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EDITORIAL



## Music in French cinema

The study of music in films as a major strand of modern Film Studies began with a special issue of *Yale French Studies* in 1980. Since then, and more particularly since the publication of Gorbman's *Unheard Melodies* in 1987 (Gorbman 1987), there have been many major monographs and collections and academic handbooks.<sup>1</sup> However, the majority of this work focuses on Hollywood cinema. At the time of writing there are only five monographs in English specifically on music in the French cinema: Kelley Conway (2004) on the women realist singers of the 1930s, such as Damia, Florelle, Fréhel or Édith Piaf, with case studies of well-known films of the period; Charles O'Brien (2005) on the transition to direct-sound cinema, a study that focuses not on the standard auteurs of the 1930s, but on cinema more generally, incorporating popular cinema of the period; Orlene Denice McMahon's (2014) partly musicological study of music in the French New Wave; my book on music in the contemporary cinema (Powrie 2017); Hannah Lewis's recent book (2018) on film music in the 1930s, both of which are reviewed by Charles O'Brien in this special number; and Albertine Fox's work on Godard (2018).

There are of course major studies that engage in part with French cinema, not least Gorbman in her field-establishing study of 1987, with its chapters on *Zéro de conduite/Zero for Conduct* (Jean Vigo, 1933) and *Sous les toits de Paris/Beneath the Roofs of Paris* (René Clair, 1930). Amy Herzog's *Dreams of Difference, Songs of the Same* (2009) uses the work of Gilles Deleuze to work through four case studies, two of which – Jean-Luc Godard's *Prénom Carmen/First Name: Carmen* (1983) and Jacques Demy's musicals from the 1960s – show how the musical moment in certain films can function creatively as a 'point of resistance' (37). And there are edited collections on film music that generally have work on French cinema, such as several chapters in a collection on European film music (Mera 2006), two chapters in a more general book (Wojcik and Knight 2001) or a single chapter in more tightly focused studies as in *The Sound of Musicals* (Cohan 2010).

Like English-language studies, French-language studies have also focused mainly on Hollywood.<sup>2</sup> Even the arguably foremost European theoretician of the soundtrack, Paris-based academic and former composer Michel Chion, works on the soundtrack more generally, not just on music, and that across a range of national cinemas, with very little on the French cinema.<sup>3</sup> Laurent Bossu's massive doctoral thesis (2005) analyses musical types in some fifty films, although many of them are Hollywood films, in which he impressionistically contrasts minimal use of pre-existing music (what he calls 'intoxication') with a more systematic and immersive use (what he calls 'noyade' or drowning). There has been some limited work on music in the French cinema from an historical point of view, such as Emmanuelle Toulet and Christian Belaygue's edited collection on music in the silent cinema (1994), or Alain Lacombe and François Porcile's broad historical survey covering the period 1940–1980 (1995). More recently, however, there has been a surge in publications by French scholars as is the case with Anglophone scholars, such as Cécile

Carayol's mainly musicological study of composed symphonic soundtracks (2014),<sup>4</sup> Jérôme Rossi's edited collection (2016) ranging from the 1930s to the present (reviewed by Charles O'Brien in this special number) and a collection focused on song (Lagabriele and Obergöker 2016). Another recent collection brings together studies of French and Latin American film music (Dufays, Nasta, and Caladanu 2018).

This double special issue builds on these publications by proposing work on some areas in French film music studies that have not yet been tackled. Two articles on film music in the 1930s focus on aspects of experimentation in the new sound cinema, whether Hannah Lewis's exploration of the mechanical piano player or Jérôme Rossi's taxonomy of composer styles. Christopher Faulkner (2011) had previously explored the role of automata in *La Règle du jeu/The Rules of the Game* (Jean Renoir, 1939), suggesting that they were an 'analogy for the medium of film itself' (9) and 'a critique of both ontological and epistemological certainty' (19). He concentrates on three of the automata in the film (the bird, the 'négresse' and the orchestrion) as markers of 'the fading half-life of the Enlightenment and its aspirations as Europe stands, in 1939, before the abyss of a second World War and the Holocaust' (19). Lewis's account of one of the automata Faulkner mentions only in passing is placed within the broader fascination with this particular instrument in a range of films other than *La Règle du jeu – La Chienne* (Jean Renoir, 1931), *Le Quatorze Juillet/July 14* (René Clair, 1932), *L'Atalante* (Jean Vigo, 1934) and *Pépé le Moko* (Jacques Duvivier, 1937). Lewis tracks the way that the instrument was used anempathetically over the course of the 1930s, showing how it denoted a fascination with experimentation in the early part of the decade, only to accrue more dystopian connotations by the end of the decade, its mechanical nature pointing to cultural anxieties over dehumanisation.

Experimentation is also at the heart of Rossi's article on different musical styles in the 1930s, exemplified by Arthur Honegger, Alexis Roland-Manuel and Vincent Scotto. As Rossi points out, the pre-war French composer who has attracted the greatest attention is Maurice Jaubert; in addition to the French-language sources he mentions, there are articles in *Studies in French Cinema* as testament to this (McCann 2009; Redner 2009), as well as work by Lewis (2015) incorporated in her more recent book reviewed in this special number. It is therefore important to explore other composers, whether Honegger, who has had considerably less work devoted to him (Albera 2002; Sprout 2019), or Jaubert's friend, the considerably less well-known or explored Roland-Manuel, or the popular song and operetta composer Scotto. Rossi's analysis of their musical styles teases out significant differences in compositional experimentation in the early sound period.

Scotto composed the music for several of the operettas starring Tino Rossi and Georges Guétary that Marie Cadalanu and I explore. These singers were extraordinarily popular in the 30 years stretching from the beginning of sound cinema through to the late 1950s, their films regularly attracting several million spectators. Their very popularity for lower-class and middle-class women is a major reason in our view for the more or less total academic silence on their work. In our article we try to give a sense of the range of their film work and to position them in the socio-cultural environment of the time, considering both what makes them similar, but also the post-war shifts that make them different.

We return to musical experimentation with Laura Anderson's article on *Le Joli mai/The Lovely Month of May* (Chris Marker, 1963); its soundtrack, with its complex sound design comprising composed music by Michel Legrand and direct sound by sound

engineer Antoine Bonfanti, is rarely addressed. As with the article on Rossi and Guétary, Anderson's article places the sonic innovations of *Le Joli mai* in the context of social and cultural shifts, this time after the end of another war, the Algerian War, suggesting that the 1962 upheavals are reflected in the film's disruptive film sound design.

Chantal Akerman was one of the foremost women directors of recent times until her death in 2015. Her work with music is best exemplified in an extraordinary double musical, *Golden Eighties* (1986), preceded by the making of that film, *Les Années 80* (1983) (see Fowler 2000; Shaviri 2007; Schmid 2010). Albertine Fox explores one of Akerman's lesser known films, the 12-minute short *Trois Strophes sur le nom de Sacher/Three Stanzas on the Name Sacher* (1989), in which cellist Sonia Wieder-Atherton, the sister of Akerman's long-time editor Claire Atherton, performs the eponymous composition by Henri Dutilleul (1976–1982). Fox shows how Akerman's intertextual references to *Rear Window* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954) establish a queer musical space.

Experimentation of a different kind is analysed in Marie Cadalanu's exploration of a distinctive development in the film musical since the millennium: short film musicals, whose fairy-tale nature is in the lineage of Jacques Demy's film musicals. In some cases, these shorts are preparation for longer feature films, but Cadalanu also explores the films of Nicolas Engel, who has made four short film musicals, suggesting that the short film musical may well be an emerging sub-genre.

The three final articles focus principally on women film directors – Céline Sciamma and Houda Benyamina – and contemporary *banlieue* films. There has been steady academic interest in Sciamma's work starting with her first two features, *La Naissance des pieuvres/Water Lilies* (2007) and *Tomboy* (2011), both of which quickly led to major analyses (Palmer 2011, 32–40; Belot 2012; Waldron 2013; Gibson 2016; Handyside 2016; Jonet 2017; Duschinsky 2018). Gemma Edney's article is the first to focus on music in *La Naissance des pieuvres*; she argues that in a film with relatively sparse dialogue, the electronica music functions as a means of identification with the protagonists, its cultural associations creating a 'girly' space which we could define as heterotopic. Edney also considers Sciamma's later films, *Tomboy* and *Bande de filles/Girlhood* (2014). *Bande de filles* has generated considerable academic interest both for what it adds to Sciamma's two previous films in terms of female vulnerability and intimacy (Wilson 2017) or queer sensibility (Lindner 2018), and for its engagement with the previously more 'masculine' *banlieue* cinema (Chevalier 2016; Reeck 2018). Rihanna's 'Diamonds', a powerful musical moment in which the three girls sing and dance along to the song *in extenso*, has been a particular focus of interest (Ince 2017; McNeill 2017; Powrie 2017, 221–223; Guido 2018). In her article Alice Pember challenges the standard reading that the song celebrates a utopian moment of feminist resistance; she argues instead that this musical moment is considerably more complex. She shows how the song at one level exemplifies the logic of neo-liberalism by demonstrating resilience in the face of a system that oppresses, but that the melancholy inherent in the lyrics of the song and the context of Rihanna's personal life, as well as the actors' performances, undermine an otherwise compliant resilience. Finally, Isabelle McNeill considers a film that has frequently been paired with *Bande de filles* (Vogt 2017; Schaub 2019), the feature *Divines* (Houda Benyamina, 2016). McNeill pairs *Divines* with a different film, the documentary *Swagger* (Olivier Babin, 2016), arguing that in both of these films located in the *banlieue* the pre-existing music functions paradoxically

both to include and to exclude *banlieue* youth, creating a transitional ‘third’ space (see Powrie 2017) that reconfigures the stereotypical image of the *banlieue*.

This double special issue therefore opens new avenues in the field of music in French cinema, showing how experimentation and popular song have long coexisted, and that what we hear can change what we see.

## Notes

1. The most prominent amongst these are Flinn 1992; Kalinak 1992; Brown 1994; Smith 1998; Buhler, Flinn, and Neumeyer 2000; Donnelly 2001; Kassabian 2001; Wojcik and Knight 2001; Cooke 2008, 2010.
2. Jousse and Saada 1995; Mouëllic 2000, 2003; Masson and Mouëllic 2003; Berthomieu 2004; Abhervé, Binh, and Moure 2014.
3. See the books listed in the references: Chion 1982, 1985, 1988, 1990, 1992, 1995, 2000, 2002, 2003. For translations into English by Claudia Gorbman see Chion (1994, 1999).
4. This study focuses on a number of case studies of contemporary films, exploring the combination of Hollywood-style symphonic music with a more ‘impressionistic’ French style. These are *8 femmes* (2002), *Sur mes lèvres/Read My Lips* (2001), *Nid de guêpes/The Nest* (2002), *Confidences trop intimes/Intimate Strangers* (2004), *Swimming Pool* (2003), *De battre mon cœur s’est arrêté/The Beat that My Heart Skipped* (2005), *L’Enfer/Hell* (2005) and *Angel* (2007).

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Filmography

*8 femmes*, 2002. François Ozon, France/Italy.  
*Angel*, 2007. François Ozon, UK/Belgium/France.  
*Les Années 80*, 1983. Chantal Akerman, Belgium/France.  
*L’Atalante*, 1934. Jean Vigo, France.  
*Bande de filles*, 2014. Céline Sciamma, France.  
*La Chienne*, 1931. Jean Renoir, France.  
*Confidences trop intimes*, 2004. Patrice Leconte, France.  
*De battre mon cœur s’est arrêté*, 2005. Jacques Audiard, France.  
*Divines*, 2016. Houda Benyamina, France/Qatar.  
*L’Enfer*, 2005. Danis Tanovic, France/Italy/Belgium/Japan.  
*Golden Eighties*, 1986. Chantal Akerman, France/Belgium/Switzerland.  
*Le Joli mai*, 1963. Chris Marker, France.  
*La Naissance des pieuvres*, 2007. Céline Sciamma, France.  
*Nid de guêpes*, 2002. Florent Emilio-Siri, France.  
*Pépé le Moko*, 1937. Jacques Duvivier, France.  
*Prénom Carmen*, 1983. Jean-Luc Godard, France.  
*Le Quatorze Juillet*, 1932. René Clair, France.  
*Rear Window*, 1954. Alfred Hitchcock, USA.  
*La Règle du jeu*, 1939. Jean Renoir, France.  
*Sous les toits de Paris*, 1930. René Clair, France.  
*Sur mes lèvres*, 2001. Jacques Audiard, France.  
*Swagger*, 2016. Olivier Babinet, France.  
*Swimming Pool*, 2003. François Ozon, France/UK.

Tomboy, 2011. Céline Sciamma, France.  
*Trois Strophes sur le nom de Sacher*, 1989. Chantal Akerman, France.  
*Zéro de conduite*, 1933. Jean Vigo, France.


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