is 'innocent' in that not it, but something else has primarily hit him. To some extent all of us of course make use of this mechanism of displacement – as when we angrily tear up a letter instead of punching its sender in the nose – but it is reserved for the delinquent to exaggerate this practice to an extent that makes sociality impossible. I think the chief psychological difference between justice and crime is that justice is group revenge on the right person, while crime is individual revenge on the wrong person or object. Now with the help of the noise-Leitmotiv technique, *Brighton Rock* intimates the psychology of delinquent aggression through the medium of two acts which, but for their context and their obtrusive presentation, would not strike you as extraordinary. The delinquent's exaggerated displacement of aggression is successfully symbolized by acts that cannot in themselves be regarded as abnormal.

(b) As for the differences between the two versions of the noise-Leitmotiv, the character differences between Prewitt and Pinkie seem to be well taken care of. Prewitt is just a doubtful character of the ordinary sort; his crime, at

whose detection he is frightened in the Leitmotivic shot, is a comparatively mild one. His reaction is accordingly more ordinary than Pinkie's, all the more ordinary because he has previously institutionalised his banging on the wall. Pinkie gets furious at a crying baby – still what might be called an ordinary reaction under extraordinary circumstances, but less ordinary than getting furious at a crying jazz band. There is cruelty even in Pinkie's reactions: he is a proper sadist, and the crimes whose uncovering he fears in the Leitmotivic shot are exceptionally severe.

It will perhaps be seen from what has been said under (a) and (b) that in *Brighton Rock* the noise-Leitmotiv fulfils two primary, and complementary, aesthetic requirements: unification and diversification. At the same time the discordant tendencies of Romanticism and Realism resolve into an attractively discordant concordance: the extraordinary is symbolized by the ordinary; a refined, though perhaps unconscious, Romanticism lifts what would otherwise be pure naturalism up to the sphere of a realism that does not stop at mirroring appearances. But through betraying an artistic sense, *Brighton Rock's* noise-Leitmotiv is not yet art. Art implies a high degree of structural organisation – I should like to use the untranslatable word *Gliederung* here¹⁰ – and towards this end it is not nearly enough to integrate the noise-Leitmotiv with picture and dialogue. In addition, there must be close interdependence between noise-Leitmotiv and music, and the symbolic significance of the motif must be deepened. For the rest, [just] as Berlioz's *idée fixe* was the forerunner of the Wagnerian Leitmotiv system, the noise-*idée fixe* (i.e. the single noise-Leitmotiv) may be the forerunner of a system of several noise-Leitmotifs.¹¹

The noise-Leitmotiv owes a debt to its forerunner, the musical Leitmotiv. It may repay it in a way that will inspire the film composer to invest his musical Leitmotiv technique with new life. But while *Great Expectations* and *Brighton Rock* have made the first steps in this direction, the danger remains that the noise-Leitmotiv will, as in *Uncle Silas*, live on the corpse of musical Leitmotiv-sentimentalism.

Notes

Source: Typescript from 1947 or 1948, written from '30 Herne Hill, [London] S. E. 24'.

- 1 May I draw the musical reader's attention to the fact that this score and Auric's previous music to *La belle et la bête* (1945) share their two home tonalities – E and C. I wonder why? [Ed.: 3 extracts from *It Always Rains on Sunday* are included in the much praised Chandos CD, *Georges Auric Film Music*, CHAN 9774.]
- 2 Frederick W. Sternfeld, 'Music and the Feature Films', *The Music Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (1947), 517 ff.
- 3 [Ed.: In the manuscript HK supplies a brief musical quotation from memory; this has been omitted here. Maurice Thiriet (1903–60) was best known as the joint composer with Joseph Kosma of the music for Marcel Carné's celebrated *Les enfants du paradis* (1945).]
- 4 [Roger] Manvell, *Film*, revised edition, p. 65.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 [Ed.: Music from *Uncle Silas* is included in the CD, *The Film Music of Alan Rawsthorne*, Chandos, CHAN 9749. According to the liner notes, Bernhard Herrmann thought that 'this was one of the finest film scores ever written'. Rawsthorne wrote music for 22 films].
- 7 [Ed.: Walter Goehr (1903–60), also known until 1948 as George Walter, wrote music for theatre, radio and television. He also edited Monteverdi and was a prominent conductor].
- 8 [Ed.: the music for *Brighton Rock*, though not discussed here, was in fact by Hans May.]
- 9 This episode, though unfortunately not the following one, has been noted by a film critic: William Whitebait in the *New Statesman and Nation*, 17 January, 1948.
- 10 [Ed.: *Gliederung* indicates parts, limbs, joints as well as structure and could be translated as 'anatomy'.]
- 11 In *Brighton Rock* there is, of course, only one noise-Leitmotiv, though it appears in two versions.

• Musical Quotation in Films

[*Apartment for Peggy, Fools Rush In, Lady Hamilton, La symphonie pastorale*]

1 The Question of Quotation

Art arises where the arbitrary and the predictable are superseded by unpredictable inevitability.¹ Musical quotations in not purely musical works often suffer from lack of art, for their extra-musical determinants tend to make them extra-

musically predictable and musically arbitrary. This frequent absence of an artistic *raison d'être*, however, is not the only reason for their frequency. They can splendidly serve the mind's most beloved activity, i.e. the covert expression of simultaneous love and hate towards a parent figure – the quoted composer.² They are, moreover, finely suited to assuaging some of a man's guilt over the rubbish he has written. Similarly as in literature a quotation serves to authorise a wrong statement, so a musical quotation may answer the quoter's need for parental approbation: he feels by thus honouring, and identifying himself with, daddy's holy words, he sanctifies his own. A rose thrown into a midden, however, does not improve the latter's smell, but rather starts to stink itself. One would therefore suppose that the human minority of cinemagoers will not easily tolerate the majority of film-musical quotations. However, they will. In fact the quotes offer them pleasure almost as intense as the thrill that the ordinary cinemagoer (*sus domesticus*)³ gets out of the stench. At any point during the film, that is to say, the spectator-listener holds a certain amount of psychic energy (tension) in preparation for grasping what the next moment is to bring. If a quotation of something known ensues, the prepared amount of energy suddenly turns out to be too big, and the surplus is discharged.⁴ Relief of tension – hence pleasure. Add to this the kick of being in the know: surrounded by ignoramuses, our human cinemagoer belongs to the initiated who know that this is 'the Tchaikovsky Concerto': its first movement is in fact among his selection of gramophone records. His satisfaction here derives again, indeed doubly, from the parent complex. Not only does he partake of superior and therefore parental knowledge, but the very object of his knowledge, the 'good', 'superior', 'classical' composer has for him (as for the film composer or musical director) parental significance.

Whereas, however, until recently 'classical' was for Hollywood a synonym for Romantic, their musicological department has now discovered that a few guys wrote usable music before the Romantic era. Not usable in its original form and

scoring, to be sure. Mr. Lionel Newman, Musical Director of *Apartment for Peggy*, has struck upon Mozart's Clarinet Quintet, struck off the clarinet, and stuck on, so as to be dead wrong, flute and harp. It seems that the selfsame musicological department's researches have also unearthed Mozart's Concerto for Flute and Harp, whence the arranger of the Clarinet Quintet came to choose the two instruments which Mozart disliked throughout his life. This, of course, is not all. The form of the second trio, for instance, is improved upon by a contraction; a full orchestral version, in A instead of D, of part of the second movement aptly serves as suicide-motive; the minuet appears at one point as background music in A flat (though it is of course played, as distinct from reproduced, in A) and triumphs finally, in its turn fully orchestrated, as coda to the film. The reader will absolve me from the task of going into the various unbelievable details of the arrangements; suffice it to say that of the innumerable cinematic misuses of good music known to me this is the most scandalous. Every musician, and nobody else, should hear it.

When I arrived at the press show of the British picture *Fools Rush In*, and saw from the synopsis that the central event would be the calling off of a wedding, I prayed: "Neither of the wedding marches, please!" They came both. The composer, Mr. Wilfred Burns, a name new to me, treats the *Lohengrin* one in his title music, and as the family of Pam or whoever it is return home from the unwedding with the wedding cake, he duly distorts the Mendelssohn. At this juncture I retired, because I felt sure the wedding marches wouldn't. Criticism: the composer does nothing to make his quotations musically inevitable, inevitable though they are when you know about the story and about film music. It might be said that you aren't supposed to know about the story, and that the overture cleverly announces the theme of the film. A musical announcement, however, must be as musical as it is an announcement: it must stand repeated hearing. Nowise a treat, Mr. Burns's treatments of the marches are as predictable as the marches themselves. They simply translate, anticipatorily in the case of Wagner. All good descriptive music

transforms; all musical translation is superfluous. And art apart, the superiority feeling to be derived from being in the know is not in this case overwhelming either, for even *sus domesticus* knows the wedding marches. As for the pleasure gain from the save-up of psychic expenditure, bless them who were not expecting the Mendelssohn and, if they knew about the film from the papers, the Wagner.

There is a third, smallish class of film-musical quotations that are neither beneath criticism as our first, nor as silly as the second. Though not actually artistic, they could be agreeable if –. Many readers will remember Alexander Korda's *Lady Hamilton*, which features 'La ci darem la mano' from [Mozart's] *Don Giovanni*. The duettino is relatively well recorded, its context not absurd. But far from being given as a whole, it is cut before the upbeat in bar 16. You can always foresee the typical, musically arbitrary cinematic cut, which will never fall on a full close, even though this be, as in the present instance, just one further bar along the road. And why cut at the precise point where, for structural reasons, the ensuing feeling of incompleteness will be strongest? Because such is the cinema's idea of maintaining movement. Never, however, has one art gained by infringing upon another.

A fourth group, the (near) artistic quotations, are so far pretty quiescent. One example, the use of [J. S.] Bach's Weimar Organ Prelude in A minor⁵ in *La symphonie pastorale*, I have discussed elsewhere.⁶ There would be more of them if film musicians would care to keep our opening oracle in mind.

Notes

Source: 'Film Music – The Question of Quotation', *Music Survey: New Series, 1949–52*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1949, [reprint] ed. by Donald Mitchell and Hans Keller (London, Faber, 1981), pp. 25–7 (second cycle).

1 [Ed. the aphorism with which this essay begins is a hallmark of Keller's style. Some hundreds of aphorisms from this period are reprinted in: Hans Keller, *Music and Psychology: From Vienna to London, 1939–52*, ed. by Christopher Wintle (London, Plumbago, 2003).]

2 See my observations on the psychology of musical quotation, imitation and caricature in *The Music Review*, Vol. IX, No. 2 (May 1948), 114 ff.

3 [Ed.: Domestic hog]

4 For Aristotle, joy at recognition was the basis of pleasure we gain from art. Groos (*Die Spiele der Menschen*, 1899) pointed out that Aristotle exaggerated the undubitably great importance of this principle. Freud (*Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten* [*The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*], 1905) was the first to give a clear indication of what determines such joy. My reflection is founded on Freud.

5 *Bachgesellschaft*, Leipzig, Breitkopf und Härtel, Vol. XV, No. 13.

6 Hans Keller, *The Need for Competent Film Music Criticism* (London, British Film Institute, 1947); reprinted in *Film Music and Beyond*, ed. by Christopher Wintle (London, Plumbago, 2005). [Ed.: Keller writes: 'In [*La symphonie pastorale*], the necessarily human hero plays the indispensable, superhuman A minor Organ Prelude by Bach at exactly the right moment from both the emotional and the formal point of view. What is – almost unbelievably – more, the delayed transition (not via any musical fade-in, nor by the musical equivalent of 'dissolve', nor indeed, most happily, by way of any music at all) from the interrupted Bach to the most strongly contrasting tango at the dance is managed with perfect musical discretion; significant and artistic continuity is retained under the most precarious circumstances. After the tango follows that dramatically climactic waltz which hero and heroine dance, and then the two are brought back again, both discreetly and contrastingly, to the church organ, this time for organ practice. (A more complete reversal of the preceding contrast would not have been tolerable, for the way from the sublime down to the primitive is shorter than the way from the primitive up to the sublime.) With the help of unashamed, 'realistic' classical foreground music, the whole compass of the relationship between the two people, indeed almost the whole compass of the human mind, is expressed in these contrariant, but unified sequences, without one set of values being injured by its contrasting one. This is musico-artistic film creation of the highest calibre, and I suspect Monsieur [Georges] Auric personally had his hand in the matter. If so, let this artist-critic inspire our film music critics' artistic mind. For while they will largely be needed to fight the wealth of poor film music, they certainly will need to know some that is good.' Keller adapted this paragraph for his paper to the film music Congress in Florence described in 'Reply to Pizzetti' (see below).]

[*La symphonie pastorale*]

2 'Featured Music: "Classical" Quotations': Reply to Pizzetti

Doubtless presented with a misleading translation of my speech on 'Featured Music: "Classical" Quotations' at the first international film music congress (the 7th *Congresso Internazionale di Musica*) [held in May 1950] at Florence, the president, Italy's veteran composer Ildebrando Pizzetti, gave in his turn a somewhat misleading account of what I said.¹ I quote *verbatim et literatim* from the official translation of his closing speech on May 19th:—

Hans Keller, a critic who is evidently most scholarly and thoughtful about the aesthetic problems regarding the art of the sound film, has said, in 'Quotation from Classical Music in the Film', many things worthy of meditation. For my own part I must confess that I remain very doubtful about the reasonableness and efficacy of quotation from classical music in the film. For example, when faced with that extract from *Symphonie pastorale* which Keller showed us where the execution of a Bach prelude on the organ accompanies the meeting in church of two young people unconsciously attracted to each other by an awakening love, I cannot attribute to Bach's music any value which is psychological or dramatic, that is, linked to the sentimental development of the characters. In this episode the sound of the organ and the solemnity of the place, that is to say the church, are suggestive. But if, instead of playing a Bach prelude, the young organist had played another piece of music the effect would, I consider, have been the same. At that point, in my opinion, in order to express or suggest the feelings of the characters the composer of the music in the film should have contrasted the Bach prelude with other musical expressions which could be referred to the sentiments of the actors.

I didn't just talk about classical quotations, but about the integration of 'featured' music in general and classical music in particular. I didn't dream of defending, in principle, the use of classical music; in fact I spent quite a time cursing typical examples of hair-raising

quotations and moreover suggested that film makers suffered from a downright quotation compulsion which was due, *inter alia*, to our age's artistic insecurity and to the consequent need for what was, psychologically speaking, the classical quotation's guilt-assuaging parental approbation. At the same time I would never have gone so far as to smell an *a priori* rat in every quotation; indeed, as a matter of critical principle, I dislike *a priori* rats – nor does Pizzetti give any reason for his wholesale suspicion. The quotation of Bach's Weimar A minor Organ Prelude I played as 'the most successful example of the integration of partial quotation.' I went on to say:—

The meaningful interruption of the Bach reinforces the sensitively delayed, music-less transition to the most strongly contrasted tango at the dance, after which follows that dramatically climactic waltz which hero and heroine dance, whence the two are brought back together again, both discreetly and contrastingly, to the church organ, this time for organ practice. A more complete reversal of the preceding contrast would not have been tolerable, for the way from the sublime down to the primitive is shorter than the way from the primitive up to the sublime. Striking continuity is maintained in this scene under the most precarious circumstances. We remember Auric's (the film composer's) own words:— 'A tight-rope walker and a dancer are the two creatures combined in any artist who moves me. Every new work is a tight-rope stretched above an everlasting track . . .' In these contrariant, but unified sequences the tight-rope stretches over the whole compass of the relationship between the two people, indeed almost over the whole compass of the human mind . . .

The Bach assumes its full significance in the sound track's wider context; but this Pizzetti has not considered at all. I submit that he does not in fact appreciate the creative intentions behind these scenes if he thinks that any old organ piece would have done equally well: only the Bach – the most popular of the sublimest organ works – could produce the extreme horizontal contrast whose significance I have described. As for Pizzetti's concluding suggestion, it not only

- Hans Keller: Essays on Film Music

contradicts his initial 'doubtfulness about the efficacy of quotation', but its execution would have landed us in Hollywood *Kitsch par excellence*, because (1) instead of being followed by a music-less transition to the dance, the prelude would have been stabbed in the back by, inevitably, hostile music; (2) instead of the extreme contrast between Bach and the dance, whose unification is helped by the sound track's *keeping to the realistic level*, the music would have jumped from the realistic to the interpretative ('background') level with artistic purpose; for (3) Pizzetti's purpose, i.e. the 'expression of the feelings of the characters', is completely achieved by the visual, and the interpretative background music would have been tautological.

I hasten to add that the above excerpt is nowise typical of the Maestro's suggestive speech; in fact its coda –

I have thought it my duty to express, briefly, what I think about the various papers. Are mine the observations of a man who, by age, aesthetic education, and personal moral sense, cannot feel and argue with the sensibility and mentality of men younger and more closely bound to certain characteristics of the life of the last twenty years, which are precisely the years of the sound film? Maybe; however, they are observations – I do not claim that they have any value as judgments – which someone can bear in mind if only to contest or refute them . . .

– is far too modest. As probably the youngest critic at the Congress,² I may say that Pizzetti's artistic seniority, his 'aesthetic education and personal moral sense', are exactly what is needed for an art still in its first childhood.

Notes

Source: *Music Survey, New Series 1949–1952*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Summer 1950, [reprint] eds Donald Mitchell and Hans Keller (London, Faber, 1981), 42–3 (second cycle).

- 1 The full text of Keller's speech was published as: 'Citazioni di musica classica nel film', *Musica e Film*, ed. S. G. Biamonte, Roma, Dell'Aeterno, 1959, pp. 223–26.
- 2 Keller (1919–85) was 31 at the time.

II. Composers

• William Alwyn: Bad and Great Work

[*Cure for Love, The Rocking Horse Winner*]

[*William Alwyn (1905–85) taught at the Royal Academy of Music until 1955 and was one of the most prolific of the British film composers and orchestrators of his day. He was also active as a composer of orchestral, chamber and vocal music. He wrote music for about 60 films, including documentaries (Desert Victory, Fires were Started and World of Plenty) and features (The Fallen Idol and Odd Man Out). Keller wrote about him on several occasions. This, the most substantial of the essays, was published in 1950 in two parts. Between the first ('Bad') and second ('Great'), Keller had been to the Film Music Congress in Florence (see 'Reply to Pizzetti' above).]*

1 Bad

It has been said that while Soviet musical life is black, American is grey. The observation still contains some of the oversimplification and avoidable bias it tries to exclude. The simplest possible and – from our, the Western standpoint – most unbiased verdict would be that while Soviet industrial culture is, at any rate musically, dark grey with some white and many black patches, Western cultural industry is a lighter grey with more white and fewer black patches. In this country, the grey seems lighter, the white patches more, and the black patches less numerous than in America. Nevertheless, we shall do well to recognize the artistically harmful influence of our own big and not-so-big business: we must not underestimate the importance of economic factors as determinants of art and trash just because of their overestimation beyond the psychotic curtain. Nor indeed does the fact that would-be art created idealistically for the mob bears natural resemblances to what we produce unidealistically for money make our own, capitalist brand of *Kitsch* anymore savoury.

The film is the incarnation of business in potential art. In order to realize the whole depressing meaning of this truism every film director and film musician should read Hanns Eisler's brilliantly intelligent and musical *Komposition für den Film*,¹ even though it contains more Marxist aesthetics than any musicologist trained in scientific method and acquainted with the last 50 years' psychological and sociological researches will remain awake over.² With a sweeping, communist stroke of the pen, too, Eisler throws Denham and Hollywood together, but it is precisely because his analysis tends to magnify our own sins that it usefully serves as a microscope:

Since its monopolization film music has fallen to culture, being at the same time not a grain more cultivated than it was in the age of its irrespectability. Its progress simply means that *Kitsch* has been roused from its lurking places and has been enthroned as an official institution.³

Repeat: that something intriguingly similar seems to have been the result of (*inter alia*) the Moscow conference of musicians at the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party in January, 1948, that in fact communist and capitalist delight in the same malpractices for seemingly opposite reasons, should not fill us with malicious joy, but should rather remind us that civilization as a whole is incapable of looking itself in the face.

As far as our own (film-) musical life is concerned, I have seen or heard no comment, let alone the overdue outcry, about the alarming fact that a leading member of our official musical institution *par excellence*, a professor of composition at the Royal Academy of Music who has quite rightly earned himself the reputation of being one of our most important film composers, has of late turned out not merely such indifferent scores as *Golden Salamander* and *Madeleine*, but also the reeking *Kitsch* that forms, if form is the word, the admittedly sparing background to *Cure for Love*. Three slightly extenuating circumstances might at the same time be brought forth in Professor Alwyn's defence.⁴

First, Alwyn is in a slightly precarious position in that his is an often reactionary idiom, looking back to the nineteenth century in, for instance, his recent Concerto for oboe, strings and harp, or even the eighteenth in his *Divertimento* for solo flute (of which I have not heard the whole), a pastiche with wrong notes duly injected – though here one must consider that one-part writing in any truly contemporary language except Schoenberg's is up against the problem of how to avoid wrong and define right vertical implications. Now while not *a priori* to be despised, a reactionary idiom will even at its most sincerely expressive turn out to have been written for the past, including, to be sure, the present inasmuch as it retains the past. For the progressive listener such music cannot have more significance than a previous age's small coin, while already at its second best it runs the risk of being rejected, or accepted, as false coin, in spite of the fact that the composer did not use base metal: it may be incapable of appearing what it is. Prophetic music finds itself in a similar situation – hear the observations on the 'swindle' of twelve-tone music – but while its creators' tragedy is simply that they have the present against them, the retrograde composers' far more serious tragedy is that they have not got the past before them.

On consideration it would, moreover, appear doubtful whether a regressive idiom can be invested with the same qualities of emotional, and the same quantities of spiritual intensities as a contemporary language. No mortal composer, that is to say, can altogether escape the shadow of a dead or dying *Zeitgeist*. It follows that an artist under the sway of *vis conservatrix* will, as seductive occasions arise, land more smoothly and unconsciously in *Kitsch* than his opposite number among the modernists. Only the greatest can safely risk being conservative because their temporal transcendence automatically makes them into revolutionaries anyway.

All of which is to say that Professor Alwyn's abominable film score may contain inadvertent as well as merely, though inevitably, apparent *Kitsch*. But it must again be stressed that

however genuinely and innocently conceived, anything that appears as *Kitsch* will by many be liked as *Kitsch* and is therefore to be considered toxic.

Second excuse: the film itself is hardly of a kind that would inspire, or indeed could make room for valuable film music. But then Professor Alwyn could either have declined the commission, or else his highly resourceful film-musical mind might have hit upon artistically less objectionable expedients such as folk material, or remembering the *Divertimento*, the comparatively harmless evil of retrospective one-part writing.

Last, Professor Alwyn's film-musical conscience is far more filmic than musical, and refuses therefore the help of a potential *vis medicatrix naturae*: his own intra-musicality. I hasten to add, however, that his highly developed film sense has in another recent instance, *The Rocking Horse Winner* (from the D. H. Lawrence story), contributed towards a downright revolutionary score, at once essentially filmic, original in musico-dramatic structure and – against his will? – musically fascinating: as great a piece of work, in fact, as his *Kitsch* seems base, and equally, *i.e.* wholly, unnoticed. Of this in the next [part].

2 Great

My knowledge of what was being said at the Florence Film Music Congress is incomplete.⁵ The translations with which we were provided consisted of mysterious summaries; there was one particularly profound *précis* that I perused with awed interest until I discovered that it was supposed to summarize my own speech. However, as far as I am aware, none of the delegates insisted on film music's need to be musical. On the contrary, we repeatedly heard what you couldn't musically do in the cinema, as if we didn't hear that in the cinema anyway. It quite often happens of course that the form of a film asks for music that does not look after itself. That is why quite often a film isn't worth bothering about. Yet, the more funny noises these film-conscious composers produce or talk

about, the more artistic they feel. For my own part, I should have felt pretty lonely at the Congress, had not [Alan] Rawsthorne at one point murmured to me: "Nobody's said yet that what is needed for a good film composer is a composer." But then Rawsthorne hardly opened his mouth during the whole Congress except for the purpose of liquid resuscitation. In fact the man who composed the music for *The Captive Heart*, who is more articulate extra-musically than most composers of his stature, was never invited to read a paper. Nor did the discussion I had hoped for take place – between Alwyn who thinks the film composer should forget about being a composer, and Laszlo Lajtha (Hungary) who thinks that film music should *qua* music be musical; Alwyn declined to attend, apparently because he was ill, and Lajtha may not have been invited.

Now most composers of Alwyn's film-aesthetic school create their anti-musical ideas about film music out of their creative incapacity and use them as a veil – transparent for all but themselves and their like – for their sound effects. Alwyn himself, however, is not among them.

Not that he never uses his filmic conscience for rationalizing his insufficient music. But this one gladly suffers in return for his equally filmic, yet musically important *Rocking Horse Winner* [1952]; as a matter of fact it is his film sense that in this case is responsible for a novel and strong musico-dramatic structure.

Unable to attend the Press Show of the film, I gave my ticket to a professional musician, asking him to report to me. He wrote: 'Useful, tasteful film music without particular distinction.' A month or so later I happened to pass a suburban cinema where the film was being shown. Suspicious both of another man's verdict and of my own prejudices (which at the time could not have been less kind to Alwyn) I walked in. It turned out that the score's distinction was extremely 'particular': by taking the rhythm of the dialogue's leading sentence as well as of its leading word as thematic basis for an expressive chromatic phrase (both well-defined and well-divisible) and for a characteristic Snap motif

respectively; by constructing this thematic material with such symphonic foresight that it becomes variable and treatable from the most distant musical and emotional standpoints, with more than one particle from the chromatic phrase having the power to function as *pars pro toto*; and – to abstract the principle of his approach – by thus succeeding in *centering a musically valid structure on the musical (or, if you like, pre-musical) aspect of the film's most functional extra-musical element* and also on a fanfare-like motto which epitomizes the theme of the film on a descriptive level, the often reactionary Alwyn has created a revolutionary form of dramatic music which, like Walton's piece for the Players' Scene in *Hamlet*, is only possible in the cinema.⁶

The susceptible listener is already prepared for the musico-dramatic significance of the dialogue's most operative sentence by the title music which, that is to say, offers the musicalization in advance of what is being musicalized,⁷ similarly as in music itself a variation or development will sometimes appear in advance of what is being varied or developed.⁸ The actual spoken exposition of the film's thematic sentence could not be more strongly stressed.⁹ First, before the musical section within the film, we hear the extravagant mother's husband say: "We must have more money." Later, in the sequence where the crucial dispute about the family's financial situation is intercut with the boy's first ride on the rocking horse, the mother says: "We simply must have more money and that is all there is to it!", and then again, thrice: "We must have more money!", and finally: "There must be more money!" Follows, immediately, Alwyn's Catch motif on "money", succeeded by his musicalization of the rhythm of the mother's ominous final pronouncement. Unfortunately, however, the music is melodramatically combined with the "Money!" which whispers that the boy hears in the house: a tautology, I thought. But since nobody seems to have noticed as much as the fact of the musicalization, my criticism, however relevant, may be in the minority of one. The further treatment of motif and phrase is spotless and

highly imaginative. One of the sad and tense chromatic phrase's most radical metamorphoses, artful in its fabric and artless in its effect, occurs during the fashion parade, in the waltz that also incorporates the Snap. Later on, with the sad three-note and two-note descending chromatic excerpts from the phrase, Alwyn realizes to the full the motivic potentialities with which he has invested it; and the Snap appears, among and after other contexts, in augmentation as meaningful dominant pedal *ostinato* in the anticipatory Eb minor threnody (dubbed at far too low a level) near the end.

The film does not end where D. H. Lawrence's story does, for the censor believed that "the ending, brilliant as it was in the short story, needed further underlining in the film". Consequently, an extra scene of supreme *Kitsch*, showing the burning of the rocking horse, "the mother's retaliation of her guilt and finally the use of the money for a benevolent purpose" was tacked on to a picture that might otherwise have shown adult artistic expression if the censor had not also given his advice in a previous sequence, where the boy is at great pains to make clear his "innocence and lack of appreciation of the value of money for its own sake." Nothing is so filthy as what stupidity has tried to clean.

Whereas, however, many an inoffensive film is spoiled by the *Kitsch* that drenches its sound track, the position is more than reversed in *The Rocking Horse Winner's* added scene: indeed, had this not been doomed by its existence, Alwyn's continued exploration of his dramatic-thematic material would have saved it. The fanfare motto underlines the burning of the horse; then a moving solo violin version of the thematic phrase emerges as the groom looks at the boy's money box, while a *fortissimo* statement of a modifying derivative from the phrase – an extract rather than an excerpt (f' – e' – c# in D minor) – accompanies the mourning mother's last entry. The next and last musical section leads, again via the fanfare and a single impressive appearance of a two-note quote from the thematic phrase – of the *Leitmotiv*, in fact, that goes through diatonic history – to the final three dark C's downstairs.

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The idiom of the score is, for Alwyn, unusually advanced: already the ternary title music's middle part shows a high degree of chromatic intensification, while the third part is, logically, less diatonic than the first. From the Aeolian A minor end of the overture Alwyn proceeds to the relative major's tonic minor at the tail end: a musically satisfactory and dramatically plausible progressive tonality, quite especially welcome in the cinema, where most non-concentric tonalities are digressive. 'Tonal Structures' would indeed have been a burning problem for the Congress to discuss, but only Roland Manuel seems to have concerned himself with them.

Notes

Source: *Music Review*, Vol. 11, No. 2, May 1950, pp. 145–46; Vol. 11, No. 3, August 1950, pp. 216–17.

The following notes are editorial unless otherwise indicated:

- 1 Hanns Eisler, *Komposition für den Film*, Berlin 1949; American edition 1947. For a recent edition in English see Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films*, ed. Graham McCann (London, Athlone Press, 1994).
- 2 Keller is referring obliquely to his own background in psychology and sociology. See Hans Keller, *Music and Psychology: From Vienna to London, 1939–52*, ed. Christopher Wintle (London, Plumbago, 2003).
- 3 Eisler, 1949, p. 57: the translation is Keller's. For a psycho-sociological discussion of *Kitsch*, see Hanns Sachs, 'Kitsch', *Close Up*, Vol. IX, No. 3 (September 1932); reprinted in: *Close Up. Cinema and Modernism 1927–33*, eds James Donald, Anne Friedberg and Laura Marcus (London, Cassell, 1998). Sachs concludes: 'From the point of view of the public, *Kitsch* has the advantage that it renders their enjoyment as effortless as possible and guards them against uncertainty and allusions to unpleasant recollections . . . the action of *Kitsch* on an eagerly receptive public is, therefore, easily characterized: it begins promptly and is soon over. The emotions released are so universal and superficial as to be independent of the individual work' (p. 266).
- 4 For a list of Alwyn's works, see: *William Alwyn: A Catalogue of his Music*, ed. Stewart R. Craggs and Alan J. Poulton (London, Bravura Publications, 1985).
- 5 For Keller's brief account of the 7th International Music Congress held in May 1950 in Florence, see *Music Review*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (August 1950), 210–12.

6 See Keller's 'Walton's *Hamlet*', *Music Review*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (August 1948), 179–99.

7 [HK:] A new device needs a new term.

8 [HK:] Mozart's music in particular tends to show independence of its temporality: ideally, it should be heard, i.e. imagined, as he himself heard it: all at once, 'like a picture'. In a future note I hope to return to a striking instance of how he develops, in a sonata movement, something whose exposition is only to be found in the recapitulation. The movement is the Prague's first.

9 [HK:] In my description of film and score I am relying on my memory and some notes of a distant single session. In a way I hope I am making mistakes: they might draw attention to the necessity for always providing the film music critic with script and score.

• Leonard Bernstein

[On the Waterfront]

[Keller appended an apology to this essay when it was first published in The Score, 12 June 1955: 'When I saw On the Waterfront more than half a year ago (two successive sessions, the first incomplete), I had no idea that I should be asked to write the present article. It may contain minor lapses of memory, which, however, would only occur in the favourable sections: I have taken great care to omit any negative criticism that may be based on faulty recollection or the illegibility of my hasty notes.']

There is no English word for *Kitsch* except 'Hollywood'. The name of the place where our century's two leading destroyers of *Kitsch*, Schoenberg and Stravinsky, have created their last-period works, is the most pejorative term in the despairing critic's vocabulary. It denotes an unscrupulous approach to the problem of form, a third-hand nineteenth-century style, and the kind of 'sonorous' orchestration which hides the absence of ideas instead of clarifying their development and interaction, and which is sufficiently stereotyped to be left to an 'orchestrator's' expert hands. His expertness is real as far as it goes; whereas it is doubtful, *experto crede*, whether some of the most prominent Hollywood composers would be able

to score their own music, let alone invent it.

While Hollywood is flooding the worlds of sight and sound with technicolored Cinemascope and the Wonder of Stereophonic Sound respectively, there are smaller American film companies which, in the words of an indigenous observer, 'have the air of being ready to make an honest buck, and never mind the grand manner.' Elia Kazan's black and white *On the Waterfront* (1954) must, in fact, have made quite a few honest bucks, for it cannot have cost much and has proved one of the most successful films of recent years. Marlon Brando won the 'Oscar' for his performance in it,¹ and the British Film Academy titled him the best foreign actor. At last January's third International Film festival at Punta del' Este (Uruguay), moreover, *On the Waterfront* won the award not only for the best direction but also for the best film score. It is not often that the musician finds himself in agreement with the film critic as far as 'background' music is concerned, but in this instance agreement must be unanimous: Leonard Bernstein's music is about the best film score that has come out of America. In sheer professional skill, it surpasses everything I have heard or seen of the music of his teacher, Aaron Copland (himself one of the very few contributors of musical music to the American film), while in textural style and harmonic idiom it is more daring even than many more individual scores by our own leading composers.

The American reaction against Hollywood was inevitable, but its success wasn't. At least two distinguished composers had reacted previously, Copland and Hanns Eisler, who wrote his anti-Hollywoodian book in what he calls the 'lion's den', to wit Hollywood.² Either reaction, however, was perhaps more convincing verbally than musically. As far as I know it, Copland's film music is at times a little half-hearted and primitive, and cannot altogether escape the charge of amateurishness. As for Eisler, he has written at least one film score that contradicts what he preaches; besides, the sermon itself represents a confusing mixture of musical truth and communist irrelevance. For itself, this gifted Schoenberg pupil has chosen to withdraw behind

the Iron Curtain where, if he is a good boy, he will have to compose what is, fundamentally, the kind of music his book is against.

If 'Hollywood' and its European forerunners be considered a 'thesis' in an Hegelian sense, and Schoenberg and Stravinsky its antithesis, then the *Waterfront* score emerges as a synthesis that satisfies both cinematic and musical requirements. Bernstein's attitude is in fact as eclectic as that of the worst Hollywood composer, but he largely selects and borrows from very different styles and methods – pre-eminently those of Stravinsky and Schoenberg themselves, Copland, Hindemith (via Piston?),³ Puccini consecutives (in the last, 25th entry), folkish elements, penta-tonicism (tonal pentascale, third mode), jazz, and various European sources (probably even the 'Dawn' interlude from *Grimes* with its 'waterfront' atmosphere) into the bargain. Significantly enough, on the rarer occasions when Bernstein does approach Hollywood's usual suppliers, his eclecticism becomes strikingly inconsistent, unity flags, his art becomes artificial, his synthesis synthetic. The crassest example is the Wagnerian *sforzato* kiss in the 12th entry that contradicts its context in every respect, structural, textural and emotional (overstatement). For the rest, the fact that Stravinsky and Schoenberg made their home in Hollywood may, after all, be of more than geographical significance; are not geography and chronology two axes in that system of coordinates that we call history?

The field in which, after much antithesis, Schoenberg and Stravinsky have finally shown their common historical function is that of polyphony, and it is indeed the largely contrapuntal texture of the *Waterfront* score that constitutes a momentous historical event in the realm of the most modern of all arts which, on the musical side, has hitherto shown a predilection for the most outmoded homophony. From the single thematic line with which the title music opens and the ensuing two-part canon at the octave, it is clear that Bernstein is determined to subject the Hollywoodian sound track to a radical spring-cleaning. Parallel to the contrapuntal method runs a panchromatic⁴

harmonic style that seems to derive from the 'new expressive chromaticism' which Gradenwitz⁵ notes in *The Age of Anxiety* (1948–49); whereas the pan-diatonic approach (Stravinsky, Copland) in sections where the contrapuntal method is relaxed would appear to stem from earlier procedures (*Jeremiah Symphony* (1942), *Fancy Free*).⁶ At the same time, the panchromatic motive power does not confine itself to the contrapuntal stretches, but also promotes some chordal developments. There is, for instance, an atonal chordal build-up that, without availing itself of all the twelve notes, is unmistakably influenced by dodecaphonic technique (of the kind best known in this country from Humphrey Searle's *Poem* for 22 strings). This is indeed the distinctive feature of the *Waterfront's* panchromaticism: it is noticeably post-dodecaphonic, not pre-dodecaphonic, like panchromaticism proper.

The contrapuntal method largely determines the anti-Hollywoodian instrumentation, which is the Mahler-Schoenberg tradition inasmuch as it throws contrasting parts into relief at the expense of conventional sonority, and in the Stravinsky tradition in that, with one or two exceptions, expressive suppression is at a premium, despite the fact that Bernstein's is a more sentimental creative character. Wind and percussion (including the piano)⁷ are treated as the new instruments which they have become through Stravinsky, and even the jazzy and swingy elements have travelled via Stravinsky, whence Gradenwitz's suggestion that Bernstein (among others) is 'fully American-grown and detached from the immediate and direct influence of European cultural and musical life'⁸ seems slightly out of focus.

Among the more individual traits of Bernstein's scoring is his well-formed habit (ultimately rooted in Schoenberg) of changing his instrumentation in midstream to clarify structural developments; with the unerring instinct of the innately practical musician, he has realized that not only textural, but also structural X-raying and spot-lighting is doubly necessary in the cinema, where the music does not call, but has to recall attention.

While, however, his romantic nature invests his 'cold', transparent scorings with hypnotic warmth, conventional structures without much meaning tend to go hand in hand with a conventional treatment of the string band, e.g. in the 7th entry where, needless to add, the music accompanies the principal pair. In the preceding entry, on the other hand, warm feeling and warm sound are, for once, as harmoniously blended as they used to be in more unsophisticated (and hence more un-kitschy) times. The strings expressively punctuate Edie's (the heroine's) words, and the piano enters with a sharply defined rhythmic motif while the strings develop a sad, lyrical melody of considerable beauty. Follows one of the less incisive, but none the less sensitive structural changes of instrumentation, the piano's motif being appropriated, *pizzicato*, by the bass at a crucial dramatic juncture.

The form is as conscientious as the texture, but far more complex. It may sound paradoxical, but a film score has to be more thematic than a symphony – or as thematic as a symphony would have to be if you played the first movement tonight and the next tomorrow night (compare Wagner's symphonic *Leitmotiv* technique). Small-scale, temporally disconnected and ideationally interrupted, the successive entries will otherwise fall to pieces. In a primitive, pre-artistic way, Hollywood's 'theme songs', motto tunes and tautologizing *Leitmotifs* have always realized the need for reinsured thematic unity. The problem for the artist is how to combine manifest thematicism⁹ with generous melodic development and insure it against monotony. Bernstein's downright Schoenbergian thorough-thematicism¹⁰ comes off with flying colours. Gradenwitz¹¹ has drawn attention to the verified thematic elaboration in the *Jeremiah Symphony* and *Fancy Free*, and the *Waterfront* music extends its thematic demands down to the last ornament. There is a 'theme song', to be sure ('I wait on the waterfront'), but it is not the usual theme without variations; in fact it does not form a structural pillar at all. Instead, the various *alternativo* and ternary forms develop the initial, highly economical thematic material with the help of an

extreme variation technique which may derive from the 14 variations of the first movement of the *Age of Anxiety*,¹² and with the intermittent support of an elaborate and un-mechanical ostinato technique which, unlike most Stravinskyism, honours rather than insults the master of the ostinato. The variation forms themselves are stratified, in that variations become themes: an ideal cinematic answer to the Schoenbergian demand for 'developing variation'.

It is fortunate that Bernstein has not heeded H. F. Redlich's somewhat unconsidered advice three years ago: 'The way indeed is open for him to forsake in future the narrow path of creative musicianship and henceforth to exploit his talents for conducting, piano-playing and lecturing . . . to the full'.¹³ 'There is one thing we've got in this country', says Father Barry in *On the Waterfront*, 'and that's ways of fighting back for what you think is right'. Bernstein's is a pretty solitary struggle, but the very fact that he has been offered a way of fighting back may gradually make it incumbent upon us to find another English word for *Kitsch*.

Notes

Source: *The Score and IMA Magazine*, 12 June 1955, 81–4. The notes are Keller's unless otherwise indicated.

- 1 Since these lines were written, it has been announced that the American Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences has awarded no fewer than seven 'Oscars' to *On the Waterfront*. In addition to individual awards for the director, the leading pair and author of the screenplay, the film has been chosen as the best picture of the year (1954), the best example of editing, and the best example of black and white photography.
- 2 *Composing for the Film*, New York, 1947; London 1951; *Komposition für den Film*, Berlin, 1942. The quotation is from the author's preface to the German edition. [Ed.: For a more recent edition, see: Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films*, with a new introduction by Graham McCann, London, Athlone Press, 1994.]
- 3 Cf. Peter Gradenwitz, 'Leonard Bernstein' in *The Music Review*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (August 1949), 198.
- 4 Perhaps it may be mentioned in passing that readers should beware of the new *Grove's* article on 'Panchromaticism', which is factually quite absurd.

5 Gradenwitz, 200.

6 *Ibid.*, 196 ff.

7 'Bernstein astonished his fellow students at Harvard by extemporizing as piano accompanist at the showings of historical films and by playing Stravinsky and Copland along with his own paraphrases of Russian folksongs to accompany [Eisenstein's] *The Battleship Potemkin*.' *Ibid.*, p. 194.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 191.

9 As distinct from latent thematicism which, always demonstrable, unites the contrasting movements of every good symphony and the contrasting subjects of every good sonata. How could these contrasting entities otherwise be one?

10 I have introduced this term for the German *Durchthematisierung*. The combination of 'through' and 'thorough' is fortunate.

11 Gradenwitz, 195 ff.

12 *Ibid.*, 199 ff.

13 'Old Musical Posers and New World Solutions', *The Music Review*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (May 1952), 158.

• Anton Karas (The Harry Lime Theme)

[*The Third Man*, *Die Dreigroschenoper* (*The Threepenny Opera*)]

For well over two years, the Harry Lime tune (from Carol Reed's production *The Third Man* [1949]) has pestered the diatonic world; a recent visit to the Continent has shown that it is in fact becoming a classic: other tunes already quote it, and people who love it are even learning to whistle it.

Almost all popular hits seem vulgar, but since not all vulgarity is popular, the success of the tune asks for an explanation, all the more because one does not remember a previous instance of a hit-song which the light music-lover cannot sing, of a tune that is no tune at all. So far, two kinds of explanation have come my way, the circumstantial and the economical. The circumstantial, which is found among highbrows who pride themselves on their lowbrow practicality, has first been given by Anthony Hopkins at last year's International Film Music Congress in Florence, and later also in the pages of *Sight & Sound*. It says that these notes have caught on because in the film they were played on the unusual instrument of the zither. The

economical explanation, which I think I got from Benjamin Frankel,¹ points to the commercial propaganda behind and in front of the tune.

Both pointers are right; neither is an explanation.

Not only are there plenty of sufficiently banal tunes which have flopped despite heavy commercial backing, but I have seen many people being struck by the Harry Lime Theme without having been subjected to any kind of conditioning, without even having seen the film or heard its zither. I am one of them. I never saw the film because I hate the zither. When I first heard the music I detested it at once – as if it were important enough to be detested. As soon as I detest something I ask myself why I like it.

Particularly when I am shocked to find myself whistling it. It is, in fact, time that one turned one's curiosity to the music itself and tried to find an intrinsic explanation for its appeal. The striking, indeed the only feature about this 'tune' is its submediant obsession which, avoiding an Aeolian insinuation, creates an extended appoggiatura, a suspense by a prolonged suspension, enhanced by the tonic-dominant bass as well as by the alternation of tonic chord and dominant seventh. The sixth is the inhibitory degree *par excellence*, because its opposition to the tonic is based on the strongest possible measure of agreement or *tertium comparationibus*, including as only the submediant triad does the tonic third: hence the arch-inhibition, the interrupted cadence V – VI. Hence, too, the added sixth – a familiar jazz device – is the rightest 'wrong' note, a harmonic non-harmonic note producing (*ceteris paribus*) the most primitive kind of dissonant chordal tension.

When I drew a colleague's attention to the fact that the Harry Lime Theme was not much more than a figured added sixth, using this degree instead of everything [else], including the tonic, he very sensitively remarked that the piece has the feel of a *coitus interruptus* – more precisely of a prolonged *coitus*. In fact, just as the latter may be regarded as both the most elementary and the most elemental application, in adult life, of what Prof. J. C. Flugel² has called the 'principle of the increase of satisfaction

through inhibition', partially regressing as it does to the unorgastic, fore-pleasurable sexual activities of childhood, so the prolonged submediant inhibition, the insistent suspension of the jazzy sixth, represents the most primitive application of this principle in the sphere of dissonant chordal formulations. (In chordal progressions, the consequences of the interrupted cadence V – VI are, of course, the prototypical example of such an increase of satisfaction.)

It is imaginable that the musical primitivity of this harmonic manoeuvre corresponds to a relatively unsublimated amount of, perhaps, infantile sexual energy behind it; this state of affairs would account for the 'sexy' character of the tune to which a well-known singer has directed my attention, and which my own feeling confirms; it would also account for one's disgust at (i.e. unconscious infantile love of) the tune's banality.

I immediately asked this singer whether he could think of another such sexy tune, and his associations anon supplied the one-time hit *Sous les toits de Paris* (from the film, I believe, of the same title) where, sure enough, the submediant (likewise arrived at chromatically from the dominant) also plays a strong and inhibitory role.

The primitive is not bad, aesthetically or morally. Rather it is beyond – better: before – good and evil. Prolonged *coitus* may revert to infantile pleasures, but as soon as it is practised with a view to affording the woman gratification, it assumes a highly altruistic and thus adult significance.

Mr. Anton Karas's tune is in the main too primitive to be bad (except for the so far unmentioned and indeed unmentionable tonic resolution): a bare harmonic structure with an ornamental pattern instead of a melody. That the same harmonic device (in the same 'primitive' key of C!) can serve as basis for something good is shown by Kurt Weill's 'Moritat' (from the Tobis-Warner production of *Dreigroschenoper*).³ Weill indicated 'Blues-tempo'; to me the blues' influence seems to extend to the melodic-harmonic structure, in that the tune apotheosises that submediant which we hear in certain blues

in place of the leading note and with a V17 implication: by an extreme inhibition of the tonic, the submediant here downright usurps it. Owing to the quality of the melodic line, we are no longer disgusted at the primitive inhibition, though in order fully to appease our unconscious conscience we may have to murmur something about the decadent German twenties. Decadent the tune certainly wishes to be, an aim that it achieves by the submediant's unbroken dominance over the tonic: if we adhere to our psychogenesis, we may here be confronted with a musical phantasy of the so-called method of *Karezza*, i.e. prolonged *coitus* without *ejaculatio*. We in our civilization tend to regard this practice as decadent, but there are sects that have ritualized it, the purpose being a supreme and sublime test of willpower as well as concentration on the spiritual aspects of the beloved. From the purely medical point of view, it would seem that we are right, in that the practice is both physiologically and psychologically idiotic, but then, with Weill's tune, the medical point of view does not arise. Possibly, if unconsciously, Weill exhibits

decadence as it were in inverted commas in order to show us that decadent art is never where we look for it: he seems to offer a parody, not so much of decadence, as of our conception of decadence. In any case, the art of love can tell us something about the love of art. Not much, perhaps, yet much we do not readily think of.

Notes

Source: *Music Survey, New Series 1949–1952*, Vol. 3, No. 4, June 1951, [reprint] eds Donald Mitchell and Hans Keller (London, Faber, 1981), pp. 283–85 (second cycle).

- 1 [Ed.: Along with Alan Rawsthorne, Benjamin Frankel also attended the Film Music Congress held in Florence in May 1950.]
- 2 J. C. Flugel, *Men and their Motives* (London, Kegan Paul, 1934).
- 3 [Ed.: The song is the celebrated 'Mack the Knife' from *The Threepenny Opera* (*Die Dreigroschenoper*, G. W. Pabst, 1931; available on BFIV 025). In the first printing of the essay, Keller includes the first 16-bar period as a music example. Of the seven phrases, the goals of the first, second, third, fourth and seventh phrases are the note A; the harmony that acts as a point of reference throughout the passage is the C major (tonic) triad with A as the 'added sixth'].