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Silent Film Music: Between Interdisciplinarity and Multidisciplinarity

Nebyliojo kino muzika: tarp tarpdiscipliniškumo ir daugiadiscipliniškumo

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Abstract

The idea of including scholarship on silent film music within the disciplinary field of musicology raises several contradictions. The fact that the musical accompaniment for a silent film can be an object of study for historical musicology has long been a point of controversy, defined by the concurrence of divergent and sometimes irreconcilable demands. The ways music is employed in silent cinema oblige us to face modes of representing and conceptualizing music that do not at all fit within the Adlerian musicological paradigm, that is, that conceptual core of modern *Musikwissenschaft* which identifies the history of music as historical investigation into the musical artwork relying on philological sources.

Given its hiatus from “canonic” objects of historical musicology, scholarship on cinematic music has emerged in the last forty years, across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and emanating from the English-speaking world, with the awareness that it occupies a disciplinary field with its own peculiarities. Epistemological discourses on film music have emphasized above all the interdisciplinary nature of their object of study, namely its location in a cross-disciplinary space between film studies and musicology. Notwithstanding this, it is worth asking: should silent film music be actually called an “interdisciplinary” or rather a “multidisciplinary” object? Does it really occupy a no-man’s land between disciplines? On closer inspection, the fundamental question of what is the founding basis for film music studies and consequently for scholarship on silent film music has much to do with our answer to the question: what is historical musicology today?

Keywords: silent film music, interdisciplinarity, musicology, film music studies.

Anotacija

Mintis įtraukti nebyliojo kino muzikos tyrinėjimus į muzikologijos disciplinos lauką susiduria su keliais prieštaravimais. Tai, kad nebyliojo kino muzikinis akompanimentas gali būti istorinės muzikologijos tyrimo objektas, jau seniai yra kontroversijų objektas, sąlygojamas vienalaikių skirtingų ir kartais nesuderinamų reikalavimų. Muzikos panaudojimo būdai nebyliajame kine susiję su muzikos reprezentavimo ir konceptualizavimo būdais, kurie netelpa į Adlerio muzikologijos paradigmą, t. y. į tą šiuolaikinės muzikologijos konceptualųjį branduolį, kuris muzikos istoriją tapatina su istoriniu muzikos kūrinio tyrimu, besiremiančiu filologiniais šaltiniais.

Atsižvelgiant į tai, kad kinematografinė muzika yra nutolusi nuo „kanoninių“ istorinės muzikologijos objektų, per pastaruosius keturiasdešimt metų XX ir XXI a. anglakalbiame pasaulyje atsirado kino muzikos tyrinėtojų, suvokiančių, kad ši muzika užima savitą disciplininį lauką. Epistemologiniuose diskursuose apie kino muziką pirmiausia pabrėžiamas tarpdisciplininis jų tyrimo objekto pobūdis, t. y. jo vieta tarpdisciplininėje erdvėje tarp kino studijų ir muzikologijos. Nepaisant to, verta paklausti, ar nebyliojo kino muziką iš tiesų reikėtų vadinti „tarpdisciplininium“, o gal veikia „daugiadisciplininium“ objektu? Ar ji iš tiesų yra „niekieno žemėje“ tarp disciplinų? Atidžiau pažvelgus, pamatinis klausimas, kas yra kino muzikos studijų, taigi ir nebyliojo kino muzikos tyrinėjimų, pagrindas, glaudžiai susijęs su mūsų atsakymu į klausimą: kas šandien yra istorinė muzikologija?

Reikšminiai žodžiai: nebyliojo kino muzika, tarpdiscipliniškumas, muzikologija, kino muzikos tyrimai.

And soon historians will feel compelled to add a new chapter to music history. This chapter will be called: Music for Film.

Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt, 1926¹

Extra-disciplinarity

In his *L'esperienza musicale e l'estetica* (1956), an influential book in twentieth-century music scholarship, Italian musicologist Massimo Mila denied cinematic music any artistic dignity, accusing it of having a merely functional nature. For a musicologist like Mila, with a background in

Benedetto Croce's aesthetics, the use of music at the service of another language estranges it from the substance of art: Its “diabolical ability” to evoke semantic effects, its “expressive cynicism,” “does not yet elevate it to the dignity of art.” Here is the critical passage from his book:

The will to expression alone, separated from that phenomenon of involuntary emanation in which artistic expression consists, serves only to produce illustrative music of a utilitarian nature, such as, for example, film scores. Here music is habitually employed not for its artistic value, but for its semantic one, for its possibilities as a language of practical communication.

[...] There is a whole vocabulary of musical locutions, whose expressive efficacy has nothing to do with the expression in which the nature of art consists [...]. [These are] all real effects of music, but of a music that remains, so to speak, outside the interests of aesthetics, since its ability to produce such effects does not yet elevate it to the dignity of art. Effects that any musician who knows his job can produce at will with a sort of expressive cynicism, in which the will to expression operates at its maximum, but from which that unconscious self-expression that is the very substance of the art is entirely excluded. (Mila 1956: 152–153)

Artistic versus semantic value, aesthetic versus functional quality, art versus utility – dichotomies like these pervade the disciplinary discourse on cinematic music throughout the twentieth century. From the silent film era to today, musicologists and composers have been debating the topic, arousing historiographical and aesthetic issues that occasionally call into question the belonging of cinematic music to such disciplinary fields as musicology, aesthetics, cultural history, and film studies.

The idea of including scholarship on silent film music (as well as cinematic music as a whole) within the disciplinary field of musicology (or music aesthetics) raises several contradictions. Even the oscillation of its definition between “music for cinema” (or cinema music) and “music for film” (or film music) reveals its problematic status. Far from constituting a futile lexical dispute, the antinomy “music for cinema” versus “music for film” (and, by analogy, in German *Kinomusik* versus *Filmmusik*, or in Italian *musica da cinema* versus *musica per film*) alludes to a basic distinction in musical production for the cinema already established during the silent film era: one between mood music, designed to accompany stereotyped film situations (therefore planned for cinematic use, but for no film in particular), and a score, whether totally or partially original but nevertheless conceived to accompany a certain movie.² The lexical distinction between “music for cinema” and “music for film” anyway solves only part of the problem. Not only does it tend to present as antinomic two solutions which, in reality, coexisted and were co-present for a long time,³ but it also leaves out a number of other musical practices, from extemporaneous improvisation to accompaniment with mechanical devices, from incidental music (in German *Inzidenzmusik*, in Italian *musica incidentale*) to the use of songs or repertoire pieces (in English, “song score” or “compilation soundtrack”). Given such heterogeneity in musical practices – which is often the cause of terminological and methodological confusion among scholars themselves – my preference, here and in the following, for the hypernym “cinematic music”⁴ has the advantage of equidistance both from normative definitions, which in trying to define the object’s essence lead to an unacceptable

reductio ad unum, and from generic labels (in Italian *colonna sonora*, in English “music score,” “soundtrack,” etc.) that have become commonplace in the film industry but lack conceptual substance.

Having said this, the fact that “musical commentary on the cinematograph,” as Mila called it, can be an object of study for historical musicology, traditionally understood as the historical study of art music, has long been a point of controversy, defined by the concurrence of divergent and sometimes irreconcilable demands. Indeed, the ways music is employed in cinema oblige us to face modes of representing and conceptualizing music that do not at all fit within the Adlerian musicological paradigm. I allude to that conceptual core of modern *Musikwissenschaft* – built by Guido Adler (1885) at the end of the nineteenth century along positivistic lines – which identifies the history of music as historical investigation into the musical artwork relying on philological sources as concrete “objects of research” that can be described as “natural matters of fact” (Gallo 2001: 16). It is a singular paradox, full of consequences for the purposes of my argument, that the birth of musicology on positivist foundations, in the decisive period of institutionalization of academic disciplines between 1870 and 1910, revealed an intrinsic interdisciplinary root, as Julie Thompson Klein and Robert Frodeman have emphasized (Klein-Frodeman 2017: 147–148). From the beginning, musicology was based on disciplinary influences: it borrowed the concept of stylistic history from the history of art, and the methods of paleography and philology from literary studies. It emphasized a positivist historiography: it was concerned with studying a closed artifact, and the concept of stylistic evolution became a central relief.

Now, when viewed in the light of the positivist paradigm, the historiographic agenda of most cinematic music, and of silent film music if any, cannot but have its main vulnus in the highly problematic status of its sources. It is worth remembering that most of the music for films of the silent era, like many of the movies they accompanied, no longer exist (Anderson 2017: 201–202). Handwritten scores with the orchestration intended by their composers are rare (among the few examples, Luigi Mancinelli’s score for *Frate Sole* by Ugo Falena, 1918, and that by Gottfried Huppertz for Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*, 1927); in cases where piano scores have been preserved (for example, that of Edmund Meisel for Sergei Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin*, 1926), these were often produced in a different context and for different purposes. In contrast, a large repertoire of mood music pieces for compilation has come down to us from the silent era, which according to its nature, however, could either precede a “musical illustration” (as in the case of the *Filmharmonie* by Werner Richard Heymann, 1927), or descend from it *a posteriori* (as in the case of the

Fantastisch-romantische Suite by Hans Erdmann, derived from the accompanying music to the Murnau film *Nosferatu*, 1922). Music materials of such varied nature, which could occupy completely different moments in the compositional process, raise notable problems when they are inserted into a historical narration guided by the notion of “opus.” The musical source then comes into relation or, more often, collides with a source of a different kind – the film print. Each of these two documents has a different ontological value. To say it with Umberto Eco’s words: the film print can be regarded as a “closed text,” which is reproduced mechanically and almost identically at every projection; on the other hand, the music of a silent film is an “open text” renewed and re-produced at each live performance.⁵ Moreover, their authors enjoy different statuses: the filmmaker, for all intents and purposes, signs the cinematic text; the composer instead supervises a complementary component, not of the cinematic text but of the screening at the film venue.

Three decisive factors determine the extraneousness of large chapters of cinematic music to the aesthetic model of musical work of art: one of a pragmatic-contextual type, another of a textual nature, and a last one of a theoretical-aesthetic nature.

(1) The first factor is evident in a review written in 1926 by Hans Erdmann, the most important film music theoretician in the German-speaking world, for the film journal *Reichsfilmbblatt* commenting on the inauguration of the Gloria-Palast in Berlin under the ambitious title *Festspielhaus of German Cinema*:

The overture *Orpheus in der Unterwelt* was played at first, not so badly and not so well. Anyways, things like these don’t happen from one day to the next. That applies even more to the *Figaro* Overture inserted before the film, but the fact that the entirety of the overture was broken up by the noise of folding chairs, back and forth running, the search for seats, etc., makes it neither necessary nor “festspielhäulich”. If you don’t take yourself seriously, you won’t be taken seriously. What the audience has accustomed itself to in the opera, must become customary in a serious cinema. (Erdmann 1926: 16)

The reception of the musical accompaniment to a film, even when it is performed as a prelude or interlude to the actual film projection, no longer complies with the only norm of behavior that the nineteenth-century aesthetic model regarded as appropriate to a musical work of art, namely pure contemplation and self-unaware listening. Music in cinema is no longer isolated, detached from the environment; it is no longer the object of immediate and exclusive attention aimed at aesthetic satisfaction. On the contrary, it is relegated to the background and placed within a frame that often deforms it.

(2) The second factor is more proximate to the conditions of music’s existence during the silent era. The live musical accompaniment to a film screening cannot have an “opus” character insofar as it is relegated to the rank of an improvisation or compilation activity. The accompanying music to film projections translates into a praxis, or rather into a variety of performance practices: it is an activity, a process in perennial development, a sort of “music-making” that seldom establishes itself as a work. Temporal transience is its customary condition of existence. Music for silent cinema, therefore, lacks one of the constitutive features of the nineteenth-century aesthetic model – the moment of its consolidation into a closed text.⁶

(3) There is a third, crucial “anti-aesthetic” factor that paradoxically derives from the artistic ambitions of cinema as such. The claim for the aesthetic status of the cinematic text as a whole, as a total artwork, implies a hierarchical subordination of the musical component. Erdmann significantly emphasized the notion in 1926:

I say on purpose “cinematic art” and not “art music for film” precisely because music belongs to the cinematic art. (Erdmann 1926: 36)

Having abandoned the claim for raising the musical component of a film screening to the level of concert music, it finds itself de-classified into the category of “applied music.” The decisive issue is its functionality, its service to a purpose outside itself. Unlike absolute music, the musical accompaniment of a film screening is not an individual entity per se – the *opus perfectum et absolutum*, in Nikolaus Listenius’s well-known definition – but it is part of a larger and superordinate totality to which it belongs.

This also involves acknowledging the fact that the attention of the audience is directed elsewhere. The German music critic Frank Warschauer wrote about this in the *Musikblätter des Anbruch* in 1929:

Whether the music for a film is put together more or less well is ultimately a question of convenience, but it cannot change anything about the judgment cast on the film. In cinema, the focus is essentially on the image, and the music must do everything possible to ensure that the listener focuses on the visuals. [...] What you notice all the time is that you cannot carefully follow the music and the film at the same time, regardless of whether the music is an illustration, such as a potpourri, or an original piece. The musical development not only contributes in no way to the scenic events but takes place on an entirely different level. If you pay attention to the film’s development, you can hear the music only with one ear; it stops in the subconscious, as happens in a cafe when you hear music while speaking or reading. (Warschauer 1929: 132–133)

As Warschauer concluded:

Against this background must the praxis of cinematic music be framed. It lies in the ‘Middle-earth of art.’ (Warschauer 1929: 133)

This Middle-earth is that of “applied music:” not art whose goal lies within itself, but refined craftsmanship whose definition rests on a subtle compromise between autonomy and functionality, between artistic and use value.⁷

On the basis of these assumptions, which were the logical corollary of the methodological horizon of the discipline still until the 1970s, those who aim at writing a history of cinematic music – especially one for the silent film era, which represents, if any, a true and proper *mise en abyme* of the problems under scrutiny – must resign themselves to compiling, so to speak, a minor history or, more precisely, a discourse on music that occupies a territory outside the Adlerian paradigm of the musical artwork. It will be programmatically a “poor” discipline occupying a marginal area in the major narrative on the “history of traditional art music in Western countries” (Karol Berger in Della Seta 2006: 314); its genesis, sources, and genres not only distinguish it from the dominant model but also involve transformations that affect the very notion of music, to the point of obliging rigorous scholars – following Mila’s example – to assert the extra-disciplinarity of cinematic music in relation to the field of historical musicology.⁸

In retrospect, we can say that for cinematic music to emerge from “Middle-earth” and earn a place in the assembly of disciplinary objects, it would have taken more than an upheaval in the foundations of musicology, as we will see below. If cinematic music seems to be on the verge of occupying a permanent place in the structure of musicological studies today, this is not due to the unexpected

discovery of its intrinsic aesthetic surplus value, but to a far more profound change in the epistemological constitution of historical musicology. In the following pages, we will go to the root of this paradigm shift, even if it is not completely resolved and not free of centrifugal forces.

Interdisciplinarity

Given its intrinsic hiatus from “canonic” objects of historical musicology, scholarship on cinematic music has emerged in the last forty years, across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and emanating from the English-speaking world, with the awareness that it occupies a disciplinary field with its own peculiarities: a hybrid field, as indicated by the definition of “film music studies,” which combines both the terms “film” and “music” in an attributive function. Even in the English-speaking world, however, the wording “film music” coexists alongside such terms as “film’s music,” “music for film,” “music in film,” “cinema music,” and “film score,” revealing a problem that is far from resolved (cf. Rosar 2002).

The pioneers of film music scholarship were film scholars such as Claudia Gorbman and Kathryn Kalinak or musicians such as Martin Miller Marks (a pianist for silent film) and Gillian B. Anderson (a composer and conductor), while very rarely, not surprisingly, are there musicologists of academic training. In the Italian-speaking world, Sergio Miceli was unique for his historiographical rigor – a uniqueness inscribed in his academic trajectory.

The various origin of the founding fathers of so-called “film music studies” is reflected in epistemological discourses; studies on film music have emphasized above all the interdisciplinary nature of their object of study

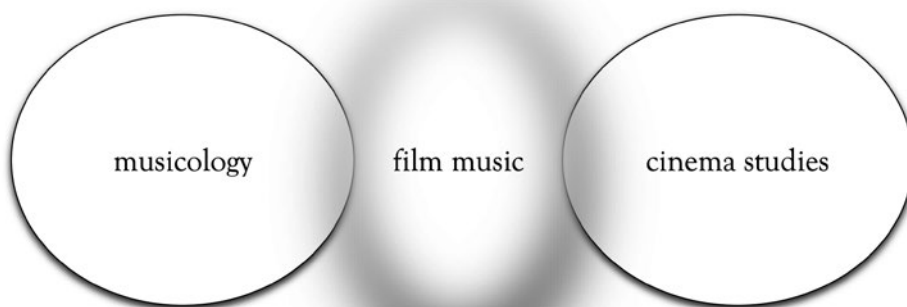


Figure 1. Film music as an “interdisciplinary” object of study.

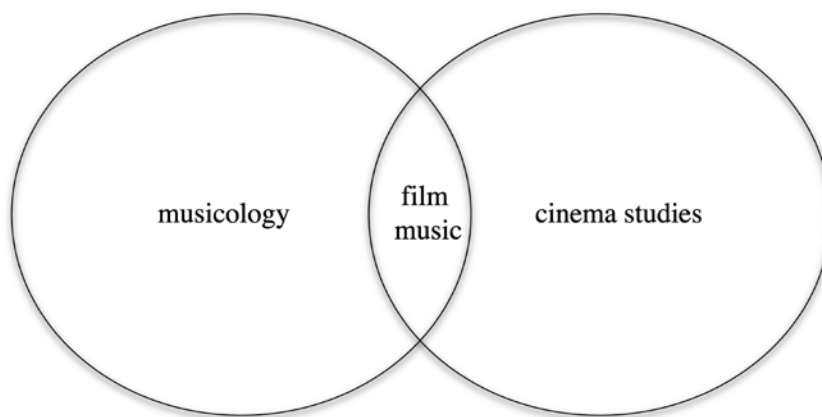


Figure 2. Film music as a “multidisciplinary” object of study.

(Figure 1), namely its location, to quote Peter Franklin, in a “cross-disciplinary site” among three categories of scholars: “academic musicologists, cultural theorists and film scholars” (Franklin 2005: 295). According to James Buhler and in the same vein, the study of music and sound in cinema would occupy a place “in the interdisciplinary space between film studies and musicology” (Buhler 2007: 145).

The definition of film music studies as an interdisciplinary field is certainly seductive but vague – a vagueness inherent to many rhetorics of interdisciplinarity. We speak about borders, spaces, or sites between different territories, in terms of common geopolitical metaphors, with the risk of generating confusion (Rosar 2002: 2). Indeed, while it is clear that an object of study can be shared in common by several disciplines (and film music is definitely one of these), it is much more difficult to understand what it means to study it with an “interdisciplinary” or even “non-disciplinary method” (David Neumeyer, quoting Kalinak, in Neumeyer 2000: 7). What could a “non-disciplinary method” even be? How might we figure out – William Rosar polemically observes (2009: 103) – the gestures of a scholar trained in one academic discipline who wishes to draw conclusions in another discipline by virtue of an alleged “inter-” or “non-disciplinarity”? Rather than employ a method that is placed “between,” “beyond,” or “outside the disciplines” (Neumeyer 2000: 4), it would seem necessary to pool the specific disciplinary competencies of both musicologists and film scholars. The object “film music” should be defined as “multidisciplinary” (Rosar 2009: 103) because it does not occupy a no-man’s land among the disciplines, but is rather shared by several disciplines (Figure 2) and therefore by several categories of scholars, each of whom devotes themselves to it not without a method, but

with specific disciplinary competencies, a technical lexicon, and a methodology *iuxta propria principia*.

An awareness of the multidisciplinary status of cinematic music should translate into a “plurality of methods,” which, according to Tilman Seebass, “is, today, one of the typical features of the humanities” (Seebass 1999: 226). Which means that, as stated by David Neumeyer:

[...] to take fullest advantage of the intellectual resources available, one should be familiar with the literatures and methods of the two separate fields. (Neumeyer 2000: 2)

This should mean first the possibility of comparing respective metalanguages, that is, the knowledge of a specific vocabulary and terminology with which different communities of scholars attempt to describe their object of study. This is where the first problems arise. Martin Miller Marks wrote at the beginning of the 1980s:

Because film communicates (at least potentially) through a conjunction of visual and auditory signals, research into film music requires an understanding of not one but two nonverbal systems of communication, as well as the problematical jargons with which we attempt to describe each of them in speech. In this age of specialized studies, few scholars have been able to master more than half of the subject. Those in film have been preoccupied with the broad essentials of its history and theory, with the result that music has been granted mostly cursory consideration. The subject also stands on the periphery of musicology. (Marks 1979: 282–283)

The consolidation of a common terminological and lexical base, which is still far from being achieved,⁹ is an indispensable prerequisite for the development of a *full interdisciplinary* methodology.¹⁰ This term is used to describe a “specialized interdisciplinary bridge” (Cozzens 2001), based on a “systematic integration of knowledge”

(Klein 2017: 29) and made possible by the joint definition of variables and categories, common thematic structures, conceptual and metalinguistic bases shared by several communities of scholars.

In short, an authentically (and not merely rhetorically) interdisciplinary methodology, if any, should translate into a “multispecialism,” which is exactly the opposite of that alleged “non-disciplinarity.” A hybrid methodology with a high degree of disciplinary specialization finds its most appropriate metaphor not in a *no man’s land*, but in a *bridge building* “between complete and firm disciplines” (Jacobs 2017: 36; Klein 2017: 26). The following statement from Neumeyer is therefore to be endorsed:

It may well be that film-music studies will eventually need to adopt a team approach. (Neumeyer 2000: 8)

Only by bridging methods of investigation pertaining to several disciplines would it be possible to extract certain aspects of a movie and its music that emerge from a shared reading. Let’s think of what skills are required to analyze a vast range of aesthetic effects that can be made between the visual and sonic spheres, from rhythmic synchronisms to audiovisual polyrhythms, to agogic congruencies; from visual to spatial synesthesias, to chromoesthesias.

Now, if teamwork, a pluralism of methods, and multispecialism are the prerequisites for a full interdisciplinary study of film music, it cannot but appear to be a contradiction the gesture of those who, imagining film music as a space in itself, a “place between,” if not “beyond,” the consolidated disciplinary territories, have decided to assert its extraterritoriality definitively, as if it were an island to be claimed by means of secession, by giving it a new name and a new flag.

So, in the last twenty years, the expression “film musicology” (apparently coined in Daubney 2000 and taken up

in Davison 2004) has gradually come into use, to indicate not just a hybrid and highly specialized field of study but a discipline distinct and separate from both musicology and filmology (Figure 3). Although Daubney herself has admitted that she coined the expression by chance and without solid preliminary epistemological reflection (cf. Rosar 2009: 101), the expression has become recurrent among filmologists with some musical skills who claim this new disciplinary space as separated from musicology. This has led to a debate about the status of film music studies, between those who argue that it belongs in the field of musicology and those who imagine that it lies outside the boundaries of musicology.¹¹

The stakes are high: if *film musicology* were to constitute itself as a discipline in its own right, film music would be condemned to perpetual exile, as an object alien to musicology proper. And so, paradoxically, the extra-disciplinarity kicked out the door would come back in through the window. We would be in the presence of what Jerry Jacobs has called “the paradox of interdisciplinarity” (Jacobs 2017: 36): In claiming the peculiarities of a hybrid field of study and of a multifaceted object, scholars sometimes tend to limit the field of vision as much as possible, confining the supposedly interdisciplinary field to a “niche” (*ibid.*) that turns out to be even more limited than the disciplinary systems that are accused of being limited.

Intradisciplinarity

The diffusion of “territorial thinking” in epistemological discourse – Seebass observed this at the end of the 1990s in the relationship between historical musicology and ethnomusicology, but the argument can be transferred *mutatis mutandis* to our object of study – has to do above

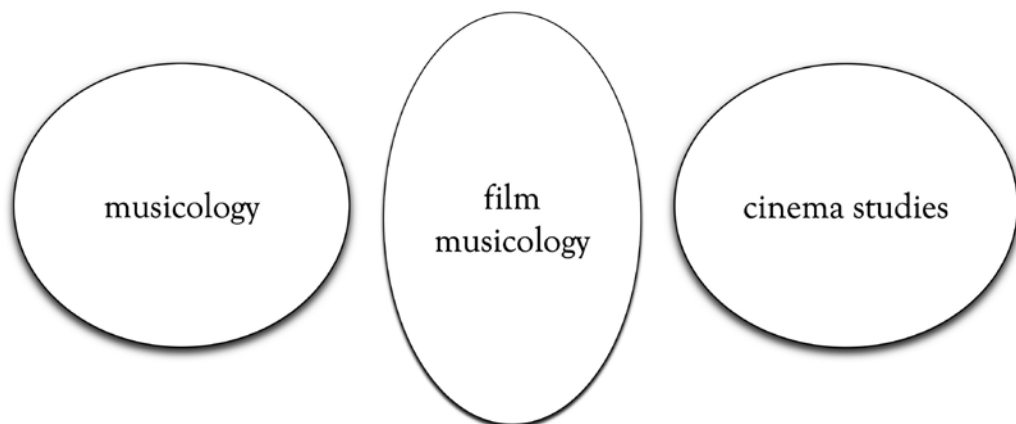


Figure 3. Film musicology as an autonomous disciplinary field.

all “with the educational system and university policy;” but for Seebass the very reason often lies “in the anxiety of not knowing how to master the Other: hence the urgency to take refuge behind defense mechanisms” (Seebass 1999: 226). Indeed, the attempt by some representatives of film music studies to establish an autonomous disciplinary field, with results however destined to run aground in the shallows of a vague albeit fashionable interdisciplinarity, has its roots in a general suspicion of traditional historical musicology. Film music studies need to find their establishing grounds in a “space outside the discipline,” as David Neumeyer wrote, insofar as the discipline appears interested only in preserving a Beethoven-centered canon of musical works (Neumeyer 2000: 3). It seems that we are still stuck with Mila’s objection and the obvious concerns of an aesthetically rooted musicology (Miceli 1996: 192). From the perspective of an historical musicology that understands itself as the history of a musical work of art, the ways music is employed in the “cinematograph” cannot but fall outside its field of interest.¹² It follows logically that anyone who wants to deal with this peculiar object of study can only place him- or herself “on the periphery of musicology” (Marks 1979: 283).

On closer inspection, however, the fundamental question of what the founding basis for film music studies is and consequently for scholarship on silent film music, whether they represent a branch of the tree of historical musicology or of cinema studies (as claimed, for example, by Claudia Gorbman)¹³ or even if they are an independent shrub, has much to do with our answer to the question: what is historical musicology today? Is the portrait that some people have painted true – a discipline concerned only with preserving a Beethoven-centered canon of musical works of art – or should this be considered a “crude caricature” (Rosar 2009: 102)? In other words, is the aesthetic concern still valid?

One wonders whether Neumeyer’s discouraging conclusion – “the study of film music is likely to remain always marginal because its irreducible interdisciplinarity alienates it from the one discipline or the other” (Neumeyer 2000: 2) – does not stem not only from a questionable definition of “interdisciplinarity” (the secessionist “niche” rather than the “bridge”), but above all from a limited vision of historical musicology per se, which doesn’t allow him to take into account a change of orientation in the most advanced horizons of the last thirty years: a Copernican turn – to quote Tobias Janz – that can be summarized as the passage from the aesthetic paradigm, which strictly understood historical musicology as the history of the musical artwork, to a more context-sensitive epistemological paradigm, which understands musicological inquiry as the history of musical culture (or better: musical cultures) (Janz 2013). If the first paradigm, as Mila’s judgment proves, denied cinematic

music the status of a musicological object of study, since it seemed to fall outside the idea of autonomy in the art of music, the second can rightfully include in its field of study a spectrum of cultural phenomena and products, from “applied music,” to “functional” or “popular music,” which, albeit reaching well beyond the definition of a musical artwork in an emphatic sense, undeniably constitute, to quote Richard Middleton, “an integral part of the wider biography of a culture” (Middleton 2004: 396). That’s not all. While the aesthetic paradigm, from Adler onwards, was characterized by the identification and analysis of a notated text as the material foundation of the musical artwork, the new historiographical paradigm – as Barbara Boisits points out – has for some time now addressed the history of performance practices, as well as the reconstruction of historical contexts and reception processes in a much broader sense.

Indeed, the crisis of positivist musicology has coincided with a broadening of the discipline’s traditional horizons, once again by borrowing, with an inherently interdisciplinary attitude, methods and paradigms from other fields of knowledge (Klein-Frodeman 2017: 158): from performance studies to media theory, to music informatics; from semiotics to the scientific-systematic fields of acoustics, physiology, psychology; from anthropology to sociology, cultural studies and gender studies. According to Karol Berger, in the same vein, the “musical facts” whose history we aim at writing include “concrete performances,” “composed texts,” as well as “the experiences and interpretations that listeners and readers derive from those performances and from those texts;” but musical facts must also contemplate “the social practices within which such actions take place,” “the personal characteristics and the vicissitudes of the people acting in the world of music, as well as the social circumstances in which they act. And, furthermore, the character of a musician and his or her identity (sexual, racial, economic, social, national, religious), as well as the social and political attitudes of his or her milieu” (Karol Berger in Della Seta 2006: 316).

If this is the current musicological agenda, there’s no reason why film music studies should seek to ground itself outside historical musicology: a discipline that, since its foundation on positivist lines, and even more so since the epistemological turning point at the turn of the twenty-first century, has been characterized by a remarkable widening of horizons, a dynamic and “porous” nature, open to “intellectual amalgams with ideas, metaphors, and methods borrowed from other domains” (Jacobs 2017: 36). On the contrary, the conditions are in place for the study of film music not only to reveal its potential as a hybrid and highly specialized interdisciplinary field, but also to be recognized as an epistemological model for

musicology tout court. Film music, and silent film music within it, can not only be regarded as an intra-disciplinary subject for modern historical musicology,¹⁴ free from aesthetic constraints, but it deserves to be considered a “hyper-musicological” question, that is, one that concerns “a specifically disciplinary identity,” as a case study par excellence of historical musicology understood as *historia civilis*, to use a lofty phrase by Franco Alberto Gallo: that is, a historiographical inquiry into music’s “cultural heritage” (Gallo 2001: 17), which contemplates textual as well as contextual approaches, which pursues philological research and the study of playing techniques on an equal footing, which knows how to reconcile the immanent analysis of musical documents with the reconstruction of performative, receptive, and cultural practices, and which knows how to place the object of research into the largest number of cultural co-texts.

The integration of (silent) film music into historical musicology, which goes hand in hand with the progressive institutionalization of the discipline within academic frameworks, cannot, however, be limited to the “canonization” of its objects. The main risk would be to confuse studying silent film music with a historical investigation that focuses exclusively on original scores and exceptional collaborations involving first-rate composers. There was a time, as Rick Altman wrote, when film music scholars “regularly jumped from one artistically successful film to another,” thus arranging a canon of works selected according to aesthetic criteria (Altman 2004: 6), which can be synthesized in the so-called “auteurist bias” (Corbella 2020). As a sort of conditioned reflex, historical musicology sought itself in cinematic music, referring to original scores, all by art music composers, which were then put together as a sort of minor canon of film music works.

Such “stories” – because a disjointed collection of analyses of work, as Carl Dahlhaus (1985) warned, does not yet constitute a history – “treated cinema as a series of self-contained texts, divorced from material existence and the three-dimensional world” (Altman 2014: xi). On the contrary, there is a common need today to redefine the ontological basis of what we call “film music” “starting from new objects and new programmes” (Altman 2004: 7). Anyone wishing to reconstruct the material existence of music in silent cinema will have to pass from a two-dimensional perspective, limited to the text, to a three-dimensional perspective, more attentive to the manifold performative practices in movie theaters. Historical documentation of the performative dimension of silent film music requires leaving aside certain textual analysis conducted, as it were, *in vitro* in favor of the reconstruction of techniques, conventions, and music practices in concrete performative reality.¹⁵

Conclusions

Scholarship on silent film music is not an experiment with an uncertain outcome along the paths of a new discipline that has yet to be defined, but should be considered as a “hyper-musicological” question, that is, one that is rooted in musicology as “a specifically disciplinary identity” (Stefano Castelvechi in Della Seta 2006: 334). Far from being a “niche” or a “no man’s land” between different disciplinary fields, the study of film music has the capacity to establish itself as a true and proper disciplinary orientation of twenty-first-century historical musicology, thus fulfilling the mandate given to it almost one hundred years ago by Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt (1926: 817).

Endnotes

- ¹ Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt, 1926:
Und bald schon werden Historiker sich genötigt sehen, der Musikgeschichte ein neues Kapitel anzuhängen. Dieses Kapitel wird heißen: *Die Musik zum Film*.
- ² For reflections on this in the English- and German-speaking worlds, see, respectively, Rosar 2002: 4; and Bullerjahn 1996: 282–283.
- ³ More on this topic can be found in Finocchiaro 2016.
- ⁴ This expression, among others, is adopted in Calabretto 2009.
- ⁵ Here I resort to the notion of “open” versus “closed” text in clear reference to Eco 1976 and 1979.
- ⁶ For an ontology of the musical artwork, see Arbo 2013.
- ⁷ This definition can be found in a seminal essay by Erdmann published in the *Reichsfilmblatt* in 1924 under the title “Film-musik: Ein Problem?,” in which he provides a sort of manifesto of cinematic music as an applied art:
Let’s define it: the accompanying music in film has the purpose of providing an acoustic balance to the silent events of the visual; so it should follow the plot in a meaningful way, interpret it musically and thereby try to enhance the mood. Film music does not aim for an independent effect as in the concert hall, but rather serves as an artistic means for a task that lies beyond its limits. It will be understood that this concept of a “functional art”, i.e. an artistic means, does not in any way imply a reduction in its intrinsic value: the means are just as important as the goal to be achieved through them. A good music, i.e. a technically and artistically faultless accompanying music, will serve well; an inadequate music – badly. (Erdmann 1924: 28)
- ⁸ It is worth emphasizing that by embracing Benedetto Croce’s severe judgment, Mila contradicted himself and his early interest in film music, an interest that had already materialized in 1933 in the essay *Musica e cinematografo* (cf. Mila 1933).
- ⁹ It is enough to go back to the oscillations in terminology that were mentioned at the beginning of this article. On this matter, see David Neumeyer:
Filmologists (who often come to cinema from literary backgrounds) have had little incentive to learn the highly specialized lexicon of what is perceived, rightly or wrongly,

as a “secondary” element of filmic production and representation. Equally modest seems to be the impulse of musicologists to learn strategies for reading films or to study the circumstances of their production and reception, since film music occupies no place in the “official” canon of twentieth-century music. (Neumeyer 2000: 2)

- ¹⁰ On “full or true interdisciplinarity” as opposed to various kinds of “pseudo-interdisciplinarity”, see Boden 1999.
- ¹¹ In addition to Rosar 2009, see also Huvet 2016 for the French-speaking area and Walter 2012 for German-language countries.
- ¹² Giovanni Morelli (1990: 444) spoke of “historiographical moralism” as a consequence of the implementation principles of an aesthetic law.
- ¹³ From the conference *Reviewing the Canon: Borrowed Music in Films*, Stanford University, 2003, quoted in Rosar 2009: 108.
- ¹⁴ It is worth highlighting that Huvet’s essay (2016) comes to the same conclusion, by describing, for the French-speaking world, an analogous itinerary of film music from an “object of study unworthy of musicology” (p. 58) to the recent “(intra) disciplinary openings” (p. 63) towards a *musicologie du cinéma* fully institutionalized in the field of historical musicology.
- ¹⁵ As far as the history of composition is concerned, several studies published in the last decade have benefited from this innovative historiographical perspective. Among the many examples that can be cited, see Tieber-Windisch 2014, and Colturato 2014.

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Santrauka

Mintis įtraukti nebyliojo kino muzikos tyrinėjimus į muzikologijos discipliną susiduria su keliais prieštaravimais. Tai, kad nebyliojo kino muzikinis akompanimentas gali būti istorinės muzikologijos tyrimo objektas, jau seniai yra kontroversijų objektas, sąlygojamas vienalaikių skirtingų ir kartais nesuderinamų reikalavimų. Muzikos panaudojimo būdai nebyliajame kine susiję su muzikos reprezentavimo ir konceptualizavimo būdais, kurie netelpa į Adlerio muzikologijos paradigimą, t. y. į tą šiuolaikinės muzikologijos (*Musikwissenschaft*) konceptualųjį branduolį, kuris muzikos istoriją tapatina su istoriniu muzikos kūrinio tyrimu, besiremiančiu filologiniais šaltiniais. Veikiama kino industrijos primestų sąlygų, kinematografinė muzika stokoja tų išskirtinumo ir aukšto dvasinio aktualumo savybių, kurias Vakarų tradicija paprastai sieja su meno objektu. Ji sumenkinama iki „taikomosios muzikos“ kategorijos. Lemiamą reikšmę turi jos funkcionalumas, tarnavimas už jos ribų esančiam tikslui. Kitaip nei absoliuti muzika, muzikinis akompanimentas filme nebėra individualus subjektas *per se – opus perfectum et absolutum* pagal gerai žinomą Nikolauso Listeniaus apibrėžimą.

Atsižvelgiant į atitrūkimą nuo „kanoninių“ istorinės muzikologijos objektų, kinematografinės muzikos tyrimai, atsiradę per pastaruosius keturiasdešimt metų XX ir XXI a. anglakalbiamame pasaulyje, remiasi suvokimu, kad ši muzika užima savitą disciplininį lauką. Skirtinga vadinamųjų „kino muzikos studijų“ kūrėjų kilmė atspindi epistemologiniuose diskursuose; kino muzikos studijos pirmiausia pabrėžia tarpdisciplininį tyrimo objekto pobūdį, būtent jo vietą tarpdisciplininėje erdvėje tarp kino studijų ir muzikologijos. Kino muzikos studijų kaip tarpdisciplininio lauko apibrėžimas yra neabejotinai viliojantis, tačiau neapibrėžtas – toks neapibrėžtumas būdingas daugeliui tarpdiscipliniškumo retorikų. Iš tiesų nors ir aišku, kad tyrimo objektas gali būti bendras kelioms disciplinoms, daug sunkiau suprasti, ką reiškia jį tirti „tarpdisciplininio“ metodu. Kino muzikos objektas turėtų būti apibrėžiamas kaip „daugiadisciplininis“, nes jis neužima „niekieno žemės“ tarp disciplinų, o yra bendras kelioms disciplinoms, taigi ir kelioms mokslininkų kategorijoms, ir kiekviena iš jų tiria jį savuoju metodu, naudodama specifines disciplinines kompetencijas, specifinį leksikoną ir *iuxta propria principia* metodologiją.

Atidžiau panagrinėjus esminį klausimą, kas yra kino muzikos studijų, taigi ir nebyliojo kino muzikos tyrinėjimų, pagrindas, ar jos yra istorinės muzikologijos, ar kinotyros medžio šaka, ar net savarankiškas krūmas, tai turi daug bendro su mūsų atsakymu į klausimą: kas šiandien yra istorinė muzikologija?

Pastarųjų trisdešimties metų pažangiausiuose horizontuose įvyko kopernikiškas posūkis, lėmęs perėjimą nuo estetinės paradigmos, kurioje istorinė muzikologija griežtai

suprantama kaip muzikos kūrinio istorija, prie kontekstui jautresnės epistemologinės paradigmos, kurioje muzikologinis tyrimas suvokiamas kaip muzikinės kultūros (arba dar geriau – muzikinių kultūrų) istorija. Pirmoji paradigma nepripažino kino muzikai muzikologijos tyrimo objekto statuso, nes ji tarsi neatitiko muzikos meno autonomijos idėjos, o antroji į savo tyrimo lauką gali pagrįstai įtraukti visą spektrą kultūros reiškinių ir produktų, kurie, nors ir gerokai pranoksta muzikos meno kūrinio apibrėžtį emfatine prasme, neabejotinai sudaro neatsiejamą platesnės kultūros biografijos dalį. Tai dar ne viskas. Estetinei paradigmai,

pradedant Adleriu, buvo būdingas notacinio teksto, kaip materialaus muzikos meno kūrinio pagrindo, identifikavimas ir analizė, o naujoji istoriografinė paradigma jau kurį laiką daug plačiau imasi atlikimo praktikų istorijos, taip pat istorinių kontekstų ir recepcijos procesų rekonstrukcijos. Esant tokioms sąlygoms, nėra jokios priežasties, dėl kurios kino muzika, kartu ir nebyliojo kino muzika, visais atžvilgiais negalėtų būti laikoma istorinės muzikologijos, suprantamos kaip *historia civilis*, intradisciplininiu objektu, t. y. istoriografiniu muzikos „kultūrinio paveldo“ tyrimu.

Delivered / Straipsnis įteiktas 2023 03 30