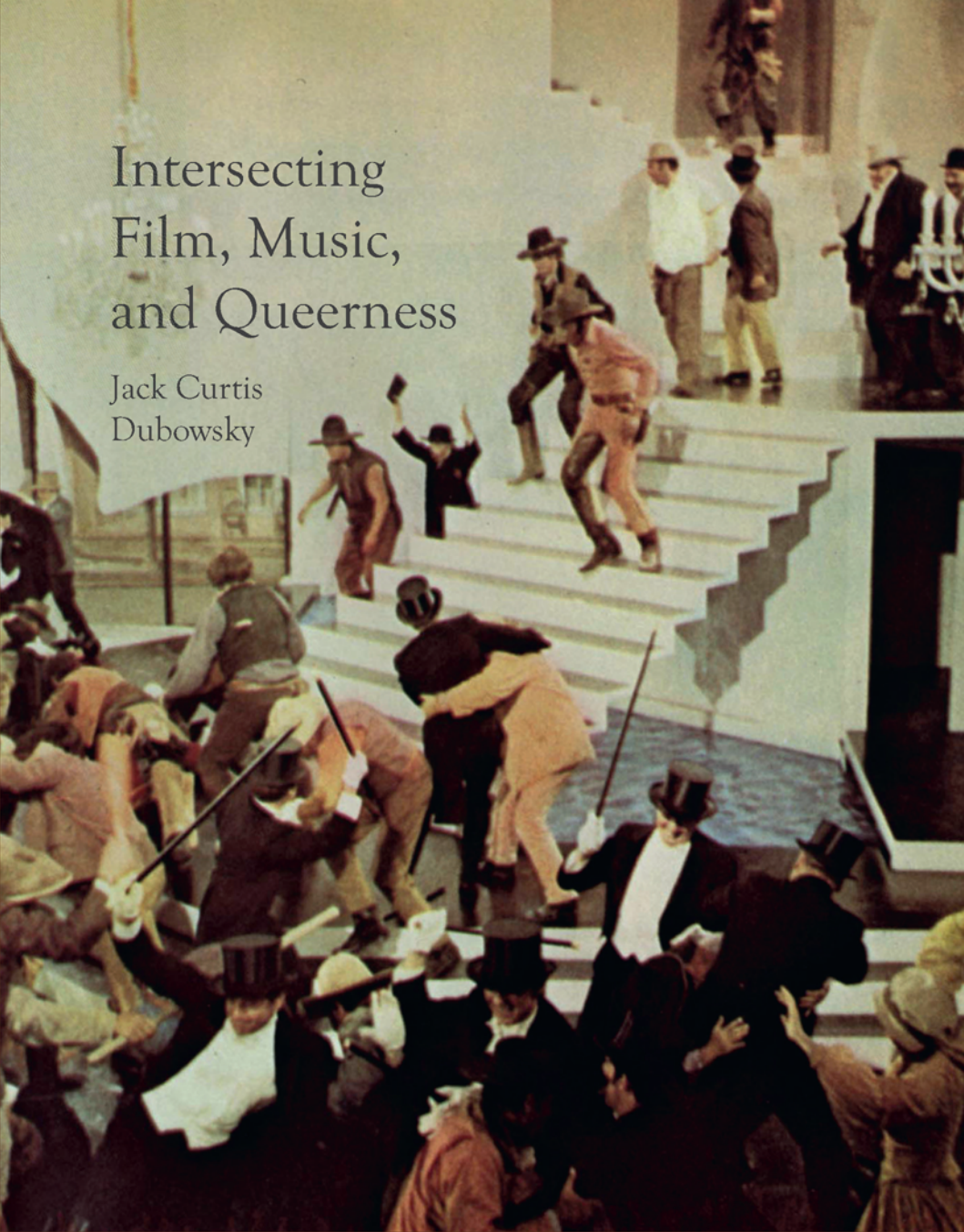


Intersecting Film, Music, and Queerness

Jack Curtis
Dubowsky



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Intersecting Film, Music, and Queerness

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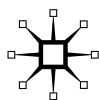
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Intersecting Film, Music, and Queerness

Jack Curtis Dubowsky

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Many easy listening, ambient, and electronic phonographic long-playing records were auditioned during the writing of this monograph.

Introduction

'Film music' and 'queerness' were, for many years, marginalized areas of academic interest, relegated to ignoble statuses such as 'low art' or 'underground' culture. This book looks at ways that queerness intersects film and its synchronized musical audio tracks. Recent developments in scholarship have encouraged, if not demanded, this interrogation. Books such as *Feminine Endings*, *The Queer Composition of America's Sound*, *Queering the Pitch*, and *Queering the Popular Pitch*, to name a few, have pursued lines of inquiry into music that take into account queerness, gender, and sexuality. *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image* published a special issue on 'Gender, Sexuality, and The Soundtrack' (2012: 6.2). The *Journal of the American Musicological Society* published a colloquy on 'Music and Sexuality' (2013: 66.3: 825–72). James Buhler's essay 'Gender, Sexuality, and the Soundtrack' (2014), published during the writing of this book, proffers challenges and directions that a book such as this one might tackle. By now it must be accepted, even by detractors within the academy, that current discourses in musicology and cinema studies regard gender and sexuality as essential facets of human identity and culture that create new ways of critically analyzing cinema and music.

Discerning 'queerness' within film – even within mainstream cinema – can involve applying models of allegory, affinity, identity, cachet, interpretation, and community. Queer perspectives, and 'queer films' themselves, operate as hothouses for issues affecting wider mainstream culture: cultural marginalization can exacerbate common challenges such as budgets, production practices, and the acquisition of cultural cachet. Recent examinations such as *The Culture of Queers*, *Club Cultures*, *Queer Pollen*, and *Impossible Dance* look at interactions between queerness, culture, identity, and the mainstream. This inquiry needs to be

applied to the motion picture soundtrack, to how music creates identity and positions a film within niche markets and mainstream culture, and to how music interacts with cachet and modes of interpretation, whilst taking gender and sexuality into special consideration.

Existing scholarly analyses of film music have come from disciplines of literary analysis, cinema studies, musicology, psychology, communication studies, and music theory, to name but a few. Each of these disciplines has particular interests at heart, and many of those interests overlap, yet scholars frequently favor study of the composer or the composer's final recorded musical output. Bringing queer theory into the discussion enables a deeper level of discourse, especially in regard to interactions between audience, production practice, meaning, and message.

This book uses independent and Hollywood films, from the 1930s to the current decade, as case studies to investigate deeper narratological meanings, messages, and histories embedded in film music and the soundtrack. It takes into consideration queer composers and queer films, but it also examines select mainstream composers, filmmakers, and films with a queer perspective. To this aim, I understand and interpret 'queer' broadly, in accordance with contemporary queer theory, to encompass all types of non-heteronormative and non-homonormative sexualities and genders: not only male cisgender homosexuals, but lesbians, transgender people, bisexuals, and heterosexuals whose partnering, fetish, or lifestyle interests fall beyond dominant patriarchal paradigms. Sexuality, gender, and identity are best appreciated with acceptance of their potential fluidity and hybridity; these factors, given the strictures of society, can provide a unique queer perspective and sensitivity to unspoken aspects of characterization and narrative. This queer perspective can unlock layers of meaning in a wide variety of films where such insights are particularly relevant in how the music functions or in how an alternative interpretation of surface narrative is communicated.

The idea of the 'intersection' is not new. Borrowing a principle from set theory,¹ this book addresses the overlap of three growing areas of critical inquiry – film, music, and queerness – within a framework of humanities research and theory. This intersected area may appear esoteric, but the fields of media studies, musicology, and queer theory are themselves expanding, and the area they intersect will likewise grow.

Joseph Kerman, a leading and early proponent of the 'new musicology,' in discussing competition between the fields of musicology, music theory, and ethnomusicology, wrote, 'It is often where two or

even all three systems can be said to compete for the intellectual control of territory that we will find the most promising fields of study' (Kerman 1985: 15). This thinking may be extended to the intersection of cinema studies, musicology, and queer theory. Binary intersections of these three fields have been accepted in academia since the 1990s at least and, in the case of film music, much earlier. Briefly I will describe the three distinct binary academic intersections that occur between these fields.

Music and film

The academic study of film music, its composition, history, and theory, has grown sufficiently large that a comprehensive overview is difficult to undertake in a few paragraphs. The field has splintered into various divisions: extension classes, scoring programs, and vocational music colleges that offer a 'practical' approach to aspiring practitioners; musicologists who wish to add the film scores of choice composers to the canon of twentieth-century compositional masterworks; and humanities scholars of all stripes who regard the cinema as an arrow in their quiver of critical expertise. There are film music appreciation courses, as well as 'handbooks,' 'readers,' 'histories,' 'guides,' and numerous anthologies of film music scholarship on academic presses by authors with a wide variety of academic credentials. Any historiography of the field of film music, therefore, tends to reflect personal biases and favoritisms, as well as an obligatory nod to its implicit futures: music for television, music for advertising, music for gaming, music for the Internet, and the catchall, music for media.

Film music composition, criticism, theory, and compendiums of suggested 'cues,' such as Erno Rapée's *Encyclopedia of Music for Pictures* (1925), date to the 'silent' period, as described in Rick Altman's authoritative *Silent Film Sound* (2004), for even if the *films* were silent, the *cinema* was not. This existing body of work expanded to match the success and eventual domination of the sound film. Frankfurt School philosopher Theodor Adorno and German composer Hanns Eisler published an influential midcentury book of film music theory, *Composing for the Films* (1947), a touchstone for further theoretical discourse in the creation and analysis of film music. In 1957, Roger Manvell and John Huntley co-wrote *The Technique of Film Music*, part of a 'technical series' on film production for the British Film Academy, a book 'addressed to everyone interested in the film, as well as to composers and professional film-makers' (1957: dust jacket). The 1970s saw a growth in professional

'how-to' books, such as composer Earle Hagen's *Scoring For Films* (1971) and music editor Milton Lustig's *Music Editing for Motion Pictures* (1980). Others followed, such as composers Fred Karlin and Rayburn Wright's heavy tome *On the Track: A Guide to Contemporary Film Scoring* (1990), which 'includes a complete click book' so the budding composer can calculate tempos and correlate them to celluloid's sprocket-lock mag synchronization systems.²

In 1977, New York University Press released sound and music editor Roy Prendergast's *Film Music: A Neglected Art*. Subsequent film music books in an increasingly 'academic' style began to snowball in the early 1990s. These include Claudia Gorbman's *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (1987), Michel Chion's books *L'Audio-Vision* (1990) and *La musique au cinema* (1995), Kathryn Kalinak's *Settling the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film* (1992), Caryl Flinn's *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia, and Hollywood Film Music* (1992), and Royal S. Brown's *Overtones and Undertones: Reading Film Music* (1994). These books were largely created within a humanities framework, outside a musicological establishment still struggling to integrate the interests and approaches of the 'new musicology.' But musicologists soon followed with their own rigorous work, as perhaps best exemplified by Scarecrow Press's 'Film Score Guide' series, in which each volume is dedicated to a single film, painstakingly researched, and robust with detailed musical transcriptions. Academic journals in a variety of disciplines became increasingly welcoming of work devoted to film music, and new, specialized journals joined the fray: *The Soundtrack; Music and the Moving Image; Music, Sound, and the Moving Image*; and *The Journal of Film Music*. Omni Music Publishing recently published limited edition, full orchestral scores of Hollywood blockbusters including *The Matrix*, *Batman*, and *Back to the Future*. Today there are an increasing number of film music concerts, festivals, documentaries, and specialized conferences.

Queerness and film

Using a broad, contemporary definition of 'queerness,' one that encompasses an inclusive spectrum of alternative sexualities and gender identities, challenges us to locate precisely when studies of queerness and film may have began, but it encourages us to consider sources such as George De Coulteray's *Sadism in the Movies* (1965). According to its own dust jacket, it is 'the book that shocked a nation,' published by the reputedly-named Medical Press of New York, also home to

The Sadist: An ABZ of Love (illustrated), and *The Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana*. De Coulteray's is not a pulp book; it boasts 256 illustrations in a durable hardback, accompanied by thorough analyses that consider desire, cruelty, rape, spanking, slavery, bondage, whips, and torture chambers, as well as 'sexual assassins' and vampires.³ I am certain more books like this were once in circulation, but are now out of print, ignored or forgotten by the academy. I hope such books will be rediscovered and reevaluated for their contributions to scholarship and evidence of progressive thought, proof that an appreciation of 'queerness' is not a post-modernist phenomenon.

Overall, the study of the intersections of alternative sexualities and film predates our current academic construct or label of 'queerness,' and begins instead with studies of 'homosexuality,' typically weighted, however well intentioned, towards *male homosexuality*. In 1972, author and film critic Parker Tyler published his comprehensive book *Screening the Sexes: Homosexuality in the Movies*. Tyler was grounded in experimental and underground film, as well as Hollywood motion pictures, and so is able to document a queer connection to the avant-garde (Jack Smith, Jean Genet, Kenneth Anger) as well as to the fabulousness of Hollywood glitter and intrigue. Tyler makes a distinction between the 'sex organ,' the 'sexual personality,' and 'gender,' in order for the book to aspire to 'all-inclusiveness' (1972: xi).

In 1977 the British Film Institute released the first of several printings of *Gays & Film*, edited by cultural theorist Richard Dyer, a shorter but more academic and theoretical work that pioneered an application of queer theory to cinema studies. Therein Dyer looks at 'ideology' and 'stereotyping,' Caroline Sheldon ventures into the 'politics of lesbian-feminism,' and Jack Babuscio considers 'gay sensibility' and various readings of 'camp.'

In 1981, historian, activist, and cinephile Vito Russo published his landmark book, *The Celluloid Closet*, an influential compendium of observations and innuendos intending to establish irrefutable evidence of homosexual 'visibility' in Hollywood cinema. One of the book's most valuable contributions is a catalogue or 'necrology' of morbidly homophobic films; many of these gay deaths arguably were encouraged by the strictures of the Motion Picture Production Code, or 'Hays Code,' that allowed for moral turpitudes to be depicted as long as the perpetrators were adequately punished.⁴ Russo's book and public lectures were a starting point for further research and public interest. *The Celluloid Closet* also achieved greater visibility than Tyler or Dyer's earlier works largely because of Russo's connection to the growing New York activist

community; his profile was raised considerably through involvement with ACT UP and GLAAD, groups that sought media attention for their work.

In the early 1990s, Alexander Doty, Corey Creekmur, D. A. Miller, B. Ruby Rich, and others published new, influential work on film from a queer analytical perspective. Books such as Doty's *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture* (1993) coincided roughly with the explosion of the 'New Queer Cinema' on screens in film festivals and urban centers. While the New Queer Cinema celebrated fresh voices and overt queer content, scholars were also encouraged to revisit and reevaluate historic, canonical films like *Bride of Frankenstein* and *Mädchen in Uniform*, and narrowed their focus with books such as *Monsters in the Closet* (1997), Harry Benshoff's monograph that looks specifically at the horror genre. 'Queer studies' would make further inroads into the academy: today there are university departments and degree programs associated with the field, whose research often thrives on studies of cinema and media culture.

Concerns of the intersection of queer and cinema studies include how sexual and gender diversity is presented; how morality and deviance are projected; how subcultures and marginalized communities are represented, misrepresented, or kept invisible; how stereotypes and clichés are propagated or challenged; how audience sympathies are manipulated; and how legal and marketing concerns affect these issues.

Queerness and music

Beginning in the 1970s, Joseph Kerman and other musicologists began to question the field's dominant positivist leanings that favored an approach of music theory and analysis over interdisciplinary approaches that would consider sociological and anthropological factors as well as the notion that music could signify cultural meanings and messages.⁵ Kerman believed new critical approaches would not supplant musical analysis, but 'should be joined with analysis to provide a less one-dimensional account of the artistic matters at hand' (Kerman 1980: 331). Kerman and his like-minded colleagues became the proponents of what came to be called the 'new musicology.'

The application of queer theory within musicology generated controversy and heated argument, enlivening debates about Handel, Schubert, Tchaikovsky, Britten, German cabaret, and Stevie Nicks, to name but a few. These contentious debates, often between established scholars,

helped revolutionize musicology itself, propelling the ‘new musicology’ into uncharted (yet familiar) territory, and pushing academic journals to publish arguments and rebuttals, claims and counterattacks.

Some scholars were aware that these ‘new’ perspectives had long been around, even if they had been obscured by positivism’s stranglehold.

Musicological explorations of the intersection of music and sexuality have a long history, if we include such writing as Edward Lockspeiser’s 1945 coded commentary of Tchaikovsky’s music as ‘shameless in its sensuousness and splendor.’ In 1977, Philip Brett’s article ‘Britten and Grimes,’ which appeared in the *Musical Times*, inaugurated a serious and antihomophobic sub-discipline of musicological scholarship that explores the ways in which sexual orientation affects musical expression. (Peraino and Cusick 2013: 826)

Mainstream recognition of this intersection was hard-fought and did not happen overnight. Proponents of a queering of musicology risked jeopardizing their standing within the academy and, for new faculty, their attainment of tenure: ‘Many of the texts in the first generation of queer musicology carry traces of defiance or trepidation in the face of personal risk. Now, however, the approaches in question have gained a measure of institutional acceptance’ (Whitesell, 2013: 836).

Part of the academy’s initial resistance to a ‘queering’ of musicology related to a perceived subjectivity of such an approach. Susan McClary, in *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, & Sexuality* (1991), argues for recognition that music *can* signify: music is more than a music theorist’s crossword puzzle, but communicates meanings and significations that can be unpacked. McClary insists that associations between music and gender are not recent inventions, but have been prescribed by canonical composers:

Beginning with the rise of opera in the seventeenth century, composers worked painstakingly to develop a musical semiotics of gender: a set of conventions for constructing ‘masculinity’ or ‘femininity’ in music. (McClary 1991: 7)

Musical tropes for constructing ‘masculinity’ or ‘femininity’ surely date earlier than the seventeenth century, but are certainly present and obvious in opera.⁶ The use of such tropes in opera extends to their use in film music. Even more fascinating is McClary’s argument that Western

art music itself bears a metaphorical relationship to coitus, not by sublimation, but by principles inherent in music theory.

Not only do gender and sexuality inform our 'abstract' theories, but music itself often relies heavily upon the metaphorical simulation of sexual activity for its effects. I will argue [...] that tonality itself – with its process of instilling expectations and subsequently withholding promised fulfillment until climax – is the principal musical means during the period from 1600 to 1900 for arousing and channeling desire. (McClary 1991: 12)

This argument that music can be a metaphor for sexuality is foundational groundwork for the intersection of queerness and musicology. McClary presages how queerness and musicology might intersect, but cautions, 'before we can address the questions concerning gender and sexuality [...] it is necessary to construct an entire theory of musical signification' (McClary 1991: 20). But it may *not* be necessary to construct an 'entire theory' of musical signification, since such significations depend upon cultural literacy and assimilations tied to time and place. Different cultures and subcultures read signs and significations differently, making a single 'entire' theory unlikely. What are most important are valid correlations between music and meaning that are constructed within the music itself. That is to say, *musical* details affect responses, not merely learned associations or personal favoritisms that elicit a response. McClary forecasts how this line of inquiry into musical signification connects to the study of film music.

Composers of music for movies and advertisements consistently stake their commercial success on the public's pragmatic knowledge of musical signification – the skill with which John Williams, for instance, manipulates the semiotic codes of the late nineteenth-century symphony in *E.T.* or *Star Wars* is breathtaking. (McClary 1991: 21)

Many contemporary audience members who might not recognize even one nineteenth-century symphony will still understand the musical semiotic codes employed in a John Williams film score. McClary's argument that music signifies is bedrock for the foundations of further film music analysis, a position that the uninitiated take for granted.⁷ McClary's arguments on feminism and music paved the way for scholars to further consider queerness and music.

Of course, 'queerness' is not simply 'homosexuality.' Trails blazed by scholars of queerness and musicology helped encourage new scholarship around Australian composer Percy Grainger (1882–1961), who copiously detailed in photographs and letters his own sexual interest in sadomasochism and incest (Bird 1999; Gillies 2006). There is little controversy around the *nature* of Grainger's interests, as he documented them himself, but groundbreaking is the exploration that Grainger's fetishes and paraphilias might be *relevant to his music*. This is the most promising area for further research: not that any particular composer liked men or women or whipping or their own mother or whatever else might be unusual or titillating, but how might such interests connect with the composer's music and musical significations.

An extension of such queerness brings us to the short but fascinating life of French Canadian composer Claude Vivier (1948–1983), a homosexual man with an avid interest in sadomasochism (Gilmore 2014: 184–5, 227). Vivier also dabbled as a filmmaker himself (Gilmore 2014: 196–8), a likely next step for contemporary composers. As the means of producing motion pictures becomes increasingly accessible at low cost through inexpensive filming equipment, video editing software, and online distribution, inspired creative people such as composers have an added incentive to make their own films.

All three together

The previous three sections looked at the unique binary intersections of the fields of queer theory, musicology, and cinema studies. If we consider these three fields together, we have a sizable overlap rich with potential and opportunities for scholarship. Scott Paulin considered these possibilities in 'Unheard Sexualities? Queer Theory and the Soundtrack' (1997).

A conversation is indeed possible between queer theory and film sound criticism, for music often participates directly in constructing onscreen representations of desire and sexuality, usually encouraging the audience to identify with a (hetero)sexual relationship and to desire its consummation. (Paulin 1997: 37)

Paulin sees that a conversation between these fields can yield information about audience identifications; this is certainly a useful tool in understanding how film music works. 'Onscreen representation' has been a longstanding concern of queer theorists and advocates for social

justice. McClary sees the possibilities of musical significations, tropes, and features in the musical score itself that can be unpacked and analyzed. So, there are actually a lot of places the overlap of the three fields can take us. Catherine Haworth, in her introduction to the *MSMI* special issue on 'Gender, Sexuality, and the Soundtrack' notes

Regardless of genre, content, media, and stated or assumed intent, the soundtrack impacts directly upon issues of gendered and sexual identity, both in its engagement with the narrative and its characters, and in our own engagement with it as active and individual subjects. (Haworth 2012: 130)

Haworth asks us to consider how the soundtrack impacts not only the narrative and onscreen world, but also our own engagement with the film. This proposes a kind of dialectic, where music interacts with the film itself but also with the audience directly. This is often why music is employed in motion pictures anyway, to promote or enhance audience engagement. When the audience is not engaged, as is often observed in a studio 'test screening' for instance, music will be brought in or adjusted to help the film. Many times music is called upon to 'fix' unconvincing acting or stilted dialogue; bringing 'queerness' into this particular interrogation increases the possibilities of analysis.

James Buhler's essay, 'Gender, Sexuality, and the Soundtrack,' suggests another line of inquiry that the overlap of these three fields is ideally situated to follow: a political, Marxist, and activist role that can expose entertainment industry power structures and colonialist, capitalist power motives.

Like feminist and postcolonial theory, [queer studies] seeks not only to unmask stereotypes but to analyze their discursive functions in order to displace and destabilize the social structures and power relations that support them. (Buhler 2014: 370)

These social structures and power relations are inherent in mass media and multinational corporate entertainment businesses.⁸ The histories behind queer communities inform an activist perspective well suited to incisive readings of politicized and manipulated sociological situations. These power relations, as Buhler notes, occur at the societal level and at the personal level; they are signified through music.

Queer theory [...] is oriented around identifying and analyzing the process of subjectification embedded within the representations of sexuality proffered by film, around looking at those representations

less as reflecting power relations of the society than of signifying them. (Buhler 2014: 371)

This perspective adds to the existing mix of musicological and representational issues the complications of signifying societal power relations; music can do that too. Buhler's essay charges scholars who undertake a study of the intersection of queerness, music, and film with several ambitious tasks.

A critical theory of the soundtrack informed by gender and queer theory would be concerned with the 'articulation of power and sexuality' on the soundtrack, how desire is made audible on it, for whom, by whom, and to what purpose. It might ask whether and to what extent the soundtrack enforces a compulsory heterosexual code, examining, for instance, how the soundtrack imposes normative gender roles and lines of sexual desire on the film's characters and our apprehension of them. [...] One can certainly imagine, at a first stage, analytical studies of how, say, gay or lesbian characters are scored, the way the soundtrack reinforces or resists engaging cultural stereotypes, whether it chooses to demonize, complicate, or valorize the character types the film presents, and so forth. (Buhler 2014: 370–71)

Buhler has outlined a number of topics he would like to see addressed. By intersecting the established academic fields of musicology, film studies, and queer studies, we have a potential to gain deeper understandings in these areas Buhler has mentioned. Some scholars warn of risks involved in interdisciplinary work, should the rigor of the fields involved become diluted. This is especially of concern in highly technical fields, such as cinema or music.

When music becomes the object of academic disciplines as it is today, discourse can become a site of struggle among the factions and interest groups that compete for the cultural authority to speak about music. The expert critical and technical languages that these groups invent can foster a social bond among those who share them, but they can also alienate and exclude outsiders. (Korsyn 2003: 6)

Scholars and practitioners of film music have seen this invention of 'expert' critical and technical languages happen. As humanities scholars rushed into the alluring and burgeoning field of film music in the 1990s, they created new jargon while avoiding the existing language of

music theorists, claiming their own territory. Media scholars and philosophers, who lacked ear training and knew little of, say, Schenkerian analysis, functional harmony, or serial operations, eagerly pontificated about film *music* within their own newly invented cultural concepts. Scholars who knew little about the 'field' or actual production practices would speak a new critical language where terminology sometimes already existed, albeit with differing 'nuance.' Film music scholars gushed effusively about 'diegesis,' 'sound advance,' the 'fantastical gap,' and 'liminal space.' Industry professionals outside of academia had different words, and often different concerns, discussing 'source,' 'prelap,' 'perspective,' and 'procedural' music.⁹ The one term all camps seemed to enjoy was 'needle drop,' with its charming visual reference.

Of course, everyone had something to bring to the table: many of the arguments that inform film music scholarship today come from the cultural studies area and were proffered by scholars without musical training. Indeed, philosophical approaches allow us to look at production and musical practices from outside the stresses of the field environment.

There is an inherent risk involved in intersecting multiple fields or specializations: to pretend to know something about all of them, while really knowing very little about anything. This book similarly teeters on an academic precipice where my own shortcomings and biases will be apparent to many scholars and practitioners. In the process of researching and writing this book, I have adhered to approaches that I find interesting and compelling. I have tried to privilege primary sources and information that has an informed relationship to production practices, filmmakers, and composers.

This book looks at how select examples of musical, cinematic, and queer 'texts' or queer 'readings' coincide, and what observations can be made when they do. I hope that these intersections will indicate what *we have been missing* when scholars and critics have looked at these films, and their musics, in the past.

Larger issues

The arguments contained in this book should be further understood within and contextualized by certain broader discourses. These include debates about audition, audience perspectives, gender, historiography, authorship, auteur theory, cultural cachet and 'street' credibility, the new musicology, and queer and trans identities and politics.

It has, on occasion, been argued that film music is 'unheard' or is not meant for active listening; that it is some kind of remote,

unessential, cinematic subtext. An opposing view insists that for music to be 'unheard' defies both logic and production practice; critical analyses of music rely on its audition, even if it is considered only a subtle reinforcement of narrative. There are fan communities who do *actively* listen to film music, and fans who will see a movie simply because a specific composer wrote its music. These spectators might even listen to the music and ignore superimposed dialogue; they may not lose any understanding of the film in doing so. And yet some absolutists argue that 'film music' is not truly music at all, in the strictest sense, since it is governed by an exterior logic, that of the motion picture, rather than its own internal logic, and therefore loses any substance or validity, becoming a kind of quasi-musical sonic wallpaper.¹⁰

This epistemological debate, on whether or not we 'hear' music in film, springs from an older debate on the role of music within broader artistic and performance traditions.¹¹ This debate has included the role of music in theatre, where it bolsters interludes and distracts during set changes; music in restaurants or soirées, where it is offered to delight guests, facilitate conversation, and aid in gustation; music for dance, where it establishes tempo but takes a back seat to beautiful dancers; and arguably even music for opera, where a typically reduced orchestra becomes a backdrop for vocal calisthenics and the parade of costume.¹² Questions concerning the importance, centrality, or obsequiousness of music are questions that solicit answers that expose the *perspective* of the responder. At a wedding, all eyes are typically on the bride, not the organist, but how can you be sure? What might we surmise about the wedding guest who is more interested in the organist than the bride?

The argument that film music is 'unheard' makes for a curious connection to queerness. It is often said that queer voices are unheard, queer images unseen, and the very presence of queers ignored or denied.¹³ Vito Russo fought this notion in *The Celluloid Closet* when he insisted that queers were visible in Hollywood film despite suppression and homophobia. Even in cultures that actively suppress queer voices, there is often a powerful underground culture. This might be a good analogy to the film music fan community's underground culture of championing 'unheard' music.

Proceeding in the absence of a uniform queer politic

Academia, activists, and popular culture all negotiate a continually shifting queer politic, focusing on what is queerly 'owned' or rejected in language, history, or social structures. In the 1960s and 1970s, a 'gay

liberation' movement was organically connected to a broader social movement of sexual liberation, where wife swapping, swingers' parties, and promiscuity were all the rage among some heterosexuals, as parodied in the Mike Myers' *Austin Powers* films, for example. The rise of the AIDS pandemic in the 1980s and 1990s elicited a reactionary sexual conservatism that may have encouraged interest in monogamy and binary relationships. Nevertheless, many queers remain highly sexually active today; consider the ethos and politic of *The Ethical Slut*, and ongoing debates on appropriate behavioral responses to the AIDS crisis and prevention. At the same time, gay 'promiscuity' is considered a dated cliché among many in an assimilationist, 'mainstreamed' homonormative gay culture that has fought to promote 'marriage equality,' to access a civil convention that many in the age of sexual liberation rejected. There is still a broad body of queer literature that argues against marriage; this debate is too entangling to be presented here as anything other than an example of the complexities of shifting queer politics (Benderson 2014; Bernstein and Taylor 2013; Conrad 2010).

Another issue at the forefront of homosexual concerns until the mid 1980s was the 'age of consent.' Socio-political new wave dance band Bronski Beat even titled their 1984 debut album *The Age of Consent*; the LP's full color inner sleeve had information on the age of consent in different countries worldwide. While this remained a concern due to such issues as entrapment and police harassment, the main issue became AIDS, a mysterious, new, fatal disease that shook the queer community into a new level of activism. There were ties between queer activism and queer academics; as this was a life-or-death situation, more people came out, lived openly, and brought queerness into their professional lives.

Queer Nation, like ACT UP, also happened to be closely intertwined with the forms of Cultural Theory then underway. [...] Queer Theory transposed an activist style into a more abstract key in hopes of unlocking and dislodging an assortment of intellectual complacencies in the study of gender and sexuality. (Morris 2013: 834)

Queer theory did not go unquestioned, even by many queers themselves, trying to make sense of it all. Although it seemed to be new territory, it had a presumed history, going back millennia, of course; since there always had been queers, this could not be a new phenomenon. Right?

The moment that the scandalous formula 'queer theory' was uttered, however, it became the name of an already established school of

theory, as if it constituted a set of specific doctrines, a singular, substantive perspective on the world, a particular theorization of human experience, equivalent in that respect to psychoanalytic or Marxist theory. The only problem was that no one knew what the theory was. And for the very good reason that no such theory existed. (Halperin 2003: 340)

A complication of proceeding with the inquiry of the intersection of film, music, and queerness is that queer theory itself, its history, canon, and politic, are still in flux. Although the academic field has its established scholars, they are not always names known and lauded by the everyday queer-on-the-street. As a contrast, Harvey Milk, a politician and activist who built bridges between gays, seniors, minorities, and labor interests, whom he notably called ‘the usses,’ is recognized as a universal civil rights hero, while queer studies risks becoming an increasingly specialized and rarefied field. As the field progresses, scholars balance interests and omissions, inclusions and exclusions.

I endeavor to use a broad definition of ‘queerness,’ that may include people of all sexual persuasions, interests, and genders, anyone bullied or cast outside for who they ‘are’ or might be presumed to ‘be.’ Queer communities will continue to negotiate their political postures; there is still dissention among the ranks with issues such as assimilation versus liberation, marriage versus other possibilities, and how queerness encourages certain geopolitical alliances in transnational struggles, to name a few.

The book’s three sections

The first section of this book, ‘Mad About the Boy: Male Homosexuality and Music in Film,’ contends with male homosexuality, which has been the subject of much existing research and argument in cultural studies. Robert Flaherty’s *Louisiana Story* (1948) is rich with inference, innuendo, and subtext normative for its period; the histories of the director, composer, and film are intertwined with perceptions and misperceptions of Virgil Thomson’s orchestral score. Gregg Araki’s *The Living End* (1992), a watershed New Queer Cinema film, uses songs from the Los Angeles industrial club scene to capitalize on audience affinities. Ang Lee’s *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), an audience favorite with a prolific and outspoken fan community, puzzled scholars and critics for perpetuating regressive tropes, while Gustavo Santaolalla’s guitar score clenched the Oscar.

The second section, 'Fighting the Patriarchy: Dykes, Misogyny, and Gender Fear,' deals with representations and anxieties in films in which a male paradigm is challenged. As far back as classical Hollywood, music informed the audience of gender roles, as it does in contemporary cinema, inviting layered critical analysis. The use of popular music can help a mainstream audience to identify with outsider characters, and can be employed to make overt textual references. The compilation score became commonplace in American cinema, especially in road movies, a genre that creates many opportunities for typification and subversion. As cinema told stories involving the trans community, gender stereotypes in text and music add further complications and nuance to the soundtrack.

The third section explores the 'Queering of Genre,' and how music is an integral part of the creation and subversion of film genres. Music helps situate film within particular genres and satisfy audience expectations, but it can also navigate liminal spaces between genres in films that defy simple categorization. Horror movies, monster movies, musicals, comedies, Westerns, road movies, virtually every type of film there is, can be queered or given a queer reading. Genres such as musicals and horror films became queer favorites, but queers also see representations of themselves in melodramas, Westerns, cartoons, and action films. Music can indicate and suggest various readings, providing subcultural signs and characterizations that inform audience sensibilities. With this, music and queerness give us much to explore in cinema.

Part I

Mad About the Boy: Male Homosexuality and Music in Film

1

Louisiana Story, Homoeroticism, and Americana

Homoeroticism has a long and colorful history in art and literature.¹ Frequently this homoeroticism is more tangible when it involves an appreciation and idealization of youth, often from a safe distance or through sublimation, directing the viewer's gaze upon romanticized depictions of the body at rest or in action, sport, combat, or dance, for instance. This tradition of homoeroticism naturally extends to cinema as well, where the direction of the camera's gaze is under complete control of the filmmaker. This chapter examines male homoeroticism in *Louisiana Story* (1948) and the contributions that music makes towards the romanticizing of male youth.

Louisiana Story is a rustic, languidly poetic film, commissioned by Standard Oil to quietly support the public image of the oil industry. It was made during a conservative postwar period marked by the height of the 'Golden Age' of Hollywood film music and the strictures of the Motion Picture Production Code or 'Hays Code.'² This period was also characterized by vibrant activity on the part of American midcentury modernist homosexual composers, including the iconic Virgil Thomson who scored *Louisiana Story*.³ The complexities of the time period both restricted and encouraged queer aesthetics and codes.

The film obsessively follows a barefoot adolescent boy through the scenic bayous of Cajun Louisiana. There is an oil derrick blowout and an alligator, but otherwise the film is remarkably devoid of conflict. The boy loses and finds his pet raccoon, Jo-Jo. The film won awards at the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) and the Venice Film Festival; the National Film Registry of the Library of Congress has preserved the film. Thomson won the 1949 Pulitzer Prize for Music for this score, the only film score to ever win the award.