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ARTICLE



## French film music scoring in the thirties: a stylistic tripartition

Jérôme Rossi

UFR Lettres et Langues, Université de Nantes, Nantes, France

### ABSTRACT

The novelty of talking cinema in the thirties, supported by an artisanal production system that allowed some individual initiatives to be expressed, produced a ferment of ideas in the field of French music scoring as evidenced in the writing of many composers. If Hollywood cinema quickly opted for ubiquitous narrative music, the author will show that French productions were much more varied by focusing on three non-exclusive approaches represented by Arthur Honegger, Alexis Roland-Manuel and Vincent Scotto. The first advocates for an 'autonomist' approach where music accompanies the images while also retaining its own structural logic (rondo, fugue, leitmotifs). The second develops a 'song-writing' approach in his collaborations with Marcel Pagnol and beyond: diegetic and extra-diegetic songs with short melodies both with and without lyrics (chorus and stanza form, sequential form). The third, finally, favours a more cinematographic conception by detaching himself from pre-conceived forms and composing music that complements the noises and the voices on the soundtrack.

### KEYWORDS

Film music; music analysis; French cinema; cinema of the thirties; song

The novelty of talking cinema in the early thirties and the intellectual responsibility that the medium had acquired in France as a valid art form – Louis Delluc had founded the ciné-clubs in 1921 and the Cinémathèque Française would be founded in 1936 – led to extensive discussion by filmmakers and film music composers.<sup>1</sup> Resolutely opposed to the approach used in American cinema – namely ubiquitous narrative music in films<sup>2</sup> and a tendency to illustrate the action and dialogues –, Alexis Roland-Manuel, writing in 1950, proudly insisted on the singularity and the diversity of French film music:

Si nous avons à être fiers de quelque chose [...], c'est que, si nous regardons du point de vue musical l'introduction des films depuis 1930, nous constatons que les Américains n'ont jamais rien fait d'intéressant, sur le plan de l'esthétique s'entend, les Anglais non plus, les Italiens non plus. Les Allemands ont cherché quelque chose, mais nous ne savons pas où ils en sont aujourd'hui et de quel pied ils repartiront, et il n'y a guère qu'en France qu'on se soit intéressé à la musique de film et que des compositeurs de grand talent, dès les années 1930, avec des points de vue d'ailleurs très différents, se sont penchés sur ce très curieux problème.<sup>3</sup>  
(Grémillon and Roland-Manuel 1997, 131)

Individual rather than corporate solutions were supported in France by an artisanal production system that differed from the Hollywood studios: composers and musicians were hired

from film to film on a contractual basis, and recording could take place in various places according to the opportunities that arose; among the most frequent recording venues were the Maison de la chimie, the Pleyel concert hall and the auditorium of the rue Francoeur. In the case of our corpus of commercial feature films in the 1930s, the general characteristics of French scoring are a moderate use of music, a balance between orchestral cues and songs, and a predilection for small ensembles dominated by the wind section. More than their American counterparts, whose instrumental choices and writing techniques seemed to be guided first and foremost by the need to make sure the dialogues remained audible, French composers were sensitive to the constraints of the microphone, creating a distinctive 'micro-genic' (microphone-friendly) symphonic sound for film music characterised by a taste for wind instruments, the discreet use of the string section and the search for a balanced and transparent sound through the use of an orchestra composed of a majority of soloists, much like a chamber orchestra (Rossi 2019b). These common points did not prevent composers from developing very different points of view that we will divide into three different approaches, each of which associated with an emblematic composer: Arthur Honegger for the 'autonomist' approach, Vincent Scotto for the 'song-writing' approach and Alexis Roland-Manuel for the 'cinematographic' approach. We will explore each of these broad categories by relying on five criteria: musical attitude towards narration, forms of musical cues, forms at the level of the film, types of synchronism and concerns about diegetic noises. We will end by considering the unavoidable blending that occurred between these approaches, this outline being mostly intended as an attempt to get a clearer vision of the diversity of film music scoring in the French cinema of the thirties.

### Arthur Honegger: the autonomist approach

Thanks to his collaborations with the likes of Abel Gance or Raymond Bernard, Arthur Honegger was one of the leading figures in French film music in the thirties and forties, as much for his personal prestige as for the memorable films with which he was associated. Although the composer advocated close collaboration with film directors (see Calmel 1992, 116), he nevertheless defended the autonomy of music which, according to him, must accompany the images while also retaining its own structural logic. The composer explained his position in a text he co-signed with his friend and working partner Arthur Hoérée about the film *Rapt/The Kidnapping* (Dimitri Kirsanoff, 1934):

En ce qui concerne la structure musicale, nous avons évité le développement symphonique, l'harmonie descriptive, préférant garder à notre partition son autonomie afin de ne point empiéter sur le domaine de l'écran et vice-versa. C'est pourquoi nous avons fait appel, chaque fois que le permettait la situation, à des formes classiques, c'est-à-dire dont le développement est issu de leur propre substance musicale et non inféodé à un plan littéraire ou psychologique. C'est ainsi que le prélude accompagnant le générique (titres), est constitué par une ouverture construite sur le thème de chacun des principaux personnages.<sup>4</sup> (Honegger and Hoérée 2002, 1)

Here, Honegger expresses the desire to work on narrative material purely as a musician, not relying too much on what appears on screen. Once musical themes have been presented, they evolve according to musical variation techniques. It is not surprising that he goes so far as to practice fugal writing, i.e. a typical musical form:



Arthur Hoérée insisted on the autonomy of the music, regretting what he considered to be the intrusion of noises in the sequence:

Dans *Les Misérables*, Arthur Honegger avait conçu pour la course éperdue dans les égouts une musique de plus en plus dense, exprimant la fatigue et les suffocations du forçat évadé. Par le procédé du « mixage » ou mélange, on a « fondu » cette musique afin de percevoir le clapotis de l'eau : la gradation instrumentale était entièrement perdue.<sup>7</sup> (Hacquard 1959, 71)

Thus, in *Les Misérables*, music is substituted for other sound effects from time to time and gives them that 'touch of psychology' mentioned by Honegger and Hoérée (2002, 2), by imitating the noise of a horse-drawn cart going full-speed (ostinato string chords) when Jean Valjean is rushing back to a bedridden Fantine (1st period, 01:40:27), or conjuring up the noise of firearms with a snare drum and trombone *glissandi* mingled with distorted fragments of *La Marseillaise* during the attack against the barricades (3rd period, 50:04). This music imitating noise is only loosely synchronised (no point of synchronisation) with the image.

Like Jacques Ibert or Darius Milhaud, Honegger composes music that develops an autonomous expressive discourse based on leitmotifs without worrying about specific visual details or soundtrack noises. Generally speaking, the music essentially works as a resonating chamber for the feelings presented on-screen, reinforcing them with what Michel Chion calls empathetic music (1994, 8).

### Vincent Scotto: the song-writing approach

Cinema followed in the footsteps of the traditional *café-concerts* and variety theatres, and naturally incorporated songs as a result. Songs written for a film achieved significant commercial success and their authors found in cinema an effective promotional tool. In return, directors exploited the popularity of some songs to improve the chances of success of their films. Producers took advantage of popular singers by making singer films. In the thirties, 740 of the released films used at least one song (Basile and Gavouyère 1996, 133). Indeed, as Giusy Pisano commented, some films are only remembered for their songs; she cites *Le Chanteur inconnu/The Unknown Singer* (Viktor Tourjansky, 1931), *La Chanson d'une nuit/One Night's Song* (Pierre Colombier and Anatole Litvak, 1933), *Embrassez-moi/Kiss Me* (Léon Mathot, 1932), *Il est charmant/He is Charming* (Louis Mercanton, 1932), *Lumières de Paris/Lights of Paris* (Richard Pottier, 1938) amongst others (Pisano 2002).

In the tradition of variety theatre and *café-concerts*, integrating scenes with singing performers in films corresponds to the 'cinema of attractions' (Gunning 1990; Arnouldy 2004), favouring the spectacular over storytelling. Songs represent 'the remains of a non-cinematic musical genre and the sense of community it conveys' (Powrie 2005, 216), and enable the director and the composer to give a participatory dimension to the film. They also imbue the everyday with joy, as evidenced by Fernandel's line at the very beginning of *Josette* (Christian-Jaque, 1937), in which he plays an accountant. To his boss who accuses him of singing more than he works, he replies: 'Mais je chante en travaillant, pour égayer un tantinet ma besogne.'<sup>8</sup>

Born in Marseille and a prolific song-writer in the thirties and forties – he composed over four thousand songs over the course of his career – Vincent Scotto is the author of 60 operettas, many of which were adapted for the screen, and wrote the music of some two hundred films over three decades (1930–1950). In their sung version, songs are integrated

in scenic mode, which means they are sung on-screen and their lyrics are perfectly intelligible (see Rossi 2010, 2016). This is of course the case with stage operettas adapted for cinema and performed by Alibert,<sup>9</sup> for example, but also with songs that are integrated in scenic mode in non-musical films. Scotto worked with a number of directors (Pierre Caron, Maurice Cammage, André Hugon, Marcel Pagnol, René Pujol, Henri Wulschleger) and is associated with a range of singers: Jean Aquistapace (*Coup de vent/Gust of Wind*, Jean Dréville, 1935; *Si tu reviens/If You Come Back*, Jacques-Daniel Norman, 1937; *Romarin*, André Hugon, 1937), barrack-room humour specialist Charles-Joseph Pasquier, aka 'Bach' (all with Henri Wulschleger: *Tire-au-flanc/The Sad Sack*, 1933; *Bach millionnaire*, 1933; *Le Train de huit heures quarante-sept/The 8.47 Train*, 1934; *Bout de chou/The Little One*, 1935; *Debout là-dedans !/Up You Get in There!* 1935; *Bach détective*, 1936; *Le Cantinier de la coloniale/The Canteen Man of the Regiment*, 1938), Georges Milton (*Embrassez-moi/Kiss Me*, Léon Mathot, 1932; *Famille nombreuse/Big Family*, André Hugon, 1934), Fernandel (*Restez dîner/Stay for Dinner*, Robert Péguy, 1932; *Les Bleus de la marine/Rookie Sailors*, Maurice Cammage, 1934; *Une nuit de folies/A Night of Madness*, Maurice Cammage, 1934; *Angèle*, Marcel Pagnol, 1934; *Les Gaietés de la finance/The Gaiety of Finance*, Jack Forrester, 1935), Fréhel (*Gigolette*, Yvan Noé, 1937; *Pépé le Moko*, Julien Duvivier, 1937; *Une java*, Claude Orval, 1939) and Tino Rossi (*Marinella*, Pierre Caron, 1936; *Au son des guitares/To the Sound of Guitars*, Pierre-Jean Ducis, 1936; *Naples au baiser de feu/The Kiss of Fire*, Augusto Genina, 1937). These songs were generally used in the context of a show (*café-concert* or variety theatre performances) but also during private classes, such as Fréhel in *La Rue sans joie/Street without Joy* (André Hugon, 1938), or as a way to make confessions or remember nostalgic memories, such as Fréhel again in *Pépé le Moko*.

So as to better characterise the particular nature of Scotto's approach regarding film music – an approach he shared with other composers like Armand Bernard, Jean Lenoir, Raoul Moretti, Casimir Oberfeld, René Sylviano or Georges van Parys (at the beginning of his career) –, we need to extend the concept of song to 'songs without lyrics': Scotto's film scores do not develop motivic or thematic material as Honegger's do but are composed of short melodies (eight bars in general) usually following a stanza/chorus or sequential pattern. Thus, although these pieces do not have lyrics, they are still akin to the art of song-writing and allow us to define a song-writing approach with the following characteristics:

- The melody (with a limited ambitus, in *cantabile* style, which means it is easy to remember and sing) is favoured over every other parameter (harmony, rhythm, timbre).
- Closed forms following a chorus/stanza pattern or a sequential one composed of successive melodies.
- A succession of melodies woven throughout the film, and taking on a kaleidoscopic form.
- No musical narration: when they occur, musical reiterations are generally due to a repetition of the recording, not to a musical variation.
- The music is mainly empathetic, although a form of detachment is sometimes evident, as we shall discuss below.
- Loose synchronism with the action happening on-screen.
- Diegetic noises are not taken into account: during his cues, the composer does not use silences to allow diegetic sounds to be heard, nor does he try to imitate or transpose diegetic sounds into music.

One melody leads to the next, sometimes quite abruptly, in *café-concert* style. Some musical pieces are thus diegetically integrated with a quick shot of the musicians that allows viewers to locate their source – such as the fair musicians at the beginning of *Zouzou* (Marc Allégret, 1934), the casino orchestra in *Bonne chance !/Good Luck!* (Sacha Guitry, 1935), the café ‘Le Tourbillon’ in *Une java* – or to evoke part of it, as is the case with the trumpeter in *Aventure à Paris/Adventure in Paris* (11:11; Marc Allégret, 1936). For this scene, Scotto chose a trumpet for the musical theme, and while it can indeed be seen on-screen (a Theban trumpet), the orchestra that accompanies it is not visible. This is reminiscent of the invisible orchestras that play during the characters’ performances in musicals. Finally, there is a third case, music for which it is possible to imagine a source in the context of the scene. At the beginning of *Les Bleus de la marine*, for example, a woman meets her lover in a room (05:11); although we do not see where the music comes from, it is plausible that it comes from a radio receiver.

On the whole though, Scotto’s ‘songs without lyrics’ are generally not part of the diegesis. These stirring melodies resonate with the actions and feelings depicted onscreen with a kind of detachment. In *Angèle*, melodies regularly accompany the characters as they move around – in a cart (05:23) or on foot, in town (42:35) or in the fields (01:11:17) – and mirror their emotions: anger (01:02:22), regret (01:00:52) or sadness (01:43:43). In *Bonne chance !* the links between the music and the situations are more tenuous and the only purpose of this succession of melodies seems to be to support the action with as much liveliness as possible. It is significant that two films as different as *Angèle* and *Bonne Chance !* use the same motif played with a rather similar tempo (a motif that can also be heard in *Merlusse* [Marcel Pagnol, 1935] and *La Femme du boulanger* [Marcel Pagnol, 1938]) in completely different situations: respectively, when Angèle (Orane Demazis) has a romantic date that ends up with her being raped (Figure 1), and when we see a golfer playing (Figure 2).

Due to their closed structure, these ‘instrumental songs’ can sometimes produce uncertainty because they remain independent objects: they do not ‘stick’ to the image through points of synchronisation or noises. This can produce a poetic in-between effect, as in the final sequence of *Pépé le Moko* where successive melodies (Table 2) conjure up, in turn, the Kasbah of Algiers (oriental mode with augmented second) and the mundane Parisian life (waltz rhythm), as Pépé (Jean Gabin) tries to go back to his beautiful Parisian lover on a ship. Here, there are no attempts at synchronism – except in the short interlude at 01:26:31 when Pepe is arrested – and melodies follow one another without having much to do with the action; the music does not express a reaction to what is happening, even when Pépé commits suicide, at which point there is only a slight change in texture.

As for the noises, Scotto almost completely disregards diegetic sounds. In the sequence analysed above, the music does not use silences to allow for the boat siren to



Figure 1. Vincent Scotto, *Angèle*, 23:00.



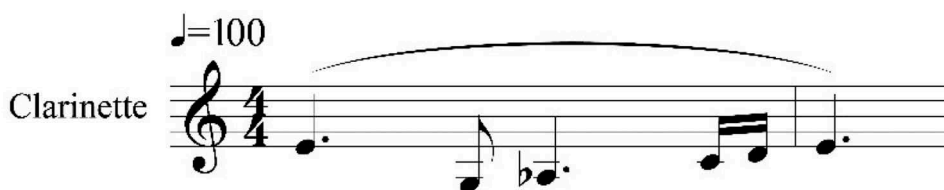


Figure 2. Vincent Scotto, *Bonne chance !* 47:39.

be heard, forcing the sound engineers to relegate the music to the background during the mixing process (01:25:27, 01:27:34, 01:27:56, 01:28:44, 01:29:25). We can find similar examples where music is totally covered by noises, like the hairdryer in *Bonne chance !* (25:26) or the bells in *Une java* (22:03).

The kind of detachment this produces can feel rather shallow, like the musical accompaniment of some silent films, when continuity was deemed more important than narrative pertinence. For example, at the beginning of *Merlusse*, a character enters a room, picks up a paper and leaves; the camera follows the character's movements, while the music, devoid of any points of synchronisation, seems to be merely making up for the lack of intelligible or noticeable noises in the soundtrack (02:39). There can even be a blatant inconsistency between the feeling expressed in the music and what is happening on-screen, without any meaningful explanation for it. At the beginning of *Une nuit de folies*, non-diegetic dancing music incongruously accompanies a deserted street where two prostitutes are talking to each other (01:12); the same music can be heard later during a scene in a restaurant (39:28), where it is more justified even if we do not see the source. In *Angèle*, when Albin (Jean Servais) goes to see Angèle in the middle of the night to warn her about the danger that is looming over her and the terrible fate Louis has set for her, a cheerful tune can be heard (34:52). Later, when Angèle's father, Clarius, feels remorseful at the thought of locking his daughter up again, the face of the actor, Henri Poupon (01:42:43), expresses the character's conflicted feelings as he is torn between pride and love for his child, yet the melody that accompanies the image at this moment bursts out in major mode, in blatant contradiction with what is at stake in this scene.

The film *Bonne chance !* never uses the same melody twice, not even the music we hear during the credits, and as such, represents a radical version of this song-writing approach, with an almost continuous musical presence at the expense of diegetic sounds, privileging spectatorial pleasure rather than building a significant musical narrative. The melodies follow one another as the film progresses, creating a kaleidoscopic form, as in some of Schumann's piano cycles (see *Butterflies* or *Davidsbündlertänze*). Scotto also plays with the singing and instrumental versions of the same song from time to time. This is the case in the film *Une java* with the song 'La Java bleue' ('Blue Java') or in *Aventure à Paris*, with the song 'Laissez-vous faire tout doucement' ('Let Yourself Slowly Go'). In this last film, the sung versions are performed during two musical acts in the presence of the musicians (Ray Ventura and his orchestra), while the instrumental versions serve as frames in the opening and end credits and underline the pivotal moments of the romantic plot revolving around Lucienne (Danièle Parola): the scene where Raymond (Lucien Baroux) and Michel (Jules Berry) discover the young woman driving her car (00:46:36) and when they



**Table 2.** Music of the film *Pépé le Moko*, 01:22-41.

01:22:41	01:23:16	01:23:39	01:24:13	01:24:31	01:25:27	01:26:31	01:26:39	01:27:49	01:29:32
1st melody (oriental)	2nd melody (waltz)	3rd melody (waltz)	4th melody	5th melody (oriental)	3rd melody	Short interlude	6th melody (waltz)	3rd melody (waltz)	End credits
Pépé walks through the Kasbah									
Pépé takes a taxi to the harbour				Inès calls on the inspector	Pépé reaches the ship; People speak	Pépé gets arrested by the inspector	Pépé is handcuffed and forced to disembark	Pépé watches the ship leave and commits suicide	

are spying on each other at the end (01:26:26) to know which one of them is going to meet Rose (Arletty), Lucienne's sister.

The song-writing approach may appear as a delayed practice of silent cinema, as cues succeed each other without a main theme (kaleidoscopic form). In addition to the songs sung on screen, instrumental music, which takes its closed form from the song (short melodies in stanza/chorus form or sequential forms), maintains a rather distant relationship with the image (no point of synchronisation), the soundtrack (no preoccupation for diegetic sounds) and the narrative, its entertaining aspect sometimes creating a feeling of detachment.

### Alexis Roland-Manuel: the cinematographic approach

Maurice Jaubert's contribution to film music has been recognised by French theoreticians since 1959 (Hacquard 1959). In 1963 Henri Colpi wrote:

Dès les premiers balbutiements du film sonore, Jaubert avait perçu qu'un domaine nouveau, que des possibilités nouvelles s'offraient au compositeur. L'un des premiers, il a compris que le rôle du musicien d'écran consistait à la fois à s'effacer derrière l'image et à sauvegarder sa propre personnalité. L'écriture musicale ou la science symphonique devait céder le pas à l'efficacité. La quantité de notes devait être dictée par la dialectique visuelle du film. Les interventions sonores devaient obéir à des mobiles précis. L'un des premiers, Jaubert avait exprimé sur la musique de film des opinions esthétiques qui font toujours autorité.<sup>10</sup> (1963, 116)

By reducing the musical soundtrack to some occurrences of percussion instruments in *Le jour se lève/Daybreak* (Marcel Carné, 1939), by making different instrumentalists play a few bars of the same piece one after the other in *Quai des brumes/Port of Shadows* (Marcel Carné, 1938), by using the sound of a boat engine to start and subtend his music in *L'Atalante* (Jean Vigo, 1934) or by playing a recorded sound backwards in *Zéro de conduite/Zero for Conduct* (Jean Vigo, 1933), and then in *Carnet de bal/Christine* (Julien Duvivier, 1937), Jaubert called into question the integrity and independence of musical expression in favour of a musico-cinematic expression. As he stated in the following lines that have remained famous:

Nous ne venons pas au cinéma pour entendre de la musique. Nous demandons à celle-ci d'approfondir en nous une impression visuelle. Nous ne lui demandons pas de nous expliquer les images, mais de leur rajouter une résonance de nature spécifiquement dissemblable. Nous ne lui demandons pas d'être expressive et d'ajouter son sentiment à celui des personnages ou du réalisateur, mais d'être décorative et de joindre sa propre arabesque à celle que nous propose l'écran. Qu'elle se débarrasse enfin de tous ses éléments subjectifs, qu'elle nous rende enfin physiquement sensible le rythme interne de l'image sans pour cela s'efforcer d'en traduire le contenu sentimental, dramatique ou poétique. C'est pourquoi je pense qu'il est essentiel pour la musique de film de se créer un style qui lui soit propre. Si elle se contente d'apporter à l'écran un souci traditionnel de composition ou d'expression, au lieu de pénétrer comme associée dans le monde des images, elle créera à l'écart un monde distinct du son, obéissant à ses lois propres.<sup>11</sup> (1936, 118)

Jaubert was not fond of the Wagnerian leitmotif and criticises its use in American films as stigmatised as 'l'une des moins recommandables des recettes wagnériennes';<sup>12</sup> regarding this, the composer even denounces the 'formidable prédominance de l'élément germanique, même et surtout en Amérique, dans la corporation des musiciens de films' (117).<sup>13</sup> He

preferred one or two themes which are varied throughout the film, rather than associated with a definite object. Each cue has its own form (no musical preconceived form), determined by the narration, but also by images and sounds. Far from rejecting diegetic noise, Jaubert relies on elements of the soundtrack:

C'est précisément le rôle du musicien de sentir le moment précis où l'image abandonne sa réalité profonde et sollicite le prolongement poétique de la musique. [...] La rupture d'équilibre sensoriel qu'elle produit chez le spectateur doit être soigneusement prévue par le réalisateur, soit, dans un moment spécialement dramatique, qu'il utilise le choc d'une intrusion brutale (un fortissimo d'orchestre enchaîné sur un cri, par exemple), soit qu'il fasse entrer insidieusement le son musical par le truchement du son non musical (le bruit d'un train engendrant un rythme qui lui-même donne naissance à la symphonie proprement dite, des violons dans l'aigu se substituant insensiblement au sifflement du vent, etc.).<sup>14</sup> (Porcile 1971, 220)

In the 1970s, Jaubert became a cult figure, fuelled by the writings of François Porcile and Alain Lacombe. Georges Delerue, for example, commented that 'Jaubert a été le créateur de la musique de film à l'écran. [...] La vérité, ce fut donc Jaubert'<sup>15</sup> (Hennebelle and Lacombe 1975, 14). Jaubert was clearly influential, but we would like to highlight the scores of one of his contemporaries and friends (Wiener 1978, 169), Alexis Roland-Manuel. Encouraged by Jean Grémillon, who was well aware that conventional musical rules were inadequate for film (Grémillon and Roland-Manuel 1997, 134), Roland-Manuel developed a similar 'cinematographic approach' to Jaubert's in *La Petite Lise/Little Lise* (Jean Grémillon, 1930), in that it relies on the specific resources of audio-visual productions.

Turning his back on the leitmotif and musical narration, Roland-Manuel tried to find the most appropriate musical means for each scene. In *Remorques/Stormy Waters* (Jean Grémillon, 1941),<sup>16</sup> the confidences that Yvonne (Madeleine Renaud), the neglected wife of André (Jean Gabin), shares with her friend are accompanied by a trio of reed instruments (clarinet, saxophone and bassoon). This sequence (17:17–18:38) conveys a feeling of soft melancholy – moderate empathy – which can be attributed either to the music, Yvonne's lines, the weariness in her voice or the rain that closes the sequence with a backward tracking shot. The musical softness becomes brighter when André and Catherine (Michèle Morgan) take a romantic stroll on the beach (55:13–58:22). Over an eight-note-long viola ostinato, the composer superimposes some vibraphone notes, followed by a long melody – the main theme of the film – played on the oboe, then on the flute (Figure 3). This theme occurs five times in the film with different variations, associated with the beach, Catherine, André's adventurous spirit... Unlike a leitmotif, therefore, it is not associated with a specific object or character and not really developed (the only variation is a funeral march at the end of the film). The discovery of a starfish (56:25) provokes a short outburst (high-pitched woodwind arabesques) of the musical material with a synchronisation of voices as Catherine exclaims: 'Regarde ! Une étoile de mer.'<sup>17</sup>

The ostinato returns with the main theme in the next sequence (01:00:08–01:03:39) to accompany the tour of the house and the kiss between André and Catherine. There is a rather moderate musical empathy here; we are very far from Max Steiner scores, such as *Gone with the Wind* (Victor Fleming, 1939). There is no accelerando, no change of register or orchestral reinforcement, but rather a form of chaste distance, as André passionately kisses Catherine. The main theme can be heard again, very discreetly, and an unobtrusive Picardy third (majorisation of the final chord) is the only thing that conveys the lovers' enthusiasm (01:03:14), before the ostinato returns to bring a darker closure to the sequence.



The musical score consists of two systems. The top system has a vibraphone part (treble clef) and a string part (bass clef). The vibraphone part starts with a whole note chord, followed by a series of eighth notes. The string part has a rhythmic ostinato. The bottom system has an oboe part (treble clef) and a string part (bass clef). The oboe part starts with a whole note chord, followed by a series of eighth notes. The string part has a rhythmic ostinato. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 70.

**Figure 3.** Roland-Manuel, *Remorques*, ostinato and Catherine's theme, 55:13.

Roland-Manuel even develops an anempathetic approach to the narration. In *La Petite Lise*, for instance, there are two particularly ambiguous moments. At the beginning of the film, Victor Berthier (Pierre Alcover), who is serving a sentence in a penal colony, thinks about his upcoming release and subsequent meeting with his daughter. He contemplates her portrait in a locket. Meanwhile, other convicts are bellowing a lullaby (from 13:45) at the top of their voices: the lyrics are in line with the character's feeling of tenderness but the whole thing sounds excessively manly and brutal and at odds with what he is feeling. The contrast is even greater at the end of the film: when Berthier is considering taking the blame for the murder of the usurer killed by his daughter, a swinging piece of Creole-inspired music can be heard coming from the bar, in total contrast with his anguish.

Finally, some of the composer's musical choices border on sound design. In *L'Étrange Monsieur Victor/Strange Mister Victor* (Jean Grémillon, 1938) soft lightly paced chords played repeatedly on the horn (19:55–20:10 and 24:29–24:48) underline the moment when Monsieur Victor (Raimu) is about to cross the line between laundering stolen property and committing murder. Almost unnoticeably, these chords sound the death knell for the respectable Monsieur Victor, who will kill his accomplice shortly afterwards, a crime that will result in his own downfall. This is less music than minimal sound material that acts as a psychological signal.

If the poor quality of sound captured through the microphone proved an obstacle for some composers (Rossi 2019b), the possibility of recording music on photographic film enabled them to achieve previously unheard-of effects by manipulating the recorded material directly. Roland-Manuel and Grémillon took this opportunity to offer the first known example of retrograde scoring in *La Petite Lise*, with a 'nocturnal litany' meant to be played backwards (Rossi 2019a). This dark, hypnotic music is used three times (17:53, 22:52, 52:08) to accompany close shots or close-ups of Lise, conveying the young woman's inner torment subjectively.

Roland-Manuel approved of the way that sounds were meshed with music in *Le Chemin du Paradis/The Road to Paradise* (Wilhelm Thiele and Max de Vaucorbeil, 1930) when the car horn serves as the beginning of a musical motif (Roland-Manuel 1987, 20–21). It is not surprising then that we find him experimenting with soundtrack noises in *Les Jumeaux de Brighton/The*

*Twins from Brighton* (Claude Heymann, 1936). A carriage comes to fetch one of the two newborn sons of Monsieur de Beaugérard senior (Raimu) (11:29); in the same sequence, he changes his mind and finally hands over the other twin. Roland-Manuel uses the coachman's bell to set the rhythm for the first bars of his musical accompaniment to this scene. Once established, the music no longer needs this bell and can develop freely. The noise therefore acts as a bridge between the diegetic world it belongs to and the symphonic score it has been included in as a rhythmic element. This work on musical scoring and soundtrack noises reaches new heights of subtlety in *Remorques*; Grémillon and Roland-Manuel composed a piece of *musique concrète* which combines rhythmical boat engine piston noises with string striations in the tempest sequence.

Joseph Kosma was also a tenant of this cinematographic approach. In *La Grande Illusion* (Jean Renoir, 1937), Kosma mainly favoured diegetic music (gramophone, cabaret shows); for instance, towards the end of the film (01:38:26), Maréchal (Jean Gabin) notices that the gramophone is acting up when the record stops. Except for some military trumpet calls when the French and German armies are mentioned, the conversation between Rauffenstein (Eric von Stroheim) and Boieldieu (Pierre Fresnay) is accompanied by a soft-toned military march, introducing a distance that enables the listener to experience the passing of time as the aristocracy little by little lose their privileges. On several occasions Kosma relies on soundtrack noises by giving his music the same rhythm as the trains that transport the prisoners.

Roland-Manuel, Maurice Jaubert, Joseph Kosma and sometimes Jean Wiener (for example in Renoir's films) share a common 'cinematographic approach' in that their music finds part of its material in the soundtrack, and its internal coherence in its complementarity with the image. Never trying to develop an independent and self-sufficient discourse with leitmotifs (the 'autonomist' approach we have discussed above), the music works with the images, using one or two main themes. Hardly empathetic, sometimes distancing itself from the images, this music loses in purely musical interest what it undoubtedly gains in efficiency on-screen. This is probably what prevented Colpi from admiring Roland-Manuel's scores for Grémillon, which he considered to be purely functional: 'Une trop stricte fonctionnalité les prive peut-être d'envolée, de poésie, de richesse musicale'<sup>18</sup> (Colpi 1963, 152).

It is probably no coincidence if we owe the development of a cinematographic approach to four composers who generally confined their work to cinema, whereas song-writing and concert music were at the heart of Scotto's and Honegger's careers.

## Conclusion

Table 3 summarises the characteristics of the three scoring approaches we have explored in this article; it is worth noting that the composers we have discussed did not always confine themselves to the same approach, sometimes combining elements from more than one. For *La Bandera/Escape from Yesterday* (Jean Duvivier, 1935), written in collaboration with Jean Wiener, Roland-Manuel adopted a song-writing approach, with accordion music, oriental music, Spanish melodies, a song ('Viens donc chez Marinella'/'Come to Marinella's') and several military marches. Yet it is one of Scotto's songs, 'Sous les ponts de Paris' ('Under the Bridges of Paris'), that opens the first sequence, which is evidence of his influence on the film. Similarly, Honegger (in collaboration with Roland-Manuel) inserted numerous instrumental songs in *Le Roi de Camargue/The King of the Camargue* (Jacques de Baroncelli, 1935), even

**Table 3.** Summary of the three approaches: autonomist, song-writing and cinematographic.

	Autonomist	Song-writing	Cinematographic
Musical attitude towards narration	Empathetic	Empathetic detachment	Moderate empathy anempathy
Form of the musical sequences	Traditional musical forms	Stanza/chorus form sequential form (with short melodies)	No preconceived form
Form at film level Synchronism	Based on leitmotifs Loose	Kaleidoscopic Loose	One or two main themes Some points of synchronisation
The music takes diegetic noises into account.	No	No	Yes

though the film comprises moments when the music adds dramatic depth to what is happening on-screen, such as choral writing to follow the movement of the caravans at the beginning, imitative writing in the scene of the chase of Rampal, and the development of a short piano motif to accompany Livette's wanderings. In *Rapt*, the same Honegger (in collaboration with Hoérée) reused the theme of one of his songs in reverse (retrogradation) – the same technique used by Roland-Manuel in *La Petite Lise* – to translate Hans's tender feelings for his beloved. As for Scotto, his work sometimes includes anempathetic music – in *Pépé le Moko*, an informer is executed to the rambunctious sound of a player piano (50:40) – or musical imitations of noises, such as a flute mimicking the whistling of a bird (24:25), or a cymbal hit to accompany a slamming door (24:21) in *Bonne chance !* He started using leitmotifs – maybe under the influence of Marcel Pagnol, who had worked with Honegger on *Regain* (1937) – from *La Fille du puisatier/The Well Digger's Daughter* (Marcel Pagnol, 1940).

The diversity of the approaches we have analysed demonstrates the uncertainties that attached to the function of music in cinema during the thirties and what directors and composers thought the viewers were expecting. In this context, it is not so surprising that producers wanted to replace Jaubert's original soundtrack for *L'Atalante* with a more fashionable song compilation, favouring a song-writing approach rather than the original cinematographic approach; Jaubert's original song 'Le Chant des marinières' ('The Song of the Marines') was varied throughout the film depending on the situations.

Throughout the thirties French cinema successfully maintained a space of experimentation where composers were able to embrace a wide variety of film music scoring. The three approaches we have presented in this article are still evident in contemporary cinema in different degrees. Although Scotto's song-writing approach is no longer very fashionable, there are still traces of his influence in Claude Lelouch's films (Rossi 2016). The cinematographic approach is exemplified in Philippe Rombi's scores for François Ozon (Carayol 2012), whereas Gabriel Yared has always preferred the autonomist approach (see the films of Jean-Jacques Beineix), with which we began, favouring composition according to the script.

## Notes

1. As evidenced by the special issue of the journal *La Revue musicale* entitled 'Le film sonore. L'écran et la musique en 1935' (December 1934), which has 19 articles on this topic. As early as January 1936, the journal inaugurated a column dedicated to film music. The first three writers to take charge of it were, successively, Arthur Hoérée, Pierre Lucas and Pierre Michaut. See also Milhaud (1930).

2. Indeed, in Hollywood cinema, one of the main functions of music was to erase the discontinuities left after the film was edited. See the analysis of the score of *Captain Blood* (Kalinak 1992, 82).
3. 'If we were to feel proud of something [...], it would be that, if we look at the films produced since 1930 from a musical point of view, we see that the Americans never did anything interesting, aesthetically speaking. Neither did the English, nor the Italians. The Germans tried to find something, but we do not know where they stand today or what their future contribution will be, and it is only in France that people have taken an interest in film music and that very talented composers started, as early as the 1930s, to look into this particular issue, developing very different points of view about it.'
4. 'As far as the musical structure is concerned, we have avoided symphonic development and descriptive harmony, in favour of preserving the autonomy of our score, so as not to encroach on what pertains to the realm of the screen, or vice versa. That is why, each time the situation allowed for it, we have chosen classical forms, that is to say, forms that develop from their own musical substance without being dependent on a literary or psychological scheme. Thus, the prelude that accompanies the opening credits (titles) is composed of an overture built around each of the main characters' themes.'
5. 'To comment on a scene where a shepherd dog chases a goat, we composed a two-voice fugue, which everybody knows to be the musical equivalent of a chase (in Italian: *fugare* = to chase). When the dog is about to reach the runaway, the two voices are heard in quicker succession, that is to say we start using the *stretto*. Then, when a thrown stone kills the victor, the survivor's voice ends the fugue on its own.'
6. '[We have put] music in charge of replacing the common material [diegetic noises] with a sort of sound synthesis, mixed with a touch of psychology: the peddler with a wooden leg, a symbolic, timeless character, is accompanied by strange off-beat music, much more evocative than the sound of the peg on the ground. The gurgling noise of water in the wash house is transposed using trills of strings and swift series of piano notes.'
7. 'In *Les Misérables*, for the desperate run through the sewers, Arthur Honegger had created music that became denser and denser, mirroring the exhaustion and suffocation of the escaped convict. During the mixing process, the music was "merged" so that the lapping noise of the water could be heard: the instrumental gradation was thus completely lost [...].'
8. 'But I sing while I work, to make it more pleasant.'
9. For the Marseille operetta films see Cadalanu and Powrie ([forthcoming](#)).
10. 'From the very beginnings of talking cinema, Jaubert had perceived that it offered a new field of exploration and new possibilities for composers. He was one of the first to understand that the role of a film musician was to disappear behind the pictures while also retaining their own personality. Efficiency needed to prevail over musical writing or symphonic science. The number of notes was dictated by the visual dialectics of the film. Sound interventions served precise motives. A true pioneer, Jaubert expressed aesthetic points of view on film music that are still authoritative today.'
11. 'We do not go to the cinema to listen to music. We ask for it to deepen our visual impressions. We do not want it to explain the pictures to us, but to add to them a resonance of a specifically different nature. We do not want it to be expressive and to add its own feeling to that of the characters or director, but to be ornamental and to combine its own arabesque with the one presented on-screen. To finally get rid of all its subjective elements, to at last help us physically experience the inner rhythm of the pictures without taking it upon itself to translate their sentimental, dramatic or poetical content. That is why I think it is essential for film music to create its own style. If it merely settles for bringing to the screen its traditional concern for composition or expressivity, instead of entering the world of pictures as an associate, it will create a distinct world of sound apart from it, ruled by its own laws.'
12. 'Less commendable of the Wagnerian recipes.'
13. 'Tremendous predominance of the Germanic faction, even and above all in America, in the corporation of film musicians.'



14. 'It is precisely the role of the musician to identify the very moment when the image takes leave of its inner reality and needs to be prolonged by the poetical power of music. [...] The sensorial unbalance it creates in the viewer must be carefully planned by the director, whether he goes for the shock value of a brutal intrusion in a particularly dramatic moment (the orchestra playing fortissimo after a scream, for instance), or inconspicuously introduces the musical sound via a non-musical sound (the noise of a train generating a rhythm which itself gives birth to the symphony, high-pitched violins gradually replacing the whistling sound of the wind, etc.).'
15. 'Was the creator of film music onscreen [...]. Therefore, Jaubert's words were the truth.'
16. Even though it came out in 1941, *Remorques* still belongs to the thirties; shooting started in March 1939, and was interrupted by the war. See Berthomé (1997).
17. 'Look! A starfish.'
18. 'Their strictly functional aspect is probably the very thing that deprives them of momentum, of poetry, of musical depth.'

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Notes on contributor

**Jérôme Rossi** is Associate Professor in Musicology at the University of Nantes. He is the author of numerous articles dedicated to post-romantic music and the connections between music and cinema. His biography of the English composer Frederick Delius received the Prix des Muses award in 2011. His more recent books are *Musiques de séries télévisées* (co-edited with Cecile Carayol, 2015), *Du concert à l'écran : la musique classique au cinéma* (co-edited with Stefan Etcharry, 2019) and *La Musique de film en France* (Symétrie, 2016). As a composer, he has signed the scores of more than 50 television documentaries and numerous short films.

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*Au son des guitares*, 1936. Pierre-Jean Ducis, France.  
*Aventure à Paris*, 1936. Marc Allégret, France.  
*Bach détective*, 1936. Henry Wulschleger, France.  
*Bach millionnaire*, 1933. Henri Wulschleger, France.  
*La Bandera*, 1935. Julien Duvivier, France.  
*Les Bleus de la marine*, 1934. Maurice Cammage, France.  
*Bonne chance !* 1935. Sacha Guitry, France.  
*Bout de chou*, 1935. Henry Wulschleger, France.  
*Le Cantinier de la coloniale*, 1938. Henry Wulschleger, France.  
*Carnet de bal*, 1937. Julien Duvivier, France.  
*La Chanson d'une nuit*, 1932. Anatole Litvak, France.  
*Le Chanteur inconnu*, 1931. Victor Tourjanski, France.  
*Le Chemin du Paradis*, 1930. Wilhelm Thiele and Max de Vaucorbeil, France/Germany.  
*Coup de vent*, 1935. Jean Dréville and Giovacchino Porzano, France/Italy.  
*Debout là-dedans !* 1935. Henry Wulschleger, France.  
*Embrassez-moi*, 1932. Léon Mathot, France.  
*L'Étrange Monsieur Victor*, 1938. Jean Grémillon, France/Germany.  
*Famille nombreuse*, 1934. André Hugon, France.  
*La Femme du boulanger*, 1938. Marcel Pagnol, France.  
*La Fille du puisatier*, 1940. Marcel Pagnol, France.

*Les Gaietés de la finance*, 1935. Jack Forrester, France.  
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*Gone with the Wind*, 1939. Victor Fleming, USA.  
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*Il est charmant*, 1932. Louis Mercanton, France.  
*Josette*, 1937. Christian-Jaque, France.  
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*Marinella*, 1936. Pierre Caron, France.  
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*Romarin*, 1937. André Hugon, France.  
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*Tire-au-flanc*, 1933. Henry Wulschleger, France.  
*Le Train de huit heures quarante-sept*, 1934. Henry Wulschleger, France.  
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