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Music, Media, and Narrative in the Streaming Age

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Kieler Beiträge zur Filmmusikforschung #19

Music, Media, and Narrative in the Streaming Age

Contents

Introduction

Guest Editors' Foreword 5

Emile Wennekes: Conferences of the IMS Study Group Music and Media: Fifteen (and Counting). A Personal Account 7

Thematic Articles

Júlia Durand: »For Bridgerton-inspired Content«: Library Music between Streaming and Online Media 17

Matthew Day Blackmar: Hip-Hop YouTube: Black Vernacular Technological Creativity Confronts Algorithmic Bias in Automated Copyright Administration 36

Stefan Greenfield-Casas: Limelight of the Idols: Voice, Virtuality, VTubers 59

Misty Choi: Hidden Voices: Exploring Desire and Memory in Joe Hisaishi's DEPARTURES 80

Nash Hickam and Jeffrey Yunek: Music Structuring Animation: The Role of Chopin's First Ballade in the Series Finale of YOUR LIE IN APRIL 98

Tabea Umbreit: Rattling Bones in the *Danse macabre* from Saint-Saëns to Tim Burton 118

Mattia Merlini: The Fate of Polystylism: The ›Orchestral Shift‹ and the ›Redefinition of Sonic Hierarchies‹ in Recorded Video Game Music 136

Book Reviews

Anika Babel: Review of: Elsie Walker: *Life 24x a Second. Cinema, Selfhood, and Society.* New York: Oxford University Press 2024 155

Henriette Engelke: Rezension zu: Claudia Hartling / Susanne Vollberg (Hrsg.): *Leidenschaft Filmmusik. Theorie – Praxis – Vermittlung*. Marburg: Schüren 2024 166

Henriette Engelke: Rezension zu: Thomas Krettenauer / Lars Oberhaus (Hrsg.): *Zwischen Kinosound und Game Audio. Film – Musik – Vermittlung*. Münster: Waxmann 2024 174

Conference Report

»Behind the Scenes«: Produktionsperspektiven auf Sound und Musik in Bewegtbildmedien. Ein Bericht zum 19. Symposium der Kieler Gesellschaft für Filmmusikforschung in Kooperation mit dem Netzwerk Drehbuchforschung an der Universität zu Köln, 27.–28. Juni 2025 (von Nico Cristantielli, Laura Drexelius, Marie Euler, Maja Hütter, Melissa Kruft, Ellen Kuhn, Alina Lutz, Leonie Poulheim, Ole Tüngler, Rubina Ünzelmann-Balotsch, Anna-Karina Vollmer, Yasaman Wardasbi und Pascal Rudolph) 183

Guest Editors' Foreword

Themed »Music, Media, and Narrative in the Streaming Age« this volume takes its cue from the eponymous joint annual conference of the Kieler Gesellschaft für Filmmusikforschung and the IMS Study Group Music and Media (June 6–7, 2024, at the University of Music and Theatre Munich). As representatives of the two collaborating societies, we – Julin Lee and Emile Wennekes – have taken on the role of Guest Editors to curate this »ensemble cast« of articles drawn from the conference. Since we also celebrated the fifteenth edition of the annual gatherings of MaM during the Munich conference, Emile has penned a featurette which looks back on the history of the Study Group.

Given that all presenters at this bilingual conference opted to deliver their talks in English, it may be no surprise that the seven full-length contributions in this issue appear in English as well. While the number of English-language articles is unusually high, it is by no means without precedent: the *kbzf* journal has always welcomed submissions in both German and English. Indeed, English-language articles have occasionally taken the stage alongside predominantly German companions: issue #12 (2016) featured 35% of its full-length articles in English, and issue #15 (2020) as many as 62.5%. This reflects the journal's continuing commitment both to nurturing German-language scholarship on screen music and to ensuring that international voices can be heard via our open-access platform.

We are delighted, then, to present the seven contributions of issue #19 that together capture the diversity of topics, genres, and methodologies addressed at the 2024 conference. In arranging this »playlist,« several thematic connections emerged. The first two articles examine what it means to »sound similar« in the streaming age. Júlia Durand reconsiders »soundalikes,« urging us to see them not merely as imitations but as key agents in shaping sonic identity and musical imaginaries. Matthew Day Blackmar, in turn, scrutinizes the practice of sampling in hip hop under YouTube's automated content detection systems, highlighting how copyright enforcement mechanisms continue to disadvantage Black creative vernaculars.

Voice takes center stage in the next two contributions, though approached through different media and to different ends. Stefan Greenfield-Casas explores the significance

of vocality in the construction of fictional personas in VTubing, while Misty Choi draws on theories of the acousmatic voice to analyze how music conveys the protagonist's inner voice in the Japanese film DEPARTURES: THE GIFT OF LAST MEMORIES (2009, Yōjirō Takita). The Japanese origins of both articles provide a bridge to the following cluster, which foregrounds questions of style. Taking a hermeneutical approach to analyze the role of pre-existing (Western classical) piano music in the Japanese anime YOUR LIE IN APRIL (Fuji TV, 2014–2015), Nash Hickam and Jeffrey Yunek demonstrate how music structures the narrative in detail. Next, starting from canonical compositions from the Western art music repertoire, Tabea Umbreit traces the timbral DNA of the *danse macabre* tradition across music and film (music) history, paying special attention to »skeletal« percussion. Matters of instrumentation – and more broadly, timbre – are likewise addressed in Mattia Merlini's contribution, in which he surveys stylistic shifts in video game scoring, especially in light of evolving technological affordances.

Last but not least, conference presenter Anika Babel offers a bonus track: in lieu of a research paper, she contributes an in-depth reflection on Elsie Walker's latest monograph, *Life 24x a Second: Cinema, Selfhood, and Society*. While formally a book review, Babel's deep and sophisticated engagement with Walker's work invites readers to reflect not only on what and how we study and teach screen music today, but also – and perhaps more importantly – why. This issue concludes with three contributions in German. Henriette Engelke reviews two recent edited volumes: *Leidenschaft Filmmusik. Theorie – Praxis – Vermittlung* (eds. Hartling & Vollberg, 2024) and *Zwischen Kinosound und Game Audio. Film – Musik – Vermittlung* (eds. Krettenauer & Oberhaus, 2024). A group-authored report on the 2025 annual conference of the Kieler Gesellschaft für Filmmusikforschung offers both a vivid account of the event and an enticing preview of the journal's next issue.

We hope that this collection, published in a journal whose name itself foregrounds film music, will encourage broader explorations of screen music across media genres, reflecting the evolving narratives in the streaming era – and also the narratives about them.

Julin Lee and Emile Wennekes

Munich and Utrecht, September 2025

Conferences of the IMS Study Group Music and Media: Fifteen (and Counting)

A Personal Account

Emile Wennekes

Holland, Germany, Portugal, Italy, Canada, France, Austria, Norway, Japan, Spain, Sweden, the United States, Greece, the United Kingdom, Ireland, … The origin of this themed issue of the *Kieler Beitrage zur Filmmusikforschung* is not just the 2024 joint Munich conference of the Kieler Gesellschaft and the IMS Study Group MaM, but in fact dates back some twenty years ago, to 2008 to be precise. That year, Prof. Tilman Seebas, in his capacity as President of the International Musicological Society, initiated a multi-day meet up with me in Amsterdam.

But before I continue this anecdotal encounter that marked the dawn of MaM, a disclaimer may be called for. Or better perhaps: *a captatio benevolentiae*. Usually, I am not fond of using first-person perspectives, however this account of the bygone days of the Study Group MaM makes that, in my view, unavoidable, given my personal involvement.

That being out of the way, Seebas had shrewdly accepted an invitation by Amsterdam Promotion Marketing that advertises the possibilities of hosting large international gatherings in the Netherlands, similar to the quinquennial conferences. Since there were already plans for an IMS meeting, in co-organization with the International Association of Music Libraries (IAML) for 2009, and no similar initiative was to take place in the near future, we discussed other matters while together. Specifically, Seebas encouraged me to reflect on topics that were, at the time, underrepresented within the IMS. Subsequently, one of the topics I brought to the table was the challenging interplay between music and (other) media. Despite the numerous fields already being explored by the New Musicology movement, many historically oriented scholars, including those within the IMS, were still remaining faithful to their more conventional topics, methods, and relevant theories.

Then, at point blank, Seebas asked me: why don't you start a Study Group (SG), in which members share »a common interest in an interdisciplinary theme of international scope«,

to quote the IMS site.[1] He firmly believed that SGs would be essential to the future of the organization, perhaps even to the sustainability of such professional societies. The first SGs had been launched in the second half of the 1980s (Cantus Planus, 1982; Digital Musicology, 1987), yet only a handful had followed their example at the time of our encounter. Growing ever since, at present, MaM is one of no less than 25 IMS SGs.

It was in 2009 that MaM stepped out into the open in Amsterdam. The SG-to-be was introduced by arguing that »Music plays an important role in media, both in old and certainly in new media: commercials, games, films, ring tones and the like. The other way around, media play an increasing role in music. They have changed the compositional process and characteristics of style; media severely influences performances, composing techniques, the way of recording and visualizing music.« In other words, MaM »seeks to examine and explore diverse aspects relevant to the theme of ›mediatizing music‹«. Questions were raised such as: »What are the theoretical and philosophical consequences of mediatized music? What are the economics behind these processes of mediatization? What role does the process of ›remediation‹ (Bolter & Grusin 2000), from LP to MP3 and 4, play? How has mediatization influenced performance practice; what was the ›phonograph effect?‹ (Katz 1999). What do processes of mediatizing music mean in terms of ›liveness‹ (Auslander 1999), ›animated liveness‹ (Wennekes 2009) and/or ›immersion‹ (Grau 2003).«[2]

One-and-a-half decades later, some of these departure points may seem dated, if not downright naive, but let's not forget that, at the time, filmmusicology was still dominated by most notably American scholars, studying hardly anything outside of the Hollywood mainstream repertoire, whereas studies on game music were nothing short of a *rara avis*. Over the years, MaM has indeed explored many of the topics mentioned above, yet augmented its scope with many others, while conference topics have also widened the perspective to the more societal and/or political embedding of music and media issues. The question has even been raised whether or not it still makes sense to recognize a distinction between music and media. But that's another discussion.

1 www.musicology.org/networks/study-groups/ (25.08.2025).
2 https://studygroupmam.com (25.08.2025).

The statements and questions cited above formed the theoretical framework of the inaugural MaM meeting, a two-day conference which took place in the ›Orgelpark‹ in Amsterdam, on July 4 and 5, 2009.[3] Prof. Hans Fidom of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam was an active co-host. After an internationally distributed, open call for papers that did not define a more specific theme other than merely ›Music and Media / Mediatizing Music‹, eighteen scholars from eight different countries presented papers at this meeting, among them diverse colleagues who would, in the years to come, proceed to co-host MaM meetings themselves, present keynote talks, and/or remain profoundly loyal to the SG as ›MaM-bers‹. President Seebas himself coordinated the election of a chair person at the constituent meeting, and after a few subsequent steps, the SG was officially approved by the IMS Directorium. I was indeed elected as SG chair and would thereafter function as the liaison officer to the Directorium.

Since its launch, an important ambition of MaM in line with the IMS credo has been to bring scholars from different countries and cultures together, and to stimulate the exchange of ideas, addressing a broad variety of subjects, methodologies, and perspectives. Tobias Plebuch, also present in Amsterdam and at the time still affiliated with the Humboldt-Universität, Berlin, swiftly took up the gauntlet and offered to co-host the second MaM meeting in Germany at his Institut für Musikwissenschaft und Medienwissenschaft. That three-day meeting presented no less than three keynote lectures (Helga de la Motte, Philip Auslander, and Michael Saffle), as well as 23 other papers. Keynote speakers are still a consistent in MaM's line-up, however, there have never again been so many at a single event. One keynote talk (MaM meetings numbers 4, 5, 6, 11) or two (numbers 3, 12, 14) has become more common. There were also get-togethers without a key note scheduled (1, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 15, 16), especially when MaM occurred as a part of a bigger event, such as those under the auspices of the IMS Directorium (see overview in Table 1).

For the 2010 Berlin convention, papers were grouped into themed sections indicative of the topics MaM embraced at the time: Virtual Worlds, Performance and Technology, Politics, Film and Radio. The presentations included work by three national research

[3] www.orgelpark.nl/en/about-the-orgelpark (25.08.2025).

groups, from Belgium, Italy and Germany respectively, and fourteen participants attended the workshop ›Multimedia Art and Performance‹. Speakers came from Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland, England and the United States. There were sixty registered participants at the conference which was funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG), the European Network for Musicological Research, and the Humboldt-Universitäts-Gesellschaft.

Commencing with this second edition of MaM, it became the *modus operandi* to annually alter destinations and to team-up with ›local‹ scholars and institutions for a two- to three-day encounter (for an overview see Table 1). Special attention has been paid to countries where English may not be the most obvious language to share insights. This implies that MaM conferences oftentimes turn out to be multilingual gatherings, German and English in Berlin, then Portugese and English in Lisbon at the third MaM conference, which took place at the Universidade Nova, FCSH-UNL (in close collaboration with Manuel Deniz Silva and with key note presentations by Anahid Kassabian and James Deaville). An additional *modus operandi* of MaM is that we always formulate international, open calls for papers, in order to not only reach out to IMS members, but to the scholarly community at large, with the aim of creating inspiring events (while hopefully in turn encouraging attendees to themselves become a member of the IMS). For every conference we establish a new program committee formed by delegates from the hosting organization(s), joined by (a) MaM representative(s) and, when relevant, the keynote speaker(s).

Table 1: Overview MaM Conferences

Number	Year	Place	Date(s)	Co-host(s)
1	2009	Amsterdam, Orgelpark	July 4–5	Hans Fidom
2	2010	Berlin, Humboldt Universität	June 25–27	Tobias Plebuch
3	2011	Lisbon, Universidade Nova	June 10–12	Manuel Deniz Silva
4	2012	Turin, Università di Torino	June 28–29	Luisa Zanoncelli
5	2013	Ottawa, Carleton University	July 11–13	James Deaville
6	2014	Dijon, Université de Bourgogne	July 1–2	Laurence Le Diagon-Jacquin
7	2015	Vienna, Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Wien	November 25–28	Cornelia Szabó-Knotik
8	2016	Stavanger, University of Stavanger	July 2	*Part of an IMS conference*

9	2017	Tokyo, University of the Arts	March 21	*Part of an IMS conference*
10	2018	Salamanca, Universidad de Salamanca	June 13–16	Matilde Olarte Martínez / Simposio Internacional la creatión musical en la banda sonora
11	2019	Växjö, Linnæus University	June 7–9	Martin Knust
—	*2020*	*Canceled*	*PM Covid-19*	—
12	2021	Cleveland, Cleveland State University; Rock and Roll Hall of Fame	June 10–11	Michael Baumgartner; Ewelina Boczkowska
13	2022	Athens, Music Library of Greece Lilian Voudouri	August 23	*Part of an IMS conference*
14	2023	Paris, Université d'Évry Paris-Saclay; École Supérieure d'Études Cinématographiques	June 19–21	Chloé Huvet; Jérémy Michot; Grégoire Tosser
15	2024	Munich, Hochschule für Musik und Musiktheater	June 6–8	Julin Lee / Kieler Gesellschaft für Filmmusikforschung
16	2025	York, York St John University	June 9–10	Helen Julia Minors; Steve Rawle; Sarah-Jane Gibson
17	2026	Dublin, University College Dublin	June 11–12	Conor Power

MaM IV (2012) was unique in so far as we kept a keen eye on the quinquennial IMS conference which would take place that year in Rome. Partnering with Luisa Zanoncelli, we organized a MaM edition in Turin (further from Rome than I assumed, but that's another matter …), and was featured as a pre-conference to the quinquennial event. We selected the proposals of 32 scholars from Europe, North America, and Asia, a number of presentations which has since become the standard (more or less). Turin was loosely themed around the twenty-fifth anniversary of Claudia Gorbman's groundbreaking study on narrative film music, *Unheard Melodies* (1987). Gorbman herself delivered the keynote address. When organizing MaM conferences, we also look for opportunities for fringe programs which might prove to be interesting to participants. The leisurely finale in Turin consisted of a guided tour through the fascinating Museo Nazionale del Cinema.

The fifth annual conference of 2013 was MaM's first little jubilee. We fruitfully colluded with James Deaville of Carleton University, Ottawa (Canada) for the SG's first gathering in North America. The focus of the three-day conference was on ›Music on Small Screens‹. Over the course of the last three decades, the dominance of the large cinematic screen has gradually eroded in favor of smaller formats for the consumption of screen

media. The jubilee edition was programmed in recognition of this development, specified through subthemes of (Popular) Television Music; Music in Children's Television; Television Musicals; Video Game Music; YouTube Music; Classical Music in Screen Media; Video Games and Opera; Theories of Television Music; Performance in Video; Creating Digital Media; Music for Television Series; Small-Screen Musical Paratexts. Karen Collins gave the keynote speech (see Table 2 for details on conferences' themes and keynote talks).

The following year, the first Francophone/English conference took place in Dijon; Laurence Le Diagon-Jacquin was our local host. This meeting aimed the spotlight on French cinema. A second Francophone/English conference would take place nearly ten years later, in 2023, at that time concentrating especially on Francophone film, co-organized with, most notably, Chloé Huvet from Université d'Évry Paris-Saclay. The tenth MaM gathering (2018) incorporated papers in Spanish, and was mainly focused on Spanish national cinema. Looking for an opportunity to reach out to Spanish colleagues, co-host Matilde Olarte Martínez featured MaM as part of the University of Salamanca's eight-hundred-year celebration, liaising as well with the national research group which organizes the yearly La Creación Musical en la Banda Sonora symposium.

Generally, the get-togethers of MaM take place in June or early July, when the academic year for many scholars is (about to be) over. The first time we deviated from this principle was in 2015 when the MaM meeting was organized in November, at the Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Wien (working with Cornelia Szabó-Knotik). The theme that year also deviated somewhat from earlier editions. Less media specific, the presentations featured more political topics: War of Media – Media of War: The Importance of Music and Media for Propaganda in Times of Change. Two other MaM conferences also digressed from the June/July timeslot, both when we organized our SG during IMS quinquennial conferences: March 2017 with a panel in Tokyo, and August 2022 in Athens. The first addressed musical TV programs in the USA during the 1950s, and the second was a peer group discussion on some theoretical principles presented in the *Palgrave Handbook of Music in Comedy Cinema* (2023; being compiled at that time). Before these two massive IMS meetings, MaM presented a panel in Stavanger (2016) which fell under

the direct auspices of the IMS too. We discussed various future lines of research there. These three gatherings were notable exceptions to the two- to three-day conference format.

The propagandistic (mis)use of music and media was once again featured in our meeting in Sweden (2019, Linnæus University Växjö; co-host Martin Knust; keynote Emilio Audissino): we concentrated on ›Music in Journalism and Propaganda‹. This was the year before the world came to a standstill due to the pandemic. All of a sudden, we also had to rethink MaM relevant to at least two immediate consequences: the twelfth annual meeting (on the relatively new topic of pre-existing music in screen-media) was necessarily postponed. Consequentially, no gathering took place in 2020, and with no end of Covid-19 in sight at that time, we decided from the start to schedule the 2021 conference as a virtual one. The meeting was hosted from two venues in Cleveland: Cleveland State University and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, with Michael Baumgartner and Ewelina Boczkowska as organizers *in situ*. MaM's debut in the United States was, ergo, launched online. With the immensely rapid, worldwide adoption of Zoom meetings, MaM likewise embraced the possibility of hosting its meetings in a hybrid form. A year later, in Athens, more than half of the presentations were beamed in from Canada, the USA, and Sweden.

In 2023, the Paris-Évry conference returned to a modest use of video presentations, while the aforementioned Munich meeting of 2024 – MaM's fifteenth – programmed together with the Kieler Gesellschaft für Filmmusikforschung, and Julin Lee in particular, made ample use of online options. The theme embraced ›Music, Media, and Narrative in the Streaming Age‹. New here was a program of parallel sessions, due to the large number of accepted papers: nearly fifty scholars presented their work at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater München. Also new to this conference was announcing beforehand that a small selection of papers would be published; the current issue of the *Kieler Beiträge zur Filmmusikforschung* features a (first) harvest of this rich research.

The most recent MaM conference took place this year (2025) at York St John University and was programmed jointly with Helen Julia Minors, Steve Rawle, and Sarah-Jane Gibson. The topic was ›Music, Media and Global Messages‹; we welcomed speakers

from no less than fourteen countries and six continents. Statistics like these may indicate that, after more than a decade and a half, interest in MaM continues to flourish.

Taking stock now, MaM has manifested itself in a large number of countries. Many more remain on the wish list, to enable us to dive into specific media and musical cultures, national cinemas, unique narratives, et cetera. MaM has not yet organized exchanges with Eastern-European countries, for example, or whole continents like Africa (only spot-lighting film: Nollywood!), Asia (Bollywood!), Oceania or South America. The 2026 MaM gathering will take place at University College Dublin. During this meeting, we will propose to elect the co-editor of this *kbzf* themed issue as incoming chair of MaM, first as co-chair, and subsequently as general chair. Julin Lee represents a new generation of high-potential music and media scholars, and with her already impressively broad profile, she may be the ideal individual to establish bridges to Asia and other parts of the world. I am delighted to continue working with her in this new capacity, while anticipating meeting new IMS ›MaM-bers‹ from around the world.

Table 2: MaM Themes

Number	Year	Theme(s)	Key Note Speaker(s)	Key Note Title(s)
1	2009	Mediatizing Music	—	—
2	2010	Virtual Worlds, Performance and Technology, Politics, Film and Radio	1) Helga de la Motte 2) Philip Auslander 3) Michael Saffle	1) Multi – Intermedialität: Veränderungen des Musik-begriffs 2) Jazz Improvisation as a Social Arrangement 3) Lisztomania: The Real Musical(ized) Story
3	2011	Listening to moving images	1) James Deaville 2) Anahid Kassabian	1) Television Music Studies: Past, Present and Future 2) Smartphone Apps and the Environments of the Future
4	2012	25 years *Unheard Melodies*	Claudia Gorbman	Music and Character
5	2013	Music on Small Screens	Karen Collins	To Fidelity and Beyond: Consuming Media in a Mobile World
6	2014	Rewriting music for film; French cinema; Jazz as soundtrack; Methodologies for the study of film sound-tracks	Philippe Gonin	Jazz et cinéma ou les repré-sentations de noirs et du jazz dans les films promotionnels et les cartoons des années 1930. Points et contrepoints

7	2015	War of Media – Media of War: the Importance of Music and Media for Propaganda in Times of Change	—	—
8	2016	Music, Media and Play: some future lines of research	—	—
9	2017	From classical conductors to Cuban bandleaders: Music on 1950s American Television	—	—
10	2018	2009-2018: a decade of studying the interaction between music and media; music and documentary film; streaming media soundtracks; new methodologies	—	—
11	2019	Sounds of Mass Media: music in Journalism and Propaganda	Emilio Audissino	Sound-logos, Olympics, Presidents, and Other Celebrations. When John Williams Scores for Mass Media
12	2021	Pre-existing Music in Screen-Media: problems, questions, challenges	1) James Buhler 2) Carol Vernallis	1) Composing for the Films in the Age of Digital Media 2) Music Video and the Multisensory
13	2022	Music in Comedy Cinema: towards a new Handbook	—	—
14	2023	Musique et son dans les médias audiovisuels francophones	1) James Deaville 2) Dominique Nasta	1) Cripping the Soundtrack: Music/Sound/Silence and the Institutionalization of Madness in Francophone Cinema 2) Entendez-vous cette voix ? La chanson, bastion identitaire d'un monde audio-visuel globalisé
15	2024	Music, Media, and Narrative in the Streaming Age	—	—
16	2025	Music, Media and Global Messages	—	—
17	2026	Directions and Aesthetics of the Digital Era	t.b.a.	t.b.a.

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Empfohlene Zitierweise

Wennekes, Emile: Conferences of the IMS Study Group Music and Media: Fifteen (and Counting). A Personal Account. In: *Kieler Beiträge zur Filmmusikforschung* 19 (2025), S. 7–16, DOI: https://doi.org/10.59056/kbzf.2025.19.p7-16.

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»For Bridgerton-inspired Content«: Library Music between Streaming and Online Media

Júlia Durand

On the website of French library music company Cézame, a playlist of ›soundalike‹ tracks inspired by popular streaming shows is advertised with: »A true cultural phenomenon, the era of streaming has raised the series to the rank of major cinematographic art.« (Cézame 2022) The industry of library music has undergone significant shifts as it seeks to adapt to both streaming services and online media. Among these changes – which include new licensing models for emerging media formats – we increasingly find library tracks that evoke (and, sometimes, very closely emulate) the score of fiction series such as STRANGER THINGS (Netflix, 2016–2025) and BRIDGERTON (Netflix, 2020–present). These tracks often come to be used in online content that stems from the shows, be it fan-created videos or professionally-produced adverts that market these productions on social media.

Taking this into account, how, then, does streaming media influence library music? Or, to put it differently, how is the trademark sound of certain streaming series worked into library catalogues? And, in addition, how does library music reinforce the sonic imaginary that is associated with these fictional narratives? Departing from these initial questions, this article inquires into library music's role in strengthening the musical identity of specific streaming shows, acting as a sonic bridge between streaming platforms and online media. Rather than viewing streaming-inspired library soundalikes as a mere reflection of a show's popularity, the sections that follow explore how such tracks actively root a series' soundtrack in a shared imaginary, as library music reproduces and reinvents the signature sounds of fictional streaming universes and spreads them beyond the boundaries of streaming platforms. The article also outlines how the paratexts that frame library music – and which increasingly allude to streaming media – are not simply an after-the-fact classification of this music, taking instead an active role in shaping the work of library composers.

Methodology

To explore these questions, I opt for a multi-method design combining qualitative interviews and an examination of library tracks and online audiovisual materials. Regarding the latter, rather than analyzing in great detail how images and library tracks are synchronized together, I sought more broadly to ascertain how streaming-inspired online media strategically uses library music to evoke the distinctive sound of a given show. The analyzed videos therefore share the fundamental trait of explicitly evoking a streaming show and appealing to its fan base with specific visual, textual, and sonic choices. Beyond that, however, the videos span a broad range of practices (and underlying purposes): from music compilations by self-professed fans, to small businesses advertising their products and trailers for streaming-inspired fan films – resembling the alternative trailers where fans, as Deaville states, engage with »practices and traditions of musical signification in re-imagining the source text« (2016, 209).

The interviews were conducted with thirteen library composers and consultants, as well as fifteen videographers and video editors, aged between 23 to 50 years old, and based in the UK, US, France, and Portugal. The interviews took place in person or over video calls between 2019 and 2021, and both interview formats were guided by a semi-structured (but flexible) script. The initial selection of interviewees was based on a purposeful sampling principle, followed by chain referral or snowballing techniques, with the goal of maximizing the variety of interlocutors and obtaining a sample that would be representative of a wide range of practices, experiences, and backgrounds. By interviewing both library practitioners and users, I sought an interdiscursive approach that would enable a comparison of these agents' perspectives on different aspects surrounding soundalikes: for instance, by ascertaining whether the categorization of tracks in libraries, with frequent allusions to streaming media, matches the search habits and expectations of clients.

The ethnographic data collected from interviews therefore allowed for an in-depth understanding of the distinctive production practices behind soundalikes, how these are discussed in the context of the library industry, and how streaming media influences the labelling of tracks in catalogues. Additionally, the interviews were invaluable to explore

specific questions that emerged after analyzing selected catalogues and online media: in particular, their data shed light on whether (and how) streaming-themed categorization in libraries plays any part in influencing composers as they produce library tracks.

Library music and soundalikes

Library music (also known as stock or production music) consists of pre-existing tracks meant to be used in all kinds of media. Today, it is found predominantly in online catalogues, where it is categorized by mood, emotion, genre, instrumentation, among other possible classifications. It is used in a great variety of audiovisual productions, from television and trailers to video games and online videos. Despite the negative reputation that still clings to library music (namely, the reductive notion that it is unoriginal and derivative), it is often a quicker and cheaper alternative to bespoke scores, making it a very significant source of music for a wide range of media, from broadcast television and film trailers to online videos and streaming.

Until recently, there has been a distinct dearth of scholarly research focusing specifically on library music as its main object of inquiry, even if it is frequently mentioned in passing in musicological studies of music in cinema, television, and other audiovisual media (Deaville, Tan, and Rodman 2021). Even publications with subject matters where an examination of library music would be particularly relevant (such as the use of pre-existing music in media) either explicitly or implicitly exclude this musical production from their scope (Godsall 2018). Notable exceptions to this scarcity are the work of Tagg (e.g. 2013) and Nardi (2012), with the former analyzing library music's codes and categories from a semiotic angle, and the latter broaching some of the aesthetic and labor implications of library music's production. Deaville (2017) has explored the use of library tracks in cinematic trailers and news broadcasts, while Wissner (2015), Haworth (2012), Czach (2020), and Roy (2023) have delved into historical questions relating to library music's use in cinema, television, and homemade videos, as well as library music's labor practices in the twentieth century.

Two recent publications have significantly expanded the study of library music: the edited volume *Anonymous Sounds: Library Music and Screen Cultures in the 1960s and 1970s*

(Sexton, Johnston, and Roy 2025), which provides an in-depth study of library music from the 1960s and 1970s (and its subsequent cult status); and a special issue of the journal *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image* (Deaville, Durand, Huelin, and Morton 2024), which explores different facets of the production, categorization, and reception of library music in digital media. More recently as well, Huelin (2022) and Durand (2020) have focused in greater detail on specific aspects in the contemporary production and use of this music. Despite this, the use of library music in online contexts remains underexplored, especially given that recent publications touching on musical production and consumption in digital media (Rambarran 2021) have overwhelmingly privileged an examination of popular music, almost entirely disregarding library music – though the latter has become an inescapable sonic presence in a significant number of online formats.

Libraries are fundamentally guided by the goal of offering clients a vast array of musical choices, with a comprehensive selection of genres and styles. As part of their efforts of presenting a catalogue that is well-stocked with any sonority clients might require, libraries also offer so-called ›soundalikes‹. These are tracks that emulate the recognizable sound of pre-existing recordings, be it popular music hits or musical themes from cinema or television shows. There are different possible interpretations of the concept of ›soundalikes‹. The term may be used in a narrower sense, to refer specifically to recordings that closely replicate a pre-existing song or piece in every aspect: its composition, performance style, production, mixing, etc. Although soundalikes in general typically fulfil the role of ›standing in‹ for a musical original that cannot be realistically used in a production, this is especially true in these stricter cases of musical imitation, whose main goal is to evade the licensing fees that would apply if the original recording was used (Bernard and Rabin 2009).

However, I use here a broader definition of soundalikes: I include library tracks that, while closely resembling pre-existing music, are not a direct mock-up. This wider understanding rests on both *emic* and *etic* perspectives: we find it both in scholarly literature and handbooks for media composers, and in the accounts of library producers and clients during interviews, as these agents used the term ›soundalike‹ to refer to library tracks that generally evoked the recognizable sound of a streaming show. More significantly, this

broader definition allows us to encompass a practice in library music that is specific to the possibilities of digital and online catalogues: namely, the ability to change a library track's paratexts over time (with its inclusion in new playlists, for example), thus *retroactively* framing a track as a soundalike of a given film or show – even if it was not initially created with that purpose.

Although soundalikes are a derided low-cost alternative to ›original‹ music (which would most often be inordinately expensive to license for a production), they can nevertheless be very effective to quickly suggest the desired connotations in listeners, instantly evoking the original music that inspired them. Soundalikes are not always advertised with explicit references to the music they emulate: as we will see ahead, the primary reason for this is to avoid accusations of plagiarism and potential legal troubles, which are not unheard of in the library music industry (Cooke 2017). That being said, to ensure they are easily found by clients looking for a given sonority, these soundalikes are often given titles, descriptions, and keywords with relatively overt allusions to the music they emulate.

On this subject, it should be stressed that the categorization of library music is a key aspect that shapes this musical practice, one which is directly tied to its functional purpose of being synchronized with media. Meier (2017, 137) points to this when she briefly broaches the categorization of tracks in royalty-free libraries such as Jingle Punks, quoting the library practitioners who carry out this classification: »The uses to which the music may be put, then, shape how it is listened to and assigned relevance: ›[…] we don't think of music as hit single/not hit single. We think, is this going to end up on a Food Network show or is this going to end up on NBC's *Minute to Win It*‹.« This functional role of library music becomes intrinsically woven into the categories and other paratexts that organize tracks in catalogues, to the point where use-based classifications coexist on the same level with more typical music genres such as ›pop‹ or ›rock‹. Categories that suggest future uses for a track in terms of audiovisual genres are therefore particularly prominent: terms such as ›documentary‹, ›weddings‹ or ›comedy‹ (along with concepts that may allude to certain audiovisual imaginaries, such as ›wizard‹ or ›spy‹) come to operate effectively in these libraries as music genres, and, much like ›pop‹, ›rock‹ or ›jazz‹, denote specific musical characteristics.

The possible uses of a library track are therefore a central consideration for categorizing and tagging this music in catalogues. Most importantly, however, we should never regard the categorization of library music as a mere semiotic exercise in unveiling meanings that are somehow already implicit in a track. This would be an underestimation of the role of the library professionals who carry out this categorization, and who hold a decisive power over the future exploitation of this music (Durand 2020). In other words, as will be explored ahead with the accounts of interviewed composers, the categorization of library music is not merely descriptive, but also highly *prescriptive*, influencing the sonorities and formulas that composers will favor. We can therefore argue that the well-established conventions in the composition and categorization of library music form a feedback loop, with each informing and shaping the other.

For this reason, it is essential to bear in mind that this categorization does not merely order and organize tracks in a catalogue: it can influence the creation of tracks themselves, by prompting composers to privilege typified formulas that may more easily be categorized. To put it differently, since library music must fit into pre-existing categories so as to be easily found by clients, its composers are also encouraged to write tracks that will neatly fit these drawers – something that is quickly evidenced by the briefs sent by libraries. As an example, during an interview with Frank,[1] a British composer taking his first steps in this music industry, he describes how a library briefed him by pointing to the extra-musical categories that his music should fit into (›dramedy‹ and ›magic‹). Frank was also given as a reference the music of the television show DESPERATE HOUSEWIVES (ABC, 2004–2012), and was told to compose »Danny Elfman style« tracks. As Frank explains, these instructions suggested at once specific sonic parameters, particularly regarding timbre and instrumentation. Frank's testimony illustrates how these allusions to pre-existing media, be it television shows or other productions, are a cornerstone of library music creation and use. Even when there is no intention of creating a deliberate soundalike, the various agents who produce or interact with a library track (be they composers, library consultants, or media creators) fundamentally communicate by referring to a shared audiovisual imaginary.

[1] In order to ensure the anonymity of interviewees, their names were replaced by pseudonyms.

In addition to this, the categorization of library music is a crucial commercial strategy for libraries, as it allows them to frame their musical offerings according to clients' preferences. As such, these processes of categorization take into account which genres and styles are in demand at a given moment, and *how* (and with which vocabulary) clients are most likely to search for them. In this sense, if library music is labeled and described with reference to audiovisual productions, it is first and foremost to mirror the search habits of media producers. During interviews conducted with these agents, it soon became clear that they did not browse libraries exclusively (or even primarily) by music style, instrumentation, or other specifically musical traits: their vocabulary tended instead to focus on the end-uses of a track, the mood or emotion they wanted to convey, or the genre of their project. It is especially telling that thirteen out of fifteen interviewed videographers claimed that, when browsing library catalogues, they guided their search by the specific functions that they envisioned for a track to fulfil in a video, and the connotations they wished it to suggest. For this reason, and owing in part to their own perceived inability to use technical musical terms, they relied instead on keywords and categories that alluded to audiovisual genres – and, sometimes, to specific productions.

Indeed, library professionals often stress the challenge of communicating with clients who are not familiar with using music terminology to accurately describe what they are searching for. They therefore frequently point to musical or audiovisual references to indicate the specific sonorities they have in mind. On this subject, in a 2018 podcast available online, a music consultant from French library Cézame mentions precisely this type of communication shortcut between consultants and clients: »It's a creative process to make it easier for people that are not musicians, to look for what they really want. We even have ›fan of‹, so if you type ›fan of Michael Jackson‹, you won't have Michael Jackson, of course, but you will have something that is really, really alike.« (CruHub 2018)

In an in-person interview, Bryan, a French youtuber, described precisely this approach in his search for library tracks: he explained that he browsed royalty-free music websites with the names of science fiction series such as THE X-FILES (Fox, 1993–2002) and FRINGE (Fox, 2008–2013), as he sought to incorporate the iconic sound of these shows into his videos. This practice, however, is shaped by a significant tension between library produc-

ers and users, as some libraries avoid tagging and describing their tracks with explicit references to pre-existing music or media, in order to avoid any accusations of plagiarism. However, the ability to search a library according to what a given track might sound like is often prized by clients.

Bertha, a German wedding videographer, criticizes in a 2021 interview the lack of this feature in the royalty-free library Artlist, stating, »You can't put in the search engine something like, I want a song that sounds like that. Sometimes I know exactly what I want … and I know they have it, and I can't do that.« Paula, a Portuguese freelance videographer, echoes Bertha's search habits in a 2019 interview, claiming that she often browses catalogues by typing into their search engine the titles of streaming shows with the distinctive sound she is seeking, giving as examples the series THE LAST KINGDOM (BBC Two/Netflix, 2015–2022) and DAREDEVIL (Netflix, 2015–2018). However, Paula stresses that this approach does not always yield the results she hopes for, as not all the libraries she uses tag their tracks (whether overtly or covertly) with allusions to streaming media.

On this subject, Kurt, a British composer and founder of a library, points in a 2020 interview to the complex position in which he finds himself regarding this categorization practice. Even as he attempts to avoid overly explicit mentions to the films or series that inspired some tracks in his catalogue, he explains that he regularly receives requests from clients seeking music that »sounds exactly like something else«: »they say, can we just have a copy of Star Wars, and we'll change some bits and pieces, and we'll call it, you know, Sky Wars?«. The perspectives of these interviewees therefore reveal a rift in the ways in which these different agents interact with soundalikes: references to the films or series that inspired a library track (or that it might evoke) may be hidden by library producers out of caution, even as they fundamentally guide the searches of library clients.

»Fan of …«: streaming soundalikes

That being said, libraries increasingly market their tracks with either overt or covert references to high-grossing films or hit television and streaming series, paying close attention to which productions are most popular at a given moment. Interestingly, even when a li-

brary track is not deliberately created as a soundalike of a series, it may well get ›repackaged‹ in a library website: namely, by being included in a themed playlist offering a selection of music that sounds similar to the soundtrack of a series. For instance, in July 2019, ahead of the release of the third season of STRANGER THINGS, royalty-free library Artlist sent their newsletter subscribers an email with the advertisement: »Turn your world upside down with this 80's synth-heavy collection inspired by the upcoming season of *Stranger Things*.« Playlists like these, which are directly tied to popular streaming shows, are becoming more prevalent in library catalogues, often coinciding with the release of a new season – and thus a predictable spike in interest in the program.

We find clear examples of this on the website of the previously mentioned library Cézame, where we encounter several themed playlists titled »Fan of«, such as »Fan of Bridgerton« or »Fan of The Queen's Gambit«, advertised with the following text: »This series of ›sound alike‹ playlists offers selections of titles inspired by the soundtracks of some of the flagship series of recent years: from the great epics of modern heroic fantasy to thrillers, via comedies & teen-series!« (Cézame 2022). Among these, the playlist »Fan of The Queen's Gambit« consists of a mix of '60s pop- and Motown-inspired songs, along with instrumental tracks in a minimalist style, with repetitive strings and piano.[2] The playlist is thus based on the two musical genres that are predominantly heard in the 2020 Netflix series, encompassing both its diegetic and non-diegetic music. To give another example, a playlist entitled »Fan of Emily in Paris« presents a variety of tracks, from lively chanson to '60s-style French pop with Hammond organ and manouche jazz.[3] These tracks already existed in the Cézame catalogue – they were not created for this playlist specifically – but they are grouped here under the pastel pink and blue illustration of Paris that is meant to evoke the Netflix series EMILY IN PARIS (2020–present).

This demonstrates how streaming shows are gaining in importance as a vehicle for libraries to promote their music more strategically and effectively. This is especially relevant when we consider that, as previously discussed, the video editors and other audiovi-

[2] The playlist can be found at https://en.cezamemusic.com/the-queen-s-gambit-fan-of--playlist-142851.html (12.07.2025).

[3] The playlist can be found at www.cezamemusic.com/emily-in-paris-fan-of--playlist-143976.html (12.07.2025).

sual creators who form library music's main client base are very likely to search for music according to visual cues and pop culture references from cinema and television. More recently, original productions for streaming services have rapidly gained in relevance for this shared imaginary. As such, rather than browsing a library with music-specific keywords such as »manouche jazz« or »analog synth«, media producers might instead turn to the numerous STRANGER THINGS or EMILY IN PARIS-themed playlists that were presented in several libraries following the success of these Netflix series.

Turning now to the »Fan of Bridgerton« playlist we also find on Cézame's website, it mainly consists of string quartets or larger string ensembles (almost all of which are questionably described as »neo-classical«), playing arpeggios and other cyclical motifs, and strongly evoking the chamber arrangements of pop songs that were used in the series.[4] The title of this playlist has a direct, overt reference to the BRIDGERTON series; however, in these libraries, tracks can also be covertly tagged with keywords that are not visible to clients browsing a website, but which nevertheless guide the results of their search.

For instance, on the websites of royalty-free libraries Artlist, Soundstripe, Epidemic Sound, and Pond5, using the word »Bridgerton« in the search engine conjures a musical selection that is perfectly aligned with the sound of the series, be it the neo-classical cues composed by Kris Bowers, or the string quartet arrangements of pop songs. Among other examples, in Pond5, we find the track »Vintage Love«, described as »A Bridgerton-style string quartet arrangement. Light and airy with a little bounce«.[5] On the Artlist website, this keyword yields a combination of classical dances (such as gigues and minuets), as well as a significant number of string quartets, along with orchestral, pizzicato-heavy cues with piano.

The same applies to what can be found in the Soundstripe catalogue when it is searched with BRIDGERTON-tagged music: an abundance of lively and brisk string quartets, as well as slower piano and string tracks in a minimalistic style. Equally, the catalogue of Epidemic Sound presents a very similar-sounding offering when it is browsed using the key-

4 The playlist can be found at https://en.cezamemusic.com/la-chronique-des-bridgerton-fan-of--playlist-145776.html (12.07.2025).

5 The track can be found at www.pond5.com/pt/royalty-free-music/item/158813394-vintage-love (20.10.2024).

word »Bridgerton«: for example, the first few tracks in the search results, such as »Manors and Manners« and »Refined Antiquities«,[6] are string-heavy, with cheerful melodic lines in the upper registers, accompanied by driving and insistent motifs.

Looking beyond the categorization of tracks, the soundtracks of hit streaming shows can also influence the composition of library music itself, as we have already gleaned in the previous section with the case of Frank. Library composers have always been advised to study the characteristic sound of popular film and television productions, an advice which increasingly includes streaming media. For example, in an interview, Kurt states that he recommends to composers writing for his library that they pay close attention to the most popular music genres in television and streaming productions, in order to emulate the distinctive sounds that might be highly sought after by editors in a given moment – thus hinting at a feedback loop between library catalogues and streaming platforms.

Uses of streaming-inspired soundalikes in online media

Having described the tracks that we find in these catalogues, it is worth stressing that they do not claim to be historically accurate renditions of the music of early nineteenth century Britain, the setting in which BRIDGERTON takes place (albeit in a very fictionalized take of the Regency era). They instead closely resemble the characteristic style and instrumentation of the underscore and of the string covers of pop songs that are used in the series. On this topic, we can refer to a comment made by a music consultant of library West One Music Group, when promoting a playlist released by the library in 2017 with the theme of MEDICI: MASTERS OF FLORENCE (Rai 1, 2016–2019): »when putting the playlist together I focused more on recreating the mood and tone of the series rather than trying to represent the period through Renaissance instrumentation.« (West One Music Group 2017) Similarly, in these BRIDGERTON-tagged library tracks, we hear music that is closer to the streaming series' signature sound than to actual Regency-era pieces: while the piano and strings found in the playlist are a period-accurate choice of instrumentation, the tracks are

[6] The tracks can be found at www.epidemicsound.com/track/wyQOzIRYr4/ and www.epidemicsound.com/track/8QUxGEjwd1/ (20.10.2024).

characterized by a neo-classical and light-minimalist style that would be anachronistic for the early nineteenth-century.

Yet it is precisely this kind of sonority that we find in some online media that is presented as Regency-themed, and that is produced by fans of the series. YouTube and TikTok, among other social media and video sharing platforms, host an endless variety of fan videos inspired by BRIDGERTON, many of which use library tracks as background music (most of it sourced from more affordable royalty-free catalogues, such as Pond5 or Epidemic Sound). These videos range from short clips on how to host a Regency tea-party to music compilations inspired by a narrative prompt – such as »You're riding fast to stop a duel«.[7] Indeed, in this specific compilation, we hear the same library tracks that are presented in the Epidemic Sound website when it is browsed with the keyword »Bridgerton«.

Although it is unclear whether the tracks examined thus far were *deliberately* created as BRIDGERTON soundalikes, what matters here is that they were labelled in the Epidemic Sound catalogue with keywords and other paratexts that allude to this streaming series – and, therefore, that decisively influence this music's future uses in media, by prompting it to be included in online videos created by fans of the show. In addition, these tracks arguably become part of a wider reimagining of the musical sound of the nineteenth century, with neo-classical and minimalist traits that are distinctly anachronistic, but which, through their prevalence in period dramas, have nevertheless become strongly associated with certain historical eras.

This library music can thus be especially effective in sonically evoking this time period in online media, regardless of its historical accuracy. For instance, we find a clear example of this in a TikTok video advertising Victorian-style jewelry, using the very same BRIDGERTON-tagged tracks licensed from Epidemic Sound.[8] This particular case points us to a phenomenon which, while not entirely in the scope of this article, is worth highlighting: the fact that these library tracks, with their potential to evoke popular streaming shows, are wielded not only by individual creators in fan content, but also by a range of

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7 The videos can be found at www.tiktok.com/@style/video/7172195044169043246 and www.youtube.com/watch?v=sxBMejNHNtU (20.10.2024).

8 The video can be found at www.tiktok.com/@hoferantikschmuck/video/7251893282840530203 (20.10.2024).

businesses, from small local shops to large companies. Streaming soundalikes can thus be used in similar ways to serve different ends, from strengthening fan engagement with a series to promoting a business by appealing to its fan base. In this sense, we see how fluidly a library soundalike can move between different types of streaming-inspired media – and how it may contribute to distributing and reimagining the sound of a show beyond streaming platforms, whether it is used in fan practices or advertising strategies.

While we have focused so far on library music and media fan practices that revolve specifically around BRIDGERTON, we can of course identify these same phenomena in the case of other streaming series, such as Netflix's THE WITCHER (2019–present). To give but one example of this, a library track from Elysium Audiolabs, specializing in »music for content creators«, is used in a trailer for a fan film set in the WITCHER universe, published on YouTube on August 3, 2021.[9] Described as »dark trailer music«, the track, which begins with an ominous electronic motif and sparse instrumentation, gradually grows into a more intensely percussive and dissonant climax, closely resembling the epic sonority that we hear in trailers and other promotional material for the WITCHER series (relying heavily on bold percussions and darker-sounding electronic dissonances rather than recognizable melodic motifs). In this case, it should of course be noted that we are faced with a clear instance of transmedia storytelling: the WITCHER universe, firstly originating in books, was adapted into successful videogames that predate the Netflix series, and this fan film in particular may very well draw inspiration from all these different media adaptations.

Library-inspired soundalikes? The case of ENOLA HOLMES

As we have seen, an examination of library catalogues reveals how the popularity of certain streaming shows prompts the inclusion of similar-sounding tracks in libraries (or the strategic ›repackaging‹ of tracks that already existed in catalogues). This music, in turn, can reinforce associations in a shared popular imaginary between certain sonorities, ideas, and narratives, even potentially contributing to a wider reimagining of the music of a given time period. Furthermore, the use and reuse of these tracks in fan-produced content

9 The trailer can be found at www.youtube.com/watch?v=l586oeoeHYg (03.09.2024).

can foster the spread of the iconic sound of a streaming show beyond the confines of streaming platforms and into social media.

In addition to this, however, although the prevalence of soundalikes might lead us to assume that library music is always relegated to the role of imitating the music of streaming shows and other popular media, this is not always the case – indeed, the reverse can also happen. Media composers often use library music as a training ground, either to try their hand at certain styles or genres they do not yet master (Durand 2023), or simply to experiment with new musical ideas – ideas which they may then recover, years later, for more prestigious media projects. Given this is a fairly common practice, we find at times in library catalogues earlier versions of cues which go on to be reworked and turned into the original themes for film, television or streaming productions.

We can find a telling example of this in Universal Production Music's catalogue. An album titled *Period Punks*, released in UPM's library in 2012, contains several tracks by renowned British media composer Daniel Pemberton, such as the homonymous »Period Punks«. This track, especially in regard to its instrumentation and the distinctive, pulsing rhythmic pattern of the strings, is strongly reminiscent of one of the main themes that Pemberton composed eight years later for the Netflix film ENOLA HOLMES (2020). Indeed, both the album and the track's descriptions (»19th century orchestra meets 21st century attitude; boisterous, irreverent, cocky«, and »A riotous mix of 19th century swagger & attitude«)[10] instantly evoke the rebellious, fourth-wall-breaking character of Enola.

At this stage, given that bespoke scores are typically more highly regarded than library music, it would be tempting to muddle the evaluative waters by asking: is Daniel Pemberton's 2020 bespoke score for ENOLA HOLMES a soundalike of his own 2012 library track? However, to get tangled in such a ›chicken-or-egg‹ dilemma would perhaps be to miss the point. It is no doubt more productive to challenge some of the dichotomies in which library music is recurrently cast, and rarely in a positive light: as a derivative imitation of something supposedly more authentic, or as a formulaic blueprint of an original. These dualities are indissociable from other longstanding »dichotomous oppositions« identified

[10] The track can be found at www.universalproductionmusic.com/en-gb/discover/albums/7902/Period-Punks (20.10.2024).

by Negus and Pickering (2004, 146), such as creativity/commerce, art/craft, and originality/imitation. Though the validity of these contrasting concepts (and their implicit hierarchies) has already been amply challenged by scholars in different fields (Hesmondhalgh 2019), we must take into account that they continue to inform how library music is (de)valued today, and how it is understood in relation to other musical practices.

Concluding remarks

It is indisputable that library music acts as a repository of musical stereotypes from popular media. Library catalogues are filled with formulas that have crystallized into clichés, and that have become synonymous with certain audiovisual worlds and narratives. Crucially, in an online landscape where a streaming show is often accompanied by sneak peek previews, behind-the-scenes, and other audiovisual paraphernalia, media producers are eager to find library tracks that effectively evoke the sound of a series, as evidenced both by the online media analyzed throughout the article and the accounts of interviewed library producers and users. On this subject, it would be rather narrow-sighted to focus solely on professionally-produced trailers and promos, and to disregard the amateur content that plays a vital role in consolidating or transforming the musical identity of a streaming show in online contexts.

However, while streaming media does influence library music, in turn, library music also actively shapes the sound of streaming media – as we could glean from the case of the »Period Punks« library track, as an embryonic version of the ENOLA HOLMES theme. Another good example to illustrate this phenomenon is that of two pages on Universal Production Music's website: one displaying tracks from the library that were featured in the STRANGER THINGS series (Universal Production Music 2024a); and the other presenting a playlist of tracks »inspired by« the music of STRANGER THINGS (Universal Production Music 2024b).

Library tracks can therefore point us to deep-rooted associations between certain music and certain narratives or fictional worlds in the context of streaming media – regardless of whether such tracks were purposely created as soundalikes, or were simply later ›repackaged‹ to strategically call attention to their sonic affinity with the soundtrack of specific

shows. That being said, library music is not a mere reflection of the musical trends of streaming productions: it also contributes to the strengthening of the musical imaginary of these audiovisual narratives. This was evidenced on different fronts by the interviews with library creators and users. During interviews, it became clear that allusions to streaming media frequently permeate every step in the production and categorization of a library track: composers are advised to emulate the characteristic sound of popular productions; tracks are strategically tagged and (re)framed with allusions to certain shows; and library clients may browse catalogues by referencing these productions, as they have become synonymous with specific musical genres and styles. These associations are then strengthened in streaming-themed online media, which, as we have seen, can use library tracks to create a strong sonic coherence with the show or series that inspired it.

In that sense, library music can shape the distinctive sound that is associated with these shows *beyond* the boundaries of streaming platforms, whether in promotional clips for social media or in fan-produced content. Indeed, this quick-to-license music is a valuable resource for fans wishing to engage with the narratives of streaming shows, and to build their own media storytelling based on these fictional worlds. In that sense, library tracks which (deliberately or not) strongly fit the musical style of a series can thus function as a sonic continuation that bridges a streaming show with fan content produced for social media, strengthening the wider musical imaginary of a streaming series.

We therefore find a feedback loop between library catalogues, streaming shows, and streaming-inspired media, as library music users actively seek tracks that evoke or emulate the sound of particular shows. Taking this into account, there are several possible avenues for future research: in particular, while this article examined uses of library tracks in various kinds of online videos, in-depth interviews with the creators of these different types of content would allow for a more nuanced understanding of how soundalikes are specifically wielded in fan videos, advertising, and other kinds of media.

To conclude, these cases of streaming-inspired library tracks (or even of library tracks that go on to inspire the themes of streaming shows) prompt us to challenge the unfavorable reputation of soundalikes, and the lingering romantic tendency to disparage any and all forms of imitation or emulation. Library tracks advertised as soundalikes, far from being

exclusively copies of pre-existing music, can instead reveal a clear grasp of the musical codes and formulas that are characteristic of a streaming series, all while developing distinctive musical ideas. Rather than regarding library music as a mere mirror of popular trends, we should approach it as part of a continuum of evolving music formulas from audiovisual narratives, both feeding from, and into, the musical imaginaries of streaming media.

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Hip-Hop YouTube:

Black Vernacular Technological Creativity Confronts Algorithmic Bias in Automated Copyright Administration

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Once upon a time, before copyright caught up with musical practice, there was a Golden Age of Sampling. Or, so the story goes. There is little consensus about when it ended, but most agree that it is behind us (D'Errico 2015; Marshall 2006). One flashpoint was the ›sampledelic‹ moment of the late 1980s, which witnessed Public Enemy's *Fear of A Black Planet* (1990) and The Beastie Boys' *Paul's Boutique* (1989), sample-obsessed records that Kembrew McCleod and Peter DiCola (2011, 207–208) argued could not have been made during the litigious early 2000s. Sampledelic records were so replete with cuts from other albums that their effects on musical authorship became the subject of debate for years to come. By the century's turn, so many critics had observed Roland Barthes' ›death of the author‹ at work that ethnographer Joseph Schloss (2000, 85–86) had to swim upstream to show that sample sources were not only guarded like trade secrets, but were also valued for their materiality – their audible traits – above and beyond their intertextual resonances. Despite conflicting claims about one being more important than the other, such records performed both textual and material work (Williams 2013). But, if there has long been agreement that sample-based hip hop is dead, when did it die? Or, what replaced it? Or, more fundamentally: did it really die?

Today, MIDI sequences and loops are the primary means by which new popular music is produced: allusive sampling has grown elusive (Williams 2015, 210). While ›remix‹ culture has normalized practices of copying, sharing, and borrowing long characterized by lobbyists and legislators to be those of bad actors (e.g., ›pirates‹, ›hackers‹), copyright algorithms like YouTube's Content ID now construe every producer of user-generated content (UGC) to be a potential bad actor. Unlike legislators and jurists, such copyright algorithms are putatively ›color blind‹. Yet, as legal scholar Anjali Vats argues, the rhetorics of citizenship undergirding copyright remain »organized through a racial epis-

teme that consistently protects the (intellectual) property interests of white people and devalues the (intellectual) property interests of people of color« (2020, 3).

This article observes how the automation of copyright administration on YouTube doubles down on Vats' dichotomy, preempting the very possibility of what Henry Louis Gates, Jr. termed »repetition with a signal difference« (1988, 56). I argue that hip-hop youth cultures now explore forms of mimicry at a practical and technical remove from traditions of sampling and remix. I examine new genres of hip-hop practice via YouTube, verifying a ›post-sample-based‹ period in rap to be one defined by circumscribed fair use. YouTube's amateur hip-hop artists instead employ a variety of creative techniques for subverting automated content-detection (ACD) algorithms; by situating their practice in the context of algorithmic listening, I reconcile sociotechnical structure and user agency, showing how new constraints produce new genres of practice relationally. I consider, in turn, the audio ›type beat‹ and the video ›fan vid‹.

Producers use ›type‹ in UGC metadata (e.g., ›Kanye West-type beat‹), simulating a celebrated beatmaker's style, to exploit a tension between legibility and search visibility. On the one hand, a type beat caters to demand among emcees for instrumentals to rap over while providing beatmakers raw material for sampling. On the other hand, it yields a siphon-like effect on revenue from official videos, quasi-illicitly monetizing UGC. But whereas the type beat turns on strategic recreation of well-known styles, ›fan vids‹ (Lothian 2018) instead set the copyrighted audio itself to video pastiche. Here, the gambit to avoid ACD involves subtle time-stretching of media. Video subversion enlists rapid-fire montage while compression artifacts thwart scanning via reduced encoding bitrates (Kane 2019, 105–125). Content ID thereby gives rise to new/hybrid genres of musical practice. Yet most such efforts are precarious at best: algorithms adapt as humans verify what they miss (Roberts 2019). I conclude by asking whether such users enact the relation Lauren Berlant (2011) termed ›cruel optimism‹, when individual aspiration runs counter to flourishing.

To study how automated copyright shapes musical practice, I engage in participant observation in virtual field sites: specifically, I read and comment upon the textual traces and media practices of a heterogeneous, pseudonymous, and loosely-knit community of hip-

hop ›hackers‹ across YouTube and Reddit to show it to be what anthropologist Christopher Kelty has termed a ›recursive public‹, one, »constituted by a shared concern for maintaining the means of association« – here, circulation of copyrighted music and participatory production of derivative works – »through which they come together as a public« (2008, 28). This public emerges through the practice surveillance scholar Simone Browne (2015, 18–20) terms ›sousveillance‹, or watching the watchers. By listening to algorithmic listening, artist-practitioners model strategies for subverting ACD algorithms, teaching each other what the algorithms cannot overhear.

As automated copyright administration impinges upon the creative possibilities enjoyed by amateur hip-hop producers, musical style and genre ebb and flow in new directions. The sound of contemporary hip hop underwent a dramatic series of changes during the second decade of the twenty-first century – for myriad reasons that overdetermine it as an object of analysis. By scrutinizing musical *practice*, we can illuminate how the choices musicians make answer to legal and political-economic forces that risk being missed altogether by surface analysis of style and genre. Moreover, such an approach helps us to remember that hip-hop practice has long endured undue scrutiny from jurists and rights-holders, permitting us to better understand the algorithmic automation of copyright administration as an extension of forces that have shaped what beatmakers and emcees have done with beats since the pioneering hip-hop generation.

Hip-hop beatmaking practices – whether material (e.g., manipulating recorded samples) or textual (e.g., performing allusive borrowing) – depend upon a loose understanding of fair use in copyright law. So too does YouTube: Google's rise owed much to its own creative understanding of the fair-use exceptions the company enjoyed for its indexing and thumbnailing of data (Gray 2020, 65–96). YouTube today is both public culture and a proprietary service. It is at once an archive of cultural memory akin to a public good (Sayf-Cummings 2013, 8–9; Drott, 2024) and a profit-driven enterprise. It is shot through with such contradictions, for the recursive publics of YouTube's UGC producers interact with multiple algorithms, yielding a complex sociotechnical system (Burgess and Green 2018; Gillespie 2007), one in which human actors and non-human actants coproduce structure and agency. I propose that YouTube's Content ID is itself a text that can be

understood via the musical lens of hip hop. Examination of music under Content ID in turn helps to explain contemporary hip-hop practice.

To these ends, I make two interventions. Specifically, I observe that hip-hop beatmaking after the ›death of sampling‹ depends upon competing logics, what I term ›verisimilitude‹ and ›mimesis‹. Each of these terms helps to describe how traditions of textual allusion in hip-hop sampling have shaded over to practices of mimicry that borrow as much textual content as possible without triggering the scrutiny of automated censors. Type-beat producers and vidders endeavor to make their work legible to a wide audience via practices of ›cloning‹ other's recordings. Yet these ›cloned‹ beats and vids only ever asymptotically approach the borrowing that characterizes recorded sampling. They audibly resemble, but do not reproduce, past recordings. This marks these practices out as distinct from self-referential traditions of textual allusion in hip hop. Type beats and fan vids are *verisimilar* to their sources, but they are no longer necessarily constructed from these sources.

Dissident speech about systems like YouTube's Content ID – itself circumscribed by Content ID's ›chilling effect‹ – takes us only so far; understanding how users subvert ACD systems shows us much more about how they work. This article's key insight is that ACD systems yield non-negligible rates of false-positive ›matches‹, mistaking fair uses for infringement; ACD subversion shows us how these algorithms listen for code – not music, nor audio – and altogether ignore matters of law. ACD preempts fair use, signaling the ›privatization of copyright‹ (Tang 2023). I conclude by comparing vidders and type-beat artists to one of YouTube's most popular ›hip-hop‹ channels, operated under the alias »Lofi Girl«, illustrating how deracinated hip hop best answers to Content ID.

Sampling as a Musical Practice

Most popular accounts (e.g., Wallace and Costello 1990) of the sample-based Golden Age are quick to attribute it to the arrival of relatively low-cost hardware samplers to the market for DIY recording equipment in the mid-to-late 1980s. But the technological-determinist thesis is lacking for several reasons. For one, these technologies were hardly affordable. More importantly, the thesis exaggerates the rupture between cutting breaks and looping samples, obscuring the continuity between shared practices of musical

pastiche and textual allusion. It further fails to recognize sampling, sound-recording copyright, and fair use as coeval. Kool Herc and Grandmaster Flash discovered turntablism just as sound recording copyright was codified in law and just prior to the clarification of fair use by legislators.[1] For decades, legal constructions of the infringer-as-bad-actor rhetorically conflated piracy with theft, but legislators had no way of knowing what turntablism would set in motion. This disjuncture between law and practice haunts contemporary hip hop (Powell 2018). It plays out today in the gulf separating those who can afford to license samples from those whose borrowings go unauthorized. Amateur hip-hop producers have adapted to avoid expensive sample clearances, instead building beats from catalogue music.

Via sampling and interpolation, single beats sometimes bring entire genres into being. The break from The Winstons' »Amen, Brother« (1969) was the material basis for drum and bass and jungle music. Just as the presence of the ›Amen‹ break signals genre affiliation in electronic dance music, the so-called ›Triggerman‹ beat helps define the hip-hop genre of New Orleans-Memphis bounce. Borrowed from New York duo The Showboys' 1986 »Drag Rap«, the Triggerman's association with the South US became so fixed that it became available for allusive sampling by artists from anywhere, first through local response songs (e.g., Three 6 Mafia's »Drag 'Em From the River« [ca. 1993]) and, later, by contemporary artists such as Drake (»In My Feelings« [2018], »Nice for What« [2018]), Chris Brown and Young Thug (»Go Crazy« [2020]) and Beyoncé (»CHURCH GIRL« [2022]). YouTuber »Heit The Great« crowd-sourced more than 20 Triggerman samples; WhoSampled.com lists as many as 190.[2]

Type beats emerged on YouTube in response to search queries seeking out sample lineages, efforts to obtain music in the style of another artist. The proliferation of online discourse analyzing sample genealogies speaks to the inability of music information-retrieval (MIR) algorithms to wholly rationalize music recommendation and discovery. While WhoSampled.com crowd-sources and aggregates YouTube videos, YouTubers

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1 Sound Recordings Act, Pub. L. No. 92–140, 85 Stat. 39 (1971); Copyright Act of 1976 Pub. L. 94–553, 90 Stat. 2541.

2 Heit The Great: *Drag Rap: 20 Triggaman Samples in New Orleans Bounce, Memphis Crunk & More*, YouTube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=5VfTlRkcrs4 (23.10.2018).

like Heit must work within the constraints of Content ID, Google's copyright administration system. Heit does so by keeping his clips to fewer than two seconds. Heit's work conveys how the ›Triggerman‹ beat has become akin to a public good, a wellspring for creativity. Yet the Showboys still want to get paid; the Winstons never reaped the rewards of the afterlife of »Amen, Brother«, nor have the Showboys been compensated for the afterlife of »Drag Rap«. Hip-hop practice very often frustrates, and is frustrated by, copyright.

Content ID enables as it constrains. Here, it makes it more difficult than ever for amateur artists to participate in the Triggerman lineage. It instead incentivizes cloning of Triggerman beats, yielding painstaking reproductions (rendered with sufficiently distinct timbres as to elude ACD) through a practice Elliot Powell, quoting Timbaland, has described as ›ghosting‹ (2018). The basic elements of the Triggerman beat exhibit extraordinary economy of means: TR-808 drums meet resonant pitched percussion repeating a twisting chromatic figure. In its elegant simplicity, the Triggerman lends itself to ghosting. What distinguishes the ecology of Triggerman clones from type beats is the absence of a recognized beatmaker's signature style; by now, it is more akin to a folk text than the type beats that index a single author that have followed in its wake. Like with the ›Amen‹ break before it, it amounts to more than a historical infelicity that The Showboys have not seen their fair share of its success, but rather a failure of copyright. Fundamentally at issue are parody and sampling as paradigms of fair use.

Content ID's Chilling Effect

Scrutinizing users who evade Content ID helps us to understand those who utilize their YouTube platforms to condemn it outright.[3] Both the content of political speech on YouTube and manipulations to the medium itself must be weighed in equal measure if we are to understand ACD as a sociotechnical system, one that structures user agency as it is shaped by user inputs. What is said depends on who or what is ›listening in‹; how it is said matters as much or more than what is uttered. Ghosted samples mask textual borrowings, weaving wolves into sheep's clothing. ›Lossy‹ audio compression obscures sample

[3] Rick Beato: *My Video Was Demonetized by 16 Record Labels … I'm pissed*, YouTube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3NnrWrkKZM (23.06.2022).

sources. Rapid-fire cuts, rotoscoping and ›datamoshing‹ thwart visual pattern recognition. Type beats and fan vids have proliferated on YouTube by reconciling competing imperatives to verisimilitude and mimesis, perpetuating a clandestine sameness: *contra* allusive sampling practices that produce a hypertext, these recursive practices instead endeavor to supplant sources without betraying methods. ›See what I did there‹-style bravura is replaced with virtuosic fungibility, where simulacrum (Baudrillard 1983) happily stands in for original. Hip hop practice renews and remediates textual strategies for fair use online.

Performer	Date	Title	Viewcount
Lil Poppa and Polo G	6/25/19	›Eternal Living‹	26,941,240
Bodega B	9/21/20	›Eternal Living (UnOfficial Remix)‹	3,439
MVR Dev	10/10/20	›Eternal Living (MVMix) – MVR Dev‹	2,403

Figure 1: YouTube Type-beat Remixes Derived from »Eternal Living« (2019)

Consider just how much (largely) unpaid creativity goes into the work of these content creators. As an example of the gulf separating YouTube partners' content from the type-beat-derived productions that refer to it, consider the three videos represented in Figure 1: Lil Poppa's and Polo G's 2019 »Eternal Living« has amassed 26 million views, while the nearest derivative works have attracted nearly 6,000 combined views, leaving little incentive for algorithmic policing.[4] As a pinned comment on one widely-viewed type beat attests (»Good luck to everyone trying to become a artist one day I wish the best to all of u«**)** such performances often signal user aspirations to being ›discovered‹ within a putatively meritocratic star system predicated on the success of only a handful[5] (Taylor 2015, 51–63). The work of the ›vidder‹ Axgawd illustrates both ACD subversion and its potential to generate millions of views – or, that is, it did until the user's most successful vid was removed for alleged infringement in February, 2020.

[4] Bodega B: *Eternal Living (UnOfficial REMIX)*, YouTube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=RicCgLXI7fg; (21.09.2020), MVR Dev: *Eternal Living (MVMix)- MVR Dev*, YouTube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=GrH2xO6yg50 (11.10.2019).

[5] alanfor, *mac miller x solange type beat – ›all's well‹*, YouTube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=x1Yq2F78JzE (19.08.2020).

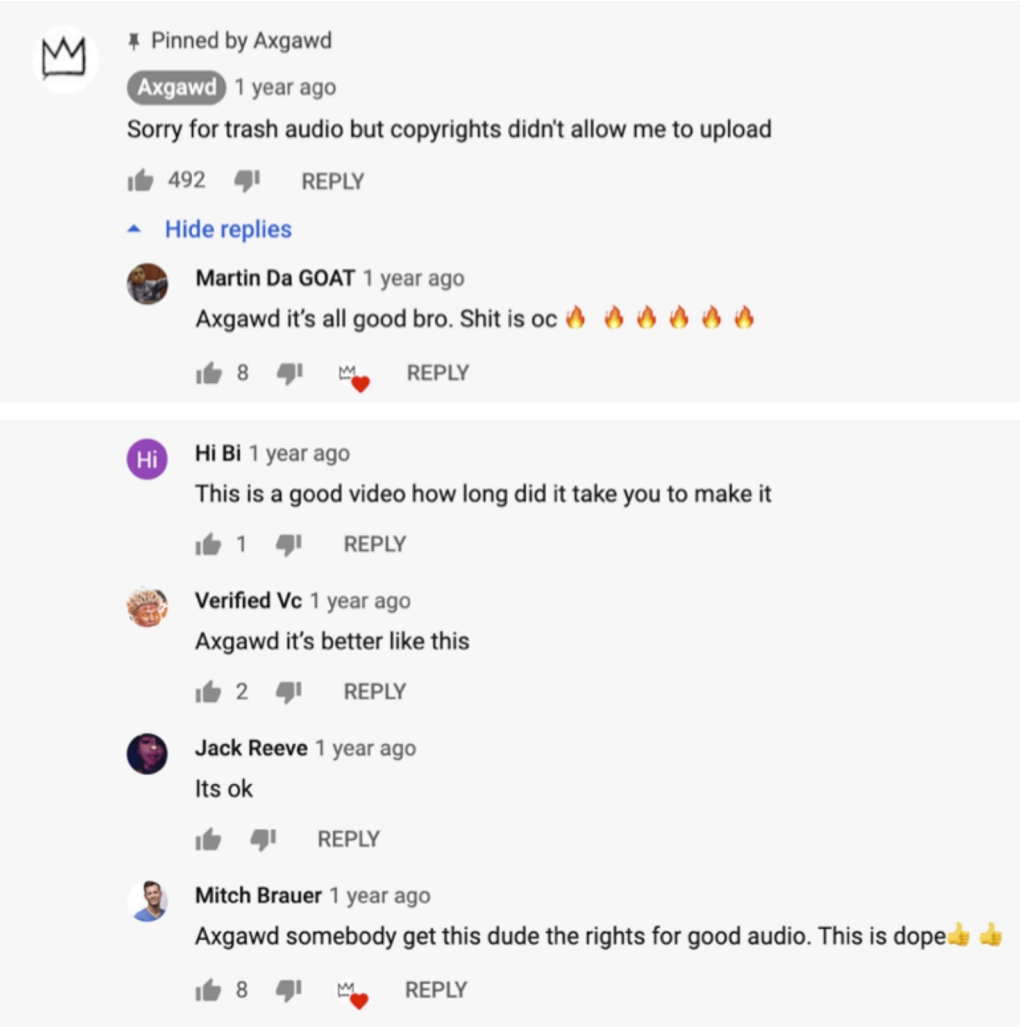

Figure 2: Pinned Comment and Replies in the »Shoota« Comments Section

This vid, set to Playboi Carti's and Lil Uzi Vert's 2018 »Shoota«, was assembled from clips from multiple source videos. Many of these cuts feature ornamented key frames, or pivot still images, cut out via ›rotoscoping‹, or the superimposition of video sources. Such decorated edits generate surplus ›noise‹ in the balance of official to user-generated content, thwarting image-scanning algorithms with digital artifacts. From 2019 to 2022, I observed the Axgawd vids built from protected content winnow away from the user's home page, leaving behind Axgawd-shot-and-edited videos produced for aspiring emcees like the aforementioned type-beat remix artists.[6] Figure 2 shows a screen capture of Axgawd's pinned message to fans, taken November 22, 2019.

[6] www.youtube.com/c/Axgawd.

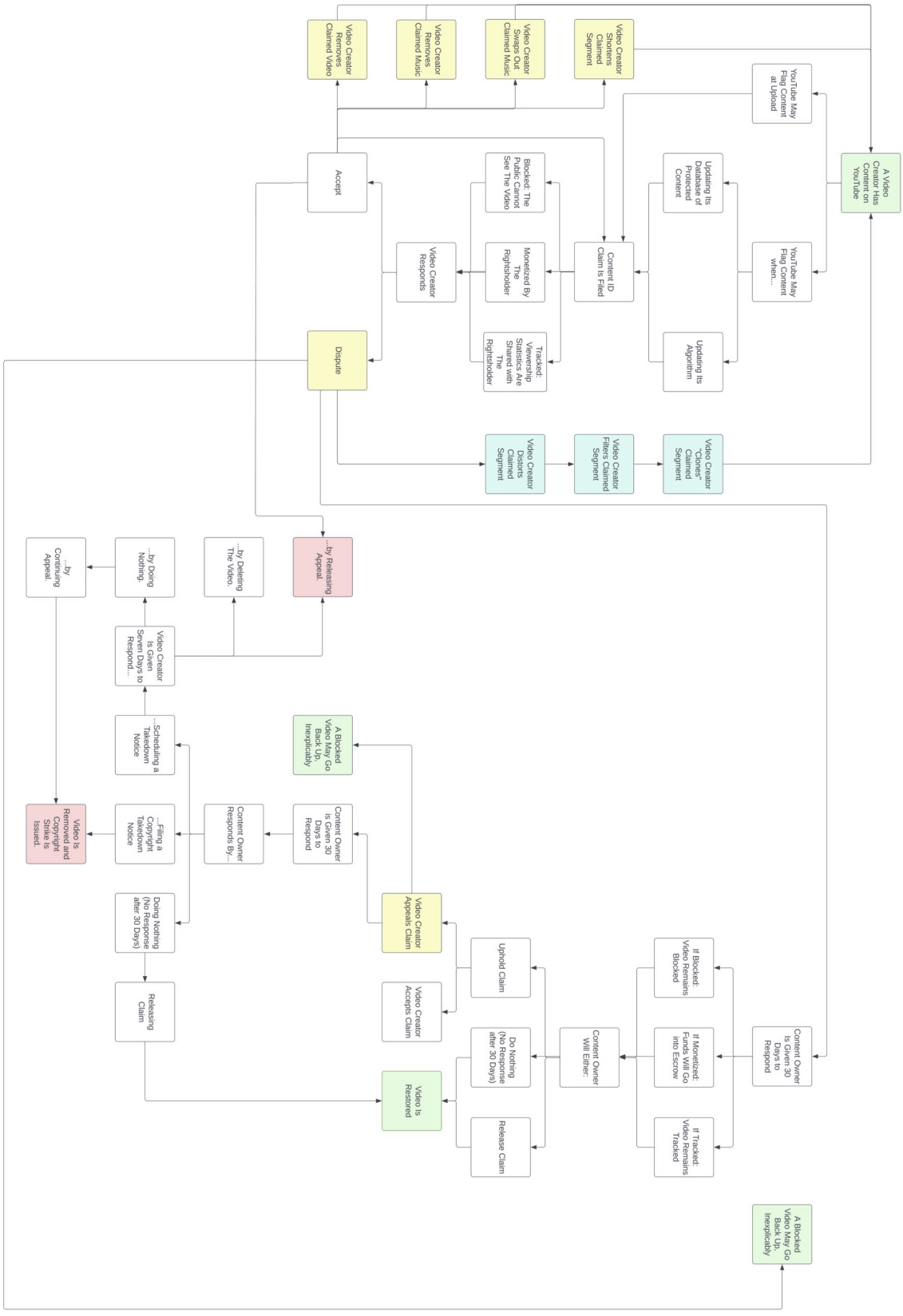

Figure 3: YouTube's Content ID Decision Tree and User Process Flow

The persistence of Axgawd's fan vids on the platform suggests that the vidder's efforts to subvert ACD succeeded only until they amassed enough views as to attract the attention of brand managers. This hypothesis is predicated on the results of my own experiments: I uploaded cuts of various lengths to find that Content ID can identify sources from as little as two seconds of media. Vidders show great ingenuity in working within these constraints (see Fig. 3).[7]

Assembling sub-one-second cuts, Axgawd musically varies clip length using ›stutter‹, or repetition of frames, ›shudder‹, or vibrating camera effects, and reverse-playback edits, accumulating such extensive adjustments to the video sources as to suggest it was the traditional, qualitative judgment of ›substantial similarity‹ that here prompted takedown orders. Millions of forfeited views are valuable enough to motivate third-party policing: in the case of Axgawd's vid for Uzi's »Sauce It Up«, its more than ten million views even led Uzi himself to host the video for a time (»It was on lil uzis channel for like 3 days…«) What instead accounts for the takedown is in fact what Axgawd described as the vid's ›trash audio‹, the gambit of the vidder's manipulations to elude ACD.[8] (»Sorry for trash audio copyrights didn't allow me to upload«) (Fig. 4).

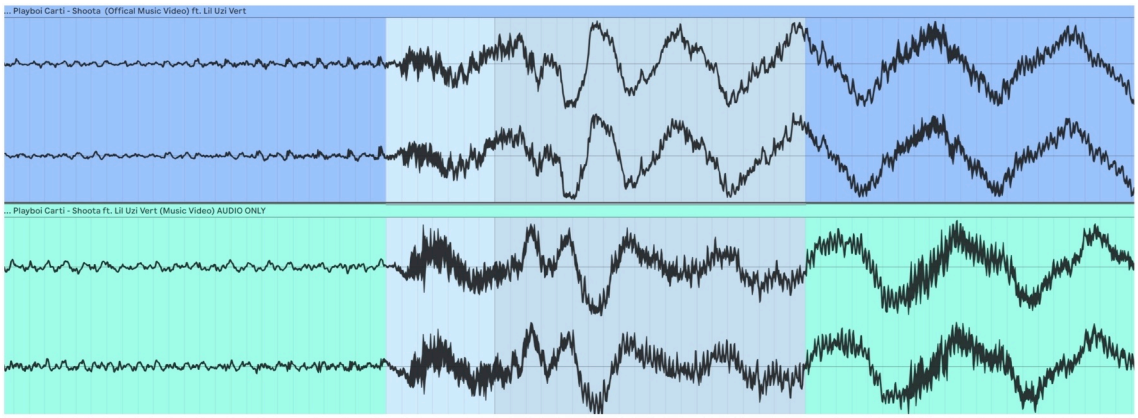

Figure 4: Amplitude over Time: Axgawd's »Shoota« (top) vs. Playboi Carti's (bottom)

Industry researchers have noted that ACD algorithms measure ratios of rhythmic onsets across several audio frequency bands (Engstrom and Feamster 2017, 16); if enough of

7 Adapted from Trendacosta 2020.

8 The waveforms in Figure 4 differ in equalization; peaks and valleys follow similar contours, but some are inverted, suggesting that Axgawd doubled the source audio, creating a phase-cancellation effect.

those detection bands are thwarted by unorthodox approaches to equalization and ›time-stretching‹, a borrowed audio file can retain its resemblance to its source while eluding algorithmic detection, achieving verisimilitude absent mimesis – the audible semblance of a referent without any machine-legible traces thereof. In the case of Axgawd's audio mixes, the midrange vocals are so overwhelmed by brittle treble as to have prompted the vidder to include subtitles clarifying the scarcely audible lyrics, a compromise that proved polarizing among listeners; one even ventured a comment on another Axgawd video requesting a version of the »Shoota« vid with clean audio. Still, more than a few commenters preferred the ›trash‹ version (»Axgawd, it's better like this.«), while others remarked that they thought they had seen an official video. Such comments illuminate a crucial dimension of Axgawd's multimedia practice: the user's vids select from sources lacking official videos while cutting together footage from songs that have received such treatments, producing the illusion that each pastiche video is itself a novel ›official release,‹ achieving mimesis absent verisimilitude, an audible suggestion of representation belied by the visual source material. Axgawd's audio subversion has the effect of emphasizing Maaley Raw's beatmaking over and above Uzi's and Carti's rap performances, intensifying the vid's musical effects – especially, the beat drops – bringing the musicality of video, whether hard synch'd or dancing to its own rhythm, to the fore of the (re)mix.

Ambivalent responses to Axgawd's »Shoota« vid illustrate how type beats and fan vids enact the affective relation Sianne Ngai (2020, 1) theorizes in terms of the ›gimmick‹, a cultural form that at once invites, and thwarts, aesthetic judgment. The Reddit subforum r/makinghiphop is filled with debates over the ethics of sampling and the creative ramifications of YouTube's algorithmic automation of copyright administration. Many participants enforce a familiar species of musical idealism, reminiscent of ›rockism‹ of yore, that casts aspersions toward type beat producers, calling instead for users to produce art for art's sake; a few boast of earning as much as $1,000 per month in type-beat-derived advertising revenue.[9] Vidders are underrepresented here, suggesting their work is seen – at least

[9] Type Beat Producers …Why do we get criticized?‹; www.reddit.com/r/makinghiphop/comments/e8lx73/type_beat_producerswhy_do_we_get_criticized/ (05.10.2023); ›[AMA] I'm a type beat producer with 40k subs. Ask me anything‹; www.reddit.com/r/makinghiphop/comments/htjlms/ama_im_a_type_beat_producer_with_40k_subs_ask_me/ (05.10.2023); »The TRUTH about ›type beats‹ …If you think making type beats is whack, this is for you;

among users of r/makinghiphop – as that of amateurs, not of artists in their own right. To be sure, the popularity of Axgawd's »Shoota« on YouTube troubled such firm distinctions between art and commerce.

The video[10] opens conventionally enough, with a title card, yet by the first entrance of the vocals, it is clear that this audio mix is wildly unbalanced – the vocals are scarcely audible, the midrange frequencies scooped out of the mix. At 00:24, the first instance of ›datamoshing‹ occurs. These decorated, rapid-fire edits reflect rap vidding's genealogy in commercial hip-hop video production, from which two videos are noteworthy for popularizing the technique: Nabil Elderkin's work for Kanye West's »Welcome to Heartbreak« (2008) and Shomi Patwary's video for A$AP Mob's »Yamborghini High« (2016).[11] One soon notices frequent datamoshing, where ›delta‹ frames, or those that map the screen position of figures, are duplicated in a ›bloom‹ or ›smear‹ effect spanning cuts (Fig. 5).[12] Such edits generate surplus ›noise‹ in the balance of official to user-generated content, thwarting ACD with digital artifacts while hewing to a recognized psychedelic style.

Figure 5: Nabil Elderkin, for Kanye West, »Welcome to Heartbreak« (2008)

Many sample-based beats repeat a two- or four-bar loop. Built around a single-measure piano loop, »Shoota« does more with less. From the harmonic stasis enacted by the perpetual oscillation between the pitches of a minor third, the piano lays down a harmonic pedal point over which Carti and Uzi elaborate pentatonic vocal melodies. Axgawd's

www.reddit.com/r/makinghiphop/comments/15c59t4/the_truth_about_type_beats_if_you_think_making/ (05.10.2023

10 The video has been removed from YouTube due to alleged copyright infringement.

11 Kanye West: *Welcome to Heartbreak ft. Kid Cudi*, YouTube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=wMH0e8kIZtE (16.06.2009); A$AP Mob: *Yamborghini High (Official Video - Explicit) ft. Juicy J*, YouTube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=tt7gP_IW-1w (11.05.2016).

12 Screen capture taken from Kanye West, *Welcome to Heartbreak ft. Kid Cudi*, YouTube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=wMH0e8kIZtE (16.06.2009), 0:54.

audio subversion enhances the melodic quality of these sing-song rap vocals, burying them in the incessant piano loop. This is rap music about the ›vibe‹, not the text (Chayka 2021). Of late, rap vocals have fervently explored sung melody, one affordance of increased interest, since circa 2007, in what Catherine Provenzano (2019) has termed The Autotune Effect (TATE) – vocals that artistically exploit the audible artifacts that Antares Audio's Autotune and Celomony's Melodyne plugins leave behind. TATE arguably raises expressive vocal performance above intelligible declamation, marking out a new era in rap in which lyricism is no longer prized in the same sense as it was during the sample-based Golden Age. The preeminence of TATE performance invites a reappraisal of how beatmaking evolved during the litigious early years of the twenty-first century; here, I explore the possibility that rap's increased privileging of melody over text declamation itself reflects the decline of sample-based fair use. I propose that this decline made literal and figurative ›space in the mix‹ for sung rap vocals' newfound primacy. That Content ID's suppression of fair use has not attracted more controversy speaks to how rap has moved on from the era in which textual allusion flourished; ACD forecloses on the possibility of renewed interest in sample-based allusion, cutting off contemporary practice from rap tradition.

Content ID as Extrajudicial Adjudication of Fair Use

The ethnographic study of what Nick Seaver (2017, 10, emphasis by the author) has described as ›algorithms *as part of* culture‹ is limned by the secrecy that surrounds both the development – and, here, the subversion of – said algorithms. Content ID was deemed a trade secret in court proceedings for *Viacom International, Inc. v. YouTube, Inc.*, decided on appeal in 2012.[13] Software developers like Google have long pursued legislative and contractual prohibitions on tampering with consumer technologies that enforce copyright protections (Gillespie 2007). Type beats and fan vids indirectly shed light on a phenomenon that colloquially carries only its trade name. Yet it is merely one way to

[13] See Case 1:07-cv-02103-LLS Document 117 of 676 F.3d 19 (2nd Cir., 2012) for the motion to render Google's proprietary algorithm a trade secret; see also Pasquale 2016.

enforce copyright. ACD systems yield a high return of false-positive ›matches‹, mistaking fair uses for infringement.

The case of Axgawd's vid for Carti's and Uzi's »Shoota« represents such a false positive – it is a fair use algorithmically misconstrued as infringement – or, so it could be persuasively argued in a US court of law. Axgawd's case never saw its day in court; Content ID preempts both infringement and the fair-use defense. Moreover, while copyright exceptions like fair use vary across international jurisdictions, it is noteworthy that subverting copyright technology is expressly prohibited in the jurisdictions of the 115 contracting parties to the 1996 World Intellectual Property Organization Copyright Treaty. So, while Axgawd's vid could arguably be defended as a fair use, the vidders' very efforts to subvert Content ID arguably undermine this claim. Let us nevertheless consider why Axgawd's vidding could be defended as fair use. In US copyright jurisprudence fair use is subject to a four-factor test, concerning the purpose of use, the nature of the copyrighted work, the amount borrowed from the original, and its effect on the market for the copyrighted work.[14] Construed as an audio work, Axgawd's »Shoota« is a commercial use that borrows liberally from the original with a demonstrable effect, measured in lost views, on the market for the original. Yet considered as a video work, it is non-rivalrous and non-excludable; there is no comparable treatment thereof. It can justifiably be construed as a parody that only aspires to be the ›official‹ video.[15] »Shoota«, ostensibly, is a fair use.

Still, US case law attests to the possibility for even audio incidentally featured in videographic UGC to be construed as infringing. The most famous instance is *Lenz vs. Universal Music Corp.*, the case of the Prince-dancing baby. In 2007, Stephanie Lenz posted a 29-second clip of her 13-month-old son dancing to Prince's »Let's Go Crazy« (1984). A recording of a recording, the audio was of such poor quality that it could not compete in the market for the original. After Universal Music sent a takedown notice to YouTube, Lenz sent a counter-notice claiming fair use. Decided on appeal in 2015, the case established the precedent that rights holders have a »duty to consider – in good faith and prior

14 Pub. L. 94–553, 90 Stat. 2541, §107.
15 *Campbell v. Acuff-Rose Music, Inc.*, 510 U.S. 569 (1994).

to sending a takedown notification – whether allegedly infringing material constitutes fair use.«[16] Content ID precludes this dance of notice and counter-notice, preempting fair use.

»Shoota« directs our attention to three shortcomings of Content ID. First, it adjudicates fair use by deferring to the rights holder. If Axgawd's vid was suppressed, the rights holder disputed the claim to fair use; if it was, in fact, self-censored, the chilling effect of Content ID is all the more palpable. Second, »Shoota« shows that Content ID is ineffectively calibrated as a ›fingerprinting‹ technology: ACD listens for rhythmic syntax above and beyond other musical parameters like timbre, predisposing it to match samples as infringements and biasing it against beatmaking. Finally, Content ID is neither impartial nor transparent, but it is efficient. Google has long argued that human review of all of YouTube's content is impossible; for now, so too is fair use.[17]

Content ID serves YouTube partners above and beyond what is required by law (Doctorow and Giblin 2022, 124–141; Suzor 2019, 59–78). Users are increasingly aware that virtually all UGC producers, save for viral superstars, get paid precious little under the system. YouTube enforces a 1,000-view threshold for remuneration – a threshold that returns only two to twelve dollars in advertising revenue to the content creator and/or rightsholder (Molina 2025); only 11% of YouTube videos are ever monetized[18] (Koh 2019). While some express frustration about new constraints on fair use, others – like type-beat producers and fan vidders – quietly work around them. Low-viewcount UGC producers and YouTube's hip-hop hackers each operate at the ›long tail‹ of the online media market, where their efforts return only a subsistence yield. Each has a fixed ceiling: the best type-beat producer is as unlikely as the best bedroom *auteur* to be anointed to stardom. By contributing to discourse celebrating copyrighted works, they feed the engines of the star system their ingenuity otherwise subverts. Does such an understanding augur the limits of hip-hop as a digital practice? Hardly. But it does point to the need to better understand how beatmaking moved on, from a self-referential tradition predicated on textual allusion, to one of mimicry absent fair use. YouTube helps us to name this

16 *Lenz v. Universal Music Group*, 801 F.3d 1126 (9th Cir. 2015), 25.
17 See *Viacom v. YouTube*, 676 F.3d 19 (2nd Cir., 2012).
18 This is not to imply that remuneration rates follow a linear curve; rather, they are mystified.

period. Call it the ›post-sample-based‹ era.[19] The arrival of the ›death of sampling‹ hypothesis itself marks the onset of our era, in which copyright either forces beatmakers to remediate via ghosting, or, to censor themselves.

Hip Hop as Content after the Death of Sampling

In hip-hop scholarship, Wayne Marshall first flagged the phenomenon that The Roots bandleader Ahmir ›?uestlove‹ Thompson had bluntly pointed out online in 2000: »anti sampling laws is killing hip hop, folks« (2006, 878). It seemed The Roots offered a novel alternative: ›analog‹ mimicry of sample-based beatmaking via ›instrumental hip-hop‹. The drum-and-bass, fade-out outro to »You Got Me (feat. Erykah Badu)« (1999) achieves through sheer ensemble virtuosity a style strikingly akin to that of the freewheeling hacker-producers of Warp Records' so-called ›Intelligent Dance Music‹. Twenty-five years later, The Roots' experiment remains singular, while ›instrumental hip hop‹ – beats absent vocals – has acquired a more prosaic meaning as a subgenre unto itself known as ›lo-fi‹. Its biggest exponent is ›Lofi Girl‹, a YouTube alias, her sobriquet stripped of its original adjectival sense (i.e., ›Lo-fi Hip Hop‹), operated by a Paris UGC producer known only as ›Dimitri‹ (Bromwich 2018).

Lofi Girl's YouTube presence comprises seamless playlists of instrumental hip hop, some livestreamed, others recorded for posterity, the most popular among them a series of ›study aid‹ playlists corresponding to affects or moods associated with different times of day (e.g., ›12:00am Study Playlist‹). The music hews closer to the style of the late *auteur* beatmaker J Dilla than to that of The Roots' experiment in instrumental hip hop. Dilla's beats have been thoroughly dissected by hip-hop's participatory cultures, which have documented even the most obscure of his samples, raising him to the center of canons of hip-hop authorship (D'Errico 2015; Ferguson 2014; Charnas 2022). This cannot be said for any of the music in Lofi Girl's vast repertory. Hers is instead music by aspiring producers mimicking Dilla and others: low-cost licenses curated to provide a continuous

[19] I am indebted to Mike D'Errico (2015) for asking when the ›post-Golden Age‹, in fact, began – and to Braxton Shelley (2020) and Alexis Lothian (2018), whose work first brought type beats and fan vids to my attention.

listening experience and a neutral affect. It is homogenized content, hip hop absent any connection to any tradition of textual allusion. It is nothing less than Muzak.

And it is indisputably popular – Lofi Girl can boast of 14.4 million subscribers. Muzak scholars provide instructive models for understanding the audibly innocuous. First, Robert Fink's (2005, 169–207) analysis of the mid-century recorded revival of Baroque ›wallpaper music‹ shows how meanings can be recuperated from recordings intended to be immune to interpretation. For Fink, the *barococo* revival indexed a reorientation toward a mode of repetitive listening that prefigured minimalism. He exhumes a discourse that interpellated audiences to carefree, superficial investment in musical meaning. Rather than pose the challenge of romantic repertory and structural listening, *barococo* music reflected back to consumers the fulfillment of their needs. Anthologies like The Melachrino Strings' 1958 *Music for Relaxation* count among the earliest entries in the history of what Tia de Nora (2000, i, 51, 52, 62) in turn diagnoses as a prevailing listener orientation in our time: music for ›self-regulation‹. Thus Lofi Girl's first playlist identified itself as »lo-fi hip hop beats to study to«. One might suppose that her repertory reconciles student life with a hip-hop lifestyle; still, one strains to understand it as hip hop. Rather, it is hip hop pre-paid in full: shorn of its subversiveness, (micro-)licensed, easy to consume, and freely available in prodigious quantities. It bears mention that Lofi Girl's anime-inspired visual appearance is phenotypically ›white‹. ›Her‹ YouTube presence is thus doubly marked as ›safe for all‹ through its anodyne performance of race and gender: Lofi Girl is ›hip hop‹ for anyone.

Were it so simple. Lofi Girl is not, in fact, ›white‹ in any straightforward way. She might be better understood as ›not Black‹, since hip-hop artists have long experimented with anime as a visual style, rerouting its racializing assemblage into autobiographically Black characters (compare Kanye West's teddy-bear persona from his 2007 *Graduation* with the cover image of Lil Uzi Vert's 2020 *LUV vs. The World 2*). Empirical research (Lu 2009) suggests that Caucasian viewers tend to interpret the anime racializing assemblage as ›white‹, while Northeastern Asian viewers tend to perceive it as ›Asian‹. This makes it an ideal representation for a globalized audience for ›instrumental hip hop‹, free of the

cultural baggage that accompanies the US sonic color line and its histories of appropriation (Fig. 6).

Figure 6: Lofi Girl circa 2023

Cue Jonathan Sterne's (1997) study of Muzak at the Mall of America. Sterne shows how sonic architecture contributes to the eponymous mall's nationalistic branding: the second-biggest mall in the world purports to serve a global audience, albeit exclusively with sounds and images of American exdcess. Lofi Girl is to hip hop what the Mall is to sound; her channel – with its autoplay continuity and seamless transitions – produces further consumption of her channel, just as sonic architecture interpellates visitors to ›shop until you drop‹. Her channel is not a complex of links comprising a musical hypertext; it is anathema to sampling as a means of preserving history and memory. And it is incentivized by Content ID. By playing nice with the censors, Lofi Girl captured her market.

Lofi Girl's channel shows how a UGC platform can grow to viral proportions, even spawning a virtual record label. This success invites two conclusions. On the one hand, Lofi Girl is useful as a limit case for music UGC producers: the most that most music-content creators can hope for is pseudonymous micro-celebrity coupled with modest advertising revenue. On the other hand, it illustrates the utility of composition by omission, promoting music free of any frame of intertextual reference, and thus any copyright liability, save for the minimal licensing cost of what is ultimately catalogue music. Present are all of the elements that constitute a beat without any of the stylistic markers of a celebrity author (e.g., Kanye West's re-pitched vocals, Dilla's asymmetrical, ›stuttering‹ sequences, Ahmir Thompson's reinvented ›Amen‹ breaks). Lofi Girl thus commands the market for ›lo-fi‹, confirming the ubiquity of deracinated hip hop.

Conclusion: Cruel Optimism?

Meanwhile, type-beat producers and fan vidders strain against ACD in bids for recognition by search and curation algorithms. By preempting allusive sampling, Content ID exhibits copyright's familiar bias against practices of parody and textual allusion in beatmaking (Carter 2017). If Lofi Girl represents hip hop liquidated of its vanguard status as Black vernacular technological creativity (Fouché 2006), type-beat producers and fan vidders corroborate the death of allusive sampling, representing what proliferates in its censored absence. If we follow Guthrie Ramsey, Jr. (2004, 1–4) in recognizing the importance of sampling as a source of intergenerational continuity and dialogue in African-American communities, we can conclude that faulty ACD algorithms are not merely technologies of censorship, but also technologies of anti-Blackness. This places Content ID in (supposedly) good company, for Safiya Noble (2018) has analyzed endemic racial bias in Google Search results. Algorithms carry the limitations of their creators' worldviews. Cataloguing their failures is becoming tiresomely commonplace even as it remains urgent. Automated copyright carries with it not only a programmatic bias against fair use, but a technical bias against intertextuality.

One cannot stress enough that hip hop has largely moved on from its era of allusive sampling. To some extent, this happened gradually: Arvin Alaigh (2018) productively built upon Sumanth Gopinath's work (2013, 252–255) on the pivotal genre of ›ringtone rap‹, illuminating a decline in sample-based tracks on the *Billboard* charts in the first decade of the century – a trend that Soulja Boy's »Crank That« (2007) confirmed rather than catalyzed. Increasingly, producers rely on catalogue music for beats.[20] To an extent, Content ID only verifies this more gradual shift. But as human-algorithm interactions come under increasing critical scrutiny, it is noteworthy that ACD militates against the very possibility of a return to heightened textual allusion in beatmaking. YouTube's terms of service are clearly hostile to the very types of creativity – technological and textual subversion – from which hip hop originated (Rose 1994). What will become of YouTube's aspiring producers, type-beat artists, and vidders?

[20] Consider Lil Nas X's »Old Town Road« (2018).

Most will give up, as Axgawd's story suggests. Some will persist in aspiring to be pulled out of obscurity. Yet, again, by contributing to discourse celebrating copyrighted works, they feed the engines of the star system their ingenuity otherwise subverts. Indeed, by making art in conditions inhospitable to such creativity, they enact the relation Berlant (2011, 24) described as one of ›cruel optimism‹, the affective relation that obtains when the pursuit of an elusive object of desire diminishes one's ability to flourish. Their content, whether suppressed or self-censored, is reduced to music for the sake of musicking. Berlant's theory reminds us that little-known musicians often catalyze the double motion of attention and celebrity that fires online discourse. Hip hop may be as ubiquitous as Lofi Girl, but its unpaid debts – long neglected by copyright – are mounting. User-generated content hosts such contradictions (Winston and Saywood 2019). Content ID exploits them.

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Limelight of the Idols:
Voice, Virtuality, VTubers

Stefan Greenfield-Casas

Figure 1 shows a solo idol standing on a stage, singing a cover of Yoasobi's »Gunjou«. The ornate stage is set in grayscale, though what looks like purple ink flows in the background. Staircases flank both sides, as do giant floating orbs. Above, spotlights fan out; below, a mirrored stage floor reflects the topside world. In the background, a composite jumbotron made of smaller hexagonal screens frames the idol. The camera cuts at the prechorus, and an enormous crowd is displayed – mostly hidden in the shadows – but their penlights (light sticks) illuminate both the scale of the venue as well as the size of the audience. The camera cuts again to the idol. Generally speaking, she looks like a traditional Japanese idol, with notably long flowing hair and a mic set amplifying her voice… but she has little flaps on the top of her head (reminiscent of the dumbo octopus), bangs that appear to be tentacles, a floating halo behind her… and also appears to be animated! Regardless, she moves with decidedly human motions, anchoring her to the corporeal

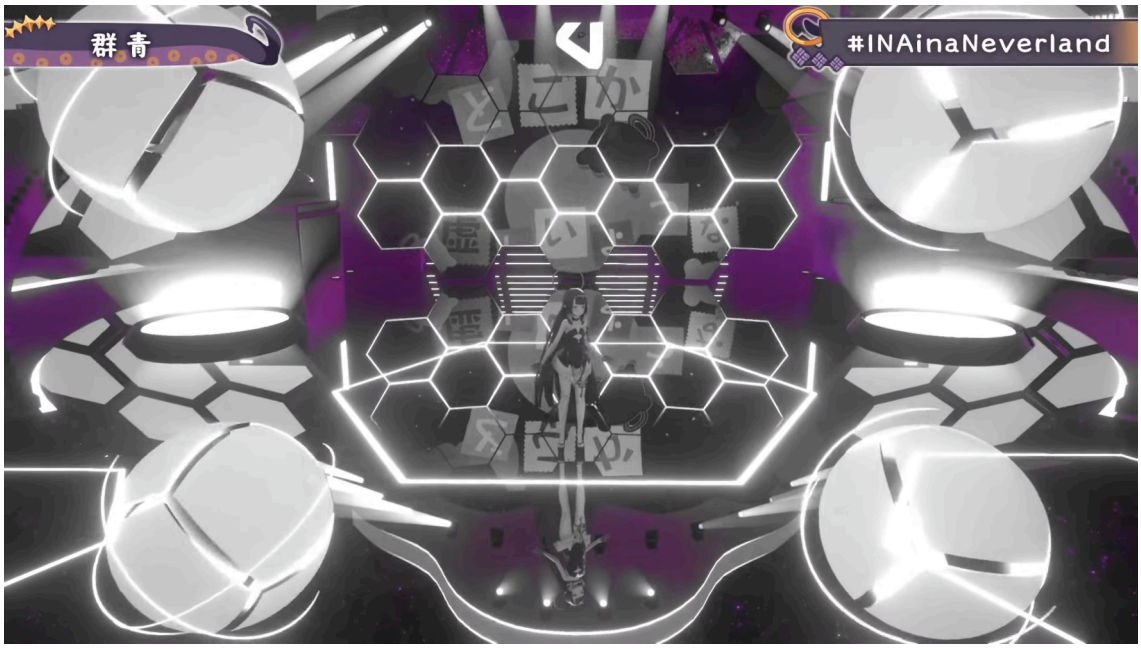

Figure 1: Beginning of Ina's »Gunjou« performance during her 2023 birthday stream. Screen capture by author

world even if she does not present as materially ›real‹. Figure 2 shows the ending pre-chorus-turned-refrain in which the stage suddenly alights with a full spectrum of flashing colors. As the song comes to an end, the jumbotron screen displays other idols with fantastical designs and costumes as the main idol dances back and forth.[1]

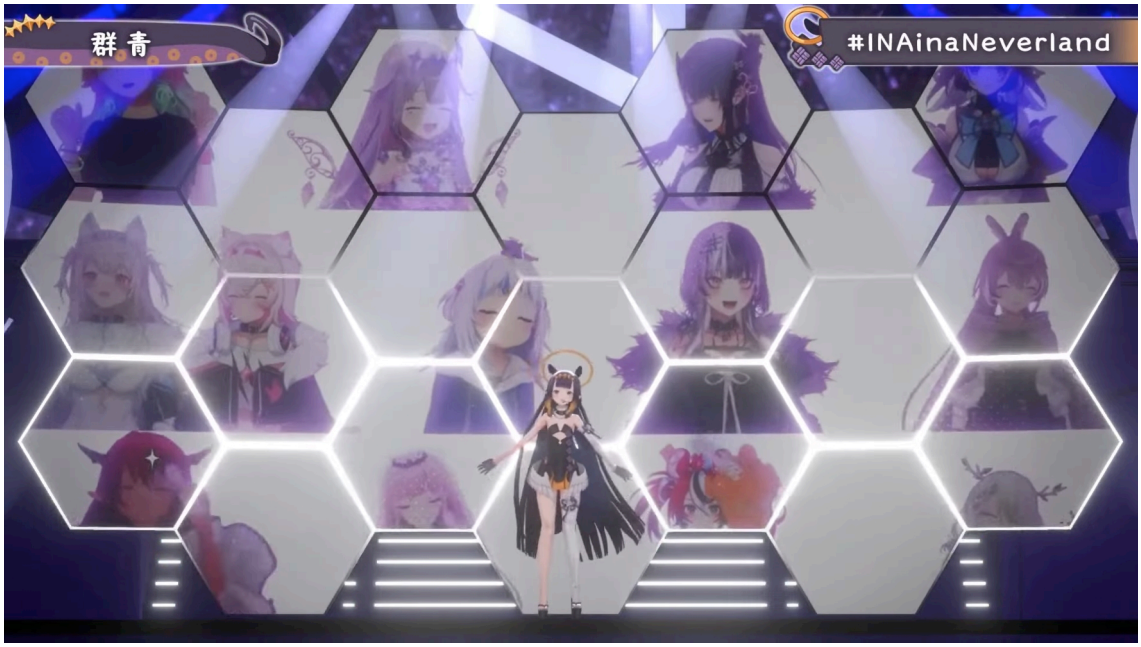

Figure 2: Ending of Ina's »Gunjou« performance (now accompanied with her friends qua chorus) during her 2023 birthday stream. Screen capture by author

The preceding paragraph offers a description of a celebratory event that took place in December 2023. An event that took place *online*, however, and which we might describe as *virtual*, rather than actual.[2] Here we have the VTuber Ninomae Ina'nis, simply called ›Ina‹ by her fans and colleagues, singing and performing as part of her birthday celebration in 2023 during a live stream.[3] She is a VTuber (a portmanteau of ›virtual‹ and ›YouTuber‹), an *actual* person who dons a simulated, *virtual* persona (Lo 2025) in order to stream. Furthermore, she herself exists in a liminal space between the virtual persona of

1 Rayzorexe, *Ninomae Ina'nis – 群青/Gunjou (Feat. HoloEN)【Ina's BIRTHDAY LIVE 2023】*, YouTube, https://youtu.be/i2S4Jz6GK7M (09.12.2023); original stream: Ninomae Ina'nis, *【3D LIVE】『Neverland Paradox』 Ninomae Ina'nis Birthday Live 2023 #INAinaNeverland*, YouTube, https://youtu.be/yT2ety9RfIo (09.12.2023).

2 I mean this in two senses of the word: both the contemporary understanding of the word as having to do with simulated spaces, as well as the Deleuzian sense of »real, but not actual«. My thoughts here are especially indebted to Paul Sanden (2019) and his theorization of ›virtual liveness‹. For a Massumian analysis of VTubers, the virtual, and the actual, see Gwillim-Thomas (2023).

3 While it appears parts of the stream were pre-recorded, it was premiered live – that is, had a set premiere date in which fans/viewers joined together to watch it when it premiered.

her idol and the actual person she really is – while there may be overlap between the two, the performative nature of being an idol should not go without comment.

From this opening and initial figures, I wish to draw attention to three things:

1. The mechanics of VTubing, called ›Live 2D rigging‹. Here, a virtual model is designed by an artist, and is then ›rigged‹ such than when the streamer moves, their model responds accordingly using motion capture technology. This is essentially virtual puppeteering and, as such, many of my thoughts going forward are indebted to Hayley Fenn's (2022) writings on puppets and music. Because these VTubers can stream as whatever they want to be, many, perhaps even most, use fantastical designs for their models. Ina's official ›lore‹ describes her as a priestess of the ›Ancient Ones‹, of which we can perhaps see some elements in her fantastical outfit. (Indeed, while not visible here, this includes tentacles she can summon from the void. I will return to this point below.) Even if a VTuber chooses to remain humanoid, however, part of the appeal of streaming as a VTuber is the ability to hide one's face and instead don a persona as a *naka no hito* (the person within). Akiko Sugawa-Shimada (2023b) (glossing Nozawa Shunsuke) notes that the concept of the *naka no hito* began with *seiyū*, Japanese *voice* actors who brought the 2D anime characters they were voicing closer to the 3D world – leading to what has since been called the 2.5D. This leads me to my second point.

2. Sound and, in particular, *voice*. If using a VTuber model is in part a way of maintaining anonymity, as musicologist Yun-Kiu Lo (2023; 2025) has convincingly argued, then the streamer's voice is the exception. While some VTubers use various ways to disguise their voice, many leave their voice unfiltered – or relatively so, at least, as they are inherently mediated through microphone, internet, and speaker. And while voice is in large part based in speaking, here we see this also comes to encompass singing. This leads me to my third point.

3. Ina is a member of Hololive Productions, the most popular VTuber agency.[4]

[4] As the company officially stylizes it, ›hololive‹ is usually written in all lowercase. For clarity and formatting's sake, I will treat it as proper noun and capitalize the company's name across this article. Hololive is a *jimusho* or management office (talent agency) and thus maintains some level of control over these streamers and what activities they can (and cannot) do. Yet its brand is strong enough that

Though the company is based in Japan, it has English and Indonesian-speaking branches as well.[5] While there are other prominent VTuber agencies, part of what initially separated Hololive is that it advertises its talents as *idols*, following the tradition of the Japanese idol industry (Aoyagi 2005; Lo 2025). Because of this, music and karaoke streams, known as *utawaku* (live singing), have been a critical element of Hololive since its inception.

In this article I argue that part of the reason for Hololive's success is based around its talents' *voices* and that their branding as idols highlighted the voice as a fetish object that tethers the ›live 2D‹ virtual model to the material ›real‹ world. In particular, I interrogate how fans remix and rearrange these streamers' music and voice clips to deepen their characters' narrative ›lore‹, constructed around both the streamer's real identity and their character's supposed backstory.

Furthering Hayley Fenn's (2022) claim that puppets afford a kind of ›inherent musicality‹, I draw from theories of voice, idol culture, and Japanese media to show how voice becomes an important element in bringing these virtual puppets to life. This vocal focus extends beyond the VTuber avatar, however, to construct the ›media mix‹ that fans buy into and in which they participate (Sugawa-Shimada 2023c; Steinberg 2012).[6] Participation here includes fans purchasing merchandise, attending virtual karaoke sessions, and even using the talents' voices or music in their own creations. The music and voices of these VTubers are especially important here, as they are usually used as the basis of fan creations, ranging from animated shorts to indie games. I use these fan creations to consider not only how official Hololive music is rearranged and voices are used for these games and shorts, but also how Hololive streamers themselves engage with these fan creations.

Across this article, I will use the aforementioned VTuber Ina as my throughline case study, though I will refer to additional VTubers as well. Because these VTubers will often

many VTubers are willing to sacrifice their complete agency for the support and publicity it otherwise offers.

5 More specifically Ina is a member of ›Hololive Myth‹, the first generation of Hololive's English (speaking) branch. She is, however, trilingual, and can speak English, Japanese, and Korean.

6 As a generalization, many (if not most) VTuber fans are those also interested in games, anime, manga, and other media related to Japanese subcultures. Because of this, they are thus primed to participate within, buy into, and *consume* this media economy.

stream for hours at a time multiple times a week (resulting in hundreds – if not thousands – of hours of streaming footage), I focus on Ina as the VTuber whose streams I have viewed the most.[7] Yet, another way fans engage with VTubers (and streamers in general) is through ›clipping‹ channels, fan channels who will curate and ›clip‹ specific moments from streams. These clips range in length and focus, sometimes highlighting something humorous a streamer said or a moment of virtuosity (or failure), sometimes translating streamers into other languages, and sometimes even editing multiple streams or points-of-view down into one cohesive narrative. Clipping itself can be an art form, with VTuber clippers especially often adding transitions, references, or memes as a way of adding a creative element to the clip. To this end, I will frequently cite clips in footnotes as a way of providing easily accessible audiovisual examples.

Finally, before moving into the body of this article, I also wish to give some insight into my own positionality here. I am not a VTuber myself (no, not even in secret) – my understanding of this phenomenon is thus rooted in theory and fandom rather than practice. I also wish to explicitly acknowledge the Japanese origins of VTubers, which will inform, but not govern, my article.[8] Following Lo, I view this phenomenon as transnational, akin to what Rose Bridges (2017, 2023) similarly suggests of anime (here also noting that both of these media products serve Japan's soft power [Iwabuchi 2015]).

Voice and VTubing

Though VTubers have existed since at least 2016 with the self-proclaimed A.I. Kizuna AI, they became a global phenomenon in 2020. On October 20, 2020, Hololive Production's Gawr Gura became the first VTuber in Hololive (and the third VTuber overall) to reach one million subscribers on YouTube (Thomas 2020). As of the time of writing, she is

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7 As with many people, I started watching streams during the pandemic lockdown of 2020. Ina debuted in that same year on September 12.

8 While a historiography examining VTubers and their relation to Japanese theater exceeds the scope of this article, the use of masks in *noh* and *kyōgen* theater, the use of puppets in *bunraku* theater, and especially the almost complete focus on voice in the oral tradition of *yose* (perhaps most famously in *rakugo*) should not go unmentioned. Indeed, one Hololive member, Juufuutei Raden, is an apprentice in the *rakugo* tradition. Raden Is My Kamioshi Clip Ch., *Raden Reveals the Origin of Her Name and Why She's Not Allowed to Perform Rakugo. 【HOLOJP】 【ENG SUBS】*, YouTube, https://youtu.be/Jogyqb7nu7k (18.06.2025).

currently the most subscribed-to VTuber, with over 4.5 million subscribers (Hololive 2022).[9] Outside of Hololive, on February 16, 2022, the VTuber Ironmouse became the most subscribed-to streamer across the entire streaming service Twitch, with over 95,000 concurrent *paying* subscribers. On September 30, 2024, she broke the all-time record for the most paying subscribers on all of Twitch, with over 320,000 concurrent subscribers.[10] While I give this brief historical gloss, this article will not provide extensive consideration to the history of VTubers – my point here is largely to draw attention to the prominence VTubers have in online streaming spaces.[11]

As I mentioned in the introduction, while these VTubers are, as with most streamers, well-known for playing games on stream, Hololive members in particular are known for another reason as well: their status as ›idols‹, and the songs they produce and sing.[12] Indeed, previous research on VTubers has also focused on the voice and, in particular, singing. Jose Garza (2022) has, for example, examined the original character songs that Hololive members commission and/or produce, arguing that they use these songs as a way of contradictorily both strengthening their persona (and thus distancing who they ›really‹ are), as well as creating a close bond between fan and streamer. Yun-Kiu Lo (2023; 2025) instead focuses on VTuber karaoke sessions, or *utawaku*, that are – as she argues – »the VTubers' signature activity« (2023). While I will address singing to some extent in what follows, I am more interested in how the voice extends beyond just singing as a way of forming (virtual) identity.

For the philosopher Mladen Dolar, the voice functions as a kind of meeting point between a neo-Cartesian split between body and, for him, *language*. It simultaneously functions as

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9 At the time of writing, now 45 of Hololive's 88 members have over one million subscribers on YouTube.

10 Part of Ironmouse's success here was likely due to her raising money for the Immune Deficiency Foundation. She herself cannot leave her house because of her compromised immune system, and so found solace in streaming (Diaz 2024).

11 For those interested in an in-depth history of VTubers, see Kovacic (2021) and especially Lo (2025).

12 Idols (transliterated as *aidoru* in Japanese) are entertainers (›talents‹) who are trained and marketed not only as singers but also as dancers, actors, models, and overall media personalities. While the term did not have the religious connotations one might associate with idolatry, recent scholarship has started to consider otherwise (Aoyagi, Galbraith, and Kovacic 2021). This quasi-religious fanaticism is perhaps best represented with the manga/anime *Oshi no Ko* and especially the anime's opening »Idol« as performed by YOASOBI.

a break from, as well as an indication of, material presence (Dolar 2006, 59–60). In the context of VTubers, this relates to Sugawa-Shimada's theorization of 2.5D, a »space between the two-dimensional (fictional space where our imagination and fantasy work) and the three-dimensional (reality where we physically exist)« (2023c, 47).[13] Here, because voice is the only ›real‹ element of the streamer that fans experience, VTuber voices become fetish-objects, a Lacanian ›objet petit a‹ to close the distance between the streamer and fan. Voice here is porous, materially bridging the virtual and real, offering 3D audio to an otherwise 2D screen, a sonic manifestation of Sugawa-Shimada's theorization of the 2.5D.[14] This obsession with voice is hardly without precedent. I am reminded of Proust and his Grandmother's voice (Žižek 2012), the film DIVA (France 1981, Jean-Jacques Beineix) in which a postman secretly records the voice of a soprano who has refused to have her voice recorded (cf. Poizat 1992), and, more recently, Robert Harper playing almost two hundred hours of the game FINAL FANTASY XIV just to hear his late friend's voice one last time in the game (Williams 2022).

There is no singular way VTubers approach their respective voices. Some follow the Japanese *kawaii* (›cute‹) aesthetic, performing an overly high voice that is not their natural speaking voice, or by even manufacturing vocal tics (such as Hololive's Usada Pekora ending most sentences with »peko«).[15] Others instead use their natural voices, but have what Barthes (1977) would identify as a grain in their voice based on their inherent vocal

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13 To be clear, Sugawa-Shimada did not invent this term, though she has theorized the 2.5D more than any other English-language scholar (see also Galbraith 2020). For a brief history of the term see Sugawa-Shimada (2023a); other representative writings on the 2.5D can be found in the special issue to which this article serves as introduction.

14 I would further contend that the VTuber is the ultimate (or at least most balanced) realization of the 2.5D. Other 2.5D examples such as cosplayers or materially actual idols lean much closer to the 3D and thus cannot truly fulfill the fantasy of the 2D as well as the VTuber. On the flip side, a character like Hatsune Miku is too rooted in the 2D, even though ›she‹ materially exists as a 3D vocal synthesis program (Kovacic 2021: 95-96). And yet, as Sugawa-Shimada argues: »it is not the case that fans are incapable of distinguishing between fantasy and reality. More precisely, they have a pleasurable interplay with the ambiguous boundary between fantasy and reality within 2.5-D space« (2023b: 131).

15 As Reddit user deoxix (2020) elucidates: »In anime some characters have some finish particles to their phrases like »-desu« or »-aru« that never happens in real life but for Japanese natives it makes them sound cuter. For Pekora the particle is »-peko«. In her lore (please don't take it seriously) this is because she comes from the country of Pekoland. There they speak Pekolandish in which somehow every word is »peko«. Pekora uses this expression often to laugh before doing some mischievous plan or to mock them after they lose to her. Sometimes wrote with arrows [PE↗ KO↘ PE↗ KO↘ PE↗ KO↘ PE ↗ KO↘] to represent the very characteristic changes of pitch she does while saying it. Once you hear it you will never forget it.«

qualities or perhaps even a regional dialect. The now-retired VTuber Shizukou, for instance, has a strong British accent which she leans into for some of her short skits.[16] A handful of VTubers even explicitly disguise their voices, whether by using voice modulators or, as the indie VTuber Zentreya uses, text-to-speech to communicate.[17] Some are well-known for their singing (and some are even professional voice actors),[18] but others are known specifically for their voice superseding language: namely, their laughs, screams, or sneezes.[19]

The importance of VTubers' voices is perhaps made most obvious by the VTuber Ophelia Midnight's ›voice study‹ streams, where she chooses a popular VTuber and analyses and replicates their voices.[20] Another famous case of VTuber vocality deals with the VTuber Snuffy, who initially used (performed) a high, *kawaii* voice for her streams, but then eventually revealed that her natural voice was much lower. Somewhat surprisingly, this revelation was generally well-received, with fans and other VTubers praising Snuffy for her honesty.[21]

There are also many examples of streamers reflecting on their own voice, as well as the voices of others, on stream.[22] Ina – with whom I began my article – has discussed how she

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16 Shizuko, *What people expect me to sound like when I say I'm from England*, TikTok, www.tiktok.com/t/ZP88cPEep/ (10.06.2022).

17 Cooksie, *Zen's TTS had a voice crack*, YouTube, https://youtu.be/o7O0-QRnhrs (17.09.2021).

18 Hoshimachi Suisei is perhaps the most notable VTuber singer/idol (she is also a member of Hololive). This is in many ways encapsulated in her being the first (and so far only) VTuber to perform on The First Take: THE FIRST TAKE, *Hoshimachi Suisei – Stellar Stellar / THE FIRST TAKE*, YouTube, https://youtu.be/AAsRtnbDs-0 (20.01.2023). As another example, ›Monarch‹ is the VTuber persona of the professional singer and voice actress AmaLee.

19 VTubers famous for their laughs include Dokibird, Henya the Genius, and the aforementioned Pekora (see footnote 15). Uruha Rushia was especially known for her ›death metal‹ scream before she stopped streaming. As for sneezes, fans will often type ›TSKR‹ (an abbreviation for ›Tasakaru‹ which is a kind of blessing in Japanese) after a VTuber sneezes while streaming. This is doubly coded as something akin to a ›bless you‹, as well as thanks for this ›blessing‹ (i.e., hearing an idol, a supposedly ›perfect‹ being, doing something un-idol-like; see footnote 12).

20 Though she is no longer active, the playlist of her voice studies is available at Ophelia Midnight Ch. [VReverie], *Vocal Study* (playlist), YouTube, www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLnWQAsQI24TJoMhgxuya4DcmEaQqJh2V9 (27.08.2025). Another YouTuber who provides VTuber voice analyses is Mirii; her playlist of these analyses is available at Mirii, *Vtuber Voice Analysis* (playlist), YouTube, www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL77ipaIFoor8vRiCn976X5agjBUd-XkxE&si=qEfNbu6VhxrxtkaR (27.08.2025).

21 Venandr, *how revealing her REAL VOICE blew this VTuber up (Snuffy) #Shorts*, YouTube, https://youtu.be/LW53zbRAHMc (20.05.2022).

22 Holofan Clips, *Matusri's Fake Voice And Holomems Who Uses Their Real Voice 【Hololive】*, YouTube, https://youtu.be/6sHX0MypaIw (25.04.2025); see also this extended compilation focusing on the ›Real Voice‹ of various Hololive members: Jihuu Translation, *Hololive: Real Voice*,

herself questions the difference between how her voice currently sounds while she streams versus how it sounded when she first started.[23] Another Hololive VTuber, Inugami Korone, has further reflected that depending on what virtual medium she is streaming, she unintentionally uses different voices (e.g., on YouTube she projects more than she does when she is hosting a ›Space‹ on X [formerly known as Twitter]).[24] Perhaps the most explicit reflection on voice comes from Amanogawa Shiina's TikTok addressing her ›real voice‹. As she states in response to accusations of not using her ›real‹ voice: »Don't act like you don't have different tones of voice for when you're doing customer service versus when you're just with your closest friends. And no, it is not a voice changer, it is my *real* voice.«[25] Here, Shiina draws attention to the fact that voices change for *everyone* and should not be considered immutable (cf. Sterne 2003).[26] For Ina, this was over the course of many years, perhaps in part because of becoming more relaxed as a streamer, perhaps because of a new microphone, perhaps because of a physiological change. For Shiina, however, our voices are always in flux, varying not only on a daily basis, but even from one event to another.

With these virtual vocalities, I am reminded of Michel Chion's theorization of vococentricism in film. As he states of a film's soundtrack, »there are not *all the sounds including the human voice. There are voices, and then everything else*« (1999, 5–6, emphasis in original). Here, however, we have moved from beyond the classical screen-based model of the projected film to the contemporary practice of streaming on the screens of computers and smartphones. *And yet this focus on voice remains*. To be clear, the attention to voice is not completely unique to VTubers – generally speaking, most streamers will have some emphasis on their voice when streaming. This could range from communications with teammates, to talking to chat (i.e., those watching and commenting on the stream in

YouTube, https://youtu.be/cVFdLAf6xSg (20.08.2024).

23 Vaan Ch., *Ina can't imitate Ninomae Ina'nis voice*, YouTube, https://youtu.be/g_gdHjSp21U (30.06.2024).

24 OtakMori Vtuber Clips, *Korone Shows the Differences Between Her Real Voice and Stream Voice 【Hololive | Eng Sub】*, YouTube, https://youtu.be/OfaRTGmyXgc (29.05.2023).

25 Amanogawa Shiina, *Is This VTuber's Voice Fake?*, TikTok, www.tiktok.com/t/ZP88V4beL/ (05.05.2023).

26 The VTuber Nimi Nightmare comes to a similar conclusion in her YouTube short considering VTuber voices: Nimi Nightmare, *Why Vtubers sound different than their debuts*, YouTube, www.youtube.com/shorts/RvrGhNbtLOo (27.01.2025).

real time [Anderson 2017]). As Stephen Tatlow writes regarding *player* voices in video games:

> Voice will always symbolize part of the real identity of the player. Vocalizations may allow players to identify – or at least assume – each other's identity[,] gender, ethnicity, geographical or cultural upbringing, and more. As a result, it may create tensions when connected to a specific in-game character that the player controls. In these situations, voice becomes part of the character identity, introducing physicality to virtuality. (2020, 17)

There is a similar vocal play here with VTubers, but at an intensified level; here, voice becomes existential. Note my framing: Sartrean existentialist, not essentialist. That is, rather than voice essentializing one being and its essence, it is one way of bringing *into* existence the VTuber model, the virtual puppet as an instrument. While it would be easy to say that the *naka no hito* breathe life into their VTuber models, I will instead quote Hayley Fenn in her discussion of marionettes and ›Marionettenspieler‹ (puppeteers):

> Marionettenspieler do not breathe life into the puppet, but rather breathe life *with* the puppet. In this sense, and through the vibrancy of its strings, the marionette is both dangly appendage to and vitally independent from the Marionettenspieler, which, to the audience, reads as authorial, in the moment. (2022, 227)

In other words, this is a symbiotic relationship between puppet and puppeteer. And, if the Live 2D models reveal the flatness of these posthuman beings (and here I am reminded of Takashi Murakami's theory of the ›superflat‹ in Japanese art [Favell 2011]), then the voice fleshes them out, creating a hyperreal (Baudrillard 1994) identity. VTubers are hardly unaware of this fact and will not infrequently draw intertextual connections that highlight their post or augmented humanity. Ina, for instance, has created official art for Hololive which she titled »Do VTubers Dream of Colorful Tomorrows?« The name is, of course, in part a reference to Philip K. Dick's classic science fiction novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (1966), which was adapted into the cult cyberpunk film BLADE RUNNER (USA 1982, Ridley Scott).[27] In a more musical and vocal vein, we might consider

[27] Ninomae Ina'nis, *»Do Vtubers Dream of Colorful Tomorrows? «*, X [Twitter], https://x.com/ninomaeinanis/status/1637835283273244673?lang=en (20.03.2023). Including ›tomorrow‹ in the title is a reference to Ina's most famous stream clip, which I will discuss below (see footnote 38). And her emphasis on ›colorful‹ is perhaps also reflected in the ending of her »Gunjou« performance (Figure 2), with Hololive and its members here literally brightening her world.

Gawr Gura singing »The Moon Song« from the movie HER (USA 2013, Spike Jonze), a film about a sentient AI, Samantha, whose existence is purely vocal.[28]

Fenn builds a theory of the ›inherent musicality‹ of puppets, a »form of musicality [that] traverses sensory planes […] and is ultimately made possible by their fundamental muteness, a muteness that allows them to appear as both vessel and creator, listener and singer« (2022, 263). Her theorization here is informed by Actor Network Theory, and thus elides essentialist formations of identity, and instead attends to the constituent parts (or actants) of what she calls the ›performance network‹:

> When expressive agency traverses an entire network of performing bodies, technologies, and objects, synchronization effects are not fixed but emergent, constructing diverse and flexible relationships between sound and image. My concept of a »poetics of synchronization« captures the relationships of simultaneity and alignment inherent in audio-visual media, while accounting for the multiple perspectives and shifts of agential concentration engendered by puppet performance. (2022, 172)

This poetics of synchronization here is further mediated by virtual time stretched across both streaming latency (Gagen and Cook 2016), but also the temporal displacement of how and when fans hear these voices.[29] Thinking of these elements in the context of a network leads me to consider how voices exist beyond their streams: namely, the media mix.

Media Mix and Sekaikan

Sugawa-Shimada's theorization of the 2.5D is explicitly based on Japanese pop culture, where she draws particular attention to the Japanese theory of the media mix (*media mikkusu*), a »media franchise marketing strategy in which cultural contents in multiple works are produced or distributed across multiple media platforms« (2023c, 47). The media mix is a two-pronged theoretical construct, what Marc Steinberg (2012) identifies as the *marketing* media mix, and the *anime* media mix. The former is the actual Japanese marketing theories that construct the latter, the assemblage of (generally physical) media

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[28] Pardun?, *Gawr Gura cried while singing The Moon Song - Full part 1 and 2*, YouTube, https://youtu.be/qIU5_GCNL8Q (02.11.2020).

[29] Beyond streaming latency, we might also consider a fan going back to (re)watch the video-on-demand of a stream that has already occurred.

products for a particular anime or game series, e.g., toys, DVDs, trading cards, foodstuffs, and home goods. Writing on the media mix as related to 2.5D theatrical performances, Sugawa-Shimada suggests that »participation of fans is vital to create the 2.5-D space. Fans show their affection for the characters/actors they love by purchasing all the goods related to them. This practice is called *ofuse* (›donation to gods‹) and to gift the goods or rent DVDs to their friends who are unfamiliar with the 2.5-D theatrical performances is called *fukyô* (›missionary work‹), as it is expanding their network« (2023b, 133).

In terms of Hololive, we can see this represented in the various goods the company and its talents will sell to fans. While some of these may be somewhat expected (e.g., figures and posters of the talents, CDs and vinyl of their music), others are perhaps less so (e.g., a laundry hamper, voice packs, etc.).[30] Yet the media mix ties into another Japanese media theory, what cultural theorist Ōtsuka Eiji (2010) theorizes as the ›*sekaikan*‹.[31] The *sekaikan* is the ›grand narrative‹ that encapsulates all stories, experiences, and objects related to an overarching franchise, group, event, etc. Relating this back to Actor Network Theory, the *sekaikan* is the overarching network, built up from its composite elements, and the media mix constitutes the (nonhuman) actants within the network. As Matthew Richardson writes while examining Japanese idols, »the media mix permits access to an intangible *sekaikan* mediated by the products. The question of an original is wholly irrelevant, because the media mix facilitates ongoing engagement with a set of affects experienced through time« (2016, 153).

For Ōtsuka, the *sekaikan* is born in large part from the *otaku* subcultures in Japan and their obsessive attempts to consume the *sekaikan* in its entirety. In his frequently cited essay on the phenomenon, Ōtsuka gives examples ranging from the Bikkuriman Chocolates and the highly prized stickers that came with them, to the MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM anime. The *sekaikan*, then, is constructed from not only the ›lore‹ of these characters, but also their daily (give or take) streaming and anything that contributes to the media mix. Thus, a

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30 Geek Jack, [20220521 - 20220627] »Ninomae Ina'nis Birthday Celebration 2022« »Laundry Ina Bag«, *Geek Jack*, https://shop.geekjack.net/products/ninomae-inanis-birthday-celebration-2022-laundry-ina-bag (04.05.2025); Geek Jack, hololive Summer 2022 Episode Voice Complete Set, *Geek Jack*, https://shop.geekjack.net/collections/hololive-summer-2022/products/hololive-summer-2022-episode-voice-set (04.05.2025).

31 While *sekaikan* translates literally to ›worldview‹ or ›Weltanschauung‹, it might more productively be thought of as a kind of *worldbuilding*.

clothes hamper is just as important as a voice pack a fan might purchase, specifically because both ultimately contribute to and extend the world of Hololive in a fansumer's daily life.

But the *sekaikan* does not stop there. While English theories of transmedia tend to privilege one canonical narrative (Jenkins 2008, 2010), the *sekaikan* is agnostic to such rigid narratives, to such a point that even *fan creations* are seen as just as important in the construction of this world.[32] While fan art is almost certainly the most common form of fan creation, perhaps because Hololive's streamers are *gaming* idol streamers, fan-produced games – often created at high levels of production – are not uncommon. Notable examples include the platformer SMOL AME (2021), the horror game EVIL GOD KORONE (2021), the ROGUELITE and VAMPIRE SURVIVORS homage HOLOCURE (2022), and the fighting game IDOL SHOWDOWN (2023). The latter two games even broke out of the Hololive fandom and became well regarded games by those with no knowledge of Hololive and its streamers. Other games, such as AQUARIUM (2023) and DAYS WITH OLLIE (2024) were direct collaborations between Hololive members and fan development teams. Here, the *sekaikan* legitimized the prosumer's creation with Hololive's development of ›Holo Indie‹, Hololive's game publishing division.[33]

In what follows, I will consider Ina's role in Besto Game Team's IDOL SHOWDOWN, published by Holo Indie and released in 2023. While the game allows players to fight using their favorite Hololive talents with special attacks based on their character's lore and/or inside jokes from their streams, notably, it also includes their *voices*, initially clipped directly from their streams. ›Initially‹ is the operative word here, because some of the talents themselves eventually offered to (re)record their voices for the developers of the game. In one notable case, Shishiro Botan was streaming IDOL SHOWDOWN for her audience, playing as herself in the game. After one battle, she comments that the developers of the game must have clipped her voice from previous streams, but that she was (playfully) unhappy with the end result. To better represent herself, she instead paused her

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32 This is not to diminish the role fandom and, e.g., fan fiction play outside of Japan – but the emphasis and building upon specific IPs is where I argue the difference exists (see Greenfield-Casas and Mc Glynn 2023; cf. Sugawa-Shimada 2023b: 127).

33 *holo Indie,* CCMC, https://ccmc-corp.com/en/holoindie/ (accessed 04.05.2025).

playthrough of the game and (on stream in real-time) provided voice clips she would approve of within the game. She begins with her sing-song catchphrase »La-Lion«, directly imploring that the developers use it as her greeting. From there, she records more dynamic sounds – the imagined sounds of taking a hit, as well as of combating others.[34] Here, voice works both to strengthen the fidelity of the game, but also as a ›fiduciary medium‹, to borrow a recent term from Matthew Mendez (2023). In other words, it is a live vocal signature of endorsement for this new world *qua* game.

IDOL SHOWDOWN Case Study

Though IDOL SHOWDOWN was initially released in 2023, Ina was only added into the game in May of 2024. Her attacks, like all playable characters in the game, are based on one of five reference types, what I will call preexisting, character, personal, stream, and postexisting references. Preexisting references are based on hypotexts that predate Ina as a streamer, for instance Kuroboshi's (the artist who illustrated Ina's character) love of octopuses and Lovecraftian mythos. Character references are based on the ›lore‹ of Ina as a character, for example, her being a ›Priestess of the Ancient Ones‹ (and thus able to summon tentacles from ›The Void‹) set on world domination. Personal references are based on traits or facts about the actual streamer outside of their streams. Ina (or the *naka no hito* who plays [as] Ina) is a professional illustrator outside of her streams, so in the game she primarily fights with a paintbrush. Stream references include inside jokes or references that have come about from streams, such as Ina threatening to ›bonk‹ chat with a crowbar if they misbehave, and so she also sometimes fights with a crowbar.[35] Finally, postexisting references (which I borrow as a term from Jonathan Godsall (2019), though with a different meaning here) are based on fan extensions of VTubers and their lore – the *sekaikan*. The example par excellence for Hololive is animator mazu's 12-minute »Myth's Bad Ending« animation depicting a possessed Ina (shown in Figure 3) fighting

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[34] Sushi Clips, *Botan records and provides her voices to the game developer during her stream [Holo live/Eng sub]*, YouTube (06.05.2023), https://youtu.be/-QdVxqaWp_4; original stream: Botan Ch. 獅白ぼたん, *【Idol Showdown】最強のアイドルは誰だ…！ホロライブ格闘ゲームやるぞい！【獅白ぼたん/ホロライブ】*, YouTube, https://youtu.be/LEgrV2vwORQ (06.05.2023).

[35] Holopaca, *What happens when we squish Inas hair?*, YouTube, https://youtu.be/dbPMVH6jtGY (31.10.2020).

against the other four members of Hololive Myth (her friends).[36] Figure 4 shows Ina's ultimate attack in the game, ›Forbidden *INK*antation‹, which is based on this animation.[37]

Figure 3: A possessed Ina fighting against her friends in »Myth's Bad Ending«.
Screen capture by author

While the game was originally released with voice clips selected by the developers, I have already shown how some talents instead re-recorded (on stream) voice clips they would prefer used in the game. Because Ina's character was added essentially a year after the initial release, however, she instead collaborated with the developers to voice most of her lines (with the most notable exception being a preexisting clip of Ina's voice cracking in excitement while exclaiming »tomorrow!« that has garnered 1.5 million views).[38] As she stated of this voice clip on stream while playing IDOL SHOWDOWN: »*That*, I did not rerecord! That is a clip. *laughs* I'm glad they added it, though.« She continues on to try

36 Mazumaro, *Myth's Bad Ending | Hololive fan-animation*, YouTube, https://youtu.be/euPfAilSpuU (29.10.2022).

37 Idol Showdown | Besto Game Team, *Idol Showdown Next Fes: Ninomae Ina'nis Debut Trailer*, YouTube, https://youtu.be/mNtDthjAs9Y (28.04.2024). It is worth noting that Ina is quite fond of puns. Because of this, all of her special attack names are puns.

38 Random Clipper, *»Tomorrow«, Ina said calmly...*, YouTube, https://youtu.be/sMcfFmR0MmA (10.02.2022); original stream: *Ninomae Ina'nis, Nintendo Direct Feb 2022 Watchalong! ※Not a Mirror Stream*, YouTube, https://youtu.be/EHpxi7khHb0 (09.02.2022).

and replicate the iconic »tomorrow!« but fails, saying with a laugh, »I can't voice crack on command!«[39]

Figure 4: ›Forbidden *INK*antation‹ in IDOL SHOWDOWN. Screen capture by author

Finally, beyond Ina's voice-*qua*-voice, she is musically represented in the game with two musical arrangements: the first is »WAHoy«,[40] a transformative arrangement of her first original song »Violet« blended with »Ahoy!« a song by Hololive's Houshou Marine.[41] In this arrangement, a choir chants Ina's name, harkening to her status as a Priestess of the Ancient Ones. Also sampled, however, is Ina's own voice: from saying her signature »Wah!« (with which she opens all streams) and her own name, to her laugh and some dialogue as well.

The second piece is »Violet Blossom«,[42] an electronica mashup of »Kanalumi«, a piece Ina commissioned from one of her favorite composers, Camellia, and »Meconopsis«,

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39 Vaan Ch., *The Ninomae Ina'nis finally appears in Idol Showdown*, YouTube, https://youtu.be/eSRevWnPj5M (07.05.2024); original stream: Ninomae Ina'nis, 【*Idol Showdown*】 *INA INA INAAAAAA*, YouTube, https://youtu.be/XYL0ruvuu28 (06.05.2024).

40 Idol Showdown | Besto Game Team, *Idol Showdown OST Track 30 – »WAHoy!«* 【*VIOLET / Ahoy!! 我ら宝鐘海賊団☆*】, YouTube, https://youtu.be/Q1yBM6BRU4g (13.08.2023).

41 Marine is also one of Ina's unitmates in UmiSea, an idol subunit within Hololive; at the time of writing, she is the second-most subscribed-to VTuber (behind Hololive's Gawr Gura), with just shy of 4 million subscribers.

42 Idol Show | Besto Game Team, *Idol Showdown OST Track 37 – Violet Blossom* 【*Kanalumi, Meconopsis*】, YouTube, https://youtu.be/jEuaFsH9YKA (06.05.2024).

Ina's second original song, composed by another one of her favorite composers, M2U.[43] While Ina's *voice* is not sampled in this piece, gamers who played as Ina when she first became available in the game would likely already have her »Meconopsis« melody in their ears, as she officially released this song within just a few days of becoming a playable character in the game. The attention Ina is given in the game – referentially, musically, vocally – is indicative of the care the development team put into *all* elements of the game. Indeed, while IDOL SHOWDOWN's 52-track OST does feature original music, most of its score is based on arrangements of Hololive's catalogue of over 500 original songs.

Conclusion

In this article, I have considered the role *voice* plays for VTuber – and especially Hololive – streams. Drawing on Sugawa-Shimada's theorization of the 2.5D, I have argued that the voice is one instrumental way of bridging the gap between the virtual 2D world of the screen-and-stream and the material-and-real 3D world. Furthermore, I have examined how VTubers' voices are used beyond their stream by fans – *prosumers* – as one way of extending the all-consuming narrative of the *sekaikan*. But this is an ouroboric parasocial relationship (Hoffner and Bond 2022), where the streamers themselves then play these games for fans and (if the game is ultimately endorsed) even work directly with the developers to continue to build this worldview.

In the conclusion to her recent paper on VTuber anonymity and singing, Yun-Kiu Lo (2023) noted that »Many of my interviewers responded that they are concerned about their voice control and feel the *utawaku* and music activities are necessary in VTuber streaming, but they often cannot come up with a solid reason [as to why].« While she continues on to suggest that karaoke streams offer a way for VTubers to emotionally connect with their audience over music, I offer another, perhaps too obvious answer: that is, because the most popular VTuber agency built its success around singing, other VTubers felt they

[43] She mentioned both of these composers during her debut stream: Ninomae Ina'nis, *【DEBUT STREAM 】 Hi! #hololiveEnglish #holoMyth*, YouTube, 12 September 2020), https://youtu.be/ujCxiHpVYmg?t=1300 (27.08.2025). The given link accounts for the specific time, but she begins talking about these composers at 00:21:40.

must follow suit. While voice is obviously an important element of VTubing and streaming in general, that should not necessitate the need *to sing*. And yet, even Hololive's weakest singers still perform karaoke (Lo 2025), even when they have vocal talents elsewhere: whether through ASMR streams, voice impressions, or perhaps even a general grain to their voice. Hololive did not create the first VTubers, but in becoming the most popular company and one centered around voice *and especially singing*, their talents set the stage for others to follow suit.

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Hidden Voices:
Exploring Desire and Memory in Joe Hisaishi's DEPARTURES

Misty Choi

In this article, I apply theories of acousmatic voice to investigate how a musical theme uncovers the protagonist's desire in DEPARTURES: THE GIFT OF LAST MEMORIES, original Japanese title OKURIBITO (おくりびと, Japan, 2009, directed by Yōjirō Takita). Specifically, I demonstrate how the main theme incorporates a hidden quotation of the Irish folk song »Danny Boy«, revealing a symbolic message from the absent father of the protagonist Daigo Kobayashi. The repetition of the main theme, embedding this quotation, evokes the father's presence and transforms into Daigo's inner voice. Its theme and variations guide him toward his new life as a mortician and facilitate his reconciliation with his father. I situate the musical and narrative construct of DEPARTURES within the discourse of voice and psychoanalysis, with an emphasis on Mladen Dolar and Brian Kane's exploration of Michel Chion's concept of ›acousmêtre‹ and de-acousmatization as informed by Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic concepts (Chion 1999, 17–23; Lacan 1994, 168). This transformation from the father's message to Daigo's inner voice allows for the de-acousmatization of Daigo's true desires, reflecting the unveiling of Lacan's ›l'objet petit a‹ in his transformative journey of reflecting on life, death, and his relationship with his father. In terms of methodology, I combine musical analysis with psychoanalytic theory to elucidate the narrative's complexities and the character's psychological state.

Death is often considered a taboo in Japanese society, and being a mortician or an en-coffiner has traditionally not been an occupation that can ever bring pride to the family. Yōjirō Takita's DEPARTURES brought this humble occupation to the cinema and expressed ineffable insights on life and death through a complex relationship between father and son. The film received critical acclaim worldwide and won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film. Distinguished film critic Roger Ebert praised it as »excellent at achieving the universal ends of narrative« (2011). This poignant story captivated audiences with its exploration of themes such as life, death, and traditional Japanese culture.

The inspiration for the film came from the experience of the lead actor, Masahiro Motoki, who plays the role of a mortician (*nōkanshi*) in the film (Bache 2009). Motoki traveled to India with his friends and witnessed the cremation ritual on the Ganges, which inspired him to read more about the relationship between life and death. Among his readings was Shinmon Aoki's *Coffinman: The Journal of a Buddhist Mortician* (2004), which became an important reference for the film. However, death was not a popular topic to be screened in Japan, especially for a film that wants to document all the details of the ceremonial rituals. Motoki and the production team faced difficulties securing funding (Hale 2009), and after the film was completed, they had to wait thirteen months before its release due to the challenging subject matter. The attitude towards DEPARTURES soon took an opposite turn after its release. The film attracted the audience with its quiet pace, elegance, delicate portrayal of the work of a mortician, and exploration of human relationships in the light of the inevitability of death.

While existing literature on DEPARTURES focuses on contemporary Japanese views of life and Buddhist rituals (cf. Ama 2010; Asai et al. 2010; Hamada and McCaffrey 2024), this article explores the film's original score and how it reveals the protagonist's desire. The lyricism of the film score in DEPARTURES suggests an aura of farewell, warmth, and sadness, aligning with the general sentiment of the film. The film score was composed by Joe Hisaishi, who is referred to as the »John Williams of Japan« by critics (Gerber 2017). Hisaishi has been active in the industry since the 1980s and is particularly renowned for his collaborations with acclaimed anime director Hayao Miyazaki and Studio Ghibli. Some of his most notable works include the scores for films such as MY NEIGHBOR TOTORO (1988), PRINCESS MONONOKE (1997), SPIRITED AWAY (2001), and HOWL'S MOVING CASTLE (2004). While studies on Hisaishi's music primarily focus on his collaborations with Miyazaki, particularly the musical language he employs (cf. Koizumi, 2010; Hara, 2020; Roedder, 2013, 2014; Bellano, 2010), Hisaishi has also emerged as one of the most sought-after film composers in East Asia, particularly for drama movies – an aspect that has not received signification attention from music scholars. His collaborations with director Takeshi Kitano on films such as SONATINE (1993), HANA-BI (1997), and KIKUJIRO (1999) have been particularly notable. Many of the musical features in Hisaishi's music for animations, such as the use of pentatonic scales, Western classical musical style,

melodic development and characteristic instrumentation can be identified in his works for drama as well. This includes the use of shamisen and the Okinawa scale in SONATINE, which lacks the second and sixth notes in the C major scale (Koizumi 2010, 69), synthesized percussion and winds in A SCENE AT THE SEA (1991), and a Western orchestral style in DEPARTURES, as discussed below.

Prior to his venture into film music, Hisaishi had a background as a classical composer with a keen interest in minimalism (Hisaishi 2024, 13–14, 25). While Mervyn Cooke has described Hisaishi's music as an »unambitious international style« that incorporates elements of pop minimalism (2008, 394), as evident in the film score of KIKUJIRO, minimalism is only one of the many musical styles and procedures Hisaishi employs. As the composer admitted, there is not a single unified musical style in his film scores (Hisaishi 2024, 15). However, Hisaishi does emphasize sentimentalism in his compositions, which he derives from his intuition and musical experiences. Despite the fluidity of musical styles in his works, Hisaishi's film scores often effectively capture the essence of the film's characters. For instance, the simple themes in SPIRITED AWAY portray the naivety of the ten-year-old protagonist Chihiro. The syncopated three-note motif fitting the pronunciation of »Totoro« reflects the lively nature of the hamster-like creature Totoro, and the melancholic theme in the style of lounge music in HANA-BI depicts the sorrow of the police officer whose wife is suffering from terminal leukemia. This ability to translate the emotional essence and psyches of a film's characters into music is precisely why Takita invited Hisaishi to compose the score for DEPARTURES (UCLA International Institute 2009). Takita explains that he intends to express the protagonist Daigo's transformation in »living one's own life« through Hisaishi's music:

> I had worked with Hisaishi before and already knew that he has been given an amazing gift, which is to effectively translate the characters' emotions into music. In this movie, there is a story about Daigo and his father. Daigo evokes his memories while taking care of his own father as a nōkanshi, and in turn, finally renews the connections with his father…This story is also really human. So what I wanted to do is to inspire the idea of »living one's own life« by his music.

According to Hisaishi, his initial approach to film scoring is primarily to convey the core message of the film. To him, sensibility plays a significant role in his creative process, aiming to be moved by his own creations (Hisaishi 2024, 25, 35–36). The music in

DEPARTURES, especially its main theme, can be seen as another example that effectively captures the sentiments of the main characters and the general atmosphere of bidding farewell. The film follows the story of Daigo Kobayashi, a professional cellist who loses his job in a small provincial orchestra in Tokyo that disbands. Daigo and his wife return to his hometown in Yamagata, where he unexpectedly finds employment as a mortician, earning a high wage to repay the mortgage on his expensive cello. Initially repulsed by his new job, Daigo gradually undergoes a transformative journey through his encounters with life and death while performing encoffinment rites and rituals. The film also delves into Daigo's personal journey of reconciliation with his estranged father, who had abandoned their family years ago. Daigo's attitude toward his father evolves from bitterness to acceptance, while the transformation goes hand in hand with his gradual acceptance of his job as a mortician. The plot reaches its climax when Daigo receives the news of his father's death. Discovering that his father has been living alone for years, he performs the encoffining ritual, leading to complete forgiveness. As Daigo performs his daily tasks of encoffinment or plays the cello accompanied by moments of self-reflection, the recurring diegetic and non-diegetic musical theme reverberates his inner thoughts that are infused with his sentiments toward his father. While DEPARTURES explicitly portrays death through the encoffinment ceremony, it subtly depicts how people express their feelings toward it, with music playing a crucial role throughout.

As I argue below, the main theme and its variations reveal Daigo's psychological state and his transformation in life. In fact, such practice is not new to Hisaishi. As noted by Marco Bellano, in Hisaishi's later collaborations with Hayao Miyazaki, such as HOWL'S MOVING CASTLE and PONYO in the mid-2000s, he began to favor longer, more developed melodic themes over the fragmented motifs he had previously used to accompany the visual cues in Miyazaki's films (Bellano 2010, 4–55). This shift is particularly evident in the score for HOWL'S MOVING CASTLE. To depict the protagonist Sophie's dramatic physical and psychological transformation – from a young woman, to an elderly lady, and back again – Hisaishi employed the technique of theme and variations (Hisaishi 2024, 80–83). The main waltz-like melody is presented in multiple variations, evolving alongside the changes in Sophie's appearance and inner state.

In addition, the use of cello in DEPARTURES is iconic and carries a strong corporeal connotation. As the director Takita explains,

> Ironically, there is something similar between the process of encoffinment and the act of playing the cello. When you play the cello, the instrument has a human, curvaceous form. The cellist embraces that form when playing the instrument, very loving, affectionate. That's very similar, physically, to the actions of the encoffiner, cradling the body, being tender and gentle with it. (Moore, 2009)

While Daigo adjusts to his new occupation as mortician, he plays his childhood cello in his hometown to reflect on life, death, and his relationship with his father, which seems to converge into a shared thought. The intimacy of playing the cello requires one to embrace the instrument and listen closely, similar to having an intimate conversation with oneself. There are two prominent sequences of Daigo's cello playing. The first occurs in his childhood room, where he plays the main theme diegetically, evoking happy memories with his father through a flashback montage. This theme is indeed his father's favorite song. The second sequence takes place in the countryside, where he reflects on his life as a mortician as he plays the cello. This moment is also presented in a montage, suggesting he is internalizing his thoughts about his work and life. In this context, the cello overlaps with the father's body and the act of encoffinment, becoming a source through which he recalls childhood memories with his father. The instrument symbolizes Daigo's inner self, where his desires resonate and drive his actions.

My study explores how the main theme can be heard as Daigo's inner voice, manifesting as a repetitive disembodied voice, or ›acousmêtre‹, that reflects his responses to the environment and life situations surrounding him. The repetition serves as a process that unveils his true desires. The term ›acousmêtre‹ (acousmatic being), derived from the Greek word meaning »a sound heard«, was adopted by Pierre Schaeffer in his famous *Traité des objets musicaux* (1966) in relation to listening to mass media, such as radio. According to the Greek myth, the acousmatics were disciples of Pythagoras who, concealed by a curtain, followed his teachings for five years without seeing the master. The purpose was to focus on the master's words, and the veil acted as a device to separate the spirit from the body. After five years, the disciples were brought to the sanctuary and allowed to see their master, the authoritative voice's owner (Schaeffer 2017, 64). The curtain is finally drawn back and the acousmatics are able to see its source – the desire is seemingly fulfilled. As

Diderot explained in *Encyclopédi, ou, Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, the disciples who can meet the master are referred to as ›Esoterics‹, while those who remained behind the veil are called as ›Exoterics‹ or ›Acousmatics‹ (1751, 111). Chion developed the notion of ›acousmêtre‹ to discuss a disembodied voice in cinema – specifically, a sensation that can be heard but not seen (Chion 1999, 17–23). The expectation of being visualized is what differentiates an acousmatic being in cinema from radio voice or ›musique concrète‹ (Buhler et al. 2010, 88). Schaeffer and Chion discuss the myth of the acousmatic voice and the Pythagorean veil to explain the acousmatic nature of ›musique concrète‹ and acoustical beings, respectively (Schaeffer 2017, 64–65; Chion 2009, 11). Both of them relate to the technological side of listening, as listening habits were significantly altered by telecommunication and mass broadcasting during the wartime, allowing audiences to hear the voice of announcers without seeing their faces. Some discourses on ›acousmêtre‹ focus on acoustic spatial entity, including corporeal space, or suggestive sounds as voiceless acoustical beings, especially in digital surround sound or in horror films (Chion 2003, 466; Jordan 2009, 47–71; Johnston 2015, 131–144). In the latter, there is often a dislocation between the body and the voice. Other discussions on voice and the body in psychoanalysis further explore the notion of acousmatic voice through the lens of one's desire.[1] While acoustics focuses on the physical properties of sound, acousmatics is concerned with an individual's reactions to sonic stimuli. The difference does not exactly lie in the contrast between objectivity and subjectivity, but in the subject's interpretation of the sound objects. The acousmatic questions such as »What am I hearing?« and »What are you hearing?«, in relation to what I am seeing, are directed back at the subject regarding their perception.

[1] Recent scholarship has explored the intricate relationship between film music and psychoanalytic theory, particularly through the lens of the acousmatic voice. Mary Ann Doane has examined how soundtracks serve as vehicles for unconscious desires, with music acting as a disembodied inner voice that reflects the psychological states of characters. This notion aligns with Jacques Lacan's concept of ›l'objet petit a‹, emphasizing how film scores not only enhance emotional engagement but also reveal the complexities of identity and desire. Furthermore, the work of Claudia Gorbman illustrates how film music functions as a suturing device, immersing viewers in the narrative while simultaneously masking the technological and ideological underpinnings of cinematic representation. These analyses highlight the significance of music in shaping the viewer's experience and understanding of character motivations within the psychoanalytic framework.

Mladen Dolar (2006) and Brian Kane (2014) examine the idea of voice as an object, arguing that it is detached from its original source. This is precisely where the concept of the acousmatic voice becomes relevant (Dolar 2006, 67–70; Kane 2014, 216–222). They further elaborate on the Pythagorean veil in relation to one's curiosity to pin down a voice to a source and its subsequent fulfillment. This process of de-acousmatization is related to the desire to uncover the mystery (Chion 1999, 23). De-acousmatization may happen in different stages, which Chion describes as a »striptease« – each stage allows the subject to get closer to the source. Dolar and Kane explore the notion of de-acousmatization of the unseen voice in relation to Jacques Lacan's concept of ›l'objet petit a‹ (Dolar 2006, 67–70; Kane 2014, 216–222). In line with Freud's idea of »the lost object of desire« – as something that is sought incessantly but never found – Lacan argues that when the object of desire is found, a person turns to another, an ›a[utre]‹. This ›l'objet petit a‹ represents an elusive object of desire at the core of the subject's enjoyment (›jouissance‹) (Fink 1995, 83–92). It is not a tangible object but a symbolic construct that emerges from the subject's relationship with the Other – the ›Symbolic Order‹. Although the person experiencing the acousmatic voice may desire to unveil its source, it could be the case that when the voice becomes attached to a body, the authoritative voice loses its omnipotent and charismatic character. De-acousmatization in films can lead to disappointment, as exemplified in THE WIZARD OF OZ (1939, Victor Fleming), where the unveiling of the powerless old man behind the Wizard produces a »castrating effect«[2]. Nevertheless, ›l'objet petit a‹ also symbolizes the inherent lacking, an inherent desire, like a window that shows what is missing. Thus, it represents an object that is both desired and lost, sustaining the subject's desires and driving their pursuit of fulfillment. It is also possible that Pythagoras' disciples maintain an illusion after de-acousmatization to cover up their disappointment, ensuring that the disillusionment does not affect the Big Other – the locus of desire structured by cultural and social signifiers. They may deny the disenchantment they have experienced, as the source is perceived to be an authoritative and respected figure. To the extreme, the disciples may raise another »screen of fetishism«, as Kane describes in relation to Freud's theory of fetishism and Lacan's writings (Kane 2014, 210–212), to maintain their fantasy. This dynamic is also reflected in DEPARTURES, as discussed below, where Daigo's desire

[2] See Kane 2014, 210.

for paternal love is resolved as he encoffins his father, subsequently directing his love and desire toward his unborn son. His desire will never be completely fulfilled. Daigo will keep permanent feelings of lack and longing (in keeping with Lacan's concept of ›l'objet petit a‹), yet he continues to drive his pursuit of fulfillment.

This article suggests that the acousmatic inner voice of Daigo is rooted in the main theme, particularly through the quotation of a phrase from the Irish folk song »Danny Boy«. This transformation of Daigo's psychological state is conveyed through the theme and its variations, culminating in his triumph over life's struggles in the final variation. The journey begins with this quotation and its connotations.

The Quotation of »Danny Boy«

The recurring main theme goes hand in hand with the unfolding of Daigo's story as a mortician. Upon closer examination, we can identify a quotation of a phrase from the Irish folk song »Danny Boy« in the main theme. As Figures 1a and 1b illustrate, the second phrase of »Danny Boy« is quoted, with the last three notes repeated and reinforced. This quotation becomes even more pronounced in the orchestral version of the theme, highlighting its presence.

This main theme is presented diegetically twice in the film and has a strong association with Daigo's father. The first instance occurs when Daigo returns to his childhood home in Yamagata and plays the theme on his childhood cello, as previously mentioned. It is first presented as a solo cello piece played by Daigo diegetically, and when it repeats, the piano accompaniment enters to underscore a flashback to Daigo's childhood, where we see his parents proudly listening to him playing the cello – perhaps the reason Daigo became a professional cellist. In these memories, Daigo and his father exchange »stone letters« as a gesture of love. However, Daigo's father's face remains blurred, as if Daigo is struggling to fully recall the details of their relationship. The intimate, personal nature of the main theme's diegetic usage, combined with the association with Daigo's father, helps to establish the theme's symbolic importance in evoking Daigo's emotional journey and connection to his past.

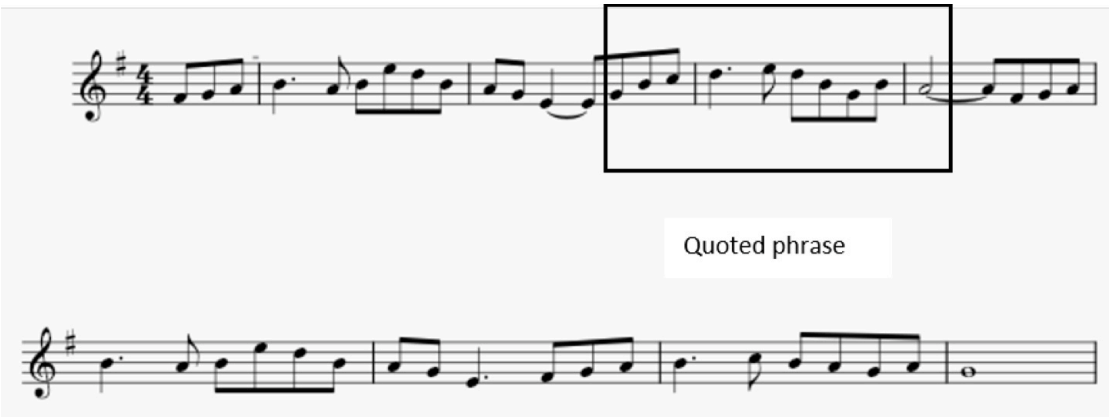

Figure 1a: »Danny Boy«. Transcriptions by the author unless indicated otherwise

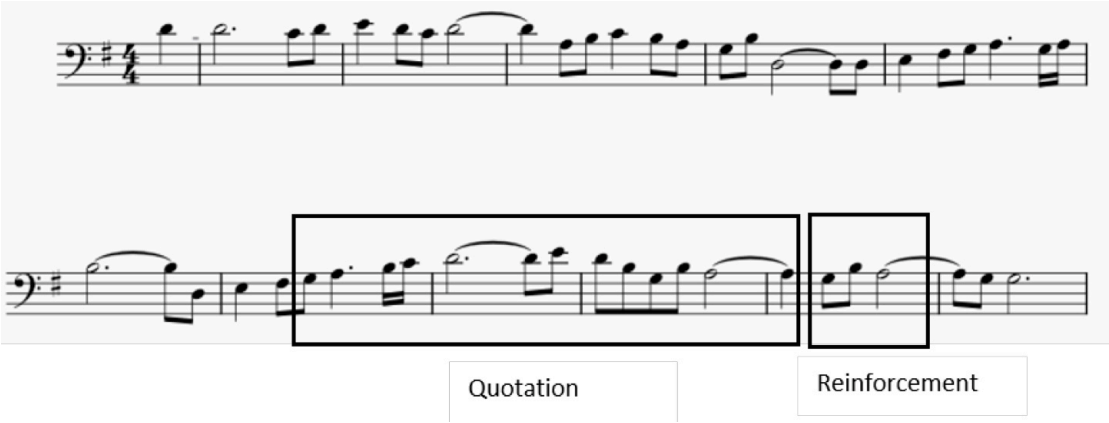

Figure 1b: Main theme of DEPARTURES

The significance of the main theme becomes even clearer in its second diegetic use in the film. This time, the theme with the piano accompaniment is played on a vinyl record. At this point, the audience can understand that the flashback in the previous scene is related to this cello piece on the record. When Daigo's wife Mika plays this music in the old coffee shop owned by Daigo's father, Daigo explains that it was his father's favorite song. Daigo gazes at the turntable with a sense of bitterness as the music plays. This diegetic use of his father's favorite song, treated as a pre-existing music within the film, further associates the main theme with Daigo's father and his identity. It is also during the same sequence that Daigo confides to Mika his complicated feelings toward his father, who had abandoned the family for another woman.

The adoption of the quotation from »Danny Boy« appears to be more than coincidental. In one episode of the film, Yamashita, Daigo's former classmate and a mirror of Daigo's

own experiences, has a strained relationship with his mother, Kizuna, due to financial issues. Kizuna is reluctant to sell her public bath, which could have provided Yamashita with a good sum of money. When Kizuna passes away, Daigo performs the encoffinment ritual for her, and Kizuna's theme is introduced at this moment. The theme begins with the same quotation from »Danny Boy« played by a solo flute (soundtrack no. 15 for the original version, no. 9 for the piano version) as Example 2 shows. After the funeral, Yamashita experiences complex sentiments of regret, understanding, and relief from his mother's death and the strained relationship between them. The mother-and-son relationship foreshadows Daigo's attitude toward his father in the second half of the movie, and the two themes are connected by the same quotation from »Danny Boy«.

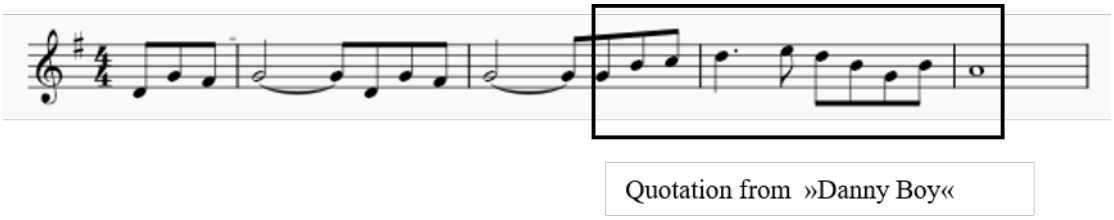

Figure 2: Beginning of Kizuna's Theme

Interestingly, the musical features of the main theme do not entirely reflect Daigo's description of his father as an irresponsible, cold-hearted person. The theme conveys a sense of warmth and humanity. The song »Danny Boy«, with lyrics set to the Northern Ireland tune »Londonderry Air«, is often associated with farewells and funerals, resonates beneath the surface of the film. This is particularly significant considering the song's common usage in memorial events and funeral ceremonies nowadays, as it echoes Daigo's work as a mortician and foreshadows the encoffinment ritual he performs for his father at the end. Although it is not a common practice to sing »Danny Boy« in Japanese funerals, Irish folk songs are well-known in Japanese society. During the modernization of education in Japan's Meiji period (1868–1911), Japanese scholars were sent to the West, including America, to learn about pedagogy and music. Sheet music and Western musical instruments were imported, and strophic song forms became popular. William Malm notes that Japanese schoolchildren easily picked up some Western folk songs, including »Danny Boy« and »The Last Rose of Summer«, more readily than others (1977, 272). As Sean Williams observes, Irish folk songs evoke a sense of nostalgia in Japanese society. In

his study, those Japanese who heard the Irish tunes reported that the music reminded them of their childhoods, hometown, or their mother's singing (2006, 102). In addition, the Japanese terms *kyōshū* (homesickness), *kaiko no jō* (yearning for the old days), and a Westernized nostalgia of *nosutarujia* can be applied to Irish music to express longing for a rural past, missing one's mother, or »the pang of the unrequited desire for belonging« (Yano 2002, 14; Williams 1977, 114). These sentiments resonate with the plot of DEPARTURES, particularly Daigo's nostalgic feelings for his hometown and his love for his parents. Joe Hisaishi recognizes the influence of Irish and Scottish folk songs on Japanese children, noting, »For modern Japanese, I think English and Irish folk songs are like their foundational musical experience« (Hisaishi 1992, 57). He also admitted that the film score for NAUSICAÄ OF THE VALLEY OF THE WIND was inspired by elements of Scottish and Irish folk music (Koizumi 2010, 64). In addition, Hisaishi scholar Kunio Hara observes that as early as CASTLE IN THE SKY and MY NEIGHBOR TOTORO, there has been a noticeable influence of folk music from the British Isles (Hara 2020, 41–42).

The song »Danny Boy« features lyrics by Frederic Weatherly, written around 1913, from the traditional Irish melody »Londonderry Air«. Although there is no unified interpretation of the song's meaning, it is generally seen as a depiction of a parent bidding farewell to their son as he goes off to war. The parent is saddened because, upon the son's return, the parent will likely be deceased.[3] If we consider the second verse of the song, the lyrics of the quoted phrase is the key to the whole film from the parent's perspective and directly mentions death: »If I am dead, as dead I well may be.«[4] The verse expresses the hope that the son will visit their grave one day. The use of the quotation serves as a reminder of its original source and its associations. The whole second verse in fact depicts the story from the perspective of Daigo's father:

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[3] The song also evokes connotations of Irish patriotisms and the Irish diaspora, but these serve primarily as symbolic meanings derived from the song. See more on the song's meaning in Wayback Machine Internet Archive entry on »Danny Boy«: https://web.archive.org/web/20181008013330/http://www.standingstones.com/danny3.html#sister (24.03.2025).

[4] See the full lyrics in »Fred Weatherly's Own Description of Writing Danny Boy«, in Wayback Machine Internet Archive, https://web.archive.org/web/20181008013330/http://www.standingstones.com/danny3.html#sister (24.03.2025); See also the original sheet music on Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/dannyboysong00weat/mode/2up (24.03.2025).

But when ye come, and all the flowers are dying,
If I am dead, as dead I well may be,
You'll come and find the place where I am lying,
And kneel and say an Ave there for me.

And I shall hear, though soft you tread above me,
And all my grave will warmer, sweeter be,
For you will bend and tell me that you love me,
And I shall sleep in peace until you come to me!

Within the story's context, the quotation of »Danny Boy« foreshadows the father's death and the son's return to the hometown in Yamagata. It can also be seen as the father's plea for forgiveness for abandoning the family. The strong conversational tone in the lyrics embedded in the hidden quotation in the theme acts as a father's message to his son. This quotation imbues the main theme with a strong sense of the father's identity. Although Daigo's father may not possess omnipotence or traditional power, his negative image and abandonment of the family have inflicted profound pain and potentially even trauma upon Daigo. Consequently, Daigo's yearning for his father's love establishes his father as an authoritative figure in his life, albeit reluctantly acknowledged. The musical theme itself is lyrical. This embedded presence of the father becomes an obsession in Daigo's mind, as the main theme recurs both diegetically and non-diegetically. The father's image exerts a mysterious power over Daigo through his inner voice, compelling him to reflect on life, death, and family bonds.

Unveiling Desires through De-acousmatization of Inner Voices

The main theme recurs multiple times in variations to signal different stages of Daigo's transformative journey as a mortician learning life lessons along the way. It becomes Daigo's inner voice, which derives from his desire and has no physical body – we recall the concept of ›acousmêtre‹ that extends beyond cinematic representations to psychoanalysis. Its recurrence can thus be viewed as the de-acousmatization of this inner voice to reveal what his true desire is. The reference to »Danny Boy« in the music and its lyricism, his father's blurry face in his memory, along with the »stone letters« exchanged between father and son set up Pythagorean veils in Daigo's interior, building a desire within him through his inner voice. This becomes Daigo's drive to search for his inner desire regard-

ing his father when he gets involved in the mortician business – an occupation that traditionally centers around family bonds. One's internal conversations over time is an indispensable part of the narrative, and an important thread to help the audience to understand why Daigo stays in a job that does not gain respect from society and his final reconciliation with the father.

The main theme appears in multiple sequences non-diegetically or meta-diegetically. After being introduced diegetically through Daigo's own playing and the vinyl record, the main theme resurfaces three times in non-diegetic contexts: during a montage of Daigo's life as a mortician, while he performs the encoffinment ritual for his father, and during the end credits alongside his demonstration of the encoffining work. The theme begins with a diegetic cello solo as Daigo plays the melody in his room, transitions to a piano-accompanied version on the vinyl record, and later to fuller and richer orchestral variations, reflecting his increasingly positive view of his job and his relationship with his father.

The main theme culminates in a beautiful montage showing Daigo's life as a mortician and his growing sense of job satisfaction. The main theme is played the fullest in its orchestral version, accompanying the montage as a variation. The rich orchestral arrangement amplifies Daigo's thoughts and experiences as a mortician, strengthening relationships and love among people. The montage also features shots of clients finding relief and expressing love for the deceased during funerals. Additionally, there are scenes of Daigo playing his childhood cello in the picturesque countryside, serving as a moment of self-reflection on life, death, and his relationship with his father. The quotation, folk-like style, timbre of the cello, and the act of playing all symbolize the father's presence and the encoffinment rite.

The main theme reappears when Daigo learns of his father's death and prepares the body for encoffining in his apartment. The vinyl record version of the main theme is played when Daigo discovers that his father is holding Daigo's »stone letter« on his deathbed. As Daigo performs the encoffinment ritual for his father, he vividly recalls his face, and the spectators finally get a clear glimpse of it. While Daigo performs the ritual, the same flashback of childhood scenes is evoked, and this time the father's face completes the final piece of his childhood memory. De-acousmatization takes place: the acousmatic voice of

Daigo's desire finally finds its source. However, this unveiling also leads to disillusionment – not because the audience discovers that the father is merely an ordinary old man, but because Daigo realizes that his father is not with another woman or leading a different family as he has believed. The father is not as cold-hearted as Daigo imagines. This revelation challenges Daigo's bitterness and moral judgments, confronting him with feelings of regret and self-blame.

The main theme ceases after the encoffinment ritual. The source of the acousmatic voice is then unveiled. However, as Dolar and Kane explain, the source is not an object, as Daigo's father is not the »thing« he truly desires. Desire is perpetually allured by its own quest for fulfillment, driven by the endless progression of various objects or signifiers occupying the position of the desired thing. If the de-acousmatization process is to unveil the ›objet petit a‹, it is not a physical object one wants to see. It represents the object of the subject's fundamental lack, the thing that fuels the subject's endless desire. It is the object that the subject can never fully possess or attain (Fink 1995, 90–91). In other words, behind the Pythagorean veil, there is nothing. The speaker's body functions as a second veil, serving as a screen upon which the fetishistic structure of desire is projected and propped up (Kane 2014, 212). This is why, after the ritual, Daigo places the father's »stone letter«, representing his father's love, on his pregnant wife's belly, for their unborn son. Daigo's desire remains unfulfilled, as his eternal desire is for paternal love, and now his unborn son occupies the place of that desire. Slavoj Žižek's description of the Pythagorean veil further explains Daigo's situation: the perpetuation of the current social order, the Big Other, in this case the family system, is maintained by Daigo's desire for paternal love.

Immediately following this de-acousmatization sequence is the film's end credits, which play alongside Daigo's elegant demonstration of the full encoffining ritual. The main theme is presented in a lively, energetic orchestral variation at a faster tempo, suggesting that Daigo has finally freed himself from his internal struggle and is ready to »live his own life« (recalling Takita's statement). The rhythmically-driven strings evoke a renewal and the start of a new chapter for Daigo.

Conclusion

Chion's notions of ›acousmêtre‹ have been further developed for more than half a century, spanning discussions from the use of film sound and telecommunication to discourses on unseen sound and desire. This article focuses on Mladen Dolar and Brian Kane's recent analyses of the acousmatic voice, as well as Joe Hisaishi's film score for the film DEPARTURES: THE GIFT OF LAST MEMORIES. It illustrates how a musical quotation is embedded in a theme, embodying the presence of the protagonist's father and unraveling the complexities of the protagonist's psychological state. This article demonstrates how this theme, with its strong conversational tone derived from the quotation, transforms into the protagonist's inner voice – an acousmatic voice that lacks a physical body yet exerts a mysterious power over him. This acousmatic voice becomes an obsession, guiding his transformative journey through variations of the main theme. Through the »de-acousmatization« process, the protagonist's inner desire is ultimately exposed. This analysis provides insights into how the acousmatic voice, conveyed through music, can play a critical role in shaping the narrative and character development in film. Further directions for research could explore the musical development or the form of theme and variations in relation to the discovery of characters' desires and drives, particularly in connection to voice and their inner thoughts.

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Music Structuring Animation:

The Role of Chopin's First Ballade in the Series Finale of YOUR LIE IN APRIL

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More often than not, pre-existing piano music in multimedia works is disfigured in two significant ways: (1) the music is cut up, distorted, and altered in order to fit with what is on screen and (2) it usually contains farcical and erroneous depictions of piano playing (Rudolph 2022). The Japanese anime YOUR LIE IN APRIL (Fuji TV, 2014–2015) is an exception on both counts. Chopin's Ballade No. 1 in G Minor, op. 23 is played in its entirety during the final episode of this anime with clear moments where the playing is accurately animated. This preservation of the original work and attention to the details in the animation raises the following question: how does the distinctively animated and preserved rendition of Chopin's first ballade relate to the narrative in this series finale?

During the performance of this work, the main character, Kousei Arima (henceforth Kousei), is competing in a piano competition while his love interest is undergoing life-threatening surgery. According to the pianists consulted for the music in YOUR LIE IN APRIL, Chopin's first ballade is an ideal piece to convey the complex emotions that would be felt in this scenario (Arakawa 2016, Chapter 43). Michael Klein states that this piece contains tragic possibilities with a secondary theme that depicts a desired ›as if‹, and an apotheosis that portrays an ostensible victory over the previous dysphoric waltz (Klein 2005, 126). As opposed to most multimedia works, we suggest that the music in YOUR LIE IN APRIL is the main driver of the narrative and structure, whereas the animation and dialogue play a subservient role. We will use concepts found in Klein (2004; 2005; 2018), Almén (2008), Hatten (1994), and Hepokoski and Darcy (2006) to analyze the narrative of Chopin's Ballade No. 1 and show how the musical structure requires no alterations to convey the complex emotional arch occurring at the series finale of YOUR LIE IN APRIL.

Narrative Summary of YOUR LIE IN APRIL

The anime YOUR LIE IN APRIL is widely known for its beautiful animation, impressive music, and heart-wrenching story. It is a visual adaptation of the manga (Japanese visual novel) written by Naoshi Arakawa that follows the story of Kousei, a young piano prodigy that had been given the title of ›the human metronome‹ for his ability to perform every song he played perfectly. After his mother – who was also his harshly demanding piano instructor – passed away, it affected his ability to play the piano, and he stopped performing.

His situation began to change after he met a girl named Kaori Miyazono (henceforth Kaori), a free-spirited violinist whose performances reflect her personality. From an early age, she was enraptured by Kousei's playing and always dreamed of performing alongside him. After she found out they were enrolled at the same high school, she was finally able to become friends with him. Through their friendship, she helped bring him back to the world of music. After many attempts at getting him to perform, she was finally able to persuade him to enter a competition and play in front of a crowd again. It is later revealed that she has some form of terminal illness.[1] As the show progresses, her health begins to deteriorate, and she can no longer hide it from her friends. During Kousei's performance in the series finale, she is scheduled to undergo a risky surgery with the odds of her survival looking slim. While he is performing Chopin's Ballade No. 1 in G Minor, Kaori comes to him in a dreamlike state, and he subsequently realizes that she did not survive the surgery. He hallucinates them performing one last duet together before she fades away, and he returns to reality.

The supplementary notes in the manga suggest that the author incorporated Chopin's first ballade for its tragic elements. As expressed in the following note by Masanori Sugano (Lecturer at Tokyo University of the Arts and Musashino Academia Musicae) published in the manga, this ballade melds with the final scene perfectly, and accurately portrays the emotions and narrative of the story (Arakawa 2016, Chapter 43).

[1] Based on the symptoms, the fandom believes it to be Friedreich's Ataxia (Shigatsu wa Kimi no Uso Wiki 2024).

> As you can imagine from the title ›ballade‹, which means ›in a narrative style‹, this dramatic work contains all the elements of a story – introduction, development, twist, and conclusion – and boasts immense popularity among fans of classical music. Of Chopin's four Ballades, *No. 1* is the only one that begins with a fiery, passionate introduction that foreshadows its tragic conclusion. Said to have taken inspiration from the ballads of Polish poet Mickiewicz, this piece unfolds at a dizzying pace, blending war and grief with the joy of peace. […] The music of Chopin conveys these emotions and experiences to the audience.

Methodology

To unpack Sugano's claim of a tragic nature in Chopin's Ballade No. 1, we will employ Byron Almén's tragic narrative archetype: »The defeat of a transgression by an order-imposing hierarchy, and logically expressed as the combination ›defeat + transgression.‹« (2008, 231) This refers to when an initial negative state (the order) is attempted to be altered by the actions of a transgressor (the transgression) but fails. A classical literature example would be Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1597): the initial state (the separation of the titular couple due to family enmity) is attempted to be altered by their transgression (plans to marry and flee) but fails. Similarly, Klein defines tragedies as failed triumphs (2004, 41). As seen in his analyses, tragic works typically begin with minor keys whose dominance is threatened by major keys (which function as transgressions) – but inevitably return to minor. By extension, the tragic archetype can be understood as the opposite of the comedic archetype. Whereas the tragic archetype sees the defeat of the transgressor, the comedic archetype sees the transgressor overcome the order-imposing hierarchy and can be viewed as »victory + transgression.«[2] Accordingly, Almén's comedic narrative archetypes consistently align with Robert Hatten's expressive genre of tragic-to-triumphant (1991, 82; 1994, 67–90).

Almén identifies the discursive strategies of breakthrough and epiphany as key elements in signifying victorious transgressions in comic works (2008, 187). Breakthrough is the disruption from the anticipated formal course of the piece, whereas epiphany is a narrative shift that affects the narrative trajectory of the piece. These two concepts are normally signaled by »(1) the unexpected appearance […] of a transcendent passage and (2) the

[2] Referring back to *Romeo and Juliet*, the narrative archetype would have shifted from tragic to comedic if Juliet had simply woken up slightly earlier.

immediate interpretive shift that it engenders from intransigent conflict to victory.« (Almén 2008, 191) As we will show, Chopin's first ballade is exceptionally tragic because the prospect of the transgression's victory is reinforced by both breakthrough and epiphany – until it is reversed near the end of the recapitulation.

As Almén states, a musical narrative is often supported by the use of topics, in which groups of topics may be associated with the order or transgression (2008, 81). He established nine types of interactions between narrative and topics; here, we focus on Type III: narrative with two topical fields that constitute poles of the narrative opposition. The example he uses is Schubert's three-verse strophic song »An den Mond« D 468. This piece consists of two eight-measure periods: one in A major and one in A minor. Each consists of different accompaniment figures and differing levels of harmonic complexity. Whereas the major section is stable and alternates between tonic and dominant, the A-minor section is full of diminished sevenths and secondary dominants. Each section also contains vocal lines that reflect the accompaniment: the former portrays »fond memories of natural settings and joyous meetings,« whereas the latter portrays »separation and loss« (Almén 2008, 82).[3] Although this piece is not as formally complex as Chopin's Ballade No. 1, the idea of having two topical fields (one consisting of topics that represent the order/another that represents the transgression) will prove useful in constructing connections between musical topics and the animation.

Along with topical analysis, form can be employed as a narrative vehicle in tragic works, especially when a piece contains deviations from a prototypical sonata structure.[4] Hepokoski and Darcy refer to the minor sonata as »generally interpretable within the sonata tradition as a sign of a troubled condition seeking transformation into the parallel major mode.« (2006, 306) They continue, stating:

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3 Although Almén references common aspects of topics, he does not seem to give explicit topic designators (such as march or pastorale).

4 Given the unusual thematic and key structure of this work, there are competing interpretations of the form. Based on Schenker's sketch of Chopin's first ballade (1979, 133), many authors argue for a three-part song form (Green 1979, 304–06; Rawsthorne 1966, 45), which Parakilas connects to the literary ballade (1992, 84–87). Alternatively, others view it as a deformed sonata (Samson 1992, 45–50; Klein 2004; Azziz 2015). We opted to use sonata form as a frame in order to evoke the narrative aspects of Hepokoski and Darcy's theory.

> The possibility of a tonic-minor-to-tonic-major trajectory (or the represented inability to attain that transformation) is rich in metaphorical implication. If we understand sonata form as a metaphor for an idealized but nonspecific human action […] minor-mode sonatas provide the means by which an initially negative state (the minor mode) is acted upon in order to seek to overturn it by means of major-mode assertion at or around the ESC point, even though that quest might be unsuccessful.

In other words, minor-mode sonatas in particular have a strong narrative charge in terms of transgressions and order-imposing hierarchies. Having a major mode-ESC during the recapitulation would give the impression that the major mode has triumphed over the minor mode, which could be viewed as the comedic archetype (victory + transgression). This simple formula is challenged in Chopin's first ballade, however, because there *is* a clear major-mode ESC in m. 180, but it is followed by over fifty measures (over 20% of the piece) of G *minor* and a marked return of the primary theme after the secondary theme's ESC (Figures 1 and 2).[5] In this situation, the return to a minor key along with a minor PAC after the major ESC (m. 208) can be interpreted as markedly tragic because it occurs after an ostensible victory in major.[6]

The unusual nature of the major-mode ESC in Chopin's first ballade is further emphasized by its atypical tonicization of VI (see Figure 1). In a prototypical classical sonata (Figure 3), a minor sonata's secondary theme is first set in the relative major (III), and then played in tonic in the recapitulation. In this work, however, both secondary themes are played in E♭ major (VI). Although third-related keys are certainly less marked in post-Beethoven sonatas, we read the use of VI as marked because the leadup to the secondary theme features a prolonged F dominant that suggests the typical tonicization of III (B♭ major) (Figure 4). Instead of the expected resolution to a B♭ triad, this F dominant features an elided resolution into another dominant seventh chord (B♭7), which subsequently tonicizes E♭ (VI). In short, the tonicization of VI is marked in this case because the normative III was being *projected* as the harmonic goal, but it is subsequently subverted by VI.

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5 Score excerpts from the edition Fredric Chopin, *Fryderyk Chopin Complete Works*. Edited by Ignacy J. Paderewski. Instytut Fryderyka Chopina, 1949. https://imslp.eu/files/imglnks/euimg/2/2a/IMSLP73959-PMLP01646-Chopin_Paderewski_No_3_Ballades_Op_23_filter.pdf (01.02.2025) Annotations are by the authors.

6 PAC stands for Perfect Authentic Cadence, whereas ESC stands for Essential Structural Closure (Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 18).

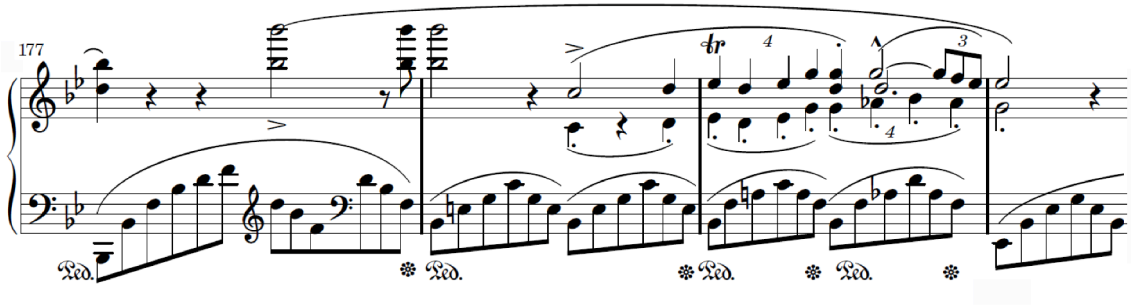


Figure 1: Harmonic closure in E♭ major in Chopin, Ballade No. 1, op. 23, mm. 177–80

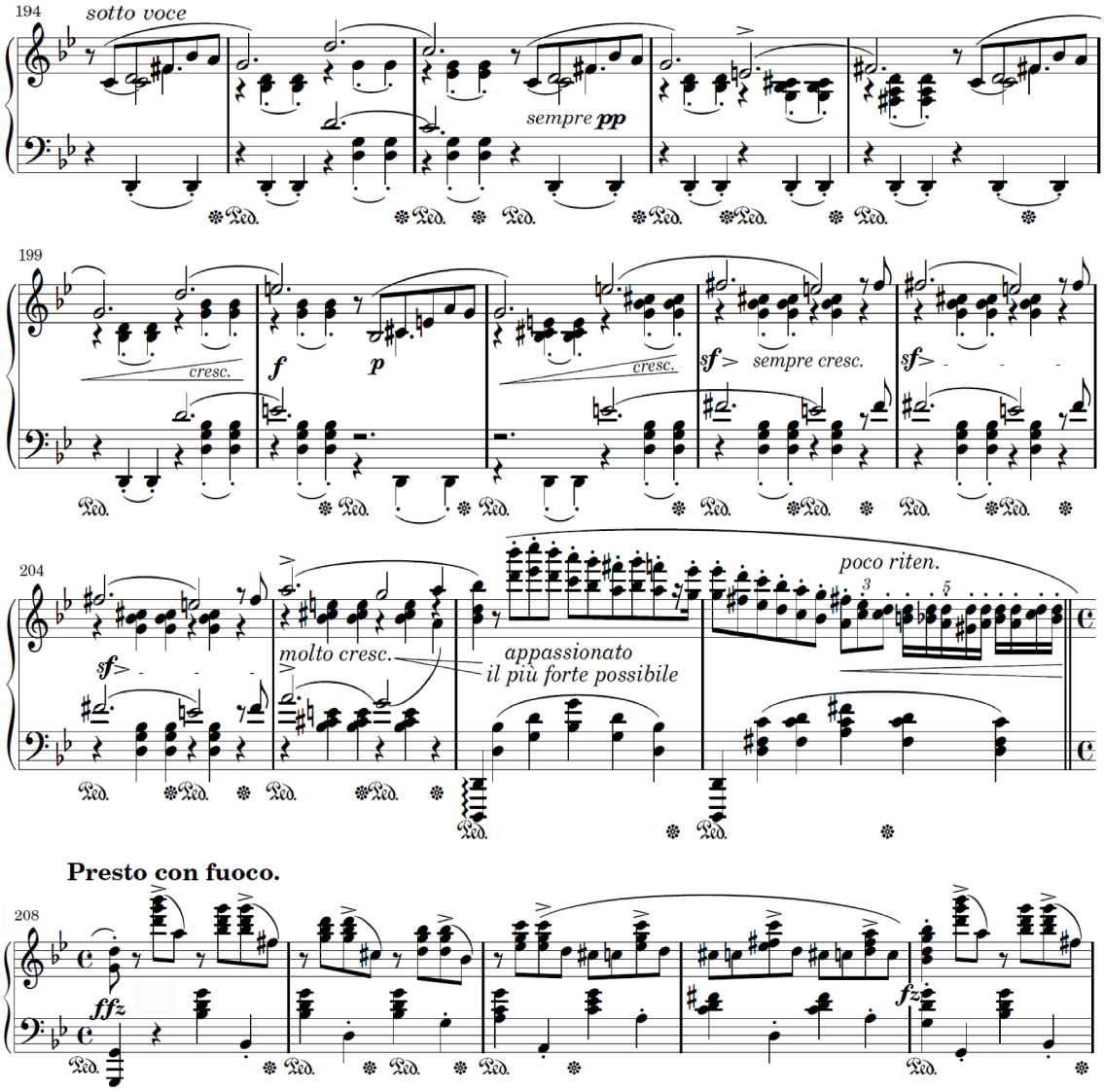


Figure 2: Return to G-minor tonic in Chopin, Ballade No. 1, op. 23, mm. 194–212

As we will show later, the three main tonicizations of G minor (i), B♭ major (III), and E♭ major (VI) are consistently correlated to present, past, and (imagined) future images

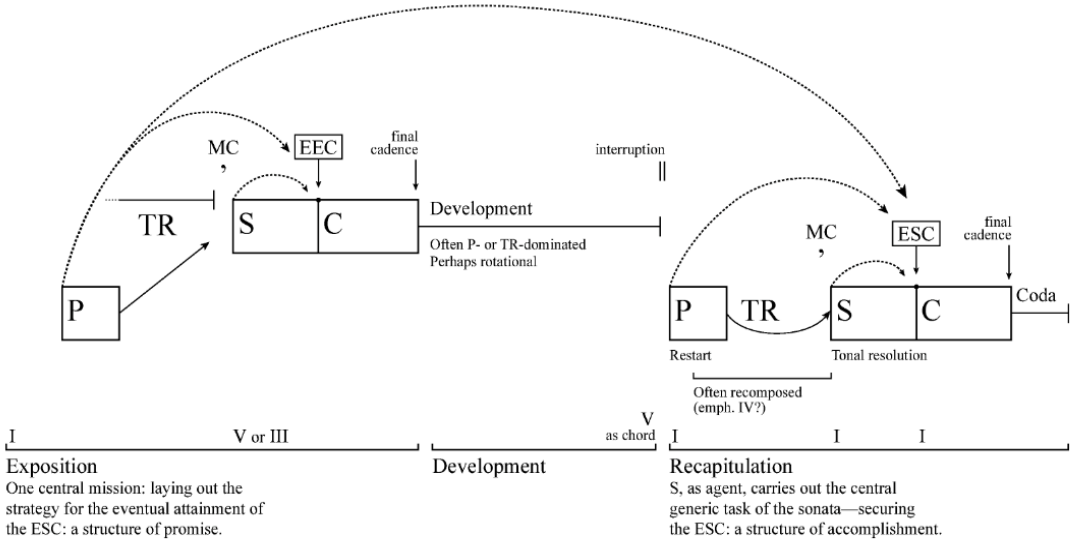


Figure 3: Sonata Form Chart (Hepokoski and Darcy 2006, 17)

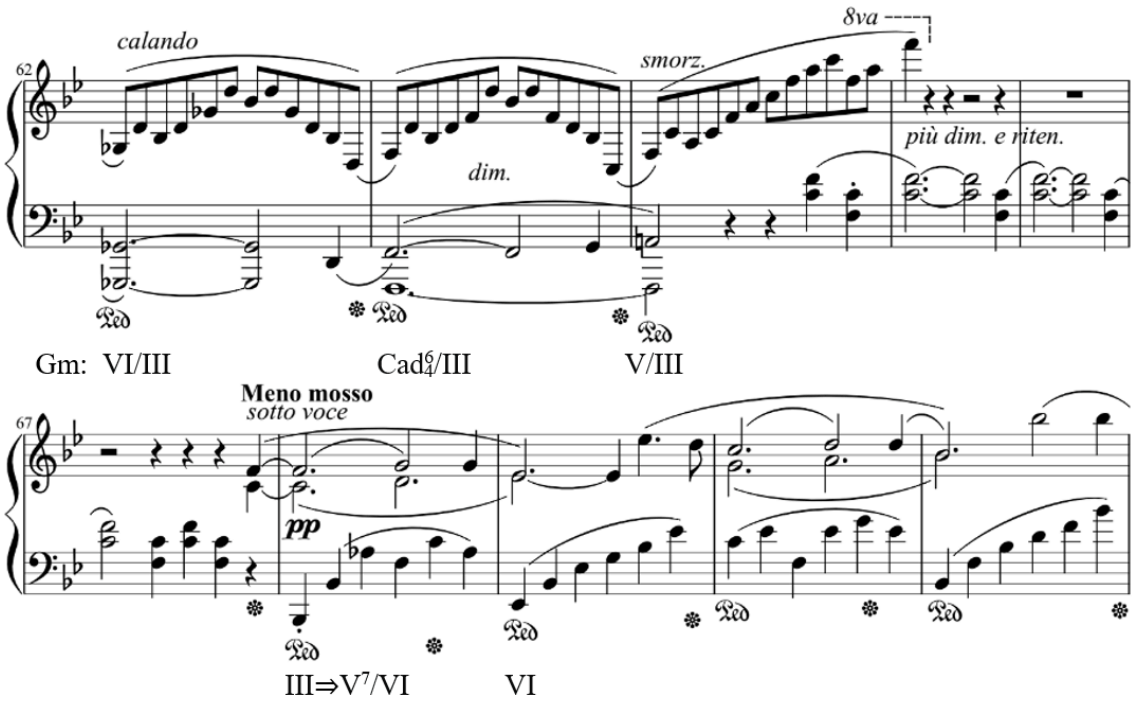


Figure 4: Tonicizations of III and VI in Chopin, Ballade No. 1, op. 23, mm. 62–71

of Kaori in the anime, respectively (Figure 5). Sections set to G minor showcase dark images of Kaori incapacitated on the surgery table, in which the minor key correlates to her perilous health. Sections set to B♭ major feature flashbacks of Kaori, in which the major

key correlates to her previous health.[7] Sections set to E♭ major feature *imagined* images of a healthy Kaori who magically materializes next to Kousei in an ethereal plane to play with him. We consider the use of VI (i.e., E♭) as an important key choice in signifying this imagined return because of its markedness and its affiliation with deceptive resolutions. That is, just as VI functions as a fleeting deceptive resolution to a major chord in a minor work, so does Kaori's presence on the ethereal plane function as a short-lived, fictional moment signifying a successful operation.

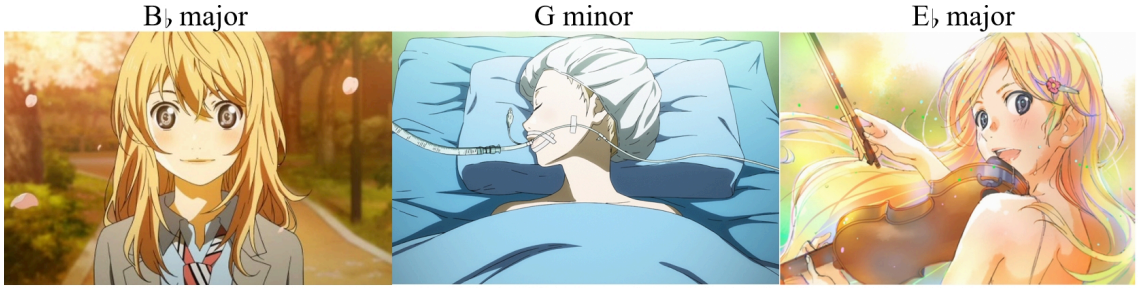


Figure 5: Key–image correlations in series finale of YOUR LIE IN APRIL (2014)

Before proceeding with a close correlation between the musical narrative of Chopin's first ballade and the animation of YOUR LIE IN APRIL's series finale, we will first establish an overview of the musical narrative elements that we claim guide the anime's narrative (Figure 6). The negative order is established at the beginning by the use of G minor and the uncanny and troped waltz topics for the introductory and primary themes, respectively. This is followed by the presentation of the positive transgression in the secondary theme, which is represented by E♭ major (VI) and the nocturne and berceuse topics (Klein 2018, 32). The development then transitions from the negative order to the positive transgression (i.e., from the PT to the ST) before arriving at the most formally disruptive moment of the work: the presentation of the ST in apotheosis at the beginning of recapitulation with ostensible harmonic closure in VI in m. 180 (Figure 1).[8] This harmonic closure is subsequently undermined by a return of the primary theme in G minor followed by a new *tempesta*-theme topic in the coda. To emulate this dark turn after the ostensible victory of

[7] It is made clear at the end that Kaori was suffering severe health issues throughout the series, which were initially hidden from Kousei.

[8] PT and ST stand for Primary Theme and Secondary Theme, respectively.

the transgression in the music, our following correlation of the music with the anime will rhetorically emphasize the possibility of a happy resolution – before revealing the anime's heartbreaking twist.

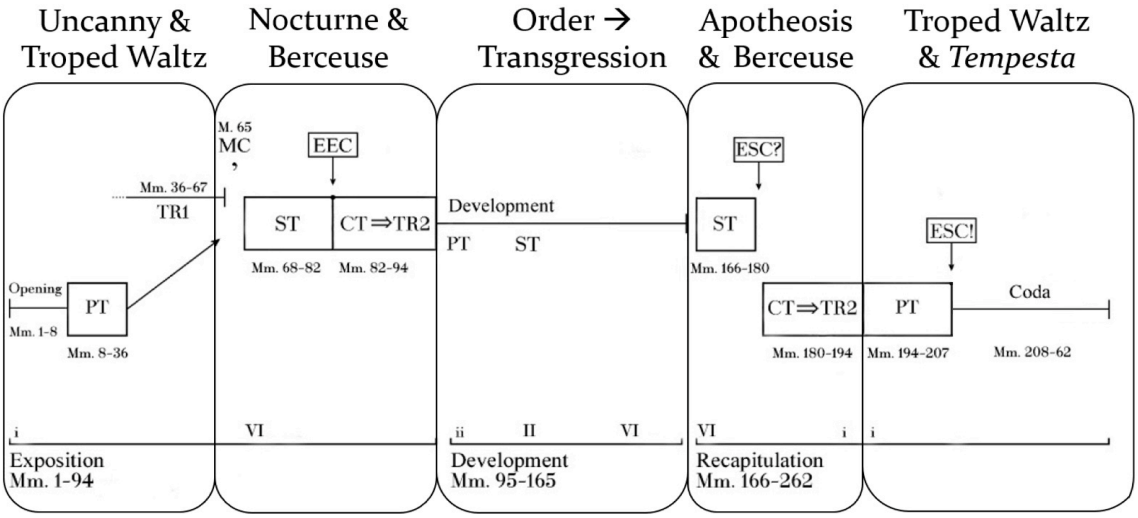


Figure 6: Formal and narrative structure of Chopin's Ballade No. 1, op. 23

Correlation of Chopin's First Ballade with the Visuals and Dialogue of YOUR LIE IN APRIL

The negative order in the work is indicated at the start by the uncanny opening of a Neapolitan chord paired with the *ombra* topic. Klein describes the uncanny in music through musical topics and chromatic harmony as follows:

> Ranging from the music of Beethoven to that of Schoenberg, we can make an intertextual abductive hypothesis about the musical signs surrounding the uncanny. To the signs for the *ombra* topic (tremolos, diminished-seventh chords, Neapolitans) we can add enharmonicism, strange uses of chromaticism, odd voice-leading, and mechanical repetitions of music material. The uncanny is associated with signs for terrible recognition, anxiety, dread, death, and the sublime. In the wake of the uncanny, we may read narratives of the dissolution of subjectivity, the ego's heroic reintegration in fate of that threat, or the ego's defiance in spite of it. (Klein 2005, 87)

Accordingly, the opening of this piece follows many of Klein's descriptors of the uncanny, such as the opening chord being an arpeggiation of a Neapolitan chord, chromaticism, diminished-seventh chords, and odd voice leading (Figure 7).

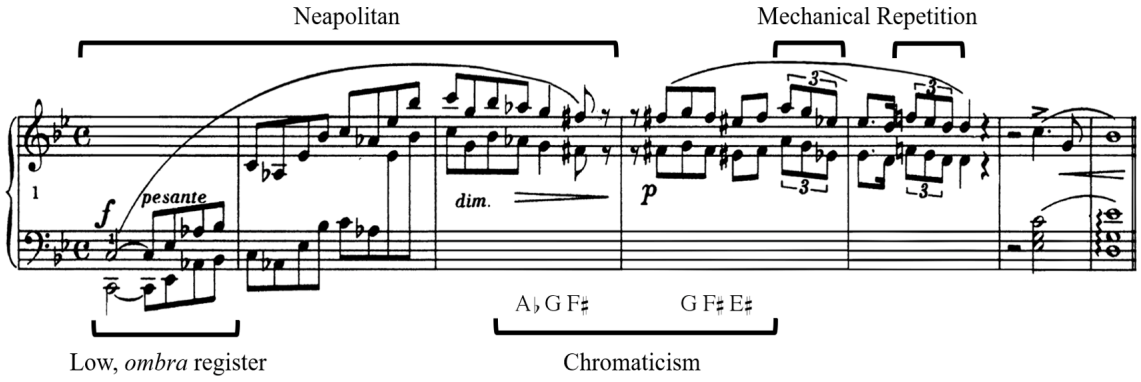


Figure 7: Annotation of uncanny signifiers in Chopin's Ballade No. 1, op. 23, mm. 1–7

Klein's comments on the narrative potential of the uncanny topic correlate tightly with Kousei's emotional angst at this moment in the anime. Klein specifies two narrative connotations of the uncanny: (1) initial terrible recognition and (2) a subsequent heroic intervention (2005, 87). This aligns with the preceding plot in the anime. At the beginning of the penultimate episode, Kousei just experienced a sudden downturn in Kaori's health, in which she passes out and starts having a seizure. As a result, he is later shown sulking alone in his room – refusing to practice for his impending piano competition. This is followed by his reluctant return to the stage, which fulfills his promise to Kaori.[9]

The negative order of this uncanny introduction is continued through the use of a troped waltz topic for the PT (Figure 8). This topic (starting in m. 8) ties the negative order to the relationship of Kousei and Kaori through its association to partner dances. Waltzes are renowned for their representation of romance and are typically used for »validating the romantic status of a couple« (Mirka 2014, 178). This dysphoric waltz, therefore, correlates to the relationship of Kousei and Kaori, through which the listeners can infer that the state of their relationship is grim because of the troping via minor mode (Hatten 1994, 295).[10] That is, waltzes typically are in major and are danced by a couple, whereas this waltz is in minor and only features Kousei on stage. As a result, the use of minor tinges the scene with sadness and emphasizes the absence of Kousei's musical partner, Kaori, who is simultaneously undergoing life-threatening surgery.

9 Before going on stage, he is shown curled on the ground repeating the phrase, »I've got to play.« That is, all indications are that he does not *want* to play, rather he *has* to play to fulfill his obligation to a dying friend.

10 Klein refers to this as a dysphoric waltz (2005, 126).

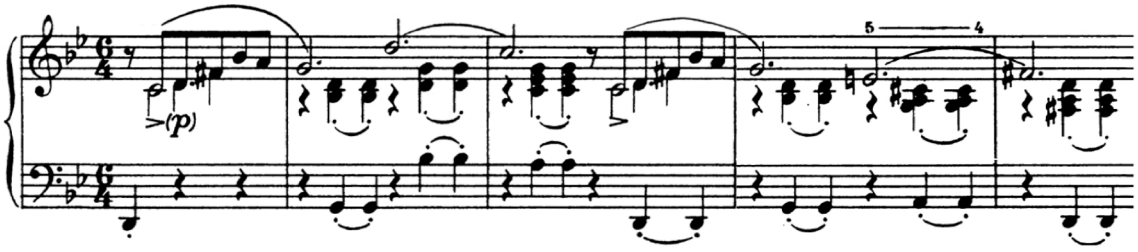


Figure 8: Troped waltz topic in Chopin's Ballade No. 1, op. 23, mm. 8–12

The subsequent transition features a precise correlation of B♭ major and G minor with images of a healthy and sick Kaori, respectively. The most notable instance of this is in mm. 31–37, in which an ensuing cadence in G minor unexpectedly tonicizes B♭ major then returns to G minor (Figure 9). In mm. 31–32, there is a subdominant-dominant progression progression in G minor that ends with V^6/V. Instead of resolving back to V in G minor, the chord the chord semitonally shifts to the dominant of B♭ major and features a marked display passage in the right hand. This shift correlates with a flashback of Kaori comforting Kousei followed by several images of a smiling Kaori against a golden background as the music continues in B♭ major. Just as the music cadences in G minor in m. 36, the bright images of Kaori suddenly shift to a dark operating room filled with bloody surgical equipment. The vital signs show that she is still alive, but as the music reaches the end of the transition the audience is given its last visual confirmation that she is alive – a slight twitch from an incapacitated Kaori and a final image of stable vital signs.

The anime then shifts into a dreamlike state which is signaled by a progression through nocturne and berceuse (i.e., lullaby) topics in the secondary and closing themes, respectively (Klein 2018, 32). As noted by Julian Horton in his chapter in the *Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory*, the nocturne is understood as an outgrowth of the vocal serenade (2014, 647), which is used to call a love interest at night. Accordingly, the anime features Kousei calling out to Kaori with the repeated phrase of »reach her«.[11] At the beginning of the berceuse topic in the closing theme, the scene suddenly shifts from the concert hall to an ethereal plane (Figure 10). This lullaby correlates with a delusional, dreamlike state for Kousei that coincides with harmonic closure in the abnormal key of VI – a key associated

[11] At this point, the serenade can be viewed as unsuccessful since Kaori fails to make an appearance, which is significant in comparison to the secondary theme's reprise in the recapitulation in apotheosis.

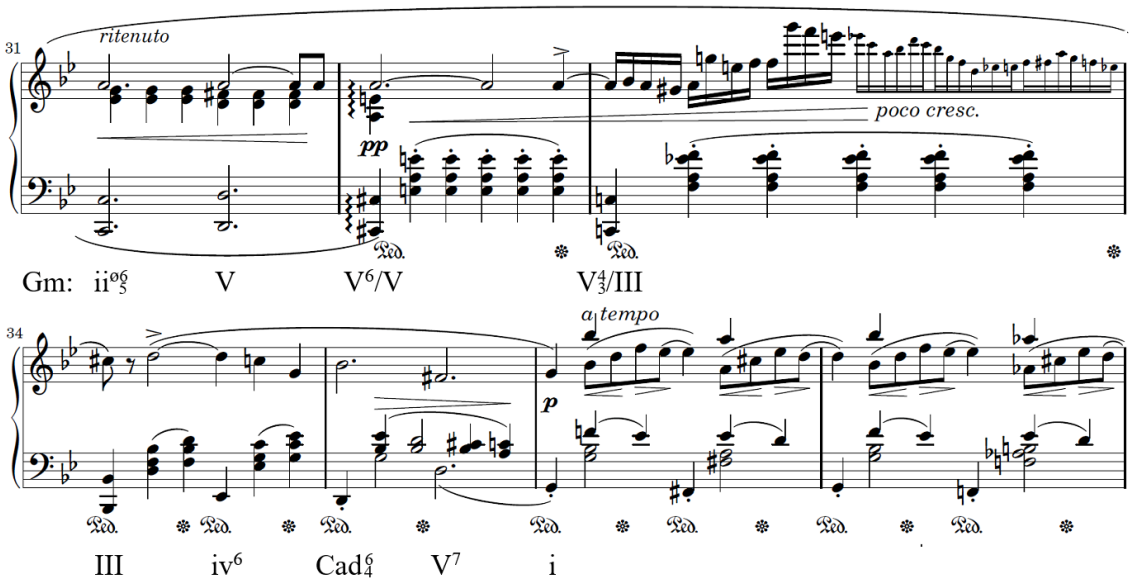


Figure 9: Gm–B♭ major juxtapositions in Chopin's Ballade No. 1, op. 23, mm. 31–37 (cf. Figure 5)

with deceptive harmonic motion (same as Figure 1). That is, Kousei is disconnected from reality where Kaori is fighting for her life on the operating table.

Figure 10: Image of Kousei on the ethereal plane during closing theme
(mm. 82–94; YOUR LIE IN APRIL 2014, [5:10–5:45])

The development features the arrival of Kaori to this ethereal plane, in which parallel key relationships and thematic juxtapositions signal a positive outcome for Kaori (i.e., a victorious transgression). Kaori arrives during the onset of the development's presentation of the primary theme, which is previously correlated with her perilous state. However, this theme is subsequently undermined because its conclusion is cannibalized by the onset of the secondary theme in the parallel major. That is, only the primary theme's basic idea and repetition are played before its continuation to cadence chromatically devolves before ending with an elided cadence into the secondary theme in m. 105 (Figure 11). Accordingly, the tragic order of the primary theme is undermined by the encroaching arrival of

the transgression-affiliated secondary theme in the parallel major. The onset of the secondary theme is emphasized in the anime by Kaori playing her violin over Kousei's otherwise unaltered performance of this ballade.[12] Musically, the addition of the violin transforms the work from a solo into a duet.[13] Hermeneutically, Kaori's playing suggests a significant progression in Kousei's delusion because she transitions from a purely visual entity to an audio-visual one.

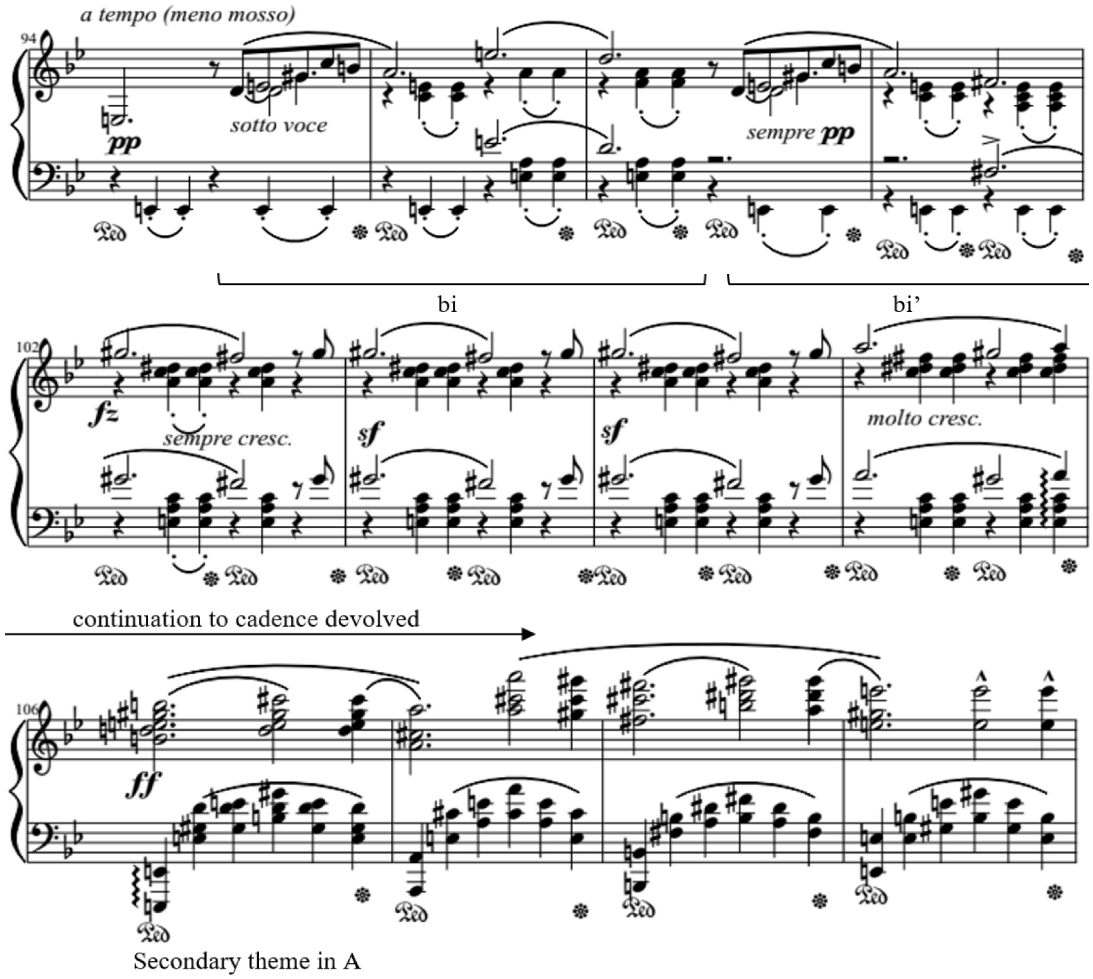


Figure 11: Cannibalization of primary theme in A minor by the secondary theme in A major in the development of Chopin's Ballade No. 1, op. 23, mm. 94–109

12 The anime consistently frames Kaori as a musician who flaunts staid musical traditions, so her playing over a piano solo is perfectly within her character.

13 Although a deeper analysis of the new timbres and counterpoint produced by this superimposed violin line may yield additional correlations to the narrative, we have limited our analysis to the harmonic and formal musical correlations that persist throughout the entire work to reduce the scope of the paper.

The animation suggests that Kousei is not initially fooled by Kaori's apparition, but this changes at the moment of epiphany in the middle of the development. As established earlier, Almén defines epiphany as a sudden moment where the narrative shifts from intransigent conflict to victory. We identify that the moment of intransigent conflict in this piece occurs in mm. 126–137, which feature an extended V♭9 chord signaling E♭ minor (Figure 12).[14] Accordingly, this indication of E♭ *minor* could be viewed as undermining the delusional key of E♭ *major*, which is associated with a positive future outcome for Kaori.

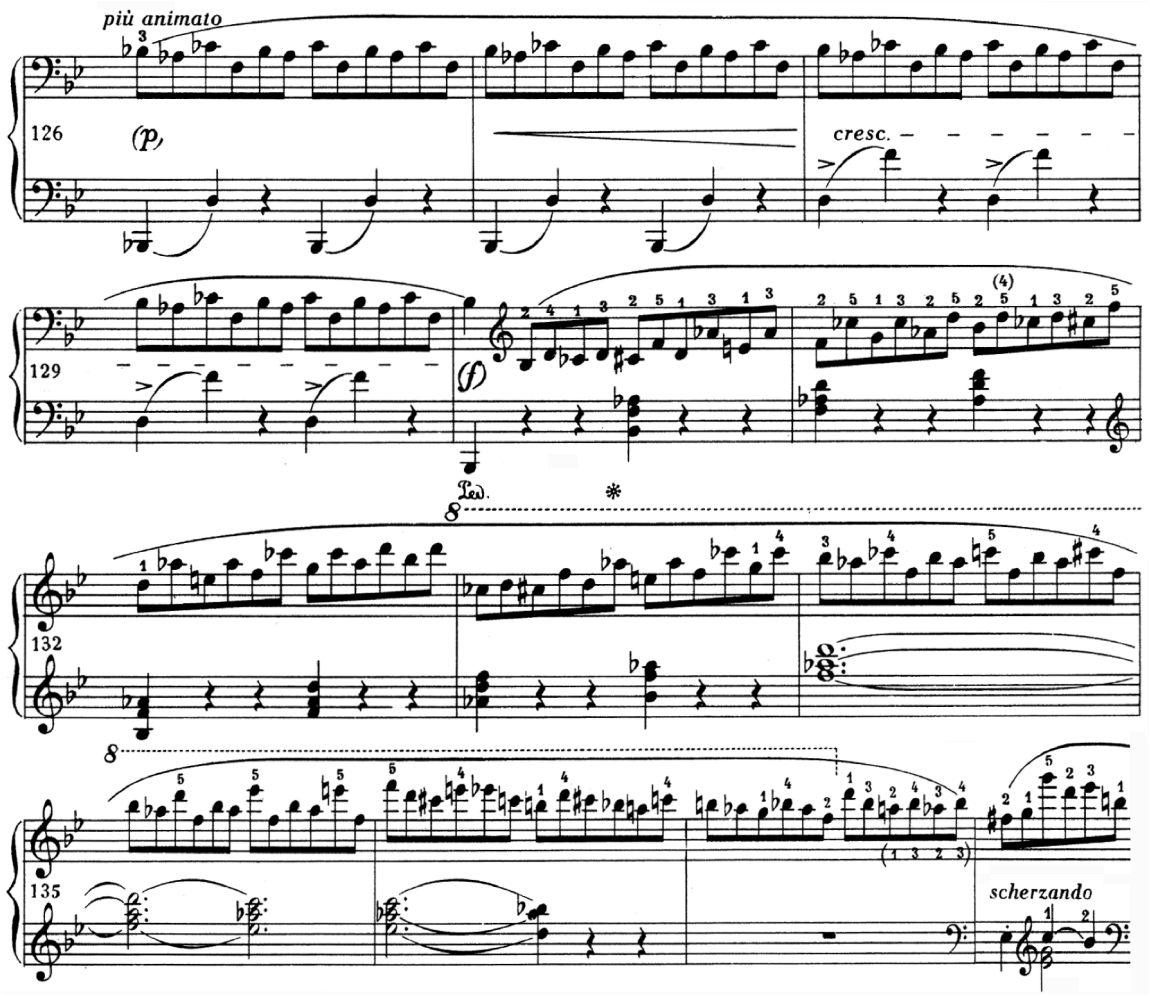


Figure 12: Evaded tonicization of E♭ minor in Chopin's Ballade No. 1, op. 23, mm. 126–38

As this is happening in the music, Kaori stares down Kousei and plays her most aggressive passage on the violin: a tremolo on the flatted ninth of the chord (C♭) that ascends in octaves before shifting to a high F (the fifth of the chord). Prior to this moment, Kousei is

[14] The F♯ appoggiatura at the beginning of m. 138 hints at the possibility of E♭ minor (i.e., F♯ = G♭).

shown as crestfallen, as if Kaori's presence is a reminder of her perilous condition. However, this all changes as this chord unexpectedly resolves to E♭ major in m. 138: the music breaks into an animated scherzando passage and Kousei's face shifts to a relaxed smile, as if buying into the delusion. As scherzos are generally lighthearted and playful works used to signify comedy (or ironic comedy) (Russel and Macdonald 2001), this scene could be interpreted as a pivotal moment for the transgression and suggests that the negative order will be defeated.

This moment of epiphany is soon followed by the other major signifier of this transgression's success: *breakthrough*, signified by the use of the secondary theme in apotheosis at the beginning of the recapitulation. Following Edward T. Cone, Klein defines apotheosis as »a special kind of recapitulation that reveals unexpected harmonic richness and textual excitement in a theme previously presented with a deliberately restricted harmonization and a relatively drab accompaniment« (2005, 124). Accordingly, this piece features an unusual recapitulation in which the secondary theme is now played in octaves in the key of VI. Accordingly, this fulfills Almén's previously discussed concept of breakthrough since it is an unexpected appearance of a transcendental passage. Klein summarizes the narrative impact of this music in general terms:

> The second theme of this ballade presents an alternate reality, a desired »as if« that stands in opposition to the opening waltz. When the second theme returns in apotheosis, one has the sense that the musical persona has overcome the darkness of the earlier waltz […] Broadly, the drama of this ballade begins with a somber state followed by a desired alternative whose eventual apotheosis promises realization. (2005, 124)

Naturally, this general musical narrative gains additional resonance when applied to the anime. The ›as if‹ is the alternate reality in which Kousei and Kaori are united. The transcendental nature of their reunion is emphasized during this theme by a marked shift from traditional animation to pastel stills of the two happily playing together, which lends a sense of surrealness to the scene (Figure 13).[15] The theme ends with a final harmonic indication of the victory of the transgression: a PAC in VI (Figure 1). Accordingly, all signs point to a happy ending. In the music, all elements of a comedic archetype are fulfilled. There is a moment of epiphany, breakthrough, and there is structural closure in the trans-

[15] This serves as a continuation of the earlier serenade. That is, the first presentation of this theme was for an absent Kaori, whereas it now functions as a symbol of the couple's union.

gression's key of E♭ major. These all correlate with elements in the anime: Kousei moves from sadness to joy and is united with Kaori in a moment of transcendental, surreal bliss.

Figure 13: Pastel images of Kaori and Kousei at the beginning of the recapitulation in Chopin's Ballade No. 1, op. 23, mm. 166–80 (YOUR LIE IN APRIL 2014, [5:10–5:45])

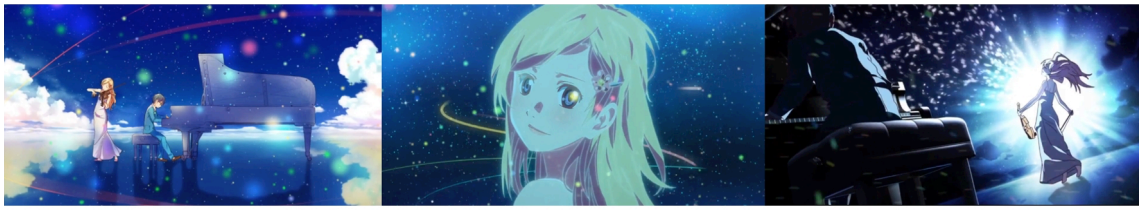
After this moment, this dream begins to fade as the moment of Kousei's dreadful recognition of Kaori's tragic fate is correlated with the return of the *ombra* waltz in G minor and the arrival of a *tempesta* coda (see Figure 2).[16] Accordingly, this serves as the tragic twist in the narrative which aligns with Klein's claim that this moment serves as the peripeteia of the work (2018, 33).[17] As the closing theme plays its lullaby, a retreat from the dream-like state is signaled through a return to normal animation as Kousei turns towards Kaori (Figure 14). As the primary theme returns in m. 194, he begins to realize she is leaving him (explicitly indicated by internal monologue). Both in the music and anime, the fate of Kaori is all but sealed as the music features a dominant pedal foreshadowing a return to G minor while Kaori's apparition begins to fade. Just as the dominant pedal resolves to a root position G-minor tonic in m. 208, the animation features Kaori bent back with a light exploding from her chest and the music shifts to a *tempesta* topic featuring an increase in rhythm, register, and tempo (i.e., the *presto con fuoco* in Figure 2). The use of *ombra* and *tempesta* in the coda signifies a tragic conclusion as this juxtaposition is historically associated with signifying horror or tragedy (Mirka 2014, 283).[18] As the *tempesta* topic subsides in m. 248, Kaori completely fades away and Kousei soon returns to the concert hall.

16 This shift from major to minor is foreshadowed in the introduction, in which the opening major chord is retroactively understood as an opening predominant Neapolitan chord in the key of G minor (see Figure 7).

17 Klein falls short of claiming this moment serves as a moment of dread realization (i.e., anagnorisis) because of music's inability to be explicit, but the anime seizes on this narrative possibility by linking the return of G minor with Kousei's plea of »Don't leave me.«

18 For example, Mirka references *ombra* scenes of Handel, Hasse, and Jommelli, and melodramas on supernatural subjects by Georg Benda and Fomin that use juxtapositions of *ombra* and *tempesta* to arouse awe and terror.

Although the viewer never gets visual confirmation of Kaori's death, Kousei acknowledges that Kaori has died by murmuring a single word: *sayonara*/farewell.[19]



mm. 180–94 **mm. 194–207** **mm. 208–50**

Figure 14: Images of return to animation, Kaori fading, and Kaori exploding (YOUR LIE IN APRIL 2014, [8:07–10:00])

Conclusion

All aspects and emotions present in the narrative of YOUR LIE IN APRIL required no alteration of Chopin's first ballade. The music encapsulates tragedy through use of topics such as *ombra* and *tempesta* in the minor sections, love through use of the waltz and nocturne, hope through a seemingly victorious secondary theme featuring apotheosis and structural closure in VI, and peripetia through a final return to G minor.

The use of Chopin's first ballade in G minor in the series finale of YOUR LIE IN APRIL features a marked incorporation of a complete classical work in which the animation and music are chronologically and topically correlated. Throughout the work, the scene changes in the animation are consistently tied to shifts in the musical form. For example, the onset of the closing theme correlates with a shift to the ethereal plane, the unusual placement of the secondary theme at the beginning of the recapitulation correlates with a surreal shift to pastel stills, and the onset of the coda correlates with a violent light exploding from Kaori's chest. Furthermore, these formal regions' musical topics relate to the scenes depicted in the animation. The closing theme's berceuse is associated with a dream realm, the recapitulation's apotheosis is associated with Kousei and Kaori's ostensible union, and the coda's *tempesta* topic is associated with darkness, flashes of light, and destruction. These correlations are even witnessed in smaller harmonic moments, in which mid-passage tonicizations of major and minor keys are correlated with scene changes. For

[19] The following scene completely skips over Kaori's death and fast-forwards to her gravesite after her funeral.

example, the shifts between B♭ major and G minor in the transition are linked with past images of a healthy Kaori and current images of an incapacitated Kaori, respectively (see Figure 5).

In fact, there are so many correlations between the music and animation that it is difficult to contemplate a piece that could maintain these musical–visual relationships without significant alterations to the animation. First, the anime could not replace the ballade with an original work because the narrative requires common-practice piano literature to fit the overall scene: a piano competition.[20] Second, an alternative would also require the unusual placement of the secondary theme in apotheosis at the beginning of the recapitulation to prolong the delusion of a victorious transgression. That is, the overall pool of viable works is greatly reduced because a prototypical tragic work features the minor-mode primary theme at the beginning of the recapitulation. Finally, any replacement would need to feature a similar sequence of topics to match the scene (e.g., the use of the berceuse to book-end the dreamlike state).

Therefore, we suggest YOUR LIE IN APRIL is an unusual example of a multimedia work where the animation and pacing of the narrative appears to be based on the music. The result is a dramatic unfolding of this series' tragic twist that aligns the structure of the music with the onscreen action. This elevates the music into the driver's seat, and lets it function as a narrative vehicle to drive the pace of the final episode, and ultimately convey the emotions being felt by the characters.

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[20] Prior to Kousei's performance, Scriabin's Op. 8, No. 12 is played by another contestant.

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Rattling Bones in the *Danse macabre* from Saint-Saëns to Tim Burton

Tabea Umbreit

During the late Middle Ages, the dance of death, also known as »danse macabre« in French or »Totentanz« in German referred to a special motif in literature and painting where one or more death figures fetch the dying, often shown sorted by class. From then on, the concept and its representation expanded, for example into a broader allegory of dying in general (Ehrmann-Herfort 2016, 682). Musical instruments or explicit dancing are mostly, but not always, present in the early depictions of the motif. The first piece of music known to us that takes up the theme is *Mattasin oder Toden Tantz* from August Nörmiger's *Tabulaturbuch auff dem Instrumente* (1598) (Boyd 2001).

Figure 1: A doctor is guided by death. Detail from a watercolor copy of the *Basler Totentanz* (1806) by Johann R. Feyerabend (public domain)

Looking at the wealth of works from different periods, as they are available to us today, the phenomenon can be divided into at least three types: in one sense, the Dance of Death describes a more intimate partner dance of a personified death with the dying. Representative of this is the *Basler Totentanz*, the famous painting from the late Middle Ages, that shows a vast array of persons who either dance with a skeleton or are being fetched by a dancing skeleton (see Figure 1). In terms of musical examples, we might think of Franz Schubert's »Der Tod und das Mädchen« (1817). However, a broader concept of the Dance of Death also includes dying people who dance without a personified Death being present. We could interpret the protagonist's famous dance of the seven veils in Richard Strauss' *Salome* (1905) as her own death dance. Then there is the more public Dance of Death, a mass event that does not have to feature someone dying: cheerful undead and skeletons dancing, disregarding the physical laws of being and time. These morbid scenes are intermingled with a *memento mori* and a reminder not to take even death too seriously.

Still present today is the centuries-old idea of the Grim Reaper, who appears as the personification of death. In German-speaking countries, death has a masculine connotation, whereas in Slavic languages it is feminine (see Figure 2). This also occurs in the French tradition where death is called »la morte«.

This might be of interest because being taken away by death was often portrayed as an act of seduction. The motif of death and the maiden is certainly so successful because of the morbid eroticism attached to it. On the other hand, the visual depiction of death mostly appears completely unisex, as a mere skeleton. The temptation to join is less introduced through sexual enticement than through dance and music. The instruments used during the Dance of Death are classically the flute and the violin or fiddle, sometimes bagpipes or the hurdy-gurdy.

This paper, however, concentrates on the musical representations of the danse macabre, in which the bodies of the dancers themselves seem to sound. A brief historical outline will show how the typical instrumentation of dancing skeletons was established in classical music and how film music took this up to form its own topos, which is still varied today.

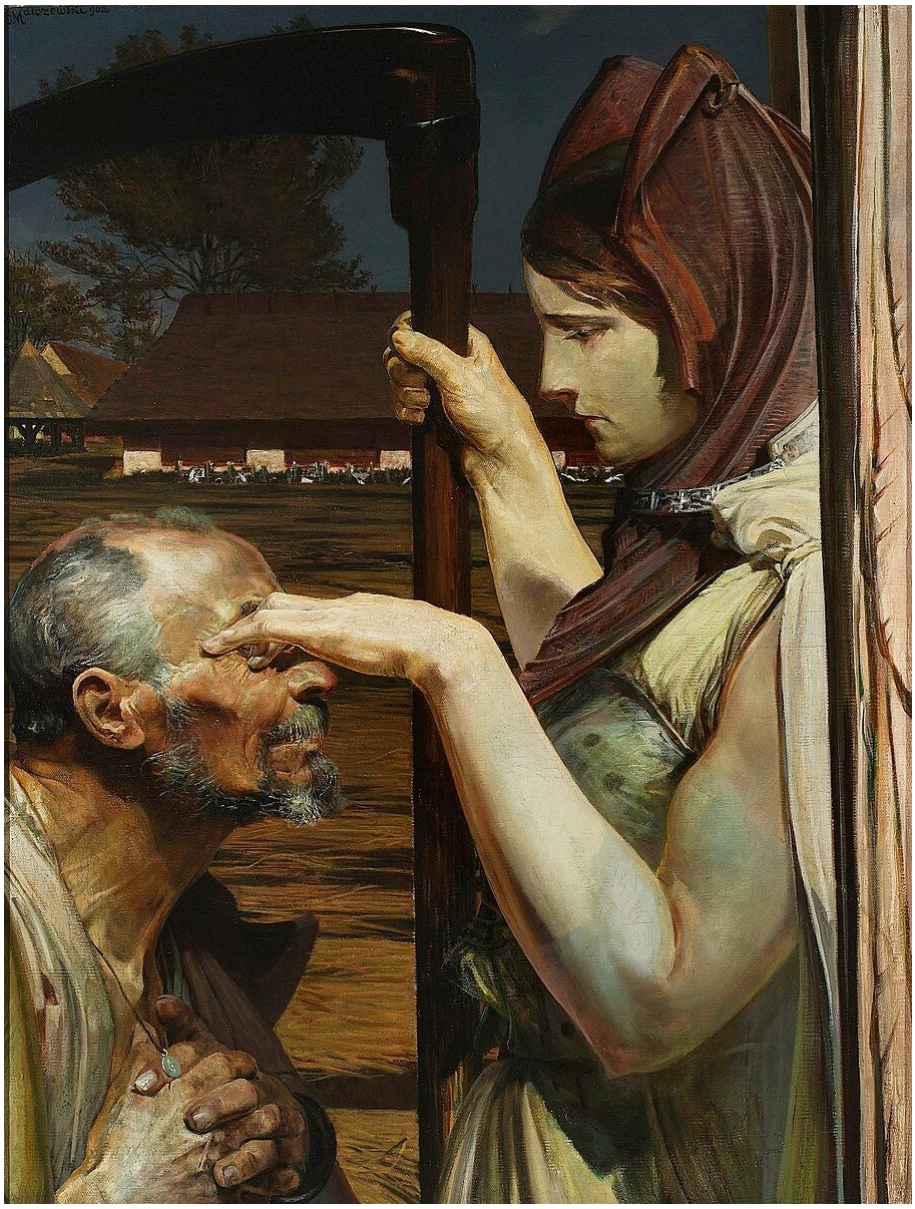

Figure 2: The painting *Śmierć* [death] (1902) by the Polish painter Jacek Malczewski (public domain)

Dancing skeletons and their sounds from the 19th century

In the nineteenth century, the subject experienced a particular revival. The old dances of death from the visual arts often served as sources of inspiration, as in the case of Franz Liszt's *Totentanz* for piano and orchestra (1849): beside the *Dies irae* and a theme from Mozart's Requiem, which he adapts musically, the triptych *Il trionfo della Morte* (ca. 1336–41) by Buonamico Buffalmacco and Hans Holbein's famous *Totentanz* (ca. 1523–

26) woodcuts served as a model here (Diagon-Jacquin 2009, 384–445). On the other hand, folklore and its literary continuation exerted a great influence, as on the two central dances of deaths in ballet form: the dance of the undead nuns in *Robert le Diable* (1831) by Giacomo Meyerbeer and the dance of the »vile« in Adolphe Adam's ballet *Giselle* (1841), where a dance with the undead kills the man who is responsible for Giselle's death.

Other central works deal not only with the undead, but explicitly with skeletons. Goethe's ballad *Der Totentanz* from 1813, which tells of a nocturnal cemetery scene where resurrected skeletons dance, was one of the works that triggered a new popularity of the motif and that describes the sound of rattling of bones during the dance in a thoroughly humorous manner. Among others, it was set to music by Carl F. Zelter and Carl Loewe (Boyd 2001; Ehrmann-Herfort 2015, 689).

In Camille Saint-Saëns' famous »poème symphonique« *Danse macabre*, op. 40 from 1874, both the personified Death, who plays the violin, and skeletons, who merely dance, appear. The term »poème symphonique« was previously established by Liszt and can literally be translated as »symphonic poem« here, as Saint-Saëns depicts the content of a poem by Henri Cazalis through the medium of instrumental music. This is program music par excellence, as the textual content can be retraced in detail in the mimetic music. This realization might have been an obvious idea, as the events in the poem are already very musical:

Henri Cazalis *Égalité-Fraternité*	
French	English
Zig et zig et zag, la Mort en cadence Frappant une tombe avec son talon, La Mort, à minuit, joue un air de danse, Zig et zig et zag, sur son violon.	Zig and zig and zag, death in cadence Striking a grave with his heel, Death at midnight plays a dance tune, Zig and zig and zag, on his violin.
Le vent d'hiver souffle, et la nuit est sombre ; Des gémissements sortent des tilleuls ; Les squelettes blancs vont à travers l'ombre Courant et sautant sous leurs grands linceuls,	The winter wind blows, and the night is dark, Moans come from the lime trees; White skeletons run through the shadows Running and leaping under their great shrouds,
Zig et zig et zig, chacun se trémousse, On entend claquer les os des danseurs […]	Zig and zig and zig, everyone shakes, The bones of the dancers can be heard rattling […]

Table 1: The beginning of Henri Cazalis' *Égalité-Fraternité* cited after Stegemann 2019, XVI. Translated by the author.

Saint-Saëns had previously set the poem to music as a song for piano and voice. His reworking as a »Poème symphonique« for orchestra now reveals almost all the instrumentation strategies that have characterized the Dance of Death in general to this day. Only the death knells are missing. In their stead, the harp must strike twelve times in the beginning to signal midnight, the witching hour. The solo violin is the only »diegetic« instrument that is itself part of the narrative in terms of sound and does not merely imitate noises, such as the oboe, which mimes the morning cock's crow at the end. The violin plays in scordatura; the E string is to be tuned down, so that the tritoni of the opening cadenza can be played on open strings. I would argue that the deceptive character of the Dance of Death is set to music here: Death itself is an ugly evil, represented by the tritoni, who can nevertheless have an attractive effect on people through his supernatural power, represented by the smooth theme the violin plays afterwards. Gustav Mahler also used a scordatura effect in his Fourth Symphony (1904) to orchestrate death in the scherzo (second movement). Here, the violin is tuned a note higher so that it sounds »screaming and raw ›as if death is playing‹« (Killian 1984, 179).

The depiction of the undead as skeletons has a clear effect in the visual language, as they are immediately and unambiguously recognizable as actually dead. In addition, the supernatural impression is heightened when the figures move without any musculature or facial expressions. In addition, skeletons also lend themselves to acoustic representation, as they can make sounds themselves, even without the aid of instruments.

Some of the very oldest instruments known to us, such as the bone flute or the quijada, are made from bones and it is probably not too bold to assume that the rhythmic striking of bare bones reaches even further back. However, the rattling of skeletons is, of course, only imitated in nineteenth century orchestral music. The percussive *col legno* technique was used to this effect in string instruments. This means that the strings are not bowed with the hairs of the bow but with its wood, which in combination with staccato or spiccato produces a rattling sound effect. Apart from Saint-Saëns' *Danse macabre*, quite a few examples of this can be found throughout music history: for example, in Siegfried Wagner's *Sternengebot* (1908), to name a lesser-known one, where it illustrates a nightmare in which an undead wedding party dances in a cemetery (Act III, Scene 4).

More striking and widespread is the imitation of rattling bones through percussion instruments, above all the xylophone. The sound is produced in the same way as when bones actually hit each other: both are directly struck idiophones. The xylophone brings with it the additional benefit of tuned pitches and thus offers far-reaching possibilities for integrating the sound into the composition. In the case of Saint-Saëns' *Danse macabre*, the intention was already unmistakable at the première; a few days later, the *Revue et Gazette Musical de Paris* reported on it (quoted after Stegemann 2019, XL): »Soon the orchestra rings to the fantastic timbre of a xylophone, doubtless to depict the clattering bones of a skeleton.«

Saint-Saëns may not have been the one who invented this typical instrumentation,[1] which was to some degree already inherent in the literary models, but his *Danse macabre* set the tone for subsequent Dances of Death in musical theater, popular music, and especially film music.[2]

Rattling bones in early film

During the nineteenth century, the Dance of Death motif became a macabre bourgeois amusement. Terracotta figurines based on images of the *Basler Totentanz* were sold, Johann Rudolf Schellenberg published caricatures such as the *English Dance of Death* (1814) and in Bavaria Franz Graf von Pocci introduced the skeleton figure to children's theatre. The Schichtl family of showmen made skeletons dance with the help of magic lanterns and marionettes from the 1870s to the 1950s. Already in the 1820s, the Belgian magician Étienne-Gaspard Robertson created sensations of this kind, using magic lanterns and invisible curtains to stage particularly impressive uncanny scenes in which skeletons appeared to move (Wunderlich 2001, 104–111). Around 1900, dancing skeletons were popular features in magic shows (Solomon 2022, 110). In a clearly fascinating

1 Michael Stegemann surmises that Saint-Saëns got the idea from his reading of Georges Kastner's *Les danses des morts* (1852) (Stegemann 2019, L). However, Kastner only describes the xylophone-like *claquebois* once in his extensive monograph because it appears in a Holbein woodcut. In his own composition in the appendix, however, he does not use an instrument of this kind.

2 Aside from *Sternengebot*, other examples are the appearance of Kaschtschej's skeleton in Nicolai A. Rimski-Korsakow's *Mlada* (1889/90), the look inside the torture chamber in Béla Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* (1918) and Olga Neuwirths *Bählamms Fest* (1999), in which the ghost of a rat rattles through a children's room. In popular music, xylophones or marimbas abound in Halloween classics like *Spooky, Scary Skeletons* by Andrew Gold.

manner, they appear to make the impossible possible: experience and history teach us that death is inevitable, a certainty that is expressed in proverbs like *Mors certa, hora incerta*.[3] Two universal fantasies seem to be at play here: immortality and resurrection. Therefore, it is no surprise that even a very early film such as LE SQUELETTE JOYEUX (France 1898) by the Lumière brothers, shows a dancing skeleton (a marionette). During its dance, some bones fall off temporarily – sometimes accidentally, sometimes to dance on their own. Unfortunately, it is unknown what music accompanied this silent film in 1898. Uploads that can be found on YouTube today are mostly underlaid with a simple, uplifting xylophone track, presumably copyright-free. In LE PALAIS DES MILLE ET UNE NUITS (France 1905) by Georges Méliès, Arabian knights encounter and fight dancing skeletons in a cave. Another twist on the theme shows up in George Albert Smith's trick film THE X-RAYS (United Kingdom 1897): a flirting couple sits on a bench, when a large camera, labelled »X Rays« is directed at them. Now they are visible as skeletons that seem to be dancing around with only their legs.

Animated movies made full use of the possibilities for instrumentation that dancing skeletons afforded. From 1929 to 1939, Walt Disney produced the SILLY SYMPHONIES, a series of animated short films that feature original musical scores as well as pre-existing music and tell self-contained stories, in which he experiments with the combination of music and storytelling. The imaginatively crafted cartoon sketches make full use of the scoring technique known as ›Mickey Mousing‹, in which the visual action has its exact counterpart in the music. The special feature is that music itself is the central theme of these cartoons. This new kind of musical novelty short was suggested by the composer Carl Stalling, who also wrote the score for the first one: THE SKELETON DANCE (United States 1929, Walt Disney) (Davis 2007, 80; Merritt and Kaufman 2016, 55). The scenery, instrumentation, and idea are very similar to Saint-Saëns' work. However, there is no personified death: a group of similar, anonymous skeletons dance in the cemetery at midnight until the rooster crows in the morning. In contrast to the previous examples, however, this dance does not merely imitate the sound of bones; instead, the skeletons create music through and on

[3] Latin proverb that translates to »Death is certain, the hour is not.« More famous to this day is the version by Benjamin Franklin: »in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.«

themselves, by deliberately using their bones as percussion instruments. At the center of Stalling's score is an arrangement of Edvard Grieg's *Trolltog* (*March of the Dwarfs*) from his *Lyric Pieces* Book V, op. 54 no. 3. In 1904, Grieg orchestrated these piano pieces for his *Lyric Suite* op. 54, using the arrangement by Anton Seidl as a basis, at least in the case of the dwarfs' march (Fog et al. 2008, 249). Here, the glissandi-rich melody is mainly played by flutes and strings. As dwarfs turn into skeletons in Disney's project, Stalling lets the xylophone take over. The many glissandi perfectly lend themselves to be played on the skeletons' rib cages.

The idea of using body parts as (percussion) instruments was already used in the previously released STEAMBOAT WILLIE (United States 1928, Ub Iwerks, Walt Disney), where Mickey Mouse plays a xylophone solo on a cow's teeth (see also Kaul 2015, 34). It recurs in different Disney films over time, most prominently in the song »Under the Sea« from THE LITTLE MERMAID (United States 1989, John Musker, Ron Clements).

An interview with Stalling suggests that originally, Walt Disney had planned to use Saint-Saëns' *Danse macabre*:

> [Mike Barrier:] I've read that Walt wanted to use that music [*Danse macabre*], but couldn't get copyright clearance, so he asked you to compose something similar.
>
> [Carl Stalling:] That's what he usually did when something was copyrighted, but my music wasn't similar at all to the *Danse Macabre*.
>
> (Goldmark and Taylor 2002, 39)

Despite Stalling's claim, the whole film and the instrumentation continues the *Danse macabre* tradition quite clearly, even if the composer did so unconsciously (cf. Kaul 2015, 37).[4]

The idea to use xylophones for a jolly dance of skeletons was also used in the Mickey Mouse Film THE HAUNTED HOUSE (United States 1929, Walt Disney), animated by Max Fleischer. From this time onward, the dancing skeletons and their xylophone sound were a popular theme in the animation industry that also inspired live-action films, such as PENNIES FROM HEAVEN (United States 1936, Norman Z. McLeod), where Louis Arm-

[4] Stalling also denies the obvious use of Grieg's music in the same interview (Goldmark and Taylor 2002, 40).

strong performs the song »Skeleton in the Closet«. After a gloomily spoken intro, accompanied by effects that resemble/evoke death knells, a light-hearted swinging Fox Trot enters the soundtrack with lyrics describing a supernatural midnight party: »The spooks were having their midnight fling, the merry making was in full swing, they shrieked themselves into a cheerful trance, when skeleton in the closet started to dance. […] you never heard such an unearthly laughter, such hilarious groans, when skeleton in the closet rattled his bones.« The sung part is followed by a trumpet solo, which is interrupted by a dancing skeleton entering the stage. It dances to a drum solo, which the drummer finishes by standing up and playing xylophone glissandi on the skeleton's ribs.

The trope also appears in Fritz Lang's monumental silent film classic METROPOLIS (Germany 1927), for which Gottfried Huppertz composed a comprehensive orchestral score that was only rediscovered in 1979 (Finocchiaro 2020, 186). Like in the example from Siegfried Wagner's *Sternengebot*, a fever dream of the protagonist Freder is utilized here to break with the laws of the narrated world and introduce supernatural elements: at a reception organized by the inventor Rotwang, his mechanical human (»Maschinenmensch«), who has the appearance of Freder's lover Maria, dances in front of the assembled men in a lascivious yet robotic manner. She corresponds entirely to the faded-in image of the Babylon the Great, the »mother of all abominations on earth«, about whom a monk had warned earlier in the film. In the second part of the dream, a group of figures from the cathedral can be seen: the personified seven deadly sins and a skeletonized grim reaper. With the musical entry of the xylophone, they begin to rise from their pedestals and the skeleton lifts a bone to its mouth to play a flute solo on it. Freder realizes: »Death is over the city - - -!« and wakes up. The sequence masterfully combines the traditional dance of death motif with all the social corruption that manifests itself in the new invention. Meanwhile Gottfried Huppertz' music appropriately brings together the old and new Dance of Death by quoting the archaic sounding *Dies irae* and utilizing the comparatively new tradition of the percussion instrument, which was associated with Saint-Saëns before in the literature (Hoklas 2015, 130).

A counterexample to the instrumentation trend in early films would be HITTIN' THE TRAIL TO HALLELUJAH LAND (United States 1931, Rudolf Ising), which includes a scene that is

visually heavily inspired by THE SKELETON DANCE (Merritt 2016, 56) but does not take up the musical trope. Instead, the three skeletons form a »regular« singing ensemble.[5]

Tim Burton's CORPSE BRIDE – »Remains of the Day«

Tim Burton's widely known stop-motion animated film CORPSE BRIDE, released in 2005, clearly follows in Disney's tradition in this aspect. It is an artistic adaptation of an Eastern European folktale, which in turn is based on an even older Jewish legend (Leonard 2011, 29, Pfefferman 2005). The legend typically tells the story of a fiancé putting his wedding ring on a twig, which turns out to be the finger of a woman's corpse who had died as a bride. She then wakes up and insists on him marrying her. Interestingly, tales like this, about brides challenging death in some form, have existed since the Middle Ages, evolving into countless variations over time (Lindbeck 2014).

The music for CORPSE BRIDE was composed by Danny Elfman and plays an explicit role in the film in that – reminiscent of musicals and revues – the characters themselves regularly make music, sing, and dance. It therefore is portrayed as particularly diegetic: the characters not only hear the music, but also create it themselves.

At the center of the movie is the track »Remains of the Day«: the protagonist Victor, who accidentally married the deceased bride Emily, is abducted by her into a bar beneath the earth, which turns out to be a kind of underworld, populated by the very cheerful dead.[6] Here, a one-eyed skeleton man and his combo musically recount the story of the corpse bride, who was killed by her fiancé to claim her inheritance. There is nothing sinister about the scene or the music, on the contrary: the whole film is brought to life by the effect that the realm of the dead is more colorful and livelier than that of the living, which is portrayed as a grey and stiff caricature of the Victorian era.

While the music above is mostly period-appropriate, the music below takes us into the world of twentieth-century jazz and cabaret (Leonard 2011, 31–35). Burton envisioned a

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5 HITTIN' THE TRAIL TO HALLELUJAH LAND was banned for its racist content in 1968 as one of the infamous »Censored Eleven« films (Jahn 2017, 88). The cemetery scene thrives on the stereotypical image of the particularly superstitious African American.

6 The track was also released on the album *Tim Burton's Corpse Bride Original Motion Picture Soundtrack* (Warner Records Inc. 2005).

Sammy Davis Jr.-style for the song, but Elfman described the final result as »in fact like a 1930s Cab Calloway song« (Salisbury 2008, 259). The skeletons sing and dance on a small stage, accompanied by a skeleton with black sunglasses at a coffin-shaped piano, bending passionately over the keys (see Figure 3).[7] The clear reference to Ray Charles, who died the year before, also vaguely characterizes the number musically, including the primacy of the rhythmic blues piano and the presence of the choir that takes over the chorus. Alien to the role models from the blues and jazz world is the xylophone sound, which gives »Remains of the Day« its individual touch.[8]

Figure 3: Human and animal bones making music together: Ray Charles skeleton at the coffin-shaped piano, lead singer Bonejangles in the background.

Besides the piano, only one sound source is audible/visible at first: the skeletons use their own bones as percussive instruments with pitches. The singer begins the show with the exclamation »Hit it, boys!« and then hits the skull plates of his dancers with his own bony

7 Screen capture taken from Ray, *Tim Burton's Corpse Bride main song – Remains of the Day*, YouTube (02.11.2011), https://youtu.be/j4p9WKnDQzQ?si=jQQd2xnbdidMXOs2, 0:30.

8 While the vibraphone was quite popular in jazz, the sharper sound of the xylophone was generally avoided. An exception is the musician Red Norvo, who also used it alongside the vibraphone and marimba, e.g. in the *Blues in E flat* from 1935.

fists to introduce the number musically. At this point in history, it comes as no surprise to the viewer that the skeletons produce xylophone sounds. The glissando over the ribs of the last dancer, which ends the musical intro and leads directly into the first piano glissando, is particularly clever. As the story is set in the nineteenth century, the idea of ivory keys is particularly obvious: the glissando is merely a transition from human to animal bones used to make music.

After this opening, the musical use of bones is initially no longer visible, but the instrumentation remains the same and the memorable opening means that the percussive sound is now associated with the bones for the viewer. Moreover, the scene includes additional sounds that blend in with the music. These include the soft rattling of the dancing skeleton bones and the particularly harsh snapping of fleshless fingers. These elements blend into the overall picture as mere noise, i.e. without a recognizable pitch: half music, half ›realistic‹ soundscape. It is precisely this soundscape that contributes greatly to the ›liveliness‹ of the realm of the dead, making it believable and individual, e.g. when slightly unpolished singing voices emerge as soon as the corresponding figure moves into the center of the picture.

The singer – credited as Bonejangles – is voiced by Elfman himself. He tells the crowd both on and in front of the screen the story of Emily, the corpse bride. This storytelling song style is indeed reminiscent of a lot of 1930s numbers, like Cab Calloway's »Minnie the Moocher«. We could also think of gospel and talking blues genres, where songs often start with an announcement of the own performance and a call to the audience to gather and listen (see Table 2).[9]

The connection to Calloway is not only a musical one: the whole scene seems to be inspired by the three Betty Boop cartoons that featured Calloway's collaboration with the Fleischer Studios in New York, especially MINNIE THE MOOCHER (United States 1932,

[9] This tradition may have its roots in original performance situations where preachers, storytellers, or street musicians had to gather their audiences in public spaces. In Europe, we might think of ›Bänkelsang‹: latest news and sensational sorties were presented at town squares often in the form of songs from the Middle Ages up to the nineteenth century. In a broader sense, these narrative situations can of course occur anywhere. In Wagner's *Flying Dutchman* (1841), Senta makes herself heard in order to recite her ballad; in the prologue to Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia* (1833), Orsini announces his story about Lucrezia. A more recent example from pop music would be »Blue (Da Ba Dee)« by Eiffel 65 or, even more fitting, »Dance of Death« by Iron Maiden.

Danny Elfman: »Remains of the Day«	Cab Calloway: »Minnie the Moocher«	The Jubalaires: »The Preacher and the Bear«
Hey, give me a listen You corpses of cheer At least those of you Who still got an ear I'll tell you a story Make a skeleton cry Of our own jubiliciously lovely Corpse Bride.	Folks, here's a story 'bout Minnie the Moocher She was a red hot hoochie-coocher She was the roughest toughest frail But Minnie had a heart as big as a whale.	Yes, just come on brothers if you want to hear, the story about that preacher and the bear, gather round boys I don't want you to miss, none of this story, 'caus it goes like this:

Table 2: Comparison of the »Remains of the Day«-intro with (potential) older role models.

Dave Fleischer). While some argued the Fleischers must have overlooked the drug references in the songs, the psychedelic cave scenes with dancing skeletons might suggest otherwise (Wennekes 2016, 292). MINNIE THE MOOCHER includes a scene in which three dancing skeletons drink beer in front of a bar while singing a part of the silly choir response of Calloway's song: »Hi-de hi-de hi-de hi-de«. This is plausibly the origin of the bar scene in CORPSE BRIDE.[10] The cartoon SNOW-WHITE (United States 1933, Dave Fleischer) also shows a surreal bar scene, drawn on the cave wall, as well as the framed picture of a skeletal gentleman with hat and moustache, who also appears in CORPSE BRIDE.[11] In an interview, Elfman said about writing »Remains of the Day«: »And it was just so much fun, because […] I knew there was going to be a big instrumental break and I had this idea for like skeletons and Max Fleischer cartoons from the 30s and I said I never had a chance to write for skeletons playing xylophone solos on each other's ribs, you know, they haven't done this in so long.«[12]

The reason why dancing skeletons are obviously associated with black (jazz) music, at least in American contexts, can be found in New Orleans. Vaguely comparable with the Mexican Day of the Dead traditions, members of the black communities dress up as skeletons, called »skeleton gangs« or »bone men«, for carnival (Mardi Gras) and jazz funerals. The tradition can be traced back to the beginning of the nineteenth century and is rooted in

10 The cartoon MINNIE THE MOOCHER does not only include the song by the same name, but seven different ones, thus offering rich references to music history itself (see Wennekes 2016, 293).

11 However, CORPSE BRIDE fans also saw the figure described as Clark Gable (with good reasons), who is widely known for his role in GONE WITH THE WIND (United States 1939, Victor Fleming). Whether the portrait in SNOW-WHITE refers to Gable or if it shows his uncanny doppelgänger remains unclear.

12 Danny_Elf_Fan Edits, *Danny Elfman Corpse Bride Interview*, YouTube (13.08.2020), www.youtube.com/watch?v=UjkmGo34coU (3:39–4:02).

the Haitian Vodou that is centered around ancestor worship (Turner 2009, 120; Abrahams et al. 2006, 76). Until today at Mardi Gras the Northside Skull and Bone Gang haunts the city, that was and is a musical center, especially for jazz.[13]

The instrumental break Elfman referred to in the cited interview differs significantly from the rest of the scene: compared to the previous one, it is far more artificial and is reminiscent of an experimental music video. A zoom into the empty eye socket of the singer turns everything black. The skeletons perform solo in front of the now-black screen and here the idea of making music with one's own bones is fully explored, this time introduced by the suggestive exclamation: «Come on boys, pick it up!«. Now the skeletons take themselves and each other apart to expand their instruments. The xylophone and marimba can be heard as the musical base. The individual instruments play short solos over this, and the filmmakers' visual creativity reaches its climax: the skeletons use each other as a stringed double bass, xylophone, one upper half of the skeleton plays the guitar on its own lower half and so on (see Figure 4).[14]

Acoustically similar intermezzi are familiar from live music performances: the drums play alone and, while the musicians are introduced by name, each one improvises a short phrase on their instrument. In the movie, the impression of such an improvisation is created by short, abruptly interjected phrases. The musical freedom creates an even greater contrast to the formal world of the living (Leonard 2011, 36). The fact that the instrument building itself is also improvised further enhances this effect. In contrast to the introduction of live musicians, the individuality of the skeletons is lost. Apart from the singer and pianist, who are recognizable by their sunglasses, eyes and hats, all of them look the same. They even swap their skulls to show how interchangeable they are. The other dead bar visitors are much more individualized due to their clothing and sometimes even more complete bodies, thus offering plenty of room for cultural-historical associations. The corpu-

13 A look at recent online posts confirms this, for example: www.mardigrasneworleans.com/news/skeletons-aren-t-just-for-halloween (27.09.2024), www.neworleans.com/events/holidays-seasonal/mardi-gras/history-and-traditions/the-north-side-skull-bone-gang/ (27.09.2024).

14 Screen capture taken from Ray, *Tim Burton's Corpse Bride main song – Remains of the Day*, YouTube (02.11.2011), https://youtu.be/j4p9WKnDQzQ?si=jQQd2xnbdidMXOs2, 01:59.

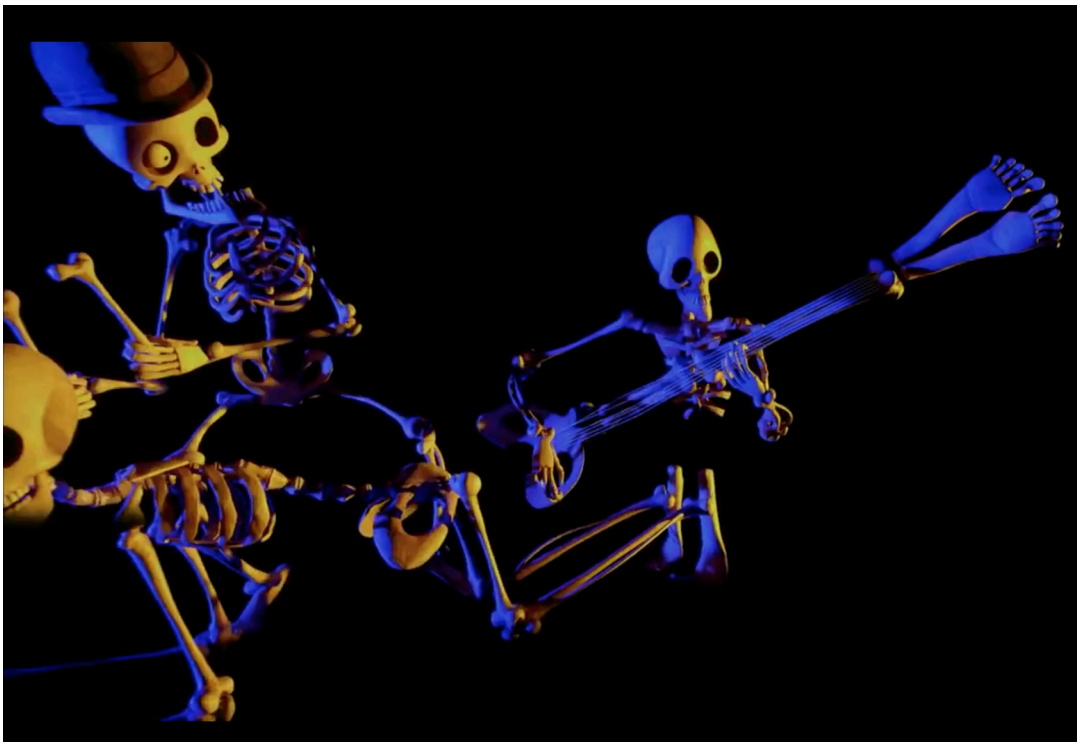

Figure 4: Bonejangles playing the skeleton-xylophone in classic Disneyesque tradition, the guitar being an extended adaption of the same idea.

Figure 5: A reference to Salome and Jochanaan. The head turns out to be the underworlds chef in CORPSE BRIDE.

lent cook carrying a male head on her tray, for example, is bizarrely reminiscent of Salome and the head of Jochanaan (see Figure 5).[15]

The general concept of portraying the dead as more cheerful than the living is reminiscent of Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld*, an operetta that has regularly staged debauched, song-filled underworld festivals since 1858. All in all, a swinging *Danse macabre* has been created here in sound and vision, which resurrects a vast array of musical and cultural-historical legends far beyond those of the twentieth century.

To quote Hofmannsthal: »As soon as we open our mouths, ten thousand dead people always have their say« (»Wenn wir den Mund aufmachen, reden immer zehntausend Todte mit«) (Hofmannsthal 2015, 159). It refers to language as an inescapable cultural repository but also to the impossibility of avoiding the presence of our cultural past in general. In the case of »Remains of the Day«, Saint-Saëns, Walt Disney, Carl Stalling, Max Fleischer, Cab Calloway, and Ray Charles have their say.

Through the interchangeability and decomposability of the skeletons as the death dance's protagonists, we come as close as possible to a seemingly timeless continuum of the dancing dead, a principle that eludes our reckoning of time in death and eternity. They once were individual humans but the show goes on and now they have become one with music. More recent films, such as COCO (United States 2017, Lee Unkrich) or Louie Zong's short but popular animated music videos on YouTube, show us that the topos lives on and is worth keeping an eye on from a musicological perspective.[16]

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15 Screen capture taken from Ray, *Tim Burton's Corpse Bride main song – Remains of the Day*, YouTube (02.11.2011), https://youtu.be/j4p9WKnDQzQ?si=jQQd2xnbdidMXOs2, 01:26.

16 Louie Zong, *ghost + guest* 👻🎶, YouTube (19.10.2020), www.youtube.com/watch?v=NEpKlsUw9XU.

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The Fate of Polystilism:

The ›Orchestral Shift‹ and the ›Redefinition of Sonic Hierarchies‹ in Recorded Video Game Music

Mattia Merlini

There are not many moments in the history of home gaming hardware that can be considered as revolutionary as the shift from on-board synthesis to playing pre-recorded music directly from the game's support.[1] This important milestone was reached in the mid-1990s, when it became possible to directly play pre-recorded music stored on the newly adopted CD-ROM support, capable of storing more than a hundred times more data than a cartridge for 16-bit home consoles. Prior to this moment, music had to be generated via on-board synthesis, mainly because of the limited space available.[2] This only allowed for basic data and instructions to be stored on the cartridges,[3] which typically had a capacity of a handful of megabytes – e.g. up to 6 megabytes in the case of Nintendo SNES[4] – to include not only music, but all the game data. This was perhaps best exemplified by the limited audio channels that early home consoles could support. A Nintendo NES/Famicom (third generation)[5] could only count on five audio channels, three of which were dedicated to the generation of simple waveforms (two pulse waves and one triangle wave), while the other two were usually employed for percussive sounds obtained via white noise

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2 For a general overview of the technological evolution in the field of video games music, see Collins 2008, 7–84; Fritsch 2013; Summers 2017, 134–146.

3 For a more detailed account of how 8–16-bit consoles worked and what their musical affordances were, see Braguinski 2018; Ciesla 2022, 197–210; Newman 2021.

4 While SNES cartridges were theoretically capable of containing 128 megabit (= 16 megabytes, because 1 byte = 8 bits) of data, the games that are normally considered the largest ever released for that console (TALES OF PHANTASIA and STAR OCEAN) were about 48 megabits (= 6 megabytes) large.

5 The concept of ›generation‹ is commonly used in video game discourse to group together consoles that share similar technical features – especially in terms of computational power (see Dreunen 2020, 31; Summers 2017, 140). The most relevant generations for the scope of this article are the fourth (starting in 1987) and fifth (starting in 1993) generations, with occasional incursions into adjacent ones.

and microscopic samples. Fourth generation consoles would employ much more sophisticated synthesis methods: the Sega Mega Drive (Genesis in the US), for instance, used FM synthesis, while the Nintendo SNES relied on wavetable synthesis, thus introducing a rudimentary (but serviceable) form of sampling into the world of gaming audio.

Thanks to the revolutionary capabilities that CD-quality audio afforded by most fifth generation consoles, recorded instruments could now have a significant presence in video games. That said, it would be misleading to say that on-board synthesis was instantly abandoned. On the contrary: there were still considerable limitations that forced composers to continue incorporating older technologies on which a lot of games still relied. Despite the huge increase in available space (700 MB), video games of that era had become more and more demanding in terms of required space, so this was still an issue. An even greater challenge was the bottleneck that occurred when consoles had to load both audio and video data from the CD simultaneously, resulting in potentially very long loading times, overusing the CPU, and saturating the RAM (Collins 2008, 81–84). The recollections of Hiroshi Tamawari, a Japanese composer who was active at that time, offer us a valuable insight into these considerable challenges, which suggests a historical narrative where the revolutionary impact of this pivotal moment in the history of video game music is reassessed:

> The music for the first SUIKODEN allowed streaming and direct playback of the waveform data that was recorded on the CD-ROM. […] While much of the game's music was streamed, the music for the world map had to be played back through the internal sound fonts, as they required having the map data read from the CD-ROM's contents. I think this game was the very first one in which Konami used the PlayStation's internal sound fonts for music creation, not to mention one of the first in general ([t]he game was released in 1995 in Japan). […] In contrast to SUIKODEN, the entirety of the music for the VANDAL HEARTS games used the sound fonts of the original PlayStation. The main director demanded that we didn't access the CD-ROM at all because the game would need to constantly read other data like the image files. (Hiroshi Tamawari, quoted in Collins & Greening 2016, ch. 84)

So, composers could choose between the two methods, and (as opposed to what has sometimes been implied, see Summers 2017, 145) it is hard to argue that opting for pre-recorded music ruled out the use of on-board synthesis entirely. One further account – this time by Nathan McCree, composer of the soundtracks for the early titles in the TOMB

RAIDER franchise – is useful for understanding how limited the use of recorded music was, thus forcing the composers to make difficult decisions:

> That was a really big leap for us. You know, all of a sudden we were competing with pop artists and producers and orchestral scores and live orchestras […] but of course we didn't have a full orchestra. Games were still considered the poor cousins of movies. And so, OK, I could abandon [Mega Drive's] Yamaha chip and instead I brought in three, I think it was, keyboards, proper synth machines, so my sounds were suddenly a lot, lot better, but I still wasn't using any samples. We still really weren't in that technology, yet, that really hadn't come about. I mean, there were sample-based things. Even the Amiga was playing samples, but again the limitations were so tight, it wasn't really a good solution, so I found that using synthesized orchestral sounds actually was pretty good, and again, with a little bit of care and attention I could get things sounding as close to an orchestra, certainly close enough to fool people. (Nathan McCree, quoted in Collins & Greening 2016, ch. 50)

From a ludomusicological perspective, then, it becomes interesting to delve deeper into how this shift in technological affordances affected the composers' musical choices. In this article, I highlight stylistic changes in the music of a selection of examples, also including games that have been remastered or remade. In particular, I focus on the shifts in the trait of stylistic eclecticism, by which I mean the polystylistic coexistence of musical features, and especially timbres, arising from different music genres. As I have argued elsewhere (2023), one of the factors that could be deemed responsible for promoting such eclectic choices is heavily technology-bound. In line with music production studies emphasizing the role of technological affordances and material constraints in the creation of music (e.g. Zagorski-Thomas 2014; Strachan 2017), I have interpreted eclecticism as a multi-faceted phenomenon which is also rooted in the use of now-obsolete technologies that allowed composers to easily mix disparate musical elements into a common synthetic texture, in which all timbres sounded equally emulated and ›fake‹ (Merlini 2023). Thus, they could be perceived as more sonically consistent than they would have been in a pre-recorded rendition of the same music.

In this article, I explore this assumption showing that, while this specific hypothesis remains difficult to prove, there are at least three ways in which eclecticism has gradually been pushed to the margins of the dominant ludomusical styles, namely the ›orchestral shift‹ enabled by the advancements in fulfilling the ›cinematic promise‹ of video game music (Mc Glynn 2023); the subsequent rise of ›symphonic hypertrophy‹; and the ›sound-

scape densification‹ caused by new technological affordances, which led to a shift in the role of music in games that relied on streamed audio. The following three subsections address each of these aspects in turn. While the first dynamic follows a specific trend, the latter two relate to a more general redefinition of the ›sonic hierarchies‹ that does not eradicate eclectic elements but does relevantly change their centrality and audibility within tracks and in the general soundscape. The structure of this article is inherited from this same tripartition, and in each section I explore the corresponding factor mainly by providing a selection of representative and compelling case studies from the age of transition to pre-recorded music or later, which reveal the presence of these patterns and trends. Of course, I cannot provide a comprehensive overview of ludomusical production during the transition from sequenced to recorded music,[6] nor is it my aim to prove that my observations are universally applicable. Instead, I aim to highlight the impact of certain game-changing processes (rooted in the transition to recorded audio) that may have discouraged stylistic eclecticism and the way players are allowed to perceive it, without necessarily embracing an apocalyptic narrative where the persistence of stylistic eclecticism in contemporary video game music is downplayed.

The Orchestral Shift: Towards the Fulfilment of the Cinematic Promise

The first – and most obvious – aspect to highlight is that, while an actual symphonic sound was unachievable by older technologies, relying on recorded music enabled composers to finally be aligned to contemporary film music practices. Not coincidentally, in the latter category falls Michael Giacchino, credited for what is usually praised as the first entirely orchestral video game soundtrack (Fritsch 2013, 27) – THE LOST WORLD (1997), soon followed by HEART OF DARKNESS (1998), with a soundtrack composed by Bruce Broughton. The new musical possibilities marked a major step forward in the fulfilment of what James Mc Glynn has called the ›cinematic promise‹ of video game music, that is »the latent aspiration to evoke the sights and sonorities of contemporary Hollywood film that persists throughout the development and marketing of so many video games« (Mc Glynn

[6] While a comprehensive history of ludomusical production has yet to be written, a general account of the transition and of the 32–64-bit era can be found in: Collins 2008, 68–73; Fritsch 2013, 24–28; Summers 2017, 42–45.

2023, 109). This is part of a wider process of remediation of cinema in video games (Brooker 2009; Fassone 2017), which persists to this day. New original symphonic music could then be marketed as not inferior to that of films, because it could finally rely on similar possibilities. I call this tendency the ›orchestral shift‹.[7]

The Japanese role-playing game GRANDIA (1997) serves as a good example of symphonic affordances being used for promotional purposes aimed at showing how powerful the new Sega Saturn console was – as composer Noriyuki Iwadare himself confirmed in an interview (Collins and Greening 2019, ch. 34). In the same source, Iwadare explains that having orchestral music was part of the promotional plan, made possible by a bigger budget than usual. Although many of the tracks made for the game are still synthesized by the sound chip (e.g. »Justin, Stand Up!«),[8] there are also fully pre-recorded orchestral tracks (e.g. »Delightful Adventure«).[9] By employing clever strategies to spare as much on-disk space as possible (e.g. inclusion of brief, reverberated, and repeated sampled orchestral modules or even single gestures, triggered by the sound processor, almost as they were one of those little waveforms at the core of wavetable synthesis), games like this could also feature individual orchestral parts within pieces that predominantly comprised synthesized sounds. Notably, unlike in Western counterparts, here the quest for symphonism is not as systematic, but this is likely the result of a peculiar relationship with eclecticism that can be found in a lot of Japanese video game and *anime* music, which routinely mixes elements from different styles (Merlini 2023).[10]

The emphasis on instrumental fidelity can be interpreted in relation to the techno-teleological ideal that Tim Summers has called ›chrononormative‹ (Summers 2023, 1–5, 26–29). Here, Summers draws on the queer theories of Elizabeth Freeman; Freeman speaks of

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7 At the same time, another functional way of promoting new games was also the inclusion of popular-styled music in games or even involving well-known songs and artists – in continuity with cross-promotional strategies that were already well established in the world of cinema (Smith 1998). While this approach is radically different from the symphonic one, it does not necessarily involve eclecticism, but just an overall change of the soundtrack's domestic style.

8 Noriyuki Iwadare, *Grandia Original Soundtracks*, King Record 1997 (KICA-5003), Disc 2, Track 14.

9 Noriyuki Iwadare, *Grandia Original Soundtracks*, King Record 1997 (KICA-5002), Disc 1, Track 3.

10 This can at least be interpreted through the lens of cultural peculiarities shaped by a long history of hybridization, while also exhibiting postmodern and globalized traits (see Galliano 2002; Iwabuchi 2002; McQueen Tokita, Hughes 2008; Ōtomo 2021).

›chrononormativity‹ in reference to the normative chronological logics and »the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity« (Freeman 2010, 3), i.e. those institutional configurations that synchronize individuals to a normatively imposed temporality and historicity. Calendars, time zones, wristwatches, time-bound recurrences and common ways of scheduling the everyday activities: these are all examples of modalities through which those ›hidden rhythms‹ that regulate the social conception of time are inculcated into all of us, acting as »teleological schemes of events or strategies for living« that synchronize human bodies to precise trajectories and »narratives of movement and change« (Summers 2023, 3–4). Summers borrows this concept to indicate those uses of ludomusical technology that fit the customs of the time, typically oriented by a teleological perspective in which a result is considered appropriate, valid and ›maximally productive‹ when it aims at the highest sonic fidelity. The advent of CD-quality audio was a major achievement in this process: from that moment onwards, ›good-sounding‹ video game music would have to leave behind hyper-compressed and synthesized sounds and embrace state-of-the-art technological possibilities allowing real instruments to be recorded. Although anti-chrononormative trajectories were possible as well, generally speaking, when the possibilities of pre-recorded music were unlocked, the music of previous generations would mostly be perceived as inadequate and obsolete: it would be seen as music that ›sounds bad‹ when compared to the state of the art, and thus subject to devaluation and synonymous with little care or investment in the game's music department. Of course, this may be seen as an inevitable consequence of the advent of CD-quality audio: what better way to celebrate the coming-of-age of video game music than by accelerating in the direction of a previously unattainable musical style, further ennobled by its illustrious precedents in the field of film music (i.e. symphonism)?[11]

Yet it would be unfair to state that recorded audio in video games only allowed for more canonical and cinematic musical experiences. Being able to use recorded music also meant that composers could manipulate samples from recorded music to build experimental tracks that could not exist in earlier console generations. For instance, Nobuyoshi Sano's soundtrack for DRAKENGARD (2003) features newly recorded performances of

[11] Curiously, a recent rise in interest in old-styled, synthesized video game music has also been observed (e.g. Summers 2023).

classical music, chopped down and remixed in an eclectic hip-hop fashion (e.g. »Chapter 10: Ground«).[12] This choice is apparently consistent with the similarly hybrid and uncanny narrative style of the game, written and directed by Yoko Taro, later to be known for his fictional universe mixing classic fantasy and sci-fi tropes with excessive stories of violence, drama and grief, often bound to producing distorted versions of those same tropes. Nevertheless, the reception of such a peculiar style of music was not exactly encouraging: Sano still recalls to this day the huge quantity of negative comments about his music for the game (see Nobuyoshi Sano in Collins & Greening 2016, ch. 74), and it was probably also because of this reason (and of the ›orchestral shift‹) that in DRAKENGARD 2 (2005), the new music by Aoi Yoshiki shifted to the much safer ground of an almost entirely symphonic score (e.g. the track »Fate«).[13]

Similar shifts can also be observed in the West. The long-running series developed by Insomniac Games, beginning with RATCHET & CLANK (2001), features music composed by the French composer David Bergeaud, an artist known for his musical cross-pollination and hybridization, and who has himself cited ›fusion‹ as »one of the many key ingredients of our cultural evolution« (Bergeaud 2008). According to the composer, game music easily allows mixing various »flavors and spices«, and he likes to play with contrasting elements to create friction (Bergeaud 2008). This approach is very apparent in Bergeaud's game scores. Take, for example, the track »Dobbo – Inside the Facility« from RATCHET & CLANK 2: GOING COMMANDO (2003).[14] Here the French musician mixes symphonic textures with material mainly derived from sample libraries published by companies like E-Lab (e.g. *X-Static Goldmine 1-5*, *XTC Files of Jungle*) and Spectrasonics (e.g. *Distorted Reality, Metamorphosis*) on CD.[15] Gradually, the brand underwent a general ›polishing‹ procedure. Initially, RATCHET & CLANK games featured a kind of humor that was not exactly politically correct and quite rich in sexual innuendos, as made evident by

12 Nobuyoshi Sano, *Drag-on Dragoon Original Sound Track Vol. 2*, Marvelous Entertainment 2003 (MJCG-80137), Track 11.

13 Yoshiki Aoi, *Drag-on Dragoon Original Soundtrack*, Sony Music 2005 (AICL-1628), Track 2.

14 As no information regarding an officially released soundtrack album from the game can be found, the audio source used here is a track from the »gamerip« unofficial release uploaded on YouTube and arranged in a coherent tracklist here: https://ratchet-galaxy.com/en/games/ps2/ratchet-and-clank-going-commando/media/original-soundtrack (18.07.2025).

15 A video proving the employment of such samples in the RATCHET & CLANK franchise can be found at https://youtu.be/igLqb6UX4_g (20.10.2024).

the subtitles of many of the sequels (e.g. *Going Commando*, *Up Your Arsenal*, *Size Matters*, *Quest for Booty*). Now, the series' protagonists Ratchet and Clank are depicted as two intergalactic heroes that have much more in common with the superheroes of Insomniac Games' other titles (Marvel has licensed many of its most well-known superheroes to the studio, e.g. SPIDER-MAN, WOLVERINE and X-MEN) than they resemble their original form.

In parallel, the style needed for the soundtrack became significantly less ›transgressive‹ than in the previous games, ultimately leading to the split between Bergeaud and Insomniac Games. This shift was already audible even before the separation. RATCHET & CLANK: QUEST FOR BOOTY (2008), which was the last game of the franchise to feature music by Bergeaud, contains music in a style that had already been forced to adopt a more magniloquent orchestral sound (e.g. »The Azorean Sea«).[16] In an interview just before the end of his collaboration with Insomniac Games, Bergeaud alluded to the increasingly widespread tendency of video game music to mimic film music by employing orchestral traits. Not a negative thing *per se*, but one that should be weighted and measured cautiously, avoiding symphonism when not necessary to the game (Bergeaud 2008). Yet the composer, after all, still sounded optimistic about this:

> […] I] don't think that all games should or will try to emulate films. In fact, it's such a young medium with so many other things to offer that there is still plenty of room for fresh inventions and creative originality and that is why I am drawn to it. (Bergeaud 2008)

Not as optimistic are many long-time fans of the series: looking to comments found under YouTube uploads of Bergeaud's scores for the RATCHET & CLANK series, especially in one popular video that traces the sources of Bergeaud's samples,[17] one can find much heated discussion by fans comparing the older soundtracks versus the new ones, as the following exchange illustrates:

> User rbeng1095 [most upvoted comment]: »Such a shame video game music don't [*sic*] use many breakbeats in video games anymore[,] but it nice to know [*sic*] what

16 As no information regarding an officially released soundtrack album from the game can be found, the audio source used here is a track from the »gamerip« unofficial release uploaded on YouTube and arranged in a coherent tracklist here: https://ratchet-galaxy.com/en/games/ps3/ratchet-and-clank-future-quest-for-booty/media/original-soundtrack (18.07.2025).

17 https://youtu.be/igLqb6UX4_g (20.10.2024).

> David [B]ergeaud used to make [R]atchet and [C]lank soundtracks[. T]hanks for reupload[.]«
>
> User Casketkrusher_ [replying to the previous comment]: »I agree, today's gaming music is all orchestrated crap, epic songs. I couldn't give a shit, I rather have some breakbeat or drum and bass[.]«
>
> User isaaccooper862 [replying to the previous comment]: »My guess is around the PS3 era, and especially recently, people want to take a more realistic approach to games, and saw Bergeaud's music as ›unprofessional‹. It might also have to do with new management moving into the company […]. The new staff probably wanted a ›Star Wars‹ space symphony orchestra feel to the series, but even growing up I could just tell the musical vibe (and even vibe of the characters and weapons) just felt different. I still play them cause [*sic*] they're Ratchet and Clank games, but the PS2 series is still king imo.«

One last notable example is the *Hitman* franchise, a Danish stealth game series which initially featured music by Jesper Kyd. While the soundtrack for the first instalment in the series, HITMAN: CODENAME 47 (2000), blends electronic and orchestral elements together in a mostly electronic texture, its sequel HITMAN 2: SILENT ASSASSIN (2002) showcases a quick shift in the direction of a soundtrack largely based on an entirely pre-recorded symphonic score. The change is clearly showcased by a comparison between the two respective »Main Title« tracks from the two games.[18] It is easy to ascribe this change to the success of the first game in the franchise, which would have invariably allowed for greater investment in the game's music. Today, this has led the latest instalments in the series to feature even more refined orchestral cues, although the presence of non-symphonic (and especially electronic) elements can sometimes still be found in these games as well (e.g. »The Farewell« from HITMAN III).[19]

Changing Sonic Hierarchies, Part 1: The Rise of Symphonic Hypertrophy

All these examples illustrate how this symphonic model – which was unattainable before the advent of CD-quality audio in home consoles – gained considerable traction. Its influence becomes even more apparent when we examine the hierarchy of sounds within the tracks. This is the first of two changes in sonic hierarchies that we will explore in the

18 Jesper Kyd, *Hitman: Codename 47 / Hitman 2: Silent Assassin – Original Soundtracks from the Eidos Videogames*, La-La Land Records 2005 (LLLCD 1030), Disc 1, Track 2 (»Main Title (Extended Version)«) & Disc 2, Track 1 (»Hitman 2 Main Title«).

19 Niels Bye Nielsen, *Hitman 3 Original Soundtrack*, included in the game's deluxe edition, 2021, Track 21.

remainder of this article, and concerns how clearly single sounds, timbres, instruments (or groups thereof) are audible in the arrangement (and mix) of a composition found in video game soundtracks. This pertains to the prominence/audibility of eclectic elements detected within the dominant style of the arrangement (mostly orchestral): these elements *might* be present, yet buried under increasingly denser layers of other instruments. This can be understood as a consequence of the orchestral shift made possible by the inclusion of pre-recorded music, which eventually led to virtually limitless polyphony, since sounds no longer had to be produced on-board. The Japanese arcade game composer Hisayoshi Ogura has described the current situation in terms of a widespread ›orchestra-sickness‹. According to his account, everyone now wants (and is often capable of incorporating) orchestral music in their games:

> I think Japan is infected with an ›orchestra-sickness‹ at the moment. It might be a global thing, but there is *zaaaaa* [makes sounds] orchestral music in every single game. […] So, I really think that game music hasn't developed at all in the past twenty years. To put it frankly, I don't think there is any progress. (Hisayoshi Ogura, quoted in Collins & Greening 2016, ch. 61)

While Ogura's view might sound pessimistic, it is undeniable that this symphonic element of video game music has become more and more prominent, even hypertrophic at times. Interestingly, this does not imply the total erasure of eclecticism: with the diffusion of the ›integrated soundtrack‹ model (Kulezic-Wilson 2020, 3–5), where all sonic elements (music, sound effects, and dialogue) intertwine, it is indeed quite common to hear electronic and symphonic elements mixed in the same track. This phenomenon also relates to what Sergi Casanelles has called the ›hyperorchestral‹ sound, typical of modern Hollywood blockbusters (2016), showcasing a certain degree of polystylism, but on a safe symphonic ground – that once again suggests an assimilation of Hollywood models into video games. Casanelles describes the hyperorchestra as:

> a virtual music ensemble that inhabits hyperreality, a product of the combination of virtual instruments (sampled and synthetic), real live recording sessions and sound processing. […] The hyperorchestra expands the possibilities of the traditional Western orchestra, which has been the dominant mode of musical expression for film and television music. (Casanelles 2016, 58)

This style can be heard in the previous HITMAN III example, as well as in the latest instalments of the JAK & DAXTER franchise. While Josh Mancell and Larry Hopkins' score for

JAK II (2003) features a largely synthesized yet eclectic soundtrack, which combines electronic, ›ethnic‹ and pseudo-orchestral sonorities (e.g. the track titled »Haven City Walking«),[20] most of Jim Dooley's music from the later spin-off JAK & DAXTER: THE LOST FRONTIER (2009) mimics this approach, but it often hides its more eclectic elements under thick layers of apparently pre-recorded orchestral textures, sometimes arriving to the point of (almost) erasing them (e.g. »A Captain's Sacrifice«).[21]

An interesting field to track orchestral hypertrophy is that of remakes and remasters.[22] For instance, LIVE A LIVE (1994) is a representative case: Yōko Shimomura's music for the original title was recently reworked for a 2022 remaster of the game by a team of ten arrangers (and also features some new tracks by the original composer). The original SNES/Super Famicom game was not released outside of Japan and was not localized for North American or European audiences. As such, the remaster was the first time that many Western audiences encountered this title (and thus its music). Some of the most obvious changes to the original music are to be found in the strong presence of the orchestra. This approach is consistent with the principle according to which rearranged music should follow chrononormative standards of the present time. Essentially, it adopts the approach of asking: how would this music sound without the technical limitations of the older console that the original game was designed for? However, sometimes there is more to it. Consider the track »The Bird Flies in the Sky, The Fish Swims in the River« from Shimomura's score for LIVE A LIVE:[23] the original piece is not especially eclectic in its style, but is far from being symphonic, as it mainly features synthesized instruments that emulate the sound of traditional Japanese instruments – perhaps a *shakuhachi* playing the main melodic line and a plucked string instrument (*koto* or *shamisen*) accompanying it.

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20 Official release unavailable, a tracklist based on unofficial »gamerips« can be found here: https://jakanddaxter.fandom.com/wiki/Jak_II_soundtrack (12.07.2025).

21 Jim Dooley, *Jak and Daxter: The Lost Frontier Original Soundtrack from the Video Game*, iTunes release, 2009, Track 12.

22 The basic difference between remake and remaster is that while the first are completely new editions of old games, that are rebuilt from scratch and can also feature quite relevant changes in the narrative and, even more so, in the gameplay (e.g. RESIDENT EVIL 2 remake from 2019), remasters are just technically improved versions of the same old games, that are usually limited to higher-resolution graphics and a more stable framerate, and may feature single remade elements (e.g. rearranged music, quality-of-life improvements, new models for important characters etc.) without changing the core of the ludic experience.

23 Yōko Shimomura, *LIVE A LIVE Original Sound Version*, NTT Publishing 1994 (PSCN-5007), Track 17.

Contrastingly, the new version arranged by Akira Iwata for the 2022 remaster[24] buries these traditional elements under an orchestration that is clearly indebted to classical Hollywood film scoring, and which bears little resemblance to the original.

A similar rebalancing of the timbral hierarchies can be heard in many examples from the so-called ›pixel remaster‹ editions of the first six entries in the *Final Fantasy* franchise (2023). Here, in the attempt at creating the ›definitive‹ versions of the first entries in one of the most important JRPG series, music director Hidenori Miyanaga gathered a number of arrangers to work on 332 tracks (originally composed by Nobuo Uematsu) in total, who strove to strike a balance between faithfully delivering the same final effect of the original music loved by so many fans around the world, and creating a new version that would be free from the technical constraints of the original music; in his words, the team's aim was to create music that that could sound ›the way it always should have sounded‹ (Miyanaga, Uematsu 2022) – although this does not necessarily align with the players' wishes and opinion.[25] The result is a body of work where Uematsu's polystylistic compositional choices are usually maintained, yet – again – they are often buried under much more dense symphonic layers. A good example is the presence of the electric bass in »Final Battle« from FINAL FANTASY IV (1991):[26] although clearly audible in the original version, heard in combination with the drumkit, it is barely discernible in this new hypertrophic symphonic context. In examples like this, eclecticism is not entirely absent, yet it is positioned lower in the sonic hierarchy of the arrangement – an arrangement that could become so dense only after the limited polyphony that was typical of on-board synthesis was overcome.

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24 Yōko Shimomura, *LIVE A LIVE HD-2D Remake Original Soundtrack*, Square Enix Music 2022 (SQEX-10948~9), Track 19 (here translated as »Unto the Birds the Heavens, unto the Fish the Seas«).

25 I say this because players often prefer to stick to the original music (see an example in Cheng 2014, 78), despite (and even *because of*) its technical limitations. So, it should not come as a surprise that the option to turn on the original soundtrack was soon added to the ›pixel remasters‹.

26 Nobuo Uematsu, *Final Fantasy IV Original Sound Version*, NTT Publishing 1991 (N23D-001), Track 43.

Changing Sonic Hierarchies, Part 2: The Role of Video Game Music in the Age of Soundscape Densification

This final section continues in the same direction, yet delves deeper into how the sonic hierarchy has changed not only within the single tracks, but also in the audio environment of video games more generally, because of the ›soundscape densification‹ afforded by fifth generation (and later) consoles. We should then ask ourselves how current productions tend to implement and use this (eclectic or not) music, and how this affects the player's musical experience. I must confess that, before embarking on this study, I felt that Ogura's description of the ›orchestra-sickness‹ permeating contemporary game scoring trends was even more severe than he describes; I essentially thought that new technological developments and stylistic trends had made eclecticism much less common in current mainstream video game soundtracks. However, as we have seen, this is not exactly the case, even though a certain degree of standardization can be observed. Nonetheless, in the final section of this article, I will embrace an autoethnographic approach to game music (see Kamp 2021, 168–170) in an attempt to account for my initial impression of recent game scoring trends.

First, I will revisit RATCHET & CLANK franchise and especially the 2016 remake of the first game in the series, comparing the battle with the ›Blargian Snagglebeast‹ with the same gameplay section from the original game (2002),[27] which features entirely different music, as the soundtrack for the remake was composed from scratch. When we listen to the relevant cue from the soundtrack album of the remake, we can easily discern electronic elements among the more prominent symphonic sound in Michael Bross' new music; in contrast, the sample-based techniques employed by David Bergeaud in his music for the original game's soundtrack has an unmistakable hip-hop character. To a certain extent, both Bergeaud's original cue and Bross' version for the remake can be defined as stylistically eclectic. Why then, when I was playing the remake in 2016, did I have the disappointing impression that the peculiar original soundtrack had been replaced with

[27] Two gameplay videos can be used to compare the two sequences, and I would like to thank the users Amados King and CrashRatchet008 for uploading them on YouTube: https://youtu.be/0vS3TYnKjFw (24.10.2024) for the new version and https://youtu.be/2bbfoynDoBU (24.10.2024) for the original one.

›ordinary‹ Hollywood-sounding orchestral music? This is where a difference between the heard soundtrack (in the context of the game and its many other sounds) and the recorded soundtrack (typically to be found in the soundtrack album) must be made. In this respect, following the suggestion many ludomusicologists make about studying video game music in the ludic context (e.g. Fernández Cortés 2021; Summers 2016) becomes handy. Indeed, if we do not listen to the tracks in isolation and instead revisit them in their intended interactive context, the reasons behind my first impression become clear. In Bross' new version for the remake, the music is mixed at a quite low volume and buried under a plethora of sound effects and relatively frequent voice acting, while in the original version the sonic environment was much less crowded. The new track is thus barely perceptible to the player, let alone its eclectic elements, which are themselves mostly covered by orchestral hypertrophy: musically present, but phenomenologically erased.

It is thus only by comparing the in-game sonic experience with the stand-alone listening experience that one can get the full picture. The music is not entirely symphonic, but its eclectic details are found at a low level on two orders of hierarchies: one relates to the track's arrangement (and mix), and this is one more example of orchestral hypertrophy; the other one relates to the overall soundscape, i.e. the hierarchy in the sound mix. So, eclectic elements are further relegated to the bottom of the mix and easily disappear from our perception. This reveals an important aspect of music's role in contemporary video games, as opposed to the way things used to work before the advent of CD-quality audio in video games. At one point, music had to convey all the expressivity that graphics with relatively low levels of detail and the lack of voice acting were unable to deliver. Then, with the advent of recorded music, it became possible to populate the sonic spectrum with voices and many more sound effects. Moreover, 3D graphics helped build a more credible virtual world, and so music became just one of many expressive means a video game could exploit. So, while game music may not be any less valorized, and while it may not be deemed any less of a priority, it is certainly the case that it is less under the spotlight, as it is often relegated to the periphery of the (increasingly dense) sound mix. This phenomenon is the ›soundscape densification‹ I mentioned earlier. Nowadays, I often end up adjusting the audio settings to make the music sound more audible, since standard levels do not allow me to have a decent idea of what is happening, musically. Paradoxically

enough, in the very moment that new compositional affordances were unlocked by the introduction of pre-recorded tracks, that same revolution brought to a downsizing of the centrality of music in the sonic economy of video games – not always described positively by players and critics, again in parallel with the transition to sound film (see Cheng 2014, 60–61). After all, it could be argued that this is just another face of fulfilling the cinematic promise, as music had to lose its centrality (and frontality) to become an ›unheard melody‹ (Gorbman 1987).[28] Embracing recorded audio – and the cinematic promise – brings with it both positive and negative consequences: timbral fidelity on the one side, and the concurrent forces of enhanced graphics and of a much more crowded audio spectrum on the other.

To illustrate this shift, we can compare the original version of the scene in FINAL FANTASY VII (1997) where Sephiroth loses his mind to the remade version seen in the recent FINAL FANTASY VII: REBIRTH (2024).[29] This comparison shows how video games now speak an entirely different audiovisual language. The original version was dramaturgically almost entirely built around the music, which is also dynamic because it stops and then restarts with an additional instrumental layer in the emotional climax of the scene. The new version is simply a cinematic cutscene with no interactivity whatsoever and with a soundtrack that underscores the scene in a much subtler way. The audio environment now features sound effects and fully dubbed characters, and new graphics (also employing motion capture technologies) help convey all the expressivity that pseudo-human characters should be able to show via their faces and bodies. If the scene works, in the end, it is thanks to the synergy between every single element I have just mentioned (and probably many others as well), and music is but a part of a complex apparatus. This is basically cinema, and music has the role that is expected according to mainstream aesthetics, that is, to make it simple: underscoring the sequence and providing references to recognizable leitmotifs (Sephiroth's theme and Jenova's themes can be heard clearly during the scene). It is just a different language, one that implies a different role for music (and for players,

28 In this sense, a double parallel between silent cinema/on board synthesis (Lerner 2013) and sound cinema/recorded music could be drawn.

29 Two gameplay videos can be used to compare the two sequences, and I would like to thank the users curryking1 and Owl-Quest for uploading them on YouTube: https://youtu.be/DwDQSXXCy94 (24.10.2024) (especially 30:01–30:43) for the original version and https://youtu.be/4QTfOQxuX3o (24.10.2024) (especially 23:58-25:07) for the new one.

who no longer need to complete the lack with their imagination, see Cheng 2014, 58–59) – for better or for worse. In such a position, music is not the absolute protagonist of the sonic environment anymore, and it is much easier to overlook it and especially its eclectic elements, which are often already quite deeply buried under hypertrophic symphonism. It is not (necessarily) a musical change, but a phenomenological change, that must take into account the perceptual experience of players in the act of playing.

Conclusion

I have explored several ways in which the ›orchestral shift‹ – enabled by the fulfilment of the ›cinematic promise‹ of video game music – along with the rise of ›symphonic hypertrophy‹ stemming from the ›orchestra sickness‹ described by Hisayoshi Ogura, and the ›soundscape densification‹ associated with the shift in music's role in the audio-streamed, (partially) pre-recorded ludomusical environment, have affected the presence (and audibility) of eclecticism in recorded video game music. Although my point here might sound apocalyptic, this is definitely not the case. There is still room for non-conventional solutions in video game music (especially in the ever-growing indie world), and recorded music can even emphasize timbral distance in eclectic music, which could sound much more homogeneous when synthesized on board. While the major eclectic stylistic models (at least in the West) tend to rely on strategies that are commonplace in contemporary cinema (e.g. the hyperorchestra, as per Sergi Casanelles), a lot of other video game soundtracks also offer stylistic alternatives – be they eclectic or not. Yet, I believe this short and inexhaustive overview has nonetheless illustrated some ways in which the adoption of recorded audio has caused several readjustments in previous balances between timbres and between the various elements of the audio mix, not necessarily erasing polystylism, but often de-emphasizing it in favor of the fulfilment of the ›cinematic promise‹, usually in the direction of the sound of mainstream Hollywood cinema. If we see this as a potential problem, then we must keep in mind that this is part of a much bigger process that is central to the contemporary situation: the simulation of cinematic models (to the point of making video games that are more accurately described as ›interactive films‹, see Powell 2021, 24–29), with consequences that go far beyond video game music. If some critics

and players have found the audiovisual experience recently offered by HELLBLADE II (2024) too akin to that offered by a film and not a sufficiently compelling gameplay experience, maybe this should suggest us that the video game, as a medium – having lost most technical constraints that characterized it as something clearly different from cinema – now needs to find its way to aspire at being something more than just cinema's (or, to be more precise, Hollywood's) little brother.

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Kieler Beiträge zur Filmmusikforschung (ISSN 1866-4768)

Review of:

Elsie Walker: *Life 24x a Second. Cinema, Selfhood, and Society*

New York: Oxford University Press 2024

Anika Babel

Life 24x a Second: Cinema, Selfhood, and Society is Elsie Walker's third and most »unorthodox«[1] book, each published by Oxford University Press (2015, 2017, 2024). Throughout the introduction and six chapters, Walker celebrates the humanitarian value of cinema, foregrounding this through gripping student and personal testimony rather than by »any intricately sustained effort to situate [her] work in relation to well-established theoretical works or other scholars« (21). *Life 24x a Second* will appeal to pedagogues and researchers of film and film music, though students and sociocultural scholars will also find plenty of intrigue.

Throughout the book's 200 pages, Walker swaps skepticism for a tenacious apperception of cinema's life-affirming powers. This is evidenced early into the introduction where she ruminates on the limitations of applying affect theory when aiming to honor the »personal revelations« that films can provoke (6–7). Although Walker does not disparage the broader usefulness of affect theory, she does challenge an apparent reluctance among theorists to consider »ways that films move individual audioviewers (*including* themselves)« – attributing such reservations to a »fear of seeming undisciplined or biased« (emphasis preserved, 6–7). Alternatively, Walker asserts that »the synergy between our personal and professional lives is inherently unavoidable, meaningful, *and* desirable« (emphasis preserved, 57).

Amid its many contributions to pedagogy and conscientious scholarship, *Life 24x a Second* is anchored by Walker's over two-decade long career and expertise in film ›sound tracks‹. As with her 2015 debut monograph *Understanding Sound Tracks Through Film Theory*, Walker's literal and figurative gap between ›sound‹ and ›track‹ opens space for

[1] As acknowledged frequently by Walker (21, 78, 102).

sound design and dialogue to feature reciprocally alongside considerations of music. This is palpable from the very first case study, THE FAREWELL (USA 2019, Lulu Wang), in the introductory chapter. Her analysis – focused on the utterances and potential meanings of one word: ›ha!‹ – demonstrates the resonances that films can initially impart, while highlighting the reverberations and even modulations that occur when ›audioviewers‹ *re*attend films. Moreover, it sets the level of incisive detail that readers can expect from the ensuing case studies.

Like Anahid Kassabian's agential use of ›perceivers‹ and my own preference for ›filmgoers‹ (see Kassabian 2001 and Babel 2023), Walker's use of ›audioviewers‹ implies a distribution of attention to both sight *and* sound – much in the way that she does not privilege music, dialogue, or sound by employing ›sound tracks‹. Unlike that term, however, Walker explicitly delineates her rationale for replacing sight-bias language (specifically ›spectator‹ with ›audioviewer‹) in the midst of one of the book's most riveting arguments: life over death.

The title of Walker's book may sound familiar. In Jean-Luc Goddard's LE PETIT SOLDAT (France 1960) the protagonist states: »photography is truth and cinema is truth 24 times a second« – referring to cinema's standard frame rate of 24 images per second. This dialogue inspired Laura Mulvey's 2006 book *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*,[2] which in turn provided the genesis for *Life 24x a Second*. It would be too simplistic to consider Mulvey and Walker's books as opposite sides of the same coin or as the glass half full/half empty versions of each other. Instead, both authors' approaches could be analogized to midnight: a single instance that demarcates both the end and the beginning of days. Where Mulvey's focus on visual stillness invariably leans towards notions of »dead ends« (12) or »loss« (144); of moments already gone/passed/past; Walker's perspective on films (or midnight, so to speak) recognizes that by interacting with films – by watching and rehearing, remembering and re-remembering – they are »always dynamic« (13); they are becoming; films breathe life. This is reminiscent of Jeffers Engelhardt and Philip V. Bohlman's use of ›dynamism‹ and ›eschatology‹ within socially-engaged contemporary landscapes to frame the transcendent power of sacred

[2] Walker does not state the subtitle in the main body of text, notes, or the extremely select bibliography.

music (2016). Indeed throughout the six chapters of *Life 24x a Second*, Walker confronts several pressing social issues: »the pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement, contemporary feminism, personal lifeshocks and the broad realities of mortality, grief, and death acceptance« (142).

Chapters one to three are given more weight in this review since Walker establishes her general methodologies and approaches to both research and teaching here. Chapters four to six are summarized relatively briefly before concluding remarks on *Life 24x a Second* are offered.

In chapter one, we are eased into an analysis of BLACKKKLANSMAN (USA 2018, Spike Lee) via Walker's typical contextualization of case studies within larger societal or pedagogical issues. Indeed, Walker never places films within the ›deathly‹ confines of a vacuum, thus redoubling her imperative concern that, like all films she considers, »BLACKKKLANSMAN represents life unfolding as it has and as is does … for the most urgent of purposes today« (37). Lee's film is the epicenter of Walker's ambition to »hear other people *and* cinema better in relation to the current BLM movement« (emphasis preserved, 26). With an enviable knack for providing the perfect degree of summarization, Walker's analysis unfolds through an examination of the measured vocal deliveries by John David Washington (who plays the protagonist, Ron Stallworth) and Terence Blanchard's score. The significance of Max Steiner's music for GONE WITH THE WIND (USA 1939, Victor Fleming) is eloquently teased out – chiefly Blanchard's allusions and engagement with Civil War-era folk and minstrelsy songs.

While Walker's candor facilitates a close, accessible, and refreshingly frank analysis, the margins of my copy are filled with suggested references. Although she certainly averts any claims of performative citing (of the 47 endnotes for chapter two, less than half a dozen list peer-reviewed work), Walker regularly infers eminent theories and theorists. On the one hand, film music scholarship no longer needs to fend for its legitimacy (an anxiety perhaps extended longer than necessary through gratuitous referential entanglements – are we entering a post-Gorbman or post-Chion[3] era?). On the other hand, Walker

[3] Chapter four's ›spin‹ on Michel Chion's ›spatiotemporal turntable‹ is a notable exception (Walker, 130; Chion 2019 [1993]).

risks bypassing the vital contributions to the field that students, in particular, ought to be made aware of. Echoes of influential scholars may appear conspicuous to those in the know and misleading to those who are not. That said, the idiosyncratic avenues through which Walker explores BLACKKKLANSMAN and her precise illustration of how the film's sonic logic beckons us to evaluate its message in light of current racial injustices can in no way be undermined by such omissions – they could only be enhanced.

In its study of NOBODY KNOWS (Japan 2004, Hirokazu Kore-eda), chapter two is framed through the pedagogical and feminist lenses of bell hooks (1994) and Sarah Ahmed (2017). Combined with her own perspective-shifting experiences of motherhood, Walker explores how ›lifeshocks‹[4] can attune new and profound habitus that alter our understandings of cinema. She adapts four culminative modes of listening – downloading, factual, empathetic, and generative – from a business-leadership context to her classroom to foster »a level of awareness that exceeds the film's diegesis *and* [our] own direct experiences« (emphasis preserved, 77). Having taught NOBODY KNOWS for over a decade, her analysis intertwines responses that the film has provoked in her students »to feel the completely involving impact of the film's unique sonic logic« (61). In so doing, she teases out »the archetypal sounds of childhood« (66), contributions from the Japanese acoustic guitar duo Gontiti, and the recurrence of a song first overheard from a playground and later sung by the protagonist Akira in a »musical effort to manage his grief« (69). Throughout her illustrative analysis, Walker employs Daniel Frampton's ›filmind‹ more clearly than in his »manifesto for a radically new way of understanding cinema«[5] as »a fully expressive medium« (2006, 99). She achieves this feat by simply pondering what a film asks of us when we listen generatively. In the case of NOBODY KNOWS, following Akira's singing, Walker suggests that »the film invites us to consider those times in our own lives when we might have power to pay attention *and* to intervene« (emphasis preserved, 70). She highlights the »eloquence of the nonverbal sounds« made by the siblings – the protagonists who are neglected by their parents and society within the narrative, but who are »privileged by the film's sonic structures« (71). Closing the

4 Borrowing from activist Sophie Sabbage (2018), Walker refers to confronting moments – and our responses to them – as ›lifeshocks‹ (14).

5 As stated on the cover of Frampton's *Filmosophy*, in which he outlines the filmind as a quasi-autonomous being.

chapter, Walker shares her post-screening classroom exercises along with her students' responses to signify »the importance of *our* bearing witness to the children's suffering, and our hearing better than the onscreen adults« (emphasis preserved, 75).

Chapter three makes the case for empathy and how music can extend a film's essence far beyond its runtime. Walker outlines approaches to teaching films that may subject students to »severe distress, trauma, and shock« but that may also »validate what they have already lived *and* hopefully expand greater knowledge of the world through hearing what the film says« (emphasis preserved, 81–2). Walker's code of classroom ethics and pedagogical methods are laid bare (84–6) before a close reading of DANCER IN THE DARK (USA 2000, Lars von Trier) is presented.

Through an almost exclusive and entirely uncritical reliance on Doc Childre and Howard Martin's 1999 self-help book *The HeartMath Solution* in this chapter, serious questions of critical engagement arise. Like the infamous Mozart Effect[6] or the rife claims that music tuned to A = 440 Hz is harmful and A = 432 Hz is healing,[7] HeartMath[8] has come under scrutiny as a pseudo-science that could benefit from an evaluation using the tools of post-modernist or post-truth critiques. Many of the ›peer-reviewed‹ laudations of HeartMath come from Stephen D. Edwards, who – at the time of writing – has published no less than 27 articles on the matter. His 2019 contribution opens strangely: »Along with the creativity of vast technological advances, humanity's endemic destructiveness continues. Planetary healing needs motivated this research.« In particular, it was Edwards' emphasis on HeartMath's objective of ›Global Coherence‹ that reminded me of the healing claims made by 432 Hz subscribers and the scope for abuse from programs that exploit vulner-

6 Essentially, the Effect claims that listening to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's music makes you smarter (something exaggerated by the press following the publication of the original study by Frances H. Rauscher et al. in 1993). For one of the many scientific rebuttals against the original unreplicable study, see Jakob Pietschnig et al. (2010), and for a sociological reappraisal highlighting the pernicious classist aspects of the claimed benefits of the Mozart Effect, see Clémentine Beauvais (2014).

7 See Ruth E. Rosenberg (2021) for a deliberation on the popularization of the 432 Hz phenomenon.

8 Now an ›institute‹, HeartMath sells various devices and software packages at a premium to help customers »[a]ccess a healthy and high-performance state called heart coherence, where your heart and brain are in sync – this helps you prevent or reduce stress, anxiety, and overwhelm, improve health and performance, and clear your thinking for more effective choices to live a healthier, happier life.« See: https://store.heartmath.com/innerbalance (10.07.2025).

abilities in people seeking to ›improve‹ their lives – such as El Sistema.[9] I imagine that these are neither the kinds of scholarship or associations that Walker wishes to prompt. That being said, the deep-breathing exercises that underscore the HeartMath technique can be beneficial – just as listening to a Mozart Piano Concerto performed by the Berlin Philharmonic at its favored A = 443 Hz can, or how listening to Javanese gamelan can (a defining attribute of gamelan is that each set is ›tuned to itself‹ and done so in a manner that does not correspond with Western conceptualizations of temperament); or indeed listening to a child create a song of their own without paying any credence to a starting (or ending) pitch. It is difficult to refute that listening to music, meditating, and engaging with films can be beneficial in an abundance of meaningful ways. These are more the kind of inferences that Walker draws upon. With a thoroughly persuasive and unapologetic rhetoric elsewhere, Walker's reliance on Childre and Martin's dubious HeartMath to confer what she already knows (»I have often intuited that all our hearts will begin to beat differently in response to emotionally loaded films that we see/hear together« [80]) seems like a disservice to the overall sageness of *Life 24x a Second*, and it threatens to undermine chapter three's otherwise poignant case study of DANCER IN THE DARK.

Chapter four confronts grief through three case studies that in the face of death can offer »many forms of life in their distinctive sonic structures« (141): LIFE OF PI (Canada 2012, Ang Lee), IRIKU (Japan 1952, Akira Kurosawa), and A STAR IS BORN (United States 2018, Bradley Cooper). In exploring films that teach us »about being positively transformed by sadness« (107), Walker combines the approaches established in the preceding chapters with psychology, »since death and grief are great levellers, humbling us all in the pain we cannot avoid as human beings, this is reason enough to join disciplinary forces« (108). Walker's comprehensive study of Mychael Danna's original score for LIFE OF PI is among the most musically rich analyses featured in *Life 24x a Second*. Here, her inquiry links Danna's compositional syntax with the protagonist's post-trauma coping strategies.

[9] El Sistema was first established in Venezuela in 1975 and is now active throughout several continents. Its mission is to enact social change by supplying instruments and musical training to disadvantaged children. Just as El Sistema has its benefits, it also has an enormous propensity – and, unfortunately, well-documented instances – for corruption and abuse of power. Their exploitation of self-improvement correlates with HeartMath ideologies. See: Geoffrey Baker's ethnographic exposé *El Sistema: Orchestrating Venezuela's Youth* (Oxford University Press: 2014) or Baker's condensed and updated feature for *Classical Music*: »El Sistema at 50: The rise and fall (and rise again?) of Venezuela's controversial music programme« (2025).

Conversely, Walker's analysis of music in IRIKU demonstrates the protagonist Kanji Watanabe's protracted turn to accepting his own terminal illness and how the film's »visual and sonic details are aligned in honoring his legacy« (121). Walker listens to IRIKU so that she may »live better in [Wantanabe's] memory« (131). Moreover, Walker applies this lesson to her own grief, sharing the influence and memory of the book's dedicatee Danijela Kulezic-Wilson – an esteemed and sorely missed scholar of film music and sound († 2021).

Moving from the entire soundtrack of LIFE OF PI to comparisons of two songs in IRIKU, Walker then focuses on a single piece in A STAR IS BORN: »the final song about Ally continuing to live after the trauma of Jackson's death« (135). Walker shows how each of these films musically reveal how their protagonists »make meaning from loss«, with Ally »turning her private grief into a public act of ritualized mourning, refusing to be constricted into silence by the double taboo of her husband's destruction by addiction and suicide« (136). As with IRIKU, Walker enacts lyrical analysis and assesses the vocal performances, noting how Ally's »rising voice reminds [her] of the strength that comes with confronting grief without expecting to fully recover from it« (139). In closing the triple case studies of chapter four, Walker notes how she is empowered by the musicalized resilience of the films' protagonists – that she too »can be emboldened in the face of grief« (141).

Chapter five is aptly titled »Turning the Microphone Around«. Here, Walker privileges the voices of her students and alumni. A tapestry of their responses to her survey »How do films feed our lives, reflect our lives and help us live better« (reproduced on pages 145–6) form the basis of this chapter, which is organized through 13 affecting subheadings: Black Lives Matter; Communications; Compassion; Coping; Emotionality; Greater perspective; Heightened capacity to hear; Identification; Mental health; Ongoing reverberations; Personal growth; Professional development; and Multiple levels of meaning. Walker's candor is reciprocated by her former students, who note resonances between films they find meaningful. Her alumni find solace or validation through careful audioviewing; students who – in their powerful and anonymized words – are »caring for a terminally ill family member« (153), in »a toxic relationship« (154), privy to »the horrors and

comradery of war« (156), »trying to find their way in post 9/11 America« (159), »dealing with feelings of abandonment« (163), relating to »the creepy nature of prejudice in everyday life for African Americans« (165), experiencing »personal traumas regarding mental health« (168); and »attempting to be open and exploratory in relation to my sexuality« (174). Such insights are precious reminders to dignify the duty of care that we have to our students whose battles we may never know, but that we nevertheless have the potential to alleviate or unwittingly exacerbate.

The sixth and closing chapter is relatively short, but among the most poignant – especially in its tribute to Kulezic-Wilson. Here, Walker embroils HeartMath, lifeshocks, generative listening, and psychology in sharing the deeply-personal impacts that CALL ME BY YOUR NAME (United States 2017, Luca Guadagnino) and PORTRAIT OF A LADY ON FIRE (France 2019, Céline Sciamma) have had on her – explaining how they »mattered to [her] when Danijela was alive, but they mean even more now that she has died« (189). Walker frames the analysis of these films within her own grief and its paralyzing effects (181–2). Noting her perception of temporal shifts in the throes of mourning and coupling it with one psychological study,[10] Walker assesses how the closing scenes of CALL ME BY YOUR NAME and PORTRAIT OF A LADY ON FIRE »use music to achieve their remarkable transformative power, along with sustained long takes« – how they seem to »slow down time *yet retain its purposefulness*« (emphasis preserved, 182). Both films recapitulate music heard earlier in the narratives, »communicating the scale of the whole film as well as the present moment and the imagined future that goes beyond the plot« (186). Walker values these films because they »can teach us about the importance of slowing down to heal ourselves« (182).

[10] The bibliographic details for Sylvie Droit-Volet and Sandrine Gil's psychological study »The Emotional Body and Time Perception« are misattributed to *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* (2009, 364, 1943–1953, https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2009.0013), which are the details for their co-authored »The time–emotion paradox« article. »The Emotional Body and Time Perception« study is actually from *Cognition and Emotion* (2015, 30/4, 687–699, https://doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2015.1023180). It is initially unclear whether Walker confused or conflated Droit-Volet and Gil's collaborative articles. After verifying, it turns out that the lengthy extract (on 182) is from the abstract to their 2015 article.

In ›talking back‹[11] to the modus operandi of academic work (namely disciplinary norms that tend to preference objectivity over subjectivity), Walker hopes that her methods »will resonate for the reader, but without assuming that they automatically will« (21). This foretold my own responses to a book that frequently tested my ability to suspend skepticism in favor of better compassion. Yet whenever Walker's sincerity and sheer empathetic loveliness teetered towards cloying, my qualms were averted by heart-wrenching disclosures and compelling evidence of classroom successes.

Although Walker set out to chart her own course, clearer sign-posting of existing research and better situating of her work among contemporary practice would be welcomed – particularly from the disciplines of film music studies, pedagogy, and ethnography – as would more critical stances towards her atypical references (namely HeartMath, but also the vast array of non-peer-reviewed sources). A significant risk was braved in these regards, but those who meet Walker's self-stated ›unorthodoxies‹ in the spirit with which they are intended will reap substantial rewards. Ultimately, this is a book that will elicit (re)watchings of the case studies, prompt us to listen to films anew, and to re-evaluate both our pedagogical praxes and how we position ourselves amid our work – achievements not to be underestimated.

Overall, I interpret Walker's approach, insight, and resultant findings as a welcome counterpoint to increasingly perceived threats toward the arts and humanities like, for instance, the misuse of artificial intelligence; the commodification of students in higher learning institutions; and therefore the existential crises of departmental closures or stringent budget cuts that seem disproportionate in comparison to many of our STEM, medicine, law, and commerce colleagues.

Before closing, some non-content-related considerations are offered. *Life 24x a Second* is handsomely presented by Oxford University Press in hardback and paperback editions (it is also available as an e-book from € 20). It features well-selected stills from all the major case studies, enticing epigraphs to open each chapter, and a well-compiled index. Points

[11] The idea of ›talking back‹ is especially prominent in chapter two where Walker reclaims the term as »a subversive and necessary ideal« (24).

of frustration arise from the frequent (but very minor) typos and the deficient bibliography of less than one page.

If readers emerge from *Life 24x a Second* motivated in any small way to adapt Walker's ideas, surely our work – and our interactions with students, colleagues, cinema, and society alike – will grow more conscientious. Further to her rich and singular analysis of films and film sound tracks, Walker proves in *Life 24x a Second* that compassion and academic integrity are not only compatible, but mutually beneficial.

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Empfohlene Zitierweise

Babel, Anika: Elsie Walker: *Life 24x a Second. Cinema, Selfhood, and Society*. New York: Oxford University Press 2024. In: *Kieler Beiträge zur Filmmusikforschung* 19 (2025), S. 155–165, DOI: https://doi.org/10.59056/kbzf.2025.19.p155-165.

Kieler Beiträge zur Filmmusikforschung (ISSN 1866-4768)

Rezension zu:

Claudia Hartling / Susanne Vollberg (Hrsg.): *Leidenschaft Filmmusik. Theorie – Praxis – Vermittlung*

Marburg: Schüren 2024

Henriette Engelke

Georg Maas ist wahrlich kein Unbekannter im Bereich der deutschsprachigen Musikpädagogik. Besonders hervorzuheben ist sein Engagement in der Schulbuchentwicklung; hierbei interessiert ihn seit jeher auch die Einbindung von Pop- und Rock- sowie Filmmusik. Zu seinen bekanntesten, auch außerhalb der Musikpädagogik rezipierten Werken gehören die gemeinsam mit Achim Schudack verfassten Lehrbücher *Musik und Film – Filmmusik* (1994) sowie *Der Musikfilm* (2008). Nach Studium und Karrierebeginn in Detmold und Paderborn sowie 30 Jahren an der Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg wurde dem frisch gebackenen Emeritus nun eine knapp 400-seitige Festschrift gewidmet, welche ihn in vollem Umfange würdigen soll.

Der mit zahlreichen filmischen Metaphern gespickte Sammelband besteht aus einem »Einspieler«, vier Kapiteln und einem »Abspann«. Zudem wird jedes Kapitel durch eine »Intro« eingeleitet und durch ein »Zwischenspiel« vom nachfolgenden Kapitel getrennt. Befasst sich das erste Kapitel mit interdisziplinären Zugängen, so rückt das zweite Kapitel die Filmmusik anhand konkreter Fallstudien in den Fokus; das dritte Kapitel widmet sich der Filmmusikpraxis, während das vierte Kapitel musikpädagogische Überlegungen anstellt. Hierbei soll sowohl der Forschungspraxis und den sonstigen, nicht nur musikalischen Interessen des Gewürdigten als auch der disziplinären Vielfalt seiner beitragenden Kolleg*innen und Wegbegleiter*innen Rechnung getragen werden. Da das Festschriftformat allerdings weder aus den bibliographischen Angaben noch dem Buchklappentext hervorgeht, schüren die Kapitelüberschriften sowie der Untertitel des Bandes (»Theorie – Praxis – Vermittlung«) möglicherweise falsche Erwartungen. Wie die Herausgeberinnen Claudia Hartling und Susanne Vollberg nämlich im Vorwort betonen, war ihnen von Vornherein eine persönliche Note besonders wichtig. Dies erklärt die Fülle an informellen

Beiträgen – von Hommagen bis hin zu autobiographischen Erinnerungen –, welche häufig durch Euphorie, Humor und − dem Titel entsprechend – Leidenschaft gekennzeichnet sind. Die vielen Danksagungen, persönlichen Bemerkungen und Anekdoten mögen für den Gewürdigten und dessen Umfeld wertvoller sein als für Außenstehende, zeigen aber, dass Georg Maas sich nicht nur als Musikwissenschaftler im Bereich der Filmmusik und Musikpädagogik profiliert hat, sondern auch als Kollege, Lehrer, Musiker und vor allem Mensch hochgeschätzt wird.

Den Titeln der Beiträge ist nicht immer zu entnehmen, ob es sich um eine wissenschaftliche Auseinandersetzung, einen quasi-philosophischen Reflex, eine Anekdote oder eine Danksagung handelt. Denn auch die Aufsätze verzichten in der Regel nicht auf Metaphern, direkte Anreden sowie explizite Bemerkungen, um mit dem Beitrag eine Brücke zwischen dem eigenen Tätigkeitsfeld und jenem des Gewürdigten schlagen zu wollen. Nachfolgend werden nur die 17 filmmusikbezogenen Aufsätze herausgegriffen; diese unterscheiden sich zwar hinsichtlich ihrer wissenschaftlichen Qualität stark voneinander, erscheinen jedoch für eine erste Annäherung wie auch tiefergehende Beschäftigung mit Filmmusik durchaus lesenswert, zumal sie sich mitunter auf unbekanntes Terrain begeben.

So nimmt Klaus Näumann Anknüpfungspunkte und produktive Wechselwirkungen von Filmmusik und Musikethnologie in den Blick: Am konkreten Beispiel wird deutlich, wie durch die Verbindung von Notensatzprogrammen und virtuellen »World«- bzw. »Folk«-Instrumenten, an deren Entwicklung neben »kulturellen Insider[n]« (93) auch Filmkomponist*innen beteiligt sind, individuelle Tonsysteme konfiguriert und nicht-westliche Musiken zum Erklingen gebracht werden können, welche trotz ihres nur annäherungsweise repräsentativen Klangresultats der illustrierenden Hörbarmachung fremder bzw. dem Adressatenkreis unbekannter Musik in Wissenschaft und Lehre zuträglich sein können. Wolfgang Auhagen wiederum führt uns in die Geschichte der Tonarten- und Instrumentensymbolik, deren Tradition sich bis in die Filmmusik fortsetzt: Er zeigt, wie jener – übrigens auch in der musikwissenschaftlichen Forschung und Lehre – häufig vernachlässigte »Aspekt einer semantischen Filmmusikanalyse […] wichtige Hinweise auf die Konzeption eines Soundtracks liefern kann« (146). Tomi Mäkelä befasst sich mit der je eige-

nen Semiotik von Bild- und Fremdtönen, indem er nachvollziehbar veranschaulicht, wie in zahlreichen Filmen die Beherrschung eines Musikinstruments als soziales »Distinktionsobjekt« (48) fungiert und Musikalität mit dem »Homo bonus« (ebd.) assoziiert wird. Indem dieses Motiv häufig in Filmen auftritt, die in »didaktisch herausfordernden Zonen« (49) spielen, kann inszeniertes Musizieren als »Indikator besonderer Eigenschaften der Menschen in einer speziellen Lebenswelt« (60) gelesen werden.

Angeregt durch den Sammelband *Walzerfilme und Filmwalzer* (2022), haben sich Georg Maas' Ko-Herausgeber mit Beiträgen zum Tanz im Film in die Festschrift eingebracht: So zeigt Wolfgang Thiel, dass die filmische Verwendung präexistenter oder originaler Walzer sowohl als diegetisches wie auch als nicht-diegetisches Element bis in die Stummfilmzeit zurückreicht. Dabei erfüllt »die ungeheure stilistische Vielfalt des Walzergenres« (118) abhängig vom jeweiligen film(musikal)ischen Kontext wie auch dem Grad der musikalischen Bearbeitung (bis hin zur Entfremdung) ganz unterschiedliche, mitunter gegensätzliche dramaturgische Funktionen und erklärt so die hohe, bis heute andauernde Popularität seines filmischen Einsatzes. Dagegen war der Twist im deutschen Unterhaltungsfilm nur von kurzer Lebensdauer: Nach Hans Jürgen Wulff griffen die Krimis und Komödien der frühen 1960er-Jahre den verpönten Tanz der damaligen Jugendkultur zwar oft nur beiläufig auf, fungierten aber ausgerechnet durch diese Beiläufigkeit der Präsentation als »Forum des Lernens einer [noch ungewohnten] Unterhaltungsform« (103), die sich rasch zum »Allgemeingut« (ebd.) etablieren und derartige Filmszenen damit überflüssig machen sollte.

Dem Tanz im Film widmen sich auch Christiane Imort-Viertel und Peter Imort, welche am Beispiel der im Gangstermilieu Chicagos der späten 1920er-Jahre spielenden Krimikomödie SOME LIKE IT HOT (USA 1959) auf die zur Zeit der Filmhandlung wie auch der Filmproduktion verbreitete Assoziation des Jazz mit Kriminalität hinweisen und in Anlehnung an das von Maas/Schudack (1994) gelehrte strukturalistische Modell die tektonische, syntaktische und semantische Funktion jener dem Swing verhafteten Filmmusik untersuchen; ferner Ute Kolanos essayistischer, nur unzureichend mit Quellenangaben ausgestatteter Beitrag zur Produktion des Klassikers DIRTY DANCING (USA 1987) und dessen Rezeption »auf beiden Seiten der Mauer« (269). Aus beiden Beiträgen geht hervor, wie

vor allem der diegetische Einsatz präexistenter Musik dazu beisteuern kann, einen Film zeitlich und geographisch zu verorten, wodurch der Film wiederum – unterstützt durch den separat veröffentlichten Soundtrack − eine neuerliche Popularität jener Musik, und zwar nun für eine neue Generation, begünstigt.

Popularmusik spielt auch bei Susanne Vollberg eine Rolle, die einen Einblick in die Zusammenarbeit von Hal Ashby und Cat Stevens für den Kultfilm HAROLD AND MAUDE (USA 1971) gibt; in Katrin Berndts überzeugender retrotopischer Deutung der Rockmusik des im geteilten Berlin spielenden Fernsehmehrteilers DER GLEICHE HIMMEL (D/CZ/GB 2016); sowie in Irina Gemsas Beitrag zur denotativen Funktion eines der wohl bekanntesten Rock-Songs der DDR, nämlich »Am Fenster« von City, welcher in dem Stasi-Film NAHSCHUSS (D 2021) eine zentrale Stellung einnimmt. Wie die beiden letztgenannten Autorinnen, so führt auch Sebastian Pfau in seinem »Essay« (223) zur dokufiktionalen Serie CHERNOBYL (USA/GB 2019) zurück in die Zeit des Kalten Krieges: Mit dem Fokus auf die Inszenierung von Wissen geht er der Frage nach, welchen Beitrag die Musik zur Konstruktion von Authentizität und Emotionalität leistet und in welchem Verhältnis dabei Objekt- und Subjektauthentizität stehen.

Besonderer Beliebtheit in Forschung und Lehre erfreuen sich − neben Hollywood-Klassikern − die oft als ›Hyphenates‹ agierenden Kultregisseure und Autorenfilmer, insofern sich an ihren Filmen die Regeln filmischen Erzählens sozusagen *ex negativo* untersuchen lassen. So schafft, wie Eva Tichatschke am Beispiel von DJANGO UNCHAINED (USA 2012) und INGLORIOUS BASTERDS (USA 2009) ausführt, Quentin Tarantinos Einsatz von Ennio Morricones Filmmusik als dramaturgischer Kontrapunkt zum Bild nicht nur kritische Distanz statt »Einfühlung und Immersion« (Rabenalt 2020, 281), sondern rückt die »der Handlung immanenten Widersprüche […] durch raffinierte audiovisuelle Komposition in den Vordergrund« (187) und macht sie dadurch bewusst emotional erfahrbar. Dass eine Reduktion sogenannter »Independent-Filmmaker« (165) auf ein Gegenbild des linear erzählenden Hollywood-Kinos, den Bruch mit Genrekonventionen oder ein Netz aus intertextuellen Referenzen allerdings zu kurz greift und eine allein darauf basierende Legitimation ihrer Filme deren »originelle Ästhetik« (167) verfehlt, zeigt Franziska Kollinger überzeugend: In ihrem innovativen Beitrag »Audio-Visionen« arbeitet sie zugleich

kritisch und anschaulich heraus, wie die Originalität des US-amerikanischen Filmemachers und Musikers Jim Jarmusch in einer »spezifische[n] Temporalität« besteht, welche »anstelle musikalischer und/oder narrativer Verlaufsformen, die Gleichzeitigkeit und [wechselseitige] Interaktion von Musik und Bild als ästhetisches Vermögen des Films vorführt« (174).

Dezidiert Fragen der Musikvermittlung widmet sich Christoph Stanges Plädoyer für die Verbindung analoger und digitaler Medien im Musikunterricht, in welchem er dem Vermischen und Überschreiten medialer und künstlerischer Grenzen das Potenzial einer Hervorbringung neuer »Denk- und Erkenntnisformen« (315) zuschreibt. Was theoretisch logisch erscheinen mag, lässt unter anderem die Frage offen, welche Art speziell *musikalischen* Erkenntnisgewinns und Verstehens er in der durch körperliche Bewegung gesteuerten digitalen Klangerzeugung sieht. Überzeugender erscheint dagegen Jens Arndts Argumentation des didaktischen Potenzials von Musikvideos und anderen multimedialen Präsentationsformen im Unterricht, durch deren visuelle Komponente selbst bei solcher Musik, die aufgrund fehlender Nähe zur Lebenswelt der Lernenden lange Zeit als schwierig zu unterrichten galt, identitätsstiftende Wirkungen erreicht werden können. Lebensweltbezug und Identifikation spielen auch in Überlegungen zum didaktischen Potenzial musikalischer Biopics hinein: So attestiert ihnen Christine Klein trotz historischer »Unstimmigkeiten« (365) die Fähigkeit, gerade durch die fiktionale Dramatisierung vor allem bei jungen Menschen eine Akzeptanz für (hier: klassische) Musik zu wecken. Dass Identifikation zu einer emotionalen Öffnung und schließlich zu einem besseren rationalen Verständnis sowie einer weiterführenden Beschäftigung führen kann und somit das primäre Ziel in der Vermittlung vor allem wenig beliebter Themen sein sollte, hatte bereits Blair Davis (2008) mit Bezug auf den Stummfilm in der universitären Lehre betont. Ob und wie allerdings mit besagten Unstimmigkeiten umgegangen wird, um die Vermittlung und Reproduktion von ›schiefen‹ Bildern zu vermeiden und sowohl Glaubwürdigkeit als auch Intention und Aussage von Filmbiographien adäquat beurteilen zu können, darf wohl als nicht zu unterschätzende Herausforderung und entscheidendes Kriterium einer adäquaten Musikvermittlung betrachtet werden. Hier zeigt sich Charlott Falkenhagens Aufsatz zu ELVIS (USA 2022) als fruchtbares Modell, indem sie − an die brisante Diskussion um *ap-*

preciation vs. *appropriation* anknüpfend − die Vorteile eines bilingualen wie auch fächerübergreifenden Unterrichts herausstellt.

Zusätzlich zu diesen Aufsätzen sei als praxisbezogener Beitrag Daniel Mark Eberhards und Michael Scharpfs Bericht über die Rekonstruktion und Wiederaufführung des Stummfilms DIE KNEIPP-KUR (D 1923) hervorgehoben, dessen durchaus als ›authentisch‹ zu bezeichnende musikalische Begleitung trotz fehlender Vorkenntnisse durch künstlerische Intuition und Sicherheit besticht und im vorgeschlagenen musikpädagogischen Setting durch die Hinzunahme und Reflexion zentraler Forschungsliteratur zur Stummfilm-Renaissance produktiv ergänzt werden könnte; ferner die hinsichtlich film(musikal)ischer Konventionen, Klischees und Kultfiguren nicht weniger lehrreiche humoristische Studie von Felix Janosa, welcher mit seinem Titel »13 Arten, eine Azteken-Jungfrau zu opfern« treffend auf die Arnold Schönberg gewidmete Komposition »Vierzehn Arten, den Regen zu beschreiben« seines Schülers Hanns Eisler anspielt.

Wie Henry Keazor (2002) betont hat, stellt die Herausgabe eines Liber Amicorum »eine qualitative Herausforderung [dar], denn im Idealfall sollten die einzelnen Festschriftbeiträge ja zugleich einen Reflex vom intellektuellen Radius des Jubilars, seinem methodischen Profil und seinem gedanklichen Reichtum geben«. Diese Herausforderung hat sich denn auch bei der Lektüre und Beurteilung des vorliegenden Bandes schnell herauskristallisiert. Dass die meisten Beiträge eher eine Lobeshymne auf Georg Maas und den Film darstellen, mag der Intention der Festschrift geschuldet sein. Dennoch hätte man sich insgesamt eine stärkere Anbindung an gegenwärtige Forschungsdiskurse und somit auch eine kritischere Auseinandersetzung mit aktueller Forschungsliteratur gewünscht. Es fällt auf, dass – sofern überhaupt (konsequent) zitiert wird − erstaunlich viele Beiträge ihre Informationen aus nicht-wissenschaftlichen Online-Quellen (darunter Wikipedia), Zeitungsberichten und Radiobeiträgen, Interviews und Booklets beziehen, mit denen auch nur bedingt quellenkritisch umgegangen wurde. Daneben überwiegen Überblicksdarstellungen sowie Schulbücher des Gewürdigten, deren genrespezifische Verkürzungen, Verallgemeinerungen und Vereinfachungen ebenfalls unreflektiert bleiben.

Dem in dieser Hinsicht mitunter fehlenden inhaltlichen Anspruch entspricht häufig auch ein salopper Schreibstil, weswegen zahlreiche Aufsätze eher essayistischen Charakters

sind. Bedauerlicherweise sind dem Lektorat zudem einige mehr oder weniger gravierende Fehler entgangen, etwa Wort- oder Satzwiederholungen, gelegentliche Fehler bei Worttrennungen oder Schreibweisen von Personennamen und Filmtiteln – wobei positiv hervorzuheben ist, dass darauf geachtet wurde, sämtliche Titel sowohl im Original als auch in der deutschen Übersetzung anzugeben.

Den Kritikpunkten zum Trotz besticht der Band neben den exzellenten Beiträgen von beispielsweise Näumann, Auhagen, Kollinger oder Falkenhagen zum einen durch seine leichte Verständlichkeit, zum anderen durch die zahlreichen Film- und Musikbeispiele unterschiedlicher Genres, Jahrzehnte und Kulturräume, wodurch er sich auch für eine auf Vielfalt bedachte Lehre als gewinnbringend erweist.

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Empfohlene Zitierweise

Engelke, Henriette: Rezension zu: Claudia Hartling / Susanne Vollberg (Hrsg.): *Leidenschaft Filmmusik. Theorie – Praxis – Vermittlung*. Marburg: Schüren 2024. In: *Kieler Beiträge zur Filmmusikforschung* 19 (2025), S. 166–173, DOI: https://doi.org/10.59056/kbzf.2025.19.p166-173.

Kieler Beiträge zur Filmmusikforschung (ISSN 1866-4768)

Rezension zu:

Thomas Krettenauer / Lars Oberhaus (Hrsg.): *Zwischen Kinosound und Game Audio. Film – Musik – Vermittlung*

Münster: Waxmann 2024

Henriette Engelke

Für ihren Sammelband *Zwischen Kinosound und Game Audio. Film – Musik – Vermittlung* (2024) konnten Thomas Krettenauer und Lars Oberhaus sowohl renommierte Filmmusikforscher*innen und Didaktiker*innen als auch den wissenschaftlichen und pädagogischen Nachwuchs sowie aktuelle Filmkomponist*innen gewinnen. Der Titel meint dabei eine thematische Bandbreite anstelle einer chronologischen Erzählung der Entwicklungsgeschichte audiovisueller Medien. Ausgangspunkt für die Konzeption des Bandes bildet die Voraussetzung, den Begriff Filmmusik möglichst weit zu denken und sowohl didaktisch als auch methodisch an aktuelle Produktions- und Rezeptionsbedingungen anzubinden, um auf diese Weise bestehende Lücken in Forschung und (schulischer wie außerschulischer) Vermittlung zu schließen.

Hierfür ist der Band in vier Teile gegliedert – »Film- und medienwissenschaftliche Dimensionen und Forschungsfelder«, »Filmvermittlung aus musikpädagogischer und interdisziplinärer Perspektive«, »Lernfelder und Beispiele für den Musikunterricht« sowie »Erfahrungs- und Werkstattberichte von Filmmusikkomponist*innen« –, wobei sich die Beiträge nicht immer eindeutig einem Bereich zuordnen lassen. So finden sich dankbare didaktische Impulse ebenso in den film- und medienwissenschaftlichen Aufsätzen wie Erfahrungsberichte aus der Praxis der Filmmusikkomposition in den didaktischen Beiträgen, wohingegen in den Kapiteln zur Filmvermittlung und zum Musikunterricht nicht flächendeckend konkrete Lehrkonzepte angeboten werden. Da es sich außerdem weder um ein Handbuch handelt, in welchem Einzelaspekte systematisch abgedeckt werden und jeder Beitrag verlässlich den aktuellen Forschungsstand widerspiegelt, noch um eine Sammlung von »Kochrezepten« (123) zur Vermittlung von Filmmusik, erscheint eine

komplementäre Lektüre der einzelnen (sich mitunter überschneidenden, ergänzenden, aber auch widersprechenden) Beiträge notwendig und lohnend.

Zum Thema Filmmusik und Filmsound seien zunächst der fundierte Überblick von Josef Kloppenburg zum Komponieren für Hollywood sowie der vertiefende Aufsatz von Claus Tieber zum integrierten Soundtrack empfohlen, daran anschließend die allgemeineren didaktisch-methodischen Überlegungen von Georg Maas (Beziehungsgeschichte von Musikunterricht und Filmmusik), Claudia Bullerjahn und Jennifer Nowak (Filmanalyse) sowie Thomas Krettenauer und Lars Oberhaus (Methoden inner- und außerschulischer musikbezogener Filmvermittlung), in welchen auch bereits existierende Unterrichtsmaterialien besprochen werden, ferner die – trotz sachlicher Fehler – konkreten Unterrichtskonzepte von Norbert Schläbitz (Filmanalyse) und Matthias Rheinländer (Filmvertonung[1]). Ergänzend bieten sich die Erfahrungs- und Werkstattberichte von Meike Katrin Stein und Jan Willem de With an, welche einen interessanten Einblick in die beruflichen Herausforderungen von Filmmusikkomposition als gleichermaßen Kunst und Dienstleistung bieten. Ebenfalls einen Blick hinter die Kulissen gibt Richard Hötters anspruchsvoller und zugleich didaktisch sehr gut aufbereiteter Beitrag zur Musik in der aktuellen Fernsehwerbung, der veraltete Theorien und praxisferne Unterrichtsvorschläge einer kritischen Betrachtung unterzieht. Einen Beitrag zu den verschiedenen Definitionen und Formen des Kinder- und Jugendfilms sowie Möglichkeiten seiner musikbezogenen Vermittlung liefert Lars Oberhaus, ergänzt um den Werkstattbericht des Filmkomponisten Johannes Repka, welcher sich als ideale Unterrichtslektüre eignet, indem er die Heranwachsenden adressiert und zum Nachdenken über die dramaturgischen Herausforderungen einer Filmvertonung anregt.

Zur filmischen Aneignung präexistenter Musik schlägt Bettina Henzler in Anlehnung an Alain Bergala »*verschiedene Methoden* des Verknüpfens und Vergleichens von Film- und Musikfragmenten« (49; Hervorhebung im Original) vor – wie sie implizit in der Mehrheit der Beiträge angewandt werden –, um die Wechselwirkung zwischen Film und präexistenter Musik sowohl auf dramaturgischer als auch auf semantischer Ebene zu untersuchen. Leider zeigen sich hier neben zahlreichen Flüchtigkeitsfehlern trotz des ausgewie-

[1] Siehe vergleichend hierzu Lehnert 2024.

senen Forschungsbezugs der Autorin zu Frankreich Sprach- und Verständnisschwierigkeiten. Dagegen zeichnet sich der Aufsatz von Franziska Kollinger zur multiperspektivischen Interpretation von Musikgeschichte im Biopic durch einen hohen Grad an wissenschaftlicher Qualität und Innovation aus. Weniger das interpretative[2] als vielmehr das dokumentarische Moment spielt bei Patric Pfister sowie Peter Imort eine Rolle, deren Beiträge zur Rock- und Popmusik das filmische Potenzial der Vermittlung von Geschichte, sozialer Bedeutung(sverschiebung) und stilistischen Kennzeichen jener Musik veranschaulichen und konkrete didaktisch-methodische Vorschläge bereithalten.

Zu den unterschiedlichen Visualisierungs- und Vermittlungsstrategien von Musik sei ferner auf den gewinnbringenden Aufsatz zum Filmmusical von Thomas Krettenauer hingewiesen, in welchem der Autor sowohl die wissenschaftliche und pädagogische Literatur eingehend auswertet als auch das vielseitige didaktische Potenzial überzeugend darlegt – einziger Wermutstropfen: die Bezeichnung der Komponistin und Pianistin Marguerite Monnot als männlichen Songschreiber (228, Anm. 2). Der Beitrag von Felix Janosa zum genreprägenden Moment der Beatles-Filme bleibt bedauerlicherweise nur sehr vage in seinen analytischen wie auch didaktisch-methodischen Ausführungen. Den vermutlich gesellschaftlich relevantesten und gleichzeitig herausforderndsten Beitrag des Bandes liefern Lars Oberhaus, Steffi Rocker und Christina Strunz zum diskriminierungskritischen und gendersensiblen Potenzial von Musikvideos. Dass dieses komplexe Thema pädagogisch nicht unproblematisch ist, zeigt sich an einigen der ausgewählten Beispiele, deren stark vereinfachte Besprechung unberücksichtigt lässt, dass sich Empowerment und Diskriminierung nicht zwangsläufig ausschließen und dass (vermeintliches) Empowerment als Modeerscheinung durchaus als Vermarktungsstrategie missbraucht werden kann.

Die dezidiert auf den Film bezogenen Beiträge lassen sich um popkulturelle Aneignungen im Zeitalter der Post-Digitalität sowie spezifisch damit verbundene Fragestellungen und Vermittlungsmethoden erweitern, und zwar mit dem profunden Aufsatz von Barbara Hornberger zur Bedeutung von Social-Media-Plattformen als demokratische »kulturelle Archive« (87) sowie mit Christoph Stanges nicht ganz überzeugendem Plädoyer für die musikunterrichtliche Einbindung von TikTok. Als wichtige ludomusikologische Hori-

[2] Siehe ergänzend auch Falkenhagen 2024.

zonterweiterung fungieren Claudia Bullerjahns informative und kritische Auswertung empirischer Studien und Analysemethoden zur »Aufdeckung interaktiver ludischer Funktionen« (40) von Videospielen sowie der eher affirmative Beitrag von Jan Torge Claussen zum didaktischen Potenzial musikalischer Interaktivität; als künstlerische wie pädagogische Brücke zwischen Bühne und Leinwand der – wenngleich terminologisch wie methodisch unsaubere – Aufsatz von Carolin Ehring zur Wechselwirkung von Film und Musik im »intermedialen« (gemeint ist multimedialen) Musiktheater.

Der Sammelband versteht sich als fachlicher wie didaktisch-methodischer Impuls und macht die untrennbare, interdependente Verbindung von Film, Musik und Vermittlung stark. So kann über den Film eine Brücke zur Musik und Kompositionsgeschichte geschlagen werden, während handlungsorientierte Vermittlungsmethoden wiederum den künstlerischen Schaffensprozess und die damit verbundenen praktischen Herausforderungen erfahrbar und nachvollziehbar werden lassen. Einen »filmwissenschaftlich-didaktischen wie auch vermittlungsmethodischen Nachholbedarf« (8) konstatierend, plädieren die Herausgeber in Anlehnung an Georg Maas für eine »*Film-Musik-Literacy*« (8; Hervorhebung im Original), welche Film und Musik als gleichermaßen vermittelnde Medien *und* zu vermittelnde Inhalte versteht und durch theoretische sowie vor allem praktische Reflexion – mit Bergala (2006, 29) ist von »schöpferischer Betrachtung« (9) die Rede – zu erreichen sei. Unter Berufung auf die geschichtlichen (technologischen, soziologischen, ästhetischen usw.) Veränderungen von Musik und Sound in den audiovisuellen Medien fordern sie die Erweiterung des Untersuchungsspektrums sowie die Anpassung der Analyse- und Vermittlungsmethoden und üben Kritik an einer »normativen Bild-/Musik-Analyse und unterschwelligen Anbiederung an die filmisch-mediale Erfahrungswelt von Jugendlichen« (9).

Wenngleich der Lebensweltbezug in dem Band trotzdem immer wieder als Ausgangspunkt und Argument dient, so decken die Beiträge durchaus eine thematische Vielfalt von Musik und Sound im Kontext von Filmen, Serien und Werbung, Musikvideos und Videospielen sowie den sozialen Medien ab und präsentieren den jeweiligen Inhalten entsprechend theoretische und praktische Methoden zu deren Vermittlung. Dabei sind die didaktisch-methodischen Vorschläge teilweise hervorragend durchdacht und konkretisiert wor-

den, wohingegen sie in anderen Beiträgen wiederum nur äußerst vage formuliert und keiner kritischen Betrachtung unterzogen worden sind. Auffällig ist, dass die entsprechenden Altersgruppen/Schulklassen selten angegeben werden und die Vorkenntnisse und Erfahrungen der Lernenden, deren musikalische und andere Kompetenzen und Präferenzen, ebenso wie die Eignung der ausgewählten Filme/Spiele, unberücksichtigt bleiben; so wird der Heterogenität der Heranwachsenden kaum Rechnung getragen. Nicht minder problematisch ist die musikunterrichtliche Verortung der Lerninhalte und Vermittlungsmethoden, insofern der ohnehin schon zeitlich knapp bemessene und inhaltlich immer vielseitiger werdende Musikunterricht als Auffangbecken für (durchaus notwendige) Medienbildung, künstlerische und körperliche Erziehung verstanden wird. Hier wären konkretere Überlegungen zur Gewichtung innerhalb des Musikunterrichts sowie zur realistischen Umsetzung einer Kooperation der verschiedenen Unterrichtsfächer wünschenswert gewesen.[3]

Als »zentrale Kritikpunkte und Defizite« (11) der musikpädagogischen Filmbildung führen die Herausgeber die auf einen Kanon männlicher Autoren beschränkte Werkauswahl, die überwiegend auf undifferenzierte Funktions- und Wirkungszuschreibungen sowie ›veraltete‹ Kompositionsverfahren fokussierten Lerninhalte und Analysen, aber auch die fehlende Anknüpfung an den aktuellen Forschungsstand an. Umso bedauerlicher ist es, dass der Band diesem zurecht gesetzten Anspruch nicht vollumfänglich gerecht wird. So fällt auf, dass die in der Einleitung angekündigte Diversität und Gendersensibilität sich lediglich auf zwei Beiträge (Oberhaus, Rocker und Strunz sowie Repka) beschränkt und sich auch nicht in der Film- und Musikauswahl widerspiegelt. Vielmehr wird ein Kanon von Hollywood-Klassikern und Kultfilmen von in der Regel männlichen Regisseuren ebenso wie ein Kanon von in der Regel männlichen Filmkomponisten und ebenfalls männlichen ›Hyphenates‹ reproduziert, deren Kompositionen bzw. Kompilationen wiederum auf Musikstücken männlicher Autoren basieren. Lediglich Kloppenburgs Beitrag »Von Max Steiner bis Hans Zimmer« reflektiert dies, indem er – zumindest in einer Fußnote (93, Anm. 1) – auf konkrete Filmkomponistinnen hinweist. Ebenfalls ist auffällig, dass sich die didaktisch-methodischen Beiträge nur bedingt auf den filmmusikologischen

[3] Siehe hierzu exemplarisch die Forumsbeiträge in *Kieler Beiträge zur Filmmusikforschung* 18 (2024).

Forschungsstand beziehen, ihre Informationen vielfach populärwissenschaftlicher und pädagogischer Literatur oder einer angenommenen Lehrmeinung entnehmen und sowohl mit diesen Quellen als auch mit PR-Material, Künstlerwebsites, Autobiographien oder Presseberichten ebenso unkritisch umgehen[4] wie mit der verwendeten Terminologie.

Obwohl die Herausgeber die generellen terminologischen Unsauberkeiten in der Beschäftigung mit dem interdisziplinären Feld Filmmusik monieren, stechen einige Aufsätze hervor, in denen Fachvokabular ohne theoretische Anbindung in den Raum geworfen wird. Exemplarisch sei auf den unkritischen Gebrauch von Begriffen wie Leitmotivik für jedwede Form melodischer Etikettierung oder Synästhesie für jegliche intermodalen Phänomene hingewiesen, die doch zumindest einer theoretischen Reflexion bedürfen. Während nämlich Michel Chions Begriff der Synchrese (»synchrèse«, Chion 1994, 63), auf den sich Henzler (50) irreführenderweise bezieht, die mentale Verbindung zweier *synchron auftretender* Reize als Voraussetzung für die Nachsynchronisation eines Filmes meint, deren außerfilmische Beziehungslosigkeit selbst bei starker klanglicher Abweichung das Publikum in Kauf nimmt, existiert im Falle von (medizinischer) Synästhesie zu einer der ausgelösten Reaktionen *gar kein physikalischer* Reiz: Die Empfindung wird vielmehr über die unweigerliche Verknüpfung mit einem anderen Sinn angeregt – allerdings nur bei einem geringen Prozentsatz der Bevölkerung und bei jedem Synästhetiker individuell, aber stets in der gleichen Kombination. Der inflationäre, Helmut Rösing zufolge umgangssprachliche, nicht aber wissenschaftlich akkurate Gebrauch des Synästhesie-Begriffs, und zwar »überall dort […], wo es um die Verbindung der Künste […] und die Aufarbeitung ihrer semantischen Konnotationen geht« (Rösing 2022), fasst weder die Besonderheit synästhetischer Effekte im engeren Sinne (vgl. Jewanski 1999, 94) noch die der Synchresis und stiftet mehr Verwirrung, als dass er ein tiefergehendes Verständnis komplexer und doch unterschiedlicher Phänomene fördert. Dies zeigt sich denn auch in der pauschalen Gleichsetzung unterschiedlicher experimenteller Ansätze der künstlerischen Avantgarde im frühen 20. Jahrhundert (so im Beitrag von Oberhaus, Rocker und Strunz), die nur zum Teil auf synästhetische Erfahrungen zurückzuführen sind.

[4] Zurecht weist Maas in seinem Beitrag (111, Anm. 10) auf die oft fehlerhaften YouTube-Beschreibungen hin.

Dass sich hier die Spreu vom Weizen trennt, zeigen neben grammatikalischen und orthographischen Fehlern[5], mangelnden Fremdsprachenkenntnissen oder unsauberen wörtlichen Zitaten auch fehlerhafte Schreibweisen von Personen- und Band-Namen[6] sowie Werktiteln[7], ferner falsche Datierungen und Werkzuordnungen[8], verbunden mit historischen Unstimmigkeiten, insbesondere zur Stummfilmzeit (etwa bei Oberhaus, Rocker und Strunz sowie Rheinländer; dagegen die historisch adäquateren Darstellungen im Online-Zusatzmaterial von Bullerjahn und Nowak). Hier sei die Hinzuziehung der (wenngleich nicht immer fehlerfreien) Datenbanken *imdb* und *filmportal* in Kombination mit Fachliteratur empfohlen. Die doch recht hohe Fehlerquote erscheint umso problematischer, als dieses Buch für den pädagogischen Gebrauch intendiert ist und angenommen werden darf, dass es vor allem von Lehrenden und Lernenden zur Hand genommen wird, denen in der Regel eine fachliche Expertise fehlt, um diese Fehler zu erkennen und im Unterricht nicht zu reproduzieren. Vielleicht hätte hier ein stärkerer Austausch zwischen den einzelnen Beitragenden Abhilfe geschaffen. Davon abgesehen spiegelt sich hier eine ganz grundsätzliche Symptomatik aktueller Publikationen wider: die Unterschätzung eines professionellen Lektorats in Kombination mit Publikationsdruck und Arbeitsüberlastung aller Beteiligten sowie daraus resultierender Ungenauigkeiten.

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5 Darunter auch Fachvokabular wie sync[h]resis (20), Ae[s]thetic Awe (33), Soulk [recte: Soul] (91), Aisthetis [recte: Aisthesis] (284) oder Figurien [recte: Figurinen] (157, wiederholt).

6 Thomas Alpha [recte: Alva] Edison (Online-Zusatzmaterial), Francois [recte: François] Truffaut (70, Anm. 10), Guiseppe [recte: Giuseppe] Verdi (93), Hildur Gudnadottir [recte: Guðnadóttir] (93), Han[n]s Eisler (97), Emilio Audissimo [recte: Audissino] (97), Draft [recte: Daft] Punk (161), Kate [recte: Katy] Perry (161, 171), Phlebs [recte: Phleps], T. (169), Michael [recte: Michel oder Michaël] van der Aa (187, wiederholt), Gioachina [recte: Gioachino] Rossini (187), Orsen [recte: Orson] Welles (201), Russel Cr[o]use (228, Anm. 3), Jonathan Larsson [recte: Larson] (246), Demien [recte: Damien] Chazelle (240, wiederholt), Ala[i]n Bergala (240, Anm. 17), Martin Scorcese [recte: Scorsese] (276), Wulff, H. C. [recte: H. J. (Hans Jürgen)] (281), Ernst [recte: Erich] Wolfgang Korngold (307), Miklós Róza (307) bzw. Miklós Rósza (310, Anm. 9) [recte: Rózsa].

7 A SPACE ODYSSEE [recte: ODYSSEY] (49ff., wiederholt), *Distanz* [recte: *Distant*] *Fingers* (61), PIRATES OF THE CARRIBBEAN [recte: CARIBBEAN] (95), »Les arts à l[']école« (144), BALLETT [recte: BALLET] MÉCANIQUE (154, 172), *Fireworks* [recte: *Firework*] (161, 171), UNE FEMME ES[T] UNE FEMME (246), »Wu-Tang Clan can still sting« (258) [recte: »Wu-Tang Clan still sting«], »We are [recte: were] a King Once« (265, 271), *Harry Potter and the So*[*r*]*cerer's Stone Suite* (308, Anm. 3) – ganz zu schweigen von der wiederholten Autokorrektur bei englischen Titeln (… oft he [recte: of the] …).

8 So stammt der Film BALLET MÉCANIQUE (1924, nicht 1921!) nicht von Walter Ruttmann, sondern von Fernand Léger und Dudley Murphy; zudem entstanden Ruttmanns LICHTSPIELE OPUS I–IV weder allesamt im Jahre 1921, noch wurden sie allesamt in diesem Jahr uraufgeführt.

Festzuhalten bleibt, dass sich die rund 360 Textseiten des Sammelbandes zügig und verständlich lesen und neben zahlreichen hochwertigen Aufsätzen aus Forschung und Praxis eine Fülle an Inspiration für die Film(musik)vermittlung bereithalten. Filmstills und Notenbeispiele wurden ökonomisch und sinnvoll eingesetzt, ergänzt um Hörbeispiele, welche über QR-Codes abrufbar sind. Zudem haben sich einige Autor*innen die Mühe gemacht, Online-Material für den Unterricht vorzubereiten, welches auf der Verlagswebsite kostenfrei zur Verfügung steht und bei Lehrenden und Lernenden unbedingt Beachtung finden sollte. Dass dabei gleich zwei Glossare und drei Vorlagen für ein Sequenzprotokoll entstanden sind, hätte man gegebenenfalls anders lösen können, zeigt aber auch unterschiedliche Perspektiven auf vermeintlich objektive Begriffe und Analysemethoden.

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Kieler Beiträge zur Filmmusikforschung (ISSN 1866-4768)

»Behind the Scenes«:

Produktionsperspektiven auf Sound und Musik in Bewegtbildmedien

Ein Bericht zum 19. Symposium der Kieler Gesellschaft für Filmmusikforschung in Kooperation mit dem Netzwerk Drehbuchforschung an der Universität zu Köln, 27.–28. Juni 2025

Von Nico Cristantielli, Laura Drexelius, Marie Euler, Maja Hütter, Melissa Kruft, Ellen Kuhn, Alina Lutz, Leonie Poulheim, Ole Tüngler, Rubina Ünzelmann-Balotsch, Anna-Karina Vollmer, Yasaman Wardasbi und Pascal Rudolph

Am 27. und 28. Juni 2025 versammelten sich Filmmusikforscher*innen an der Universität zu Köln zum 19. Symposium der Kieler Gesellschaft für Filmmusikforschung, das in diesem Jahr in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Netzwerk Drehbuchforschung stattfand. Unter dem Titel »›Behind the Scenes‹: Produktionsperspektiven auf Sound und Musik in Bewegtbildmedien« wurde ein facettenreicher Blick auf die oft unsichtbare Arbeit geworfen, die hinter der Filmmusik und den Klangwelten der Bewegtbildmedien steckt. Die Beiträge des Symposiums reichten dabei von den technischen und künstlerischen Produktionsprozessen bis hin zu den politischen und kulturellen Implikationen von Musik und Klang in Film und Fernsehen. Die Vorträge beleuchteten zahlreiche Aspekte der Filmmusikproduktion – sei es die Rolle der Musik im historischen Film, die erzählerische Bedeutung von Sounddesign oder die Herausforderungen, mit denen Komponist*innen und Sounddesigner*innen konfrontiert sind, wenn sie ihre Arbeit hinter den Kulissen leisten. Es ging darum, die Schnittstellen zwischen künstlerischem Ausdruck, technischer Präzision und gesellschaftlichen Kontexten zu erfassen und die oft übersehenen, aber entscheidenden Rollen, die Musik und Sound in der Gestaltung von Filmwelten spielen, zu würdigen. Der vorliegende Tagungsbericht, der im Rahmen eines Seminars von Pascal Rudolph an der Universität zu Köln entstand, bietet eine umfassende Reflexion und Auseinandersetzung mit den verschiedenen Vorträgen und Diskussionen des Symposiums.

Das erste Panel trug den Titel »Produktionsprozesse außerhalb des narrativen Langfilms«. In Kerstin Stutterheims Vortrag »Musik als narratives Element in gegenwärtigen Dokumentarfilmen« standen zwei Beispiele im Zentrum: Johan Grimonprez' SOUND-

TRACK TO A COUP D'ÉTAT (2024) und James Bennings LITTLE BOY (2025). Beide Filme verdeutlichen auf unterschiedliche Weise, wie Musik nicht nur emotionalisierend, sondern als eigenständige, teilweise gegenläufige Erzählebene fungiert. Grimonprez' Film thematisiert die Ermordung des kongolesischen Premierministers Patrice Lumumba vor dem Hintergrund der US-amerikanischen Außenpolitik während des Kalten Krieges. Der Einsatz von Jazz, insbesondere Musik von Louis Armstrong, ist dabei bewusst ambivalent gestaltet: Armstrong erscheint als Symbol afroamerikanischer Kultur, zugleich aber auch als Instrument US-amerikanischer Propaganda in Afrika. In Bennings LITTLE BOY (2025) wird Musik hingegen in eine formal-strenge Struktur eingebettet: Auf Szenen, in denen Kinder Architekturmodelle kolorieren, folgen historische Reden; Popmusik der jeweiligen Zeit verbindet den Alltag mit politischer Geschichte. Der Film entwickelt so ein Spannungsfeld zwischen Kindheit, kultureller Erinnerung und Gewaltgeschichte. Stutterheim plädierte dafür, Musik im dokumentarischen Film als bewusst eingesetztes dramaturgisches und nicht nur emotionalisierendes Mittel zu verstehen. Musik könne eine reflexive Erzählebene bilden, die zur Vielschichtigkeit dokumentarischer Formen wesentlich beiträgt.

Abbildung 1: Kerstin Stutterheim bei ihrem Vortrag. © Netzwerk Medien

James Deaville widmete seinen Vortrag »Heading for the Covers: The Use of Pre-Existing Music in Trailer Production« der Frage, wie präexistente Musik in Filmtrailern gezielt eingesetzt wird. Nach Deaville sind Trailer nicht nur als Marketinginstrumente zu verstehen, sondern als eigenständige audiovisuelle Form mit eigener Logik und Erzählweise. Musik lässt sich darin aus zwei Perspektiven betrachten. Zum einen hängt sie eng mit der Produktion zusammen: Originalaufnahmen sind häufig teuer und schwer zu lizenzieren, weshalb Trailerproduzent*innen oft auf Cover-Versionen zurückgreifen. Diese lassen sich flexibler gestalten und können inhaltlich stärker mit den Bildern abgestimmt werden. Zum anderen entfalte die Musik so eine zentrale Funktion: Sie strukturiere Emotionen, schaffe Wiedererkennung und verändere die Bedeutung des Gezeigten. Dabei wird ein Song nicht nur wiedererkannt, sondern gleichzeitig in einen neuen Kontext gestellt, was beim Publikum sowohl Vertrautheit als auch Irritation auslösen kann. Deaville argumentierte, dass sich gerade in dieser Verbindung von Bekanntem und Neuem die Stärke von Trailermusik zeige.

In seinem Vortrag »Zwischen Auteur und Kollaboration« befasste sich Peter Niedermüller mit der Frage nach Auteurism und künstlerischer Zusammenarbeit in der Filmproduktion am Beispiel des Komponisten Angelo Badalamenti. Besonderes Augenmerk lag auf seiner Beziehung zu David Lynch, mit dem er ein prägendes Duo bildete. Als Ergebnis formulierte Niedermüller, dass Auteurism auf eine Weise untersucht werden muss, die die Illusion individueller Autorschaft dekonstruiert. Dabei sollte der Blick eben auf kollaborative Prozesse gerichtet werden, die Autorenschaft mitprägen.

Anschließend setzte sich Gernot Preusser in seinem Vortrag mit dem immer noch in Hollywood vorzufindenden romantischen Klangideal des 19. Jahrhunderts auseinander und analysierte insbesondere die Rolle dieser Tradition innerhalb moderner Produktionsbedingungen. Anhand einer qualitativen Inhaltsanalyse von Interviews in dem Buch *Score: A Film Music Documentary* (2017) stellte Preusser vier zentrale Produktionsprozesse heraus: die musikalische Ideenfindung, die Kommunikation mit Regie und Produktion, die technische Umsetzung sowie die finale Filmpassung. Besonders die Ideenfindung wird hierbei von den Komponist*innen selbst als kreativer Kernprozess stilisiert und häufig romantisch überhöht. Des Weiteren typisierte er vier verschiedene Kompo-

nist*innen-Gruppen: die traditionellen Einzelgänger*innen, digitalisierte Künstler*innen, technisierte Sound-Producer und innovative Teamplayer. In der anschließenden Diskussion wurde besonders der Einfluss des romantischen Genie-Begriffs auf die Selbstinszenierung der Komponist*innen thematisiert. Preusser betonte, dass viele sich bewusst in die Tradition ›großer‹ Orchesterkomponist*innen stellen und sich so von popmusikalischen Konventionen abgrenzen.

Der Vortrag von Stefan Drees widmete sich dem gezielten Einsatz von Musik und Klang in den Drehbüchern der Regisseurin und Drehbuchautorin Agnès Varda. Drees zeigte, wie Varda Musik frühzeitig als strukturelle und dramaturgische Komponente in den kreativen Prozess integrierte. In ihrem Debütfilm LA POINTE COURTE (1955) nutzte sie Fotografien in der Konzeption des Storyboards inklusive annotierter Klangüberlegungen. Besonders auffällig war laut Drees Vardas präzise Planung der Musiknutzung. Besonderes Augenmerk richtete Drees auf SANS TOIT NI LOI (1985), Vardas erfolgreichsten Spielfilm. Das eigens komponierte Streichquartett prägt hier wesentlich die Klangästhetik. Des Weiteren fungierten Songtexte als Kommentare zur Handlung und die Musik bildet das zentrale, fast einzige verbindende Element zur ansonsten weitgehend verschlossenen Protagonistin. Musik erscheint bei Varda somit nicht nur als nachträgliche Untermalung, sondern als integraler Bestandteil der filmischen Konzeption.

Wie werden Klänge für die filmische Welt produziert und wer bekommt die Anerkennung dafür? Das dritte Panel »Studios, Foleys, Sounds« beleuchtete über drei verschiedene Vorträge Aspekte zu Produktionsästhetiken, Berufsrealitäten und Fragen der Autor*innenschaft. Tomy Brautschek widmete seinen Vortrag dem Phänomen des Soundfetischismus und der Produktionsästhetik bei Hans Zimmer. Die Studios, so Brautschek, sind in diesem Kontext keineswegs neutrale Produktionsstätten, sondern inszenierte ›Klangtempel‹ mit popkulturellem Wert. Der Zugang ist beschränkt, das Innere für Außenstehende verborgen, wodurch der Raum ›magisch‹ aufgeladen würde. Obwohl Hans Zimmer seine Räume für Interviews und Dokumentationen öffnet, sieht Brautschek darin eine ähnliche Wirkung, da das Interieur im barocken Stil mit integrierter Studiotechnik geheimnisvoll und erotisch inszeniert ist. Das fetischisierte Setting demonstriere Macht und Erfolg.

Abbildung 2: Pascal Rudolph bei der Moderation. © Netzwerk Medien

Jörg U. Lensing legte in seinem Vortrag die zugrundeliegenden Arbeitsstrukturen von musikalischen Produktionen im Film offen. Sein Einstiegsbeispiel war APOCALYPSE NOW (1979). Aufgrund von unbrauchbarem Tonmaterial musste die Filmpremiere um ein Jahr verschoben werden, wodurch sich die üblicherweise sechs- bis achtwöchige Postproduktionszeit für den Ton auf neun Monate verlängerte. Der darauffolgende Soundtrack schrieb Geschichte und im Abspann wurde erstmals die Berufsbezeichnung »Sound-Designer« aufgeführt. Trotzdem seien laut Lensing alle technischen Arbeitsfelder und somit auch alle sound-bezogenen Tätigkeiten auf der niedrigsten Stufe der Wertschätzung, während Produzent*innen und Regisseur*innen die Spitze der Pyramide bilden. Zusätzlich kritisiert Lensing die gängige fragmentierte Arbeitsteilung innerhalb von Filmproduktionen aus der eine unzureichende Kommunikation zwischen Komponist*innen und Sound-Designer*innen folgt. So stellt er die Idee eines »Sonic Storytellings« vor, die auf eine enge Verschränkung von Bild und Ton durch die integrative Arbeitsteilung abzielt. Lensing schließt seinen Vortrag mit der Vision, die Rolle eines »Creative Audio Directors« zu etablieren. Hierbei handelt es sich um eine bisher nicht existente Berufsbezeichnung, die sowohl gestalterische als auch regieführende Kompetenzen im Ton-

bereich vereint. Aus dem Plenum wurde ergänzend angemerkt, dass es in der Produktion von Videospielen bereits vergleichbare Rollen gibt, von denen die Filmbranche lernen könnte.

Simone Nowicki befasste sich in ihrem Vortrag »Das Ohr übersieht: Foley-Künstler*innen zwischen Urheberrecht und Unsichtbarkeit« mit der strukturellen Unsichtbarkeit von Geräuschemacher*innen in der audiovisuellen Medienproduktion. Sie kritisiert dabei den Begriff »Foley«, der auf den US-amerikanischen Geräuschemacher Jack Foley verweist, dessen Name bis heute das Berufsbild prägt, während zahlreiche andere häufig weibliche Praktiker*innen unsichtbar bleiben. Exemplarisch verwies sie auf Beryl Mortimer, die ab den 1950er-Jahren an James-Bond-Filmen mitarbeitete, deren Name jedoch nie in den Credits erschien. Nowicki schlug den Begriff »Noisemaking« beziehungsweise »Geräuschemachen« vor, um die kreative Eigenleistung, das implizite Wissen und die performative Dimension dieser Arbeit sichtbar zu machen. Damit verbinde sich auch die Forderung, bestehende Vorstellungen von Autorschaft, Kreativität und geistigem Eigentum in der Medienproduktion neu zu denken. Nowicki plädierte dafür, Geräuschemachen nicht länger als rein technisches Handwerk zu begreifen, sondern als kreative, körperlich-performative Praxis. Performances in Live-Formaten wie Gaming-Konzerten oder Live-Hörspielen schaffen erste Momente der Sichtbarkeit. Hier werde nicht nur die künstlerische Interpretation greifbar, sondern auch das kreative Potenzial des Geräuschemachens als eigenständige Ausdrucksform deutlich. Zum Abschluss wurde aus dem Plenum die Frage aufgeworfen, wie sich das Berufsbild der Geräuschemacher*innen im Zeitalter von Künstlicher Intelligenz weiterentwickeln könnte. Nowicki betonte, dass solche Herausforderungen nicht neu seien und sich das Arbeitsfeld stets durch Anpassung an veränderte Produktionsbedingungen und die kreative Aneignung neuer Technologien neu definiert habe.

Fritz Schlüter, der sich in seiner Promotion mit der Geschichte und Praxis des Fachbegriffs »Atmosphäre« (kurz: Atmo) in der Filmtongestaltung beschäftigt, widmete seinen Vortrag der akustischen Ästhetik in Angela Schanelecs Film MEIN LANGSAMES LEBEN (2001). Im Zentrum stand die Frage, wie Atmo, also kontinuierliche Raumklänge oder das sogenannte Grundgeräusch eines Ortes, nicht bloß als beiläufige Klangkulisse funktio-

niert, sondern gezielt als ästhetisches Mittel eingesetzt werden kann. Nach Schlüter ist Atmo ein tontechnischer Fachbegriff für Aufnahmen des Raumklangs, die einer Szene Authentizität und räumliche Tiefe verleihen, auch wenn sie vom Publikum oft nur unbewusst wahrgenommen werden. Auf Grundlage von Interviews mit dem Tonmeister und der Bildeditorin des Films zeigt Schlüter, dass Schanelecs Arbeitsweise konventionelle Filmtonpraktiken infrage stellt. Anstatt einzelne Klangquellen zu isolieren und nachträglich zu verändern, enthält der Setton einen auffallend hohen Anteil an Raumklang.

Daran anschließend stellte Niclas Stockel in seinem Vortrag zentrale Thesen seiner Dissertation zur Musikvideoproduktion im postdigitalen Zeitalter vor. Ausgehend von der Beobachtung, dass heutige Musikvideos stark durch Online-Plattformen geprägt sind, analysierte er deren ästhetische und strukturelle Veränderungen. Am Beispiel vom Video zu Beyoncés »Pretty Hurts« zeigt Stockel, worin er eine postdigitale Ästhetik verortet. So setzt hier der Song erst nach etwa zwei Minuten ein. Davor und danach werden Dialoge, Album-Material und andere musikalische Elemente eingebettet. Dadurch entsteht eine Gestaltungsweise, bei der digitale Mittel selbstverständlich integriert sind und auf Strategien wie Remix, Collage oder Mashup zurückgegriffen wird. Die formale Autonomie der Songs wird so aufgebrochen. Daher versteht Stockel Musikvideos als eigenständige, medienübergreifende Werke, deren Bezug zur Musik bewusst flexibel gehalten wird.

Der letzte Vortrag des ersten Tages wurde von Patricia Euler und Pascal Rudolph gehalten. Sie gingen den Fragen nach, wie Klänge im Drehbuch über bloße Benennung hinaus ausgedrückt werden können und welche sprachlichen sowie gestalterischen Mittel eine immersive Klangerfahrung auf der Drehbuchseite ermöglichen. Dazu analysierten sie das von Scott Becks und Bryan Woods geschriebene Drehbuch des Filmes A QUIET PLACE (2018), in dem blinde Außerirdische mit stark entwickeltem Hörsinn die Erde überrannten und im nun postapokalyptischen Setting alles jagen, was Geräusche erzeugt. Euler und Rudolph legten, entlang Charles Peirces Semiotik und James Deavilles Forschung zu kreativer Klangbeschreibung, verschiedene Strategien offen, die durch Symbolizität, Indexikalität sowie schriftklanglicher und bildklanglicher Ikonizität geprägt sind. Auf Grundlage ihrer Analyse plädieren sie für die Erforschung von Drehbüchern, weil diese einen eigenen ästhetischen Wert besitzen. Anschließend wurde über einen möglichen

Vergleich zwischen diesen Überlegungen und der klanglichen Beschreibung in Comics diskutiert.

Am ersten Vortrag des zweiten Tages ging es mit Anna Ricke um die Musik und den Sound in Textbüchern des Gothic-Theaters . Das Gothic-Genre geht aus der Literatur hervor und fand dann Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts Eingang ins Theater. Anhand von drei Fallbeispielen zeigte Ricke, wie Musik in Aufführungen eingesetzt wurde. Gegenstand ihrer Analyse waren neben Manuskripten und Textbüchern vereinzelt auch Noten. Ricke betonte die Bedeutung von Geräuschen, die nicht nur als atmosphärische Ergänzung fungierten, sondern wesentlich für die dramatische Wirkung waren, da deren Funktion stets mitbedacht wurde. In der Diskussion wurde die weibliche Prägung des Genres thematisiert. Ricke wies darauf hin, dass es Autorinnen aufgrund gesellschaftlicher Bedingungen oft schwer hatten, ihre Stücke aufzuführen. Insgesamt zeigte Rickes Vortrag eindrucksvoll, wie stark Musik und Geräusche bereits vor dem Film narrativ eingesetzt wurden. Durch die Analyse früher Textbücher lassen sich Formen sonischen Storytellings herausarbeiten.

Danach widmete Claus Tieber sich der Frage, wie sich Rhythmus als filmisches Gestaltungsmittel im Übergang vom Stumm- zum Tonfilm im Drehbuch niederschlägt. Dabei zeigte er, dass Rhythmisierung von Alltagsgeräuschen ursprünglich aus dem Theater stammt, im Film jedoch neue Möglichkeiten der Umsetzung bot. Besonders deutlich wird dies in frühen Tonfilmen wie Harry Beaumonts THE BROADWAY MELODY (1929): Im Drehbuch ist dort zu Beginn eine Montagesequenz mit kurzen, rhythmisierten Einstellungen beschrieben – eine visuelle und akustische Choreografie, die in dieser Form auf der Bühne nicht realisierbar gewesen wäre. Tieber betonte, dass Rhythmus im Film nicht nur musikalisch zu verstehen ist, sondern auch durch die Abfolge von Szenen, Geräuschen und Bewegungen entsteht. Wie lässt sich Rhythmus also in filmischen (und schriftlichen) Medien überhaupt bestimmen? Tieber möchte durch die Analyse von rhythmischem Potenzial auch formale Elemente wie Schnittfolgen oder Schuss-Gegenschuss-Schemata eine visuelle und narrative Rhythmustheorie entwickeln. Sein Erkenntnisinteresse richtete sich darauf, wie bereits im Drehbuch rhythmische Strategien zur Steuerung von Aufmerksamkeit und Emotion sichtbar werden.

Jörg Holzmann bot Einblicke in sein laufendes Forschungsprojekt zu frühen Konzertfilmen, insbesondere der Reihe *Das Weltkonzert* aus den 1930er Jahren, unter der Leitung von Franz Schreker. Die Filme dokumentieren die Orchesterpraxis der Zeit und eröffnen damit neue Perspektiven auf Tonregie, Schnitttechnik und musikalische Inszenierung im frühen Tonfilm. Holzmann illustrierte zudem seine Vorgehensweise an beispielhaften Videoaufnahmen, die ermöglichten, musikalische Interpretationen und Spielweisen der gezeigten Musiker*innen en détail zu analysieren.

Danach widmete sich Jan Topolski der Rolle von Musik und Klanggestaltung in Science-Fiction-Filmen der DDR. Im Fokus stand die Frage, wie Zukunftsvisionen und Raumfahrt durch akustische Mittel inszeniert werden und inwiefern die Filme nicht nur künstlerische Werke, sondern auch politische und technologische Statements waren. In der anschließenden Diskussion wurde die Bedeutung der Musik in der Science-Fiction-Filmproduktion weiter thematisiert. Besonders die Frage, inwieweit Musik und Sound als narrative Mittel in Science-Fiction-Filmen genutzt werden können, um sowohl die technologische als auch die emotionale Dimension von Zukunftsvisionen zu verstärken, wurde von den Teilnehmenden diskutiert.

Thomas Jaermanns Vortrag zielte auf eine musikwissenschaftliche Neubewertung des österreichischen Filmkomponisten Anton Profes (1896–1976), der vor allem für seine Musik zu den *Sissi*-Filmen bekannt wurde. Jaermann thematisierte in Bezug auf Profes' Biografie auch seine Tätigkeiten während der NS-Zeit. Offiziell gibt es laut Jaermann keine Informationen zu seiner Arbeit während dieser Zeit. Sein Name stand auf Goebbels »Gottbegnadeten-Liste«, von der er aus unbekannten Gründen wieder gestrichen wurde. Die Frage, ob Profes eher als Mitläufer oder aktiver Unterstützer des NS-Regimes zu klassifizieren ist, lässt sich Jaermann zufolge aufgrund fehlender Quellen nicht abschließend klären.

Die Regisseurin und Drehbuchautorin Ruth Olshan stellte anschließend ihren Film HIMBEEREN MIT SENF (2021) vor und beleuchtete die Rolle der Filmmusik als erzählerisches Element im Kinderfilm. Der Film erzählt von der Teenagerin Meeri, die sich erstmals verliebt und dabei merkt, dass sie durch die Verliebtheitsgefühle fliegen kann. Gleichzeitig ist sie mit familiären Umbrüchen konfrontiert, wie zum Beispiel dem Um-

gang mit dem Tod ihrer Mutter und der neuen Partnerschaft ihres Vaters. Olshan zeigte auf, wie die Musik in ihrem Film nicht nur Emotionen begleitet, sondern innere Entwicklungsprozesse der Hauptfigur widerspiegelt. Nach Olshan gehe es nicht darum, mit Musik zu manipulieren. Stattdessen soll sie es ermöglichen, dass Kinder komplexe Situationen und Gefühle nachvollziehen können.

Abbildung 3: Die Mitglieder der Kieler Gesellschaft für Filmmusikforschung und des Netzwerks Drehbuchforschung. Vorne von links nach rechts: Robert Rabenalt, Maria Behrendt, Pascal Rudolph; hinten von links nach rechts: Peter Niedermüller, Julin Lee, Kerstin Stutterheim, Christine Lang. Nicht im Bild: Stefan Drees. © Konstantin Schoser

Das letzte Panel der Konferenz eröffnete Christine Lang mit ihrer dramaturgischen Analyse von Charlotte Wells' AFTERSUN (2022). Lang betonte, dass Dramaturgie sowohl eine praktische Tätigkeit im Produktionsprozess als auch ein »reverse engineering«-Werkzeug ihrer Analysearbeit sei. Lang zeigte, dass die offene Erzählstruktur des Films epische Ver-

fahren wie Wiederholung, Variation und musikalische Metaphern nutzt, um emotionale und psychologische Prozesse darzustellen. Die Musik fungiere dabei als verbindendes Element zwischen den Zeitebenen und trage wesentlich zur Kohärenz der Erzählung bei. Lang hob hervor, dass gerade durch musikalische Prinzipien eine Form der musikalischen Dramaturgie entstehe, die narrative Kohärenz erzeuge und gleichzeitig die Grenzen des Erzählens auslote.

Robert Rabenalt thematisierte im anschließenden Vortrag die Spannung zwischen künstlerischem Anspruch und ökonomischen Anforderungen im Bereich der Filmdramaturgie und der Arbeit mit Soundtracks. Ausgehend von zwei kontrastierenden Fallbeispielen stellte er zwei Denkmodelle gegenüber: einerseits Filme, bei denen musikalische und dramaturgische Entscheidungen bewusst geplant und im Drehbuch verankert sind, andererseits solche, bei denen sich diese Aspekte im Produktionsprozess ergeben. Grundlegend ging es ihm um die Frage, welche dramaturgischen Wege Filme wählen und wie diese Entscheidungen mit ökonomischen Bedingungen zusammenhängen. Der Vortrag unterstrich damit die Relevanz dramaturgischer Entscheidungen als Schnittstelle zwischen Kunst und Markt.

Im letzten Vortrag der Konferenz analysierte Julian Caskel den Film TÁR (2022) mit Blick auf musikwissenschaftliches Wissen im Drehbuch. Todd Fields Drehbuch richte sich potenziell sowohl an ein bildungsbürgerliches Publikum als auch an musikwissenschaftlich geschulte Rezipient*innen. Es oszilliert dabei zwischen einer eigenen elitären Inszenierung und einer Kritik an elitären Strukturen. Caskel arbeitete heraus, dass die narrative Intention primär über kulturelles Vorwissen transportiert wird, wodurch Musik nicht illustrativ, sondern als ästhetisch-semiotisches Element dramaturgisch wirksam wird. In der Diskussion wurde die Frage aufgeworfen, ob eine musikwissenschaftliche Expertise am Set beteiligt war. Dies wurde als wahrscheinlich eingeschätzt, jedoch fehlen offizielle Bestätigungen.

In einer längeren Abschlussdiskussion wurde über die gesamte Konferenz reflektiert und verschiedene Themen und Vorträge miteinander in Beziehung gesetzt. Wenngleich einige Leerstellen identifiziert wurden – zum Beispiel wurden wenig außereuropäische und nicht-amerikanische Filmbeispiele besprochen – wurde die Veranstaltung insgesamt als

sehr gut bewertet. Die Diskussionen, die sicherlich auch länger hätten gehen können, waren allesamt konstruktiv und wertschätzend. Insbesondere die rege Teilnahme von Studierenden wurde positiv hervorgehoben. Neben zahlreichen Kölner Studierenden waren auch eine Delegation von Mainzer Studierenden sowie externe Gäste anwesend. Schließlich wurde eine Vorschau auf die nächste Konferenz gegeben, die voraussichtlich vom 18. bis zum 20.06.2026 in Marburg unter dem Titel »Audiovisuelle Inszenierungen von Gender – Zwischen Ästhetisierung und Politisierung« stattfinden wird.

Empfohlene Zitierweise

Nico Cristantielli / Laura Drexelius / Marie Euler / Maja Hütter / Melissa Kruft / Ellen Kuhn / Alina Lutz / Leonie Poulheim / Ole Tüngler / Rubina Ünzelmann-Balotsch / Anna-Karina Vollmer / Yasaman Wardasbi / Pascal Rudolph: »Behind the Scenes« – Produktionsperspektiven auf Sound und Musik in Bewegtbildmedien. Ein Bericht zum 19. Symposium der Kieler Gesellschaft für Filmmusikforschung in Kooperation mit dem Netzwerk Drehbuchforschung an der Universität zu Köln, 27.–28. Juni 2025. In: *Kieler Beiträge zur Filmmusikforschung* 19 (2025), S. 183–194, DOI: https://doi.org/10.59056/kbzf.2025.19.p183-194.

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