

Part 1: Music and Poetry Analysis

The opening of the Phantom of the Opera gives the audience plenty of reason to wonder at the existence of the phantom. He is whispered about as a legend in both the auction scene and the 1881 storyline as the opera house prepares their performance, drops notes embossed with a skull, makes mysterious demands and has a powerful hold over the choir girl Christine Daae. When he at last chooses to share his voice, he seems to live up to his primordial mythos, but has a salience and humanity hiding underneath that reveal the tragedy of his character.

Each verse in the Phantom's song to Christine begins with a slow whole step motif, commonly called the sighing motif, which combined with the plodding tempo give him the chance to show off his rich, whole tone – eventually. In the first verse, he grows from a whisper, beckoning to Christine from the darkness. The first verse is half the length of the other verses, seemingly cut off midway to give time to the orchestration to repeat the theme. Lyrically, the listener is also left hanging. The tension in both the lines and the harmony pull us in just as they pull in Christine.

The second verse ends with a half cadence, a pause before the grand opening-up in the third. The instrumentation expands from the slow, dark strings into a brilliant and full brass sound, eclipsing the phantom in the third verse and supporting him in the fourth. This reflects the relationship between the phantom, the person, and the phantom, the myth. He lives in and relishes his mystery and darkness, but it is greater than he is – he is at the end of the day still human. This begins to creep out in his timbre on certain words, like the break in his voice on “garish” in verse three and the occasional hoarseness in the quieter, whispered lines at the end of verses.

Those endings are also notable for their thematic content – “you will live as you’ve never lived before” and “only then can you belong to me” imply directly the romantic intentions the phantom has for Christine. Through a modern lens, his feelings towards her are entirely inappropriate, seeing as he has groomed her and established an incredibly uneven power dynamic. Note, however, that the

phantom has had little socialization, learning much of what he knows from hearing operas practiced and performed. His creepy intentions upon Christine reflect the stories which exist in our culture about love and romance.

Indeed, fantasy is of utmost importance to the phantom. Concepts of “imagination”, “dreams”, “fantasies”, “journey through a strange new world” and “intoxication... sensation” appear throughout, as he attempts to persuade Christine not only to be with him, but to be with his way of life. That his intentions are laid bare only in whispers, shrouded in the traditional imagery of romanticism otherwise, can be interpreted as both an indictment of how that tradition treats female protagonists like Christine and as an opportunity to pity those who, like the phantom, learned what they know of relationships from a culture which doesn’t reflect how they really work.

Let us return to the sighing motif mentioned above. The song shows both the phantom relishing in his self-created mythos and his underlying melancholy, sighing on each line and playing into the tragedy of his character. The final sung note is held over a variety of chords before resolution, a final display of the internal and external conflicts the phantom sits embroiled in.

Part 2: Harmonic Analysis (attached at back)

Part 3: Motivic Analysis

The first motive appears in the fade-in to the Paris opera house in 1881, softly in the background (about 4:00). It's suggestive of the mystery surrounding not one specific person, but the opera house and its legendary status as a whole. Repeatedly throughout the movie, the four notes are heard to warn of danger, such as when the phantom leaves his note following Christine's disappearance (about 50:00), and when Christine awakes in the phantom's lair (44:00). All of these scenes reflect the apparent majority impression of the phantom and his dominion over the opera house, a figure of primordial mythos who causes things to happen, albeit indirectly. In this way, the motive is only as attached to the character of the phantom as it is to the idea of the phantom and his opera house, a ghostly, supernatural idea moreso than the physical person behind the mask. The theme is slow and melancholy, evoking feelings of fear tinged in sadness, in line with the hopeless fear the previous owner and cast felt toward the phantom's figure.

The retrograde theme, however, is more sinister in its physicality. It appears where Christine is discovered missing (about 27:00), when she flees to the cemetery for an unknown confrontation ("Wishing you were here again"), and when the phantom's backstory is told by Madame Giry. Each of these corresponds to the threat of the phantom made real, a physical act done unmistakably by him. The melancholy of the original notes is supplemented by the eeriness created by the descending instead of ascending leap. Here the phantom lives out his legend, and instills the most fear and inspires the most retribution from others.

The second motive (besides being a personal favorite) has to be one of the most famous in any musical. The massive organ run is jarring every time it happens, shaking the listener. The enormous physicality of the fortissimo organ chords are lent to set-piece moments in the film, such as the chandelier falling (1:55:20), Christine taking the phantom's hand for the first time (31:00), and the Phantom's public hanging of Joseph Buquet (1:05:13). These alarmingly direct, often violent physical acts by the phantom match the feeling and timbre of the organ's motive.

Compare this directly with the sung version of the motive, always on the words “Phantom of the Opera”, in the song, “Phantom of the Opera”. Here, the timbre doesn’t directly contrast what the organ does, but instead provides much the same mood without the heavy percussiveness. It’s sung by both the phantom and Christine, and provides the first moment of understanding between the two of them, musically as they duet and personally as they interact in his lair. The softening of the theme puts the phantom and his actions into perspective, opening the door for Christine’s final action of forgiving and showing kindness to the phantom.

The overt, physical nature of the second motive is in a way the thematic continuation of the vague, primordial threat captured by the first motive. They each describe the nature of the titular character and his opera house, in the case of the first motive equivocating them. Harmonically they could not be more different – the first motive is a single melody, often a solo line in the instrumentation, while the second theme is overbearing in comparison, and is sung explicitly. The musical overall uses this contrast to clearly signpost plot shifts like those associated with them above.

Part 4: Holistic/Misc. Analysis

Part A

The drama of the “play within a play”, or in this case “opera within a musical”, is something of a cultural touchpoint at this point. After all, anything done by Shakespeare, Star Trek, and Andrew Lloyd Webber has to count for something. *Phantom*’s “Past the Point of No Return” delivers the dramatic irony with tension sharpened by the trap set for the phantom amongst his machinations.

The phantom appears in his own opera, trading verses and then dueting with Christine, his lyrics for each of them dark and troubling. On each line, the phantom’s voice swells and dies in tandem with the orchestra, initially a full-bodied string orchestra lacking much in the way of ornamentals. The phantom’s voice plays in the pocket of the beat with a generous helping of rubato that increases as he grows impassioned. He makes use of both a large dynamic and melodic range, changing his timbre from crooning to whispering to croaking out words like “succumbed” (00:50). When he lands on the theme, his voice broadens and becomes more traditionally melodic.

Christine’s verse is all the more impressive for the training apparent in her voice. She makes use of an incredible amount of vibrato, opening on a high note and using seemingly the full range of her voice. She delivers her performance convincingly, but the lyrics written by the phantom paint her as a distressingly helpless love interest, enraptured by the phantom without really understanding why, having “no second thoughts” (3:25). As she enters the theme, the orchestra ticks us off to what is wrong, growing larger and louder and higher in the top line. Christine’s last several lines are some of the most expressive, distressed lines she has delivered in the film, filled with vibrant and fiery imagery, most importantly, the mention of being “past the point of right or wrong”, a radical departure from her previous hesitations in her relationship with the phantom and a disturbing sign of how he would like her to be for him.

Musically, this has all been leading up to their duet, upon which the brass enters in force. A full horn section plays loudly behind their melody, and trumpets reinterpret the sighing motive from before

with a shorter, distressing first note. Quickly the dynamics fall off, and Christine's voice seems to waver. Several chords interlude, and the phantom enters a reprisal of "all I ask of you". This shift marks his most honest attempt yet at winning over Christine, showing real vulnerability. Where he previously declared he had brought her here and she must have no doubts, he now asks to go anywhere she goes, a reversal in their power structure more true to life. He is cut off by the Phantom theme, played several times slowly before strings enter a set of repeated scales, indicating their flight to the depths of the opera house.

Part B

The medley opens on the phantom's decidedly more confident "All I Ask of You", ending on a screamed "Hell!" (00:25). There is a moment where Christine essentially dresses down the phantom for his crimes, to which he responds that his disfigurement both prevents him from joy and compels him to murder. Here he transitions into "Music of the Night" (1:58), describing his mother's hatred for him due to the disfigurement and begging for compassion as his voice breaks, once again showing true vulnerability towards his love. He hardens through the end of the song, just as he hardened in his life against the prejudices of the world. Christine responds with empathy before Raoul enters, upon which the Phantom once again retreats to the veneer of the Phantom character he has created for himself. When the phantom jumps on Raoul, his melodic line mimics the quick rhythms from "Masquerade" (4:00). After the phantom delivers his ultimatum to Christine, we enter a wonderful section of polyphony as the phantom sings "Past the Point of No Return" and Raoul enters "All I ask of You" at 5:05. This emotional apex caps off with Christine's recap of "Angel of Music" (5:38), where she remuniates on who the phantom is to her and decides to offer compassion despite his deception. This leads to an emotional resolution, as the orchestra plays through "Angel of Music". However, at 7:40 the delegation hunting the phantom enters to a snare drum and faint chants of "Phantom of the Opera", a reminder of the awful nature of the villainy of the phantom. We hear the music box from the beginning of the movie softly playing "Masquerade" as the phantom cries along, a reminder of happier times and

a chance for the phantom to release his sorrow safely behind his mask. Ironically, as he sings “Christine, I love you”, this is also the moment when he is the most emotionally unmasked. The orchestra recaps “All I ask of You”. Finally, the song ends on a sorrowful note, echoing the phantom’s first telling of his story by ending on the same chords as “Music of the Night”, with plentiful sigh motifs and the phantom’s personal declaration of the end of the music of the night, and by extension, his story as started the first time we heard “Music of the Night”.