

QUT

E. F. BURIAN: Music in Sound Film /Hudba ve zvukovem filmu/

When we consider music in sound film, we must first of all depart from the assumption that we are dealing with (so many) meters of sound which dynamically and rhythmically solve the space of the film ^{54. frame} tape.

Sound Meter

This measure turns history upside down. All theories, from Monteverdi all the way to Stravinsky, are thereby liquidated. All the periodicals devoted to decadent, i.e. serious, music are unable to break up this measure by any little formula pertaining to musical education. The first shock of this realization was so strong even for me, that I was on the verge of burning all my manuscripts of yesterday. And I am used to quite a lot from my heretic work! Now all those leitmotives and program jokes will again be in fashion, once more recitative will be considered; however, a gentleman with a ^{ruler} tape measure will count exactly how many centimeters long is the word and how many millimetres the flute will whistle.

What to do with the theory?

Imagine that music has a firmly layed out development and that genius passes through centuries solving composition in firm linkage with that tradition. Even the jazz revolution was

firmly linked to the tradition of the Protestant choral and African tom-toms. If something remarkable happened here, it was only because jazz was truly the predecessor of the changes we are now witnessing during the florescence of mechanical production. And now compare the tradition of film with this colossal tradition of the Palestrinas, Beethovens and Smetanas. Discover something commensurate between musical and film development. The relationship of these two traditions is equal to zero. The contents and technical problems of music are fundamentally different, even directly incongruous to film. Film thinks, feels and works quite differently than music with its Bach tradition. Film really is not interested in anything else than a measurable and palpable musical space. Film cuts, shortens and lengthens its musical element according to its law, i.e., to the law of its own tradition, not the musical tradition.

Structure

If the composer of yesterday's style wails that he is limited by the hegemony of the film contents, if he is tearing his hair when asked to repeat all over again the already settled, really scandalous effects for the concert or theater stage, then he shall have no other option but to forget that he ever called himself a composer and rename himself the sound technician, since it is the only designation that truly fits him. If the film composer will start his work with the sound, then the best

solution for him is to ask for a measuring tape that will enable him to measure words and instruments, and he will change from an insincere genius into a sound technician, a function we are courageously reaching with the mere realization of his work designation. Then it will make no difference at all if there is a tradition of symphonies and sonatas, nobody will be interested whether Stravinsky composes as a neo-classicist or impressionist. The entire theory of musical development shall progress or regress at its leisure--the sound engineer, however, will construct and make blueprints for kilometers of tones in the sense of the film structure. Thus the musician will not complain about violence and film shall have its tectonic space.

Functional sound

Unlike the old music of the biographs, when the bandleader of a screaming salon orchestra was inventing all kinds of different moods and stealing from authors all over the world, today music in film finds its purpose only in function. What is the function of ^{in film} music. It is the justification of sound material that does not retouch the picture and that is not composed in the sense of the old operas, for example, Gluck, it is directly the film, a sequence of film images and their plot. The theory of mechanical music shall always have the function of sound as its point of departure rather than pure musical rules. Let us not forget that this no backdrop to the picture but the picture

itself. Music in a sound film is not only heard, it is first of all seen. This is the theoretical basis which turns the acoustic aspect of sound into a visual one. The visual character of sound is subject to montage as is the pictorial script, and some compositions, i.e., purely musical composition, in the concert sense, are excluded. If somebody today still considers music in sound film from a purely acoustic viewpoint, then he has fallen way back behind the comprehension of this achievement. Only the visual character of sound turns musical work in film into what should properly be called functional sound. We do not understand under this term only the sound of the instruments or voices in the picture. A shot of those who play and sing is not yet the film function of sound.

Montage

If we proceed from the assumption that film is above all governed by the law of montage, then we cannot take out its music outside this law and place it into some special extra-film musico-historical position. Quite the contrary, once we pass in sound film from exclusively acoustic music to exclusively visual meters, we will realize that only in montage that find the true composition of music, the composition which heretofore the composers attempted to replace by composing moods. And if we, as absolute composers (i.e., composers who have good reasons to believe only in music not based on literary contents), know that

music cannot be other than acoustic, and when we add to this view the finding from sound film about the visual character of this acoustic music, then we have on hand an obvious point of departure for work in the film: each musical flow of accords, tones, halftones, every instrumental expression, every tone of the human voice can become phonogenic only after it had been mechanically treated. What do I call mechanical work in film music? We record certain musical dynamic entities on disks x meters long. We will record them at various dynamic strengths of various lengths at various shots. For that we needed some raw musical material, written by the composer with its forthcoming montage already mind. This x number of sound disks is for us working material, just the so-called rough cut film material with scenes which had been shot. What is the next stage of the work of the film director? To clarify, complete and dynamize the action on the film tape by cutting and montage. What is the next stage of the work of the composer? The proper composition of the work, just as that of the film director. The composition which had been recorded is not a film composition, it is only the rough-cut material of rhythms, accords, melodies, etc. The composition proper begins only at the sound table with scissors in hand. Here the composer can finally demonstrate his art, here he finally begins to compose musically. He cuts up his sound meters into those elements which, even with the best of will, cannot be recorded in

natura. He cuts the composition material into centimetres, into thousandths of a second, and he assembles it together with the director who needs an acoustic dimension for his picture. This is a miracle awaiting its theoretician and also entrepreneurs to finally (for God's sake) stop believing in synchronization with the picture and realize what the technology of the new film brings. Today, montage is a law above all laws for a film theoretician. It is such an evident and simple matter, and simultaneously so complicated, that it and only it will show if the film director is what he says he is. For a musical theoretician the musical film montage is still double Dutch, just as photomontage was twenty years ago incomprehensible to film. Film itself is old enough, but film sound is still in diapers. This gives rise to contradictions which can have a very embarrassing effect even in films of world renown. Thus a scandal reaching all the way to the skies can happen, like in the case of the Czechoslovak film "Muz a stín" (Vrazda v Ostrovní ulici) /Man and Shadow [Murder in Ostrovní Street]/ in which the producers, fascinated by the sound mixer, stuffed the entire film, topsy turvy, with the tasteless music of old biograph, so that the picture suffered an irreplaceable acoustic loss. Therein also lies the reason why a composer ignorant of the film technique is forced to invent "storms," "loves," and "sunrises" while the film characteristic of the music is slipping through his fingers. And tell me, in what other art

form is it possible to combine so much magic as in film which can poetically link the song of a nightingale with the sweet talk of lovers and the growling of machines with the protest of workers? And have you already heard an opening gate sound the alarm, a moon play the violin and clouds burst into song? Certainly not in Czechoslovak film because, well--contracts are contracts, business is business and producers-entreprpreneurs are producers-entreprpreneurs.