Powrie, Phil and Robynn Stilwell, eds. 2006.
Changing Tunes: The Use of Pre-existing Music in Film.
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This twelve-essay anthology is a collection of papers first presented at two conferences on music and film held in 2000 and 2001 in the United Kingdom.[1] It brings together a diverse group of scholars—musicologists, film scholars, media and communication scholars, literature and area specialists—around one topic: the use of "pre-existing music" in film. Though the anthology is somewhat inconsistent in quality and type of contribution, its appearance is welcome, for it provides not only the most extensive treatment of the subject to date but also the most convincing proof of the topic's significance and intrinsically interdisciplinary, collaborative nature.

The book is divided into two sections: "Pre-existing Classical Film Scores" and "Popular Music and Film." The term "scores" in the heading of the first section suggests that it deals only with classical music used nondiegetically; in fact, both sections touch on diegetic and nondiegetic uses of the repertories. Notwithstanding the division into two headings, the book brings together three areas of research under the rubric of "pre-existing music": instrumental art music, opera, and popular music (xiii). This grouping results in more than breadth of content; it is an implicit acknowledgement that "pre-existing music" is an aesthetic category in and of itself that cuts across genres and repertories. The volume's title, *Changing Tunes*, expresses a fundamental methodological assumption sustaining the collection: a commitment to the study of emergent musical meaning as music crosses social, political, and cultural contexts that transform, sometimes radically, its impact and reception.

The essays range significantly in style and content. After a short and lucid introduction by the book's editors, Phil Powrie and Robynn Stilwell, Claudia Gorbman's treatment of the use of music in Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* and Mike Cormack's essay on the ambiguity of classical music in film serve almost as secondary introductions. We are then treated to chapters on the use of Mascagni in *The Godfather III* (Lars Franke), the history of *Carmen* on the big screen (Ann Davies), Mozart as film music (Jeongwon Joe on the film *Amadeus*), and a close look at three different cinematic uses of Grieg's *Peer Gynt* (Kristi A. Brown). The section "Popular Music and Film" is equally diverse, consisting of six chapters on such topics as the queer and

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camp qualities of the *bolero* in Pedro Almodóvar's films (Vanessa Knights), the pastiche score of Mel Brooks's *Young Frankenstein* (Raymond Knapp), popular song as leitmotif (Ronald Rodman), and the accordion in French cinema (Phil Powrie). The last two chapters are interesting departures from the rest of the collection in that they deal with musical objects as much as they do with sound: Stilwell explores the importance of records in girls' rites-of-passage films and Timothy Warner considers the pop video in relation to sampling techniques.[2] The book ends with a useful and detailed filmography and, as befits the vast area of inquiry opened up here, a long bibliography. The latter is bound to be an important starting point for research in this field, but it would have perhaps been kinder to the reader to divide it into different sections, either by chapter or by subdiscipline, so as to facilitate retrieval. It is beyond the scope of this review to offer a detailed, critical account of each chapter; accordingly, I would like to limit the discussion to two chapters that are closer to my own areas of specialization and which will convey a sense of the collection as a whole: "Ears Wide Open: Kubrick's Music" by Claudia Gorbman and "The Fabulous Destiny of the Accordion in French Cinema" by Phil Powrie.

Gorbman's analysis of *Eyes Wide Shut* is at once an elegant and illuminating look at the role of original and pre-existing music in Kubrick's final (and probably unfinished) film. Gorbman also makes an important contribution to auteur theory, a mode of interpretation that stresses the artistic responsibility of the director in the film's design and execution. She argues convincingly that the selection and manipulation of the soundtrack within the narrative is a personal expression on the part of the director, and she identifies the 1960s as the decade when this practice came into its own.[3] Moreover, she shows the relevance of that practice to our understanding of contemporary cinema, pointing to the carefully selected, personal, and sometimes idiosyncratic soundtracks made up of pre-existing music in the work of such filmmakers as Wim Wenders, Quentin Tarantino, Aki Kaurismaki, and Tsai Ming-liang.

As the title ("Kubrick's Music") of Gorbman's chapter suggests, not only does the music heard in Kubrick's movies become wholly the director's own, but his active engagement with the soundtrack reflects an openness ("Ears Wide Open") to all that the world of commercially recorded music has to offer (and she is careful to stress that it is recorded music that Kubrick, and other filmmakers like him, have in mind for their films, 18).[4] This agency in the film's musical design is an act of listening first and foremost, rather than a mode of compositional practice in the traditional sense of the concept. Whether or not one agrees with Gorbman's unapologetic director-centered approach, her understanding of a filmmaker's alertness to, and ability to

carefully select different kinds of music seems particularly appropriate in the context of a single volume dedicated to pre-existing music. Indeed, the collection as a whole bears witness to the fact that the development of a certain musical sensibility for a film, the selection of pre-existing works, and the combination of those works with images are productive forms of musical behavior, heretofore unduly neglected by scholars because they don't fit into the normative view of musical creativity.

Indeed, Gorbman's main point about *Eyes Wide Shut* is that the soundtrack conveys, in a manner at once visceral and cerebral, "the very presence of Kubrick's narrational agency, godlike in its aloofness and audaciously heterogeneous taste" (18). This authorial "presence" is made manifest subtly through the carefully selected diegetic songs or tunes that accompany the emotional odyssey of Bill, the tormented protagonist played by Tom Cruise, spanning a range of genres and styles from Mozart's Requiem to "Strangers in the Night." But this presence is also asserted even more overtly, as when one hears Ligeti's *Musica Ricercata* for piano solo throughout entire segments of the film, as if marking the different "stations" in Bill's journey. Gorbman provides a clear and lucid exposition of the use of Ligeti's music in the film, but wonders what the original intent behind the most insistent repetitions of Ligeti's piece may have been. She cannot be blamed. I, for one, suspect those passages to be little more than a temp-track that no one dared to rework after Kubrick's death.

Arguably the most memorable use of pre-existing music in *Eyes Wide Shut*, the inclusion of the Waltz 2 from the *Suite for Variety Stage Orchestra* by Shostakovich, frames the film at its beginning and end credits and also appears during a poignant montage sequence halfway into the film.[5] Gorbman views this piece—a parody at once mocking and elegiac—as evidence of an "aesthetic intelligence behind the film, so historically richer and deeper than Tom Cruise" (18). While Gorbman's statement can be read as praise for Kubrick in his choice of Shostakovich's waltz, it also emphasizes, if only in an epigrammatic form, the role of music in film as a shorthand for a particular sensibility, a pool of readily available cultural references, and ultimately a worldview. To be sure, Shostakovich's music carries rich cultural and historical associations. It is removed from a traditional waltz both temporally—the piece was composed in the late 1930s at a time when the waltz's popularity had faded—and geographically. Shostakovich's use of the saxophone (and thus the instrument's inclusion in the film), while helping to reestablish the sexual overtones the waltz possessed in its early life, also calls up a musical style (jazz) and a milieu (the dance hall) at odds with those traditionally associated with the waltz. Whether the choice of this particular piece had anything to do with the author of the novella on

which the film is based (Arthur Schnitzler), his city (Vienna), or Kubrick's own tormented relationship with his Jewish-Mitteleuropean roots remains an open question.

Underlying Phil Powrie's essay on the role of accordion music in French cinema is the provocative and, in my judgment, entirely persuasive suggestion "that 'accordion music,' whatever the form it takes, is in essence a [*sic*] pre-existing music because of its cultural connotations" (138). In the first half of the essay, Powrie describes just what those connotations are, how they have accrued throughout history, and what the future of accordion sound as a rich field of associations may be. He provides a clear and concise history of the accordion in French—and especially in Parisian—history as well as an account of its uses, both as sources of sound and as images in French cinema.

The most important association Powrie uncovers is that between accordion and *guinguette* culture. Famously depicted in several impressionist paintings as well as in films of the 1930s, *guinguettes* (from *guinguet*, cheap wine) were French countryside inns where people used to go for an inexpensive meal in good company, surrounded by the sounds of dance music. Found near the banks of the Marne and the Seine, or at the outskirts of the cities, *guinguettes* became common gathering places for the working-class population in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, all the more so after Sunday was officially recognized as a day of rest in 1907. But it was in the 1880s, with the introduction of the accordion to France by Italian immigrants, that the instrument became associated with the *guinguettes*. In pre-war films such as René Clair's *Under the Roofs of Paris* (1930) and Julien Duvivier's *They Were Five* (1936), the ideals of community and integration and the principle of circulation symbolized by the accordion were documented by and recreated for the big screen. *Guinguette* culture came to an end after World War II and the accordion's decline followed within decades—both "casualties of post-war consumer culture" (139). The 1950s saw both the decay of working-class culture and the apogee of the accordion's presence in French cinema via the presence of its most famous practitioner, André Verchuren, who starred in three well-known features.

Since an adequate account of French film during the period between the 1950s and the 1980s is beyond the scope of his essay, Powrie focuses instead on the appearance of the accordion as an object of the past—either reminisced, mythologized, or both—in two contexts: first, the so-called *cinéma du look*, as exemplified by *Diva* (France, 1981) and *Subway* (France, 1985), and second, in a number of "heritage" films, adaptations of classical plays or novels which Powrie interprets as instances of a retrospective "museum aesthetic" (145). Among these, emphasis is given to *Une dimanche à la*

campagne (*A Sunday in the Country*, France, 1984), directed by the prolific and eclectic Bertrand Tavernier.[6] In both groups of films, albeit in different ways, we are very, very far from the beginnings of the instrument's history on the big screen, let alone its history in the city of Paris, and Powrie conveys that distance effectively.

Powrie contextualizes what he calls the "rebirth" of the accordion as a dynamic element of French cinema (which itself is perhaps a reflection of the instrument's revival in a number of young rock and folk bands). Yann Tiersen's score for the film *Amélie* (Jean-Pierre Jeunet, France, 2001), the focus of the second half his chapter, is the culmination of this development.[7] Powrie's thorough and nuanced close reading of the score for this film is informed and therefore strengthened by the historical and critical material presented in the early part of his chapter. While stressing the significance of Tiersen's background as an eclectic musician from Brittany, one whose status is marginal on account of both his provenance and his blending of styles (rock, folk, and even classical), Powrie is ambiguous as to who is responsible for the editing and mixing of the score itself. But this issue becomes less important as he launches into a complex and poignant interpretation of the music, and through it, the film as a whole. His reading leaves the traditional sites of agency—the director, the writer, the composer—at the margins of the discussion, focusing instead on the "work" done by the accordion music as a shared, dynamic cultural agent. *Amélie*, Powrie concludes, "is a gigantic *trompe l'oeil*" (150), whose threatening immobility is undermined by the music alone. Music "is like the girl with the glass in the Renoir, whom Dufayel [a character in the film] can never manage to capture; the girl and the accordion are the center around which everything else circulates, and which causes everything to circulate" (150). As with Gorbman's essay and a number of other contributions to this anthology, this reading implicitly acknowledges that a soundtrack is as good an entry point into a film's interpretation as any other, and in some cases is the best mode of accessing the hermeneutic core of a film.[8]

As mentioned earlier, Powrie claims that because of its rich baggage of connotations all accordion music is pre-existing music. There is still an important difference, however, between a repertory taken as a whole, one whose status is indelibly linked to the sound of an instrument, and a recognizable work by an individual composer with a rich and distinctive reception history of its own. Consider Mozart's works as discussed in Joe's essay on *Amadeus* or Grieg's music as interpreted by Brown in her essay on *Peer Gynt*: might these cases warrant the use of the word "quotation," despite the radical recontextualization these works undergo as they become part of a film?

As Gorbman's essay illustrates, pre-existing music in film is employed as a means of presenting a deep, thought-provoking picture of a complex, multifaceted problem; as one reads in Robynn Stilwell chapter on girls' rites-of-passage movies, it is capable of expressing a character's voice; as Deborah Knight's essay on the *bolero* in Almodovar's films suggests, finally, it is like a musical magnet, lending itself to both absorbing *and* representing the sensibility of a character who happens to like it or a milieu in which it is frequently heard or performed. The use of pre-existing music, in other words, calls up a whole constellation of related phenomena, in both literary fiction and the performing arts: voice, polyphony (in Bakhtin's sense), allusion, borrowing, parody, and intertextuality—to name but a few. As each of the chapters focuses on repertories and films, the theoretical questions implicit in the material are adumbrated rather than worked out explicitly. This is meant as a compliment, not a criticism, to the volume. But it is hoped that scholars will soon engage with the individual essays in *Changing Tunes* from this perspective as well, thus helping to galvanize the growth of what appears to be a vast and fascinating terrain of theoretical speculation as well as historically informed criticism.[9]

Notes

1. One conference was called "See/Hear" and was held in Newcastle-upon-Tyne in November of 2000, and the other was the Royal Musical Association's annual conference at the University of Southampton in April of 2001. One of the essays, however, Jeongwon Joe's "Reconsidering *Amadeus*," was presented on a different occasion.

2. By "rites-of-passage" films Stilwell means films that depict "the acquisition of a voice, the mastering of personal symbols, or the inability to do so" on the part of a teenager or very young woman (166). Examples discussed by Stilwell include *Heavenly Creatures*, directed by Peter Jackson (New Zealand/USA/UK, 1994), *Little Voice*, directed by Mark Herman (UK, 1998), *Ghost World*, directed by Terry Zwigoff (USA/Germany/UK, 2000), and *The Virgin Suicides*, directed by Sofia Coppola (USA, 1999).

3. As Powrie and Stilwell point out in their introduction (xiv), Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (UK/USA, 1968) was in this respect a watershed moment in film history. Remarkable precedents for Kubrick's use of long stretches of classical works, however, are found throughout Luchino Visconti's oeuvre, Pier Paolo Pasolini's early films (*Accattone* [Italy, 1961], *Mamma Roma* [Italy, 1962], *La ricotta* [Italy, 1963], and *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* [Italy, 1964]), and Jean-Luc Godard's pre-1968 films. Godard's whimsical and provocative use of Beethoven's quartets set a precedent for a whole generation of European filmmakers. Preston Sturges's *Unfaithfully Yours* (USA, 1948) is an overlooked gem in the history of pre-existing music in film. An early example of classical music used "against type" is the appearance of Brahms's Fourth Symphony in Luis Buñuel's terrifying documentary, *Tierra sin pan* (*Land without Bread*, Spain, 1932).

4. As if stressing a similar point, the title of Sergio Bassetti's (2002) brilliant monograph on the music of Kubrick's films reads "Music According to Kubrick" (*La musica secondo Kubrick*).

5. By mentioning the waltz as a movement of the *Jazz Suite* [*sic*], composed in 1938 and thought lost during the war, Gorbman unwittingly perpetuates a misattribution (the work's

complete title is *Suite for Jazz Orchestra No. 2*). The mistake originated in the recording used for the film (*Shostakovich: The Jazz Album*, The Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, R. Chailly, Decca 33702). Kubrick and his collaborators, evidently trusting Decca's attribution, did not amend it.

6. Though I am less skeptical than Powrie is of the relative value of "heritage" films in general and of Tavernier's film in particular, I found the advantages of his approach particularly convincing. In an older article of mine I analyze the same scene from *Une dimanche à la campagne* as Powrie does here without, however, taking into account the context he so richly reconstructs (Biancorosso 2004:199–202; see also Powrie 1997:42–43).

7. *Amélie* is the English version of the original title, which reads *Le fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain* and which Powrie paraphrases for the title of his chapter ("The Fabulous Destiny of the Accordion in French Cinema").

8. It would be very interesting to be able to confirm the rumor that in 2001 the film was screened by Gilles Jacob, the director of the Cannes Festival, in an early cut without music. Jacob rejected the film, and its exclusion from the Festival eventually caused an uproar.

9. A sign that the topic of pre-existing music may soon be coming into its own is the appearance of two recent monographs on German cinema by Caryl Flinn (2004) and Roger Hillmann (2005).

References

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