



Commentary on Neumeyer's MTO 0.1 essay*

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[1] I believe that the derivations of film music stem not so much from opera or “serious music” (or “classical music”—whatever you want to call it—the stuff you go to a concert hall to hear) but from more of the popular idioms of the time. Now granted, operatic and symphonic music were used in abundance to accompany silent films (Ride of the Valkyries accompanied the ride of the KKK in Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915)—but so were popular tunes of the day. (Momentary excursus: part of the problem I'm having in separating classical from popular music genres stems from a time—prior to WW I—when such distinctions are not as clear as they would later become.)

[2] And I think that it's also not a question of what was used, but HOW it was used. Basing my understanding of silent film music mostly on early sound films (those in which there was a synchronized soundtrack without dialogue—and such films dating from the late 1920s and early 1930s, must represent an advanced stage of silent film music compositional art—e.g. *Don Juan* (1926), *Sunrise* (1927), even *City Lights* (1931)), I would say that the use of music is not really like what you find in opera. In fact, I would say that the use of music in silent films probably bears a closer resemblance to music that was used in Broadway shows. When I first heard that recent recording of *Show Boat*, I was amazed to hear the unsung music (“background music”—not in the Schenkerian sense!) because it worked in the same way as does the silent films with music that I've seen. Though the opera-to-movies path seems tempting, I think the available evidence does not follow it.

[3] One additional tangential note. The usually-heard story about Schoenberg and movies is based on the one from the biography by Willi Reich. In brief, it states that the head of MGM was considering Schoenberg as a composer for *The Good Earth*. Schoenberg stated his conditions: “I want \$50,000, and a guarantee that not one note will be changed”—“Thus ends the relationship of Schoenberg to the movies” says Reich. But in fact there must be more. According to the catalogs of the Arnold Schoenberg institute, there exists quite a bit of music written for *The Good Earth* and for another film (of which I don't remember the title). It would be interesting to examine these sketches as evidence of how Schoenberg envisioned the relationship of music to film, and to see how it relates to the *Begleitungsmusik*, Op. 34.

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