Musicology and the Presentation of Silent Film
Author(s): Philip C. Carli
Source: Film History, Vol. 7, No. 3, Film Preservation and Film Scholarship (Autumn, 1995), pp. 298-321
Published by: Indiana University Press
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3815096
Accessed: 15/06/2011 09:01

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=iupress.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.
Musicology and the presentation of silent film

Philip C. Carli

Musicians, musicians and film scholars are, to a large extent, unaware of their interaction and common ground in silent film/music restoration. The aesthetic of the performer is strong in both a person playing for a silent film and a person describing, restoring or presenting a silent film, and there are points where personal aesthetics collide or have differing agendas. Personal taste in silent film accompaniment is as decided and strong as a love of chocolate or a hatred of pickled beets, and often considered to be as uncommunicable; however, the passionate antipathies expressed to particular films or the music associated with them often involves partial education. Musicologists feel certain films are stinkers without realizing the differing cultural and aesthetic criteria peculiar to different schools of filmmaking, and film scholars hate certain scores without understanding their period effectiveness or their appeal in different performance approaches. In terms of presentation, this conflict of educated tastes can interfere with mutual agreement, to the detriment of the performed product.

This article is a synthesis of many of my researches and interests with a look at trends in the accompaniment of silent films. It is not strictly about musicology and film history per se, because the two disciplines have so many features in common, and these features in turn overlap into less clearly marked territories of music in general and film in general. At base, historia-aesthetic disciplines that work with performance arts have much common ground. As an historical performer, I must admit to personal tastes that not only conflict at times with those of my musicological and film colleagues, but with modern standards of taste and scholarship as well. My irrepresibly populist loves fight intellectually with my scholarly training and instinctive sense of quality and artistic worth, so that writing this paper has been a monumental effort in producing a text that is both compatible with my preferences and a considered study of the subject at hand.

The best term for my aesthetic approach to film accompaniment, given the two threads I have to reconcile, is ‘scholarly emotionalism’. In truth, emotionalism drives much historia/aesthetic criticism, as the fiction writer’s dictum ‘write about what you know’ translates to scholarly writing’s ‘write about what you care about’. In scholarly etiquette, however, footnotes are normally preferred to enthusiastic judgements of taste. Bear with me. This paper seeks to delineate instances where musical scholarship, alongside of taste and physical materials, may be of help in understanding, presenting and preserving silent film.

The issue of personal taste is becoming more important as the number of silent film presentations and venues for film accompaniment grows. Fifteen years ago, silent film screenings were uncommon, and elaborate musical accompaniments even
the presentation of a silent film with live musical accompaniment is still a ‘special occasion’, but more on the account of expense or venue than actual scarcity. There have been panels on film accompaniment, festivals with special attention to the pairing of music and image (Cinémémoire, Paris; the Strasbourg Film Festival), and festivals which make the most of special ‘guest’ accompanists (Bill Pence and the Telluride festival; the Pordenone festival)¹.

Silent film has resurged to the point where it has become very nearly a major performance form again, an exercise where money, reputations and egos can be made to an appreciable extent (though it is still hard to make a living at it). This comes through in the sheer number of performances each year² and in the dependence of certain venues on silent film presentations with live music as a novelty or a special event. Many symphony orchestras now have one or more silent film events each year, a situation which simply did not exist ten years ago.

Some of these events take advantage of the performance halls of these orchestras, of which a growing number are revamped motion picture palaces³. The special occasion nature of having live music is not the only attraction; deeper, perhaps is the sense of seeing ‘how it was done’ – an extinct format brought forward for public view again. People have a strong urge to see ‘vanished’ or obsolete activities that were once everyday. Thous-ands of people attend ‘living museums’ like Sturbridge Village in Massachusetts, Greenfield Village, Michigan, Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia, and the Genesee Country Museum in western New York every year.

Building a new audience for an older medium through a combination of nostalgia, novelty and supportive creativity (in the form of live accompaniment) is not without obstacles, however. One danger arising from the new interest in silent film, because of its new economic viability, is that the films presented are expected to have immediate audience recognition in some capacity in order to fill the theatre and pay for their presentation (unlike cultural activities whose support is almost entirely based on sources beyond ticket sales). There will be an ever more limited number of films with this quality as we grow further and further away from the culture that originally produced silent films, and we could be forced to overlay a few ‘box office’ films through sheer economics. In point of fact, there is still no way to effectively convince a modern general audience of the viability of the ‘little pictures’ that made up the bulk of silent film production and which constitute the largest group of extant materials; modern audiences not only rely upon a certain element of star recognition (Lon Chaney, Greta Garbo, Douglas Fairbanks) but on an expectation of being dazzled in some way. It is much easier to sell a grotesque fantasy such as Phantom of the Opera (1925), or even a lesser known adventure film like Old Ironsides (1926) or The Sea Hawk (1926), than a smaller-scale production like Smouldering Fires (1925) or Regeneration (1915) (questions of rarity aside). Is the upsurge in silent film presentations an encouraging sign of greater cultural awareness among the cinema- and symphony-going public, or will it prove merely a novelty, to be pursued until the short attention span of the audience is sated or exhausted – a situation even more transient than that governing film presentations in the 1920s, when the product individually was used and immediately discarded? The collaborative abilities of film and music specialists may well bear on the answer to this question.

The presentation and interpretation of silent film has been hampered by numerous technical problems and inadequacies in projection prints; for the most part, the attitude has necessarily been ‘you’re lucky to see it at all’. To that end, the process of restoration has two purposes: (a) to arrest decomposition and preserve a film from vanishing entirely, which sometimes means that the resultant copy is of mixed visual quality, and (b) to preserve the work in the form closest to its original release format.

Restoring a film is in many ways more like restoring a musical work than restoration in other art forms. In painting and sculpture, for the most part, what you see is what you have to work with, a matter of filling in the blanks and cleaning up what is already present; and you have from the start an extremely limited number of physical source materials. The difficulty in film is that you have, from the start, myriad of people interfering with the outcome of the final product, from screen-
contemporary paintings in better condition than the one you are working on, cleaning and removing varnishes, repairing deterioration due to chemical alteration or decomposition of the painter’s materials. The means of judging the cumulative effect of a restoration, the combination of all elements mentioned thus far, is like restoring a musical composition—the effect cannot be properly judged except in a performance venue with the work actively in use, and (except in rarefied instances) in its effect upon an audience. In many ways, this last is most important.

Musicians are specializing in reconstructing and composing scores for restored silent films. One interesting aspect of the renewed interest in silent film and film music comes in the form of festivals where the differing approaches to film appreciation through music are combined: reconstructions of original scores, compilations in the manner of the original scores, and completely new scores that owe little in their approach to earlier models. The exploration of new methods of film accompaniment has become a matter of hot debate and strong emotions comparable in some cases to the emotions engendered by the films themselves. The Pordenone Silent Film Festival (Le giornate del cinema muto) has made a speciality of inviting musicians to bring both period and contemporary approaches to silent film accompaniment, and it is fascinating that two camps have not arisen. Instead, with those who take a strong interest⁴, each film and its music has been approached as an individual case; some things work, and others do not. Division is not made according to whether it is the original music or not, but is based on whether what emanates from the pit complements and enhances the images on the screen. Because of its refresh-

Fig. 1. Gillian Anderson. [Photo: Claire Flanders.]
ingly experimental attitude, Por\-denone has commissioned a few of the worst accompaniments I have ever heard – and many of the best as well.

As an historical musician, I will begin by considering the preparation of scores using original materials or methods. The two principal musicians who revive the orchestral accompaniment practices used in the pre-talkie era are the conductors Gillian Anderson and Donald Hunsberger. Anderson prefers to take a score as it appeared, complete, and then to adapt the film to fit, the underlying principle being not merely that both score and film should correspond exactly in length, but that the music originally used is an integral part of the original film, and thus a primary resource in trying to recreate what people saw. Her approach has produced some remarkable and aesthetically rewarding performances, especially when both score and film evince complementary care, taste and craftsmanship. Hunsberger uses cue sheets as practical models, and often creates his own cue sheets and scores for films, taking the film given as the product to be fitted in a manner superior to its original accompaniments. Thus he defines the film and its music as separate entities.

The academic disciplines of musicology and film scholarship are (perhaps surprisingly) near contemporaries. The word ‘musicology’ is generally conceded to have appeared in 1915, in the first issue of the Musical Quarterly, which articulated in magazine format what had been regarded in scholarly circles as a branch of antiquarianism. The current Webster’s definition lists it as ‘the scholarly or scientific study of music, as in historical research, musical theory, the physical nature of sound, etc’. To these disciplines I would add ‘musical aesthetics’. The year 1915 also marked the appearance of Vachel Lindsay’s Art of the Moving Picture®, which is principally an aesthetic text, but its authorship by a noted high-cultural figure acknowledged that motion pictures were an art form worthy of serious academic and critical attention.

Musicology seems a more likely partner for film scholarship than many other disciplines because both deal with performance arts. Music, ultimately, is meaningless without someone to hear it other than the performer; likewise, film has no meaning without an audience besides its makers. Many of the same scholarly techniques used in one discipline may be applied to the other with equal
success. In recent years several elements have entered musicological training that make it a broader, and in many cases more tactile, field. Semiological and deconstructionist theory has found its way into musicology as it has into film studies. Cultural history, the impact of music upon its audiences, and the audience’s feedback into musical genres, is the strongest movement in musicology to-day. These elements have been major facets of film historiography for some time, but have also gained greater importance there in the last fifteen years. Studies such as Charles Musser’s Before the Nickelodeon, with their direct examination of cultural influences upon the creation and creators of films (in his case, Edwin S. Porter) have direct corollaries in Jane Fulcher’s study of French grand opera and contemporary French politics and Ralph Locke’s and Cyrilla Barr’s collection of essays on how women patrons shaped American attitudes to art music at the turn of the century.

Musicologists have only begun looking at silent film accompaniment and its practice as a legitimate scholarly pursuit within the last fifteen years. What publications existed that examined the music performed with silent films were few and, on the musical side, were the work of enthusiast/scholars rather than academics, with a very few exceptions. There were a few publications from the film side; if not studies, at least important texts from the silent era were reprinted in the 1970s by the Arno Press in conjunction with the Museum of Modern Art and the New York Times, including Erno Rapée’s two principal works, Encyclopedia of Music for Motion Pictures and Motion Picture Moods for Pianists and Organists (both originally published in 1925). These works, as well as the enthusiast books (some of which, such as Ben Hall’s classic The Best Remaining Seats, are still invaluable modern sources) provided accessibility to materials that proved very helpful to those who started examining what Rapée’s texts and the journalistic data of musicians in cinemas actually meant when put together with films.

The upsurge in this kind of work took place as a great change began coming through musicology, a diversification of scholarly approaches to the questions inherent in studying musical aesthetics and history. Notable among these was the upswing in examining social ramifications of musical performances, and also a great increase in the study of ‘vernacular’ and less easily classifiable musics than the traditional European-based art music repertory. For instance, in the United States, American music in general and the ‘business’ of public music-making at the turn of the century received greater scrutiny and emphasis within educational institutions than previously, as well as studies of personalities whose compositions and performances encapsulated social trends (such as John Philip Sousa and Scott Joplin).

The result of such studies is that rather than looking for the ‘great American masterpiece’, compositions and performance media are now being evaluated on a more contextual footing. This is not to say that we can ever fully capture the appeal or artistic excitement of musical works that were the emotional and artistic property of a recognizable but still distant society, but we can at least fit them into a larger picture that may allow us to understand the content better. Some of the contexts now under exploration are: a country where practically every town and village was proud to have a wind band; the upper-class intellectual stimulus and artistic patronage of Boston and New York; and the commercial drive and reckless energy of vernacular performers from bordello parlours to Broadway pit orchestras.

With the increasingly eclectic trend in historical and aesthetic studies, many more film scholars than previously are also showing interest in the musical side of silent film presentation, and some of these scholars are able to encourage a reciprocal interest in silent film among musicians. Likewise, it seems that musicians are making inroads into communicating their viewpoints to their film colleagues, with, once again, mutually beneficial results. My own experience as a musical scholar/performer and a film scholar exemplifies this. Few of my musicology colleagues at the Eastman School of Music had any knowledge of silent film in anything but a cursory fashion before I came as a student; the only person who had done any work with silent film was Donald Hunsberger, who had curtailed his activities locally as a silent film conductor to focus on building his national reputation (which he has done, much to his credit). At the same time, my colleagues at the George Eastman House in the Motion Picture Department were puz-
zled at first by a practicing musician who not only accompanied silent films but was passionate about the film medium on its own merits. But they immediately recognized the value of an extra film trained scholar in the context of film studies and preservation work. It is particularly apt at the Eastman House, for no one in the Motion Picture Department was originally schooled as a film scholar; each came from other academic disciplines, applying them to film. Over the years, both the Eastman House and the Eastman School of Music have shown greater interest in each other’s activities and agendas, and indeed Paolo Cherchi Usai, Senior Curator of the Eastman House Motion Picture Department, wishes to increase the ties between the two institutions both intellectually and publicly.

Social and cultural studies are now a very hot item in American musicology (and increasingly in European musicology), and the study of film music, for both silent and sound films, fits perfectly within this framework. Two American musicologists who have devoted considerable effort to examining (and performing) silent film music are Gillian Anderson and Martin Marks. Anderson is in many ways the perfect example of a scholar-practitioner, in that she has not only written extensively in academic journals on the music used by cinema musicians, but has reconstructed and conducted performances of the original accompanying music for fourteen films. As president of the Sonneck Society, the musicological organization devoted to the study of aspects of music in the United States, Ms. Anderson organized and chaired an interdisciplinary session on film music for the Society’s 1995 national conference; the participants included popular culture scholar Philip Tagg from the University of Liverpool (UK), film and literary scholar Claudia Gorbman from Indiana University, and film music composer David Rakin. Martin Marks, professor of musicology at MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), has often accompanied silent films as a pianist in the Boston area, in addition to publishing the most extensive single study of the aesthetics and practice pertaining to silent film music, using specific scores as individual case studies (including Joseph Carl Breil’s compiled score for The Birth of a Nation). This increase in scholarly interest in silent film music not only demonstrates the subject’s new academic legitimacy, but also points the way for educating practicing professional musicians, thus building both a pool of performers and a new audience with an informed critical stance.

Tastes and knowledge have changed considerably in the past eighty-five years, and there is a conflict in film music circles as to whether to follow the original score or cue sheet for accompanying a film, thus presenting it in as nearly as possible its ‘original presentation’, or adapting the score to more modern aural tastes in order to help the film bridge the gap of time and be more readily accessible to a different viewing culture. Any element of popular culture dates itself and becomes an artifact with the passage of time, but in some ways film and music have aged in different ways because differing cultural assessments have been imposed upon them. Photography tends to produce an intense impression of realism, and presenting a drama on film gives it an air of veracity – and specific location – far beyond that achievable by any other medium. A film made in 1915 will not be confused with a film made in 1995, simply because of production values that are apparent in the photographed background. Therefore an audience is visually discouraged from applying the aesthetic values of 1995. The sense of nostalgia evoked by the unavoidable visual dating of a film usually helps a naïve audience to bridge the gap of generations, and to attempt, at least, to follow the narrative as it is presented.

The effect of conservative ‘highbrow’ culture on the consumption of the relatively abstract ‘classical’ music still canonized in 1995 is an overwhelming impression that standard musical works have remained constant – on a superficial level – despite the passage of ninety years. Without concrete clues to past musical expectations, it is assumed that the passage from Tchaikovsky first quoted a film score in 1910 is ‘the same’ passage as it is heard today, even though the mental ears of the past audience were as different from ours today as a Locomobile limousine from a Lexus. The nature of that difference is at the centre of musicalological attention now.

On the one hand, the argument has been put forward that the average American filmgoing audience in 1910 was more widely educated in ca-
Shakespeare was popular culture in the sense that it was expected to be part of a middle-class education and enjoyed as entertainment, while at the same time providing a morally and artistically uplifting experience; meanwhile, the same audience enjoying Shakespeare on the boards and on the screen probably could identify a Rossini overture better than modern audiences. The turn-of-the-century audience also made the operatic tenor Enrico Caruso a household name not so much because of his American stage performances, but because of his recordings, several of which sold in the millions. The division of cultural entertainment into 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow' was less defined at the turn of the century, and the attitudes pervading other performance arts such as music and drama naturally followed into early attitudes towards film and filmmaking.

On the other hand, 'highbrow' people to-day have had deeper acquaintance with the musical 'masterworks' - many now become musical 'workhorses' - through recorded media, the contemporary classical radio station, and the emergence of more opera companies than was possible at the turn of the century, when first-hand knowledge of opera was distinctly limited as compared with recordings and excerpts. Passages that were once heard as allusions to elevated art are now considered barbarically detached clichés. The dislike of the original score evinced by some scholars is based on the difference between the public once

monic literary and musical 'masterworks' than the average 1994 audience, including Shakespeare's plays. William Uricchio and Roberta Pearson, in their study of the Vitagraph 'quality' one-reelers, express a certain amount of surprise that their research indicated the wide familiarity of many segments of the American public with so-called 'high-art' cultural figures such as Shakespeare as part of their everyday lives, and that in fact 'members of all social formations would thus have had intertextual frames for making sense of the 'quality' films, even though some would have been more widespread than others and some would have been more culturally sanctioned than others.
knowing a little of everything and the public now knowing a lot about certain things. There is no auditory cue, with most reconstructed live accompaniments, to invite a naïve modern audience to listen to pastiche scores with any other than 1995 expectations.

Meanwhile, some people find the sound quality of early recorded scores, no matter how well preserved, objectionable for nearly opposite reasons; they specifically date the object and remove the timeless quality which many scholars and critics feel to be the supreme attribute of any 'great' artwork — its universal application to any generation, no matter its cultural background. Paolo Cherchi Usai, who has perhaps the strongest opinions about the musical accompaniment of silent films among the Pordenone committee, worries about dating the film too specifically by elements (such as transfer noise) that he and many of the film community find old-fashioned in a destructive way.

The different valuation of 'old-fashioned' – positive as applied to photographed elements of setting, negative as applied to auditory qualities – suggests several cultural assumptions relating to music and sound, some of which will be considered at length below. The first, that the poor fidelity of worn early recordings, especially those made mechanically, distracts the ear as well as dating the sound, certainly is understandable. Battered copies of film are visually objectionable in much the same way, and the contemporary response to early synchronized scores suggests that audiences of the period found the distortions unpleasant. This objection only applies to modern presentations using early recorded materials, of course, and is one of the reasons that synchronized scores have not been used at Pordenone even when they are available. I would plead that this reason alone, however, should not be considered sufficient to bar all synchronized scores from scholarly attention.

The second assumption was briefly referred to above — that a great work of art should be expected to 'rise above' considerations of place and time. This assumption is familiar in musical scholarship. European musicological circles are historically driven by the original German didactic elements of the discipline, and are still hot on the trail of timeless masterworks and the elucidation of what constitutes their ultimate worth (if such a thing exists), instead of insights into the specific culture that produced them. Music, therefore, is especially prey to being considered as non-contextual. In film scoring, this approach works well for films that are mythic or highly romanticized, films that do not depend upon culture-specific references in order to make their dramatic points. The hallucinatory world of Wiene's Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1919), the exaggerated symbolic aestheticism of L'Herbier's Rose-France (1917), or the romantic longings of Borzage's Lucky Star (1929) can accept many differing and often contradictory musical treatments, because they subjugate their few direct references to the business of ordinary living in Germany, France and America to the overall 'timeless' tone of the film. A good composer can seize upon such a film's salient point and illuminate it in a modern fashion, thus speaking directly to a modern audience in its own aural language.

Most silent film, however, is highly culture-specific, and to deny in the scores the stereotypes and conventions inherent in every production from every country is a risky business. Gusseineing-up a film with a new score is not like performing Shakespeare in modern dress. The works of Shakespeare and other classic dramatists have been redefined through generations of European reception in terms of timeless merit. American mass-audience productions whose plots are intimately tied up with specifics of a deliberately recognizable, narrowly defined cultural schematic cannot always stand such treatment.

William deMille's Miss Lulu Bett (1921) provides an example of a film whose emotional and narrative themes derive in part from a specific time, place and manner of thinking. The tale of a gentle woman downtrodden by her insensitive family has immediate resonances that transcend cultural specifics, as a story, but the film's character motivations and the specifics of this familial unhealthiness derive from American small-town life in the first twenty years of the century. There are plenty of stereotypes, from the brother who has been to the big city, and who speaks of a world far greater in scope than the circumscribed one available to Lulu and her horrible in-laws, to the country railroad-passenger-agent-cum-telegraph-operator. In its 1991 retrospective of the work of both Cecil
and William deMille, the Pordenone festival presented the film with an amorphous harp accompaniment which did not evoke any feeling or situation in the story other than a general sense of sentimentality. The harp’s limited colouristic and volume capabilities and its strongly defined societal associations (‘heaven’, ‘beauty’, ‘restaurant dinner music’) – which do not traditionally allow much in the way of wit or irony – work against it as an instrument capable of expressing a wide range of emotions, thoughts or dramatic situations. Since the instrument has no special association with small-town life, its weakness for the dramatic colouration demanded by film accompaniment is not offset by any other factor.

Frank Borzage’s Seventh Heaven (1927) presents a similar case, but here Borzage’s passionately romantic outlook colours and defines the story’s specific cultural contexts. Baldly, the story is of two people who fall in love in Paris at the outbreak of World War I, and the film’s dreamlike quality is rooted in early-20th-century ideas about Paris. The sets are not factually Parisian, but ideistically Parisian – Expressionistically Parisian, if you will, since the set design was so heavily German influenced – what an enthusiastically imaginative romantic American would like Paris to be. The film’s world premiere at the Carthay Circle Theatre in Los Angeles on 6 May 1927 had a score compiled by Carli Elinor, who also conducted the cinema’s orchestra. However, a Movietone synchronized score compiled and composed by Erno Rapée and played by the Roxy Symphony Orchestra of the Roxy Theatre, New York, was added for the New York premiere on 25 May at the Harris Theatre. Regardless of the sound quality compared to modern sound reproduction, the accompaniment provided was culturally in context with the film, and met the film on its own romantic terms.

For its 1993 screening at Pordenone, Borzage’s elegant sweetness was severely compromised by the over-amplified, insensitive and musically inept accompaniment of an English group who seemed to have no concept of what the film was about. Their accompaniment, based upon current British popular music trends, completely distorted the import of a film that wears its heart on its sleeve. The effect was precisely that of someone standing up in a Shinto temple and yelling what a bloody good religion he thinks Shintoism is. The argument levelled against using the period score was, according to one scholar of my acquaintance, its extreme sweetness – ‘like sugar poured on chocolate syrup’, referring to the effect of the film and its music together. The alternate approach presented failed in that it seemed to negate this perceived sweetness, thereby setting the film and its accompaniment in direct opposition rather than complementarity.

At the opposite pole from the ‘timeless’ approach is the ‘authentic’ presentation. In this area once again, films and musical works present very similar problems. In music and musicology, the closest practice in terms of performance (thus analogous to film presentation) is the historical performance movement – presenting music with techniques and instruments similar to those used at the time the musical work was composed. It is supposed that in presenting these works in their original formats and with the original instruments, we gain insight into the aural world of the audiences that first heard them, and thereby understand the colours and balances that inspired composers to write the way they did.

The problem for the movement has been to distinguish between the ‘authentic’ validity of original instruments and arrangements, and the (merely) aesthetic validity of convincing interpretations based on the ‘authentic’ borrowings. It is true that Beethoven does sound rather different on a Viennese style pianoforte of 1830 than on a modern concert grand; whether the resultant sound is one that Beethoven imagined, or wanted, or would have preferred is another question, prompted as it is by a comparison of two centuries – not available in Beethoven’s day! Recently, the pianist Malcolm Bilson presented a series of concerts in New York with his students that caused these questions to be reassessed afresh, and an article by Allan Kozinn appearing in the New York Times on 15 September 1994 argued for the validity of both modern and historical performances.

Aesthetic scholarship boils down to a matter of taste – taste as related to or discerned in different cultures and historical periods but taste nonetheless. Therefore, in the process of restoration, sometimes personal taste can be confused with scholarship. It is especially difficult to come up with
a canonical format of any dramatic work, due to elements of practicality that enter into every performance situation. Sometimes the restoration process of an artwork that has seen many alterations from its original format, structure and purpose, takes a degree of creativity that verges upon fabrication. Sometimes this fabrication is necessary to fill in lacunae in mutilated original sources, to make the restoration intelligible at all. However it may also be done to bring the artwork more in line with current traditions; in times when the element of 'authenticity' was not a primary aesthetic criterion, this kind of uncredited restoration and improvement was accepted as a mark of an interpreter’s good taste.

I refer here in drama to David Garrick’s notorious acting editions of Shakespeare, which are ‘cut and paste’ versions (with a lot of ‘cut’) of the original plays; at the time of their production in the 1770s, they were not only successful but lauded for their refinement of what was then considered primitive dramaturgy. In music, the German and English revivals of Handel’s oratorios in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries involved composers (including Mozart) writing new orchestral parts – now referred to as ‘additional accompaniments’ – for instruments Handel had not included in his original scores, in order to make the works palatable to new audiences. These modifications persisted in performances of the oratorios, and indeed were often considered necessary elements, until the 1960s.

The crime arises when such improvements, even if they really are better than the original version (as best as can be determined), are created and publicized as authentic, period elements. The claim negates their integral value, as in the benchmark case of the Victorian literary scholar John Payne Collier and his Shakespeare edition, which incorporated Collier’s postulations about questions arising in the text in (Collier’s forged) Elizabethan-Jacobean handwriting in a battered copy of the Third Folio. An example from musicology is Fritz Oeser’s performing edition of Georges Bizet’s Carmen, which purports to be a scholarly edition but is actually a farrago of assembled sources that combines two versions of the work (originally an opéra-comique with spoken dialogue, which was replaced with recitatives by another composer after Bizet’s death, among other changes) into an uncomfortable single version. Oeser’s edition has been frequently performed throughout the world as the ‘authentic’ version, and it has only been within the last few years that opera houses have started to present Carmen in its original format – and the discovery has been made that it really stands very well on its own.

These situations involve stark self-aggrandizement or self-delusion; but what of instances where a careful restoration accepted as ‘authentic’ is based upon practice exactly contemporary with the artifact – but not tied to it in any documented fashion? Scott Joplin’s folk opera Treemonisha, for which Joplin’s original orchestral score has disappeared, was reorchestrated in the 1970s by the composer Gunther Schuller using a turn-of-the-century collection of Joplin rags arranged for dance band (commonly referred to as ‘the Red Back Book’) as his model. The use of this source, because of its direct contemporary ties to Joplin (it was issued by his mentor and principal publisher, John Stark), plus the newly-current familiarity of audiences with the sound of these orchestrations due to Marvin Hamlish’s inclusion of them in his score for George Roy Hill’s film The Sting (1974), has given Schuller’s reconstruction an air of authenticity despite the known fact that Joplin had intended his opera for the pre-war Broadway stage, where a dance band orchestration would have been considered laughably crude alongside the elaborate quasi-symphonic orchestrations of composers like Victor Herbert and Rudolf Friml.

In film, Enno Patalas’s restoration of F.W. Murnau’s Nosferatu (1922) is a similar case. The checkered history of the film’s original distribution and legal suppression is well known, as is the problem of the sources in allowing a canonical, ‘performing’ edition. Patalas’s version of Nosferatu is visually very attractive, and in many ways it is the most viewable version of the film available to a modern audience. However, purporting to present the ‘original’ tints – even though chances are they are probably close to the original tints – of the film without having a period copy of the film with those same tints as a reference does the restoration a disservice. The approach is indeed based upon contemporary practice; but it is always a moot point how far a modern scholar or archivist can
accurately or empathetically interpret a practice sixty or seventy years dead. The scholarly tools developed through the authenticity movement are invaluable in producing convincing, empathetic scores, but the 'authentic presentation' recedes like a rainbow the further it is pursued.

With exploration of non-Western national cinemas and accompaniments taking a greater part of the Pordenone festival, the results have been at once fresh and naturally less susceptible to preconception; they give rise to a third framework from which to approach film accompaniment, neither 'timeless' nor 'authentic'. A striking collection of Indian silent films presented at the 1994 festival were accompanied by a group of Indian musicians specially assembled for the event by the National Film Archive of India. The linear, non-cumulative style of the classical Indian music performed would seem on the surface to be ill-suited to a group of films that drew in many ways upon Western filmmaking practice, but these practices were adapted to conform with Indian narrative traditions. A film such as Gallant Hearts (1931), with its spacious storytelling and continuous narrative flow, is artistically congruent with the long periods of Indian classical music-making; the result is both aesthetically gratifying and culturally convincing.

It was logical to expect the Indian films to be successful with Indian music, since the cultural influences that produced the musical style also altered the film narrative style. If Western films are approached similarly, as cultural artifacts of a foreign (though intimately recognizable) milieu, the construction of musically congruent original scores offers the possibility of even greater rapport between film and score, since the same culture directly produced (rather than adapting, as in India) both narrative media. Thus the scholarly disciplines devoted to historical accuracy may be used to provide a cultural grounding for a score 'translation' into modern musical idiom. This should not be impossible to do that from a modern musician's perspective.

Two essential tools for determining the historical and cultural background of silent film music are the cue sheet and the synchronized score; the latter will be discussed at length below. The use of cue sheets as a guide to establishing presentation elements of films is now considered standard practice in film preservation. However, little has been done with the interior information present on cue sheets, i.e. the timings for each cue as placed against extant prints. The only people doing this are those putting together music and image for performance purposes. The restoration of Intolerance from its published score is a benchmark in this regard, and will be considered shortly, but little attention has been applied as yet to films with cue sheets.

An interesting situation has arisen with respect to Frank Borzage's Humoresque (1920). The George Eastman House has copies of both a non-incipit cue sheet (that is, a cue sheet with only the titles of compositions rather than both the title and a line of music) and a piano/conductor part for the compiled score; the sources match each other but the timing for the complete film given at the head of the cue sheet differs from the aggregate timings of the individual cues by nearly five minutes20. A number of possible explanations present themselves, the simplest being that the times indicated are inaccurate and that no-one bothered to add them up. Such a large difference in running times is unusual, however - it represents nearly a half-reel's difference in film terms (about 420 feet at the advised running speed of 21 fps). At what point prior to release was the film given to James Bradford, who compiled the score? Donald Hunsberger has mentioned to me that, in his examination of cue sheets, such discrepancies occur relatively frequently; if it is simply a matter of sloppy addition, what does it tell us of the attitudes and practices of these compilers - even when the scores they prepared work very well?

A most recent example of Gillian Anderson's work that has directly aided film research has been her reconstruction of the score to Chaplin's The Circus (1928), which was compiled and composed by Chaplin himself in collaboration with Arthur Lange. This project presents a number of interesting wrinkles on the music/restoration question: Chaplin was intensely interested in music and the accompaniments to his films, but some critics consider The Circus the weakest of Chaplin's 1920s feature films, and the film has not been seen with its original release score since 1928-29, because Chaplin prepared a new (and quite ineffective) score to be synchronized with the film for its
However there are other ‘authentic’ versions besides the MOMA print. The copy of the film at the George Eastman House dates from a retouching of the film in late 1917, and has both new footage and considerable excisions. The Eastman House also has a copy of the orchestral score adapted to follow this version; it is no less ‘authentic’ than Ms. Anderson’s. An analogous case in musicology is Mussorgsky’s Boris Godunov; Mussorgsky’s first version of 1867 was extensively revised first by Mussorgsky himself and then, after his death, by his friend Rimsky-Korsakov. There are, in fact, three ‘authentic’ versions of the opera – two versions prepared by Mussorgsky and the Rimsky-Korsakov version, the latter being (at least until quite recently) the one most commonly performed to-day.

The MOMA/Anderson Intolerance has ‘primacy’ in that it is taken to represent the film in the closest possible state to its initial release, artistic considerations perhaps taking a secondary role in this instance. An argument could be made that the later version is both no less authentic and artistically more successful, as Joseph Carl Breil’s ineffective score only benefits from cutting. The controversial silences which disturb some modern viewers who see the film with Breil’s score are ultimately part of the warp and woof of that particular score. To decry them as being wrong is a denial of the printed sources; simply because they are there, however, does not negate the possibility of other experiments, and the existence of Breil’s score for the film in itself does not negate the possibility (and, indeed, desirability) of newly composed accompaniments, as Anderson notes herself[23].

The weakness of Breil’s score may be regarded as a further compromise of the effect of the film, bringing us into the thorny problem of ‘authenticity’ as opposed to ultimate artistic effectiveness. The subjectivity of the latter criterion is equalled by the unattainability of the former, for part of the materials simply no longer exist. The MOMA/Anderson reconstruction of the film may be the closest thing in duration and sound to what was initially presented in 1916, but it does not resemble what was originally seen, largely because of the temporal shifting of consciousness occasioned by pristine movement juxtaposed with artifactual stills. It is an extraordinary piece of reconstruction, but ultimately yet another version of the film, since not all

sound re-issue in 1969. Edward Rothstein’s review in The New York Times of 28 February 1994 emphasized not only the excellence of Chaplin and Lange’s score, treating the event from a musical standpoint[21], but also noted that the original running speed of the film was indicated on the cue sheet as 20 fps. This is an unusually slow running speed for a late 1920s production, but such documentary evidence needs to be taken into account as the problem of generally dating running speeds comes to the foreground with the increase of silent film presentations.

Another example on the same issue, where the original score would introduce further complication, however, is Frank Borzage’s Lucky Star, originally released with a Movietone synchronized score. The addition of the Movietone score would have forced the film to run at 24 fps; viewing the film in the strictly silent version restored by the Nederlands Filmmuseum, several scholars – including myself – believe the film appears best at 20 fps. Rothstein’s comment on the filmic implications of a musical reconstruction (of The Circus, noted above) is, to my knowledge, the first such critical discussion, and it is gratifying that it comes from a music critic. It will be very valuable if film and music critics can address themselves to issues from their complementary fields with, if not complete technical assurance, at least comparable interest and appreciation.

Gillian Anderson’s work also presents the textbook study of the intermarriage between film history and musicology; I refer now, of course, to the restoration of D.W. Griffith’s Intolerance (1916) undertaken by Ms. Anderson in collaboration with the Library of Congress and Peter Williamson of the Museum of Modern Art. In this film the study of physical materials beyond the film itself measurable aided the reconstruction of the film. Relying upon Griffith’s personal set of orchestral parts and his copy of the reduced score, they formulated a time frame into which to fit their edition of the film[22]. The version of Intolerance that they prepared has been the subject of much criticism, both pro and con, concerning its artistic merits; yet it must be admitted that what they prepared is as close to an original version – or, in her words, a ‘premiere version’ – as could be made.
the parts (image, duration, sound) cohere with one another. Film scholars should perhaps move away from the idea of ‘release version’ and understand that we will never know precisely what a silent film looked like to its original audiences. Once again, ‘authenticity’ in itself is a chimera, though its pursuit offers valuable side benefits.

Indeed, Ms. Anderson’s work with period scores, and especially the scores to Griffith’s films, has provided much more cultural information than we might have expected. Griffith’s own participation in the construction of the scores is as much a guide to his cultural and intellectual background as the image on the screen; in fact, coupled with the image, the correlation of the two provides a historical context of its own. The musical materials provided with another film can give insight not only into a prepared score for a major studio production, but also a particular studio’s release policy. The Hunchback of Notre Dame (1923) was Universal’s largest and costliest production to date; it was also one of the first to open in a major New York house. Thomas Schatz details Universal’s marketing policies in the early 1920s and the kind of films it produced for a variety of different markets, none of them including the large first-run houses in New York, Chicago and San Francisco that Paramount and Metro used for their premieres.

Hunchback differed in that Irving Thalberg decided to exhibit the film on a road-show approach, with a grand opening in New York at a major theatre. Thalberg left Universal in early 1923, and apparently the road-show screenings peters out and were replaced by Universal’s usual marketing to neighbourhood and better-class small city theatres. The George Eastman House possesses sources for two different original accompaniment approaches; one is the first violin part for the road show version, the other a standardized cue sheet for smaller, less musically lavish houses. Thus this film offers a fascinating opportunity to compare music representing different cultural contexts in the same time period.

The first violin road-show part makes substantial technical demands upon the performer and includes a large amount of classical music frequently used by cinema orchestras at the time; the overtures to Glinka’s Russian and Ludmilla and Auber’s La muette de Portici, the ballet music from Jules Massenet’s opera Le cid, and a number of other works that Erno Rápée’s Encyclopedia would classify as ‘Heavy Dramatic – Difficult’. The cue sheet, on the other hand, consists almost entirely of pieces by the standard cinema music composers such as J.S. Zamecnik and Gaston Borch, music that was
common fare at the smaller cinemas that constituted Universal's main market.

A rationale for altering the suggestions used in the cue sheets is that modern audiences who attend screenings are more sophisticated musically than audiences in the 1920s, and would object to the chopping up of classical literature — not to mention the use of of clichéd pieces now over-familiar to everyone — that was characteristic of the typical silent film musical accompaniment. Also, Dr. Hunsberger, whose reconstructed score for Hunchback uses elements of both the road-show score and the cue sheet, admits to a certain leeriness (though less than many conservatory colleagues) about much of the semi-classical literature turned out by composers such as Borch and Zamecnik strictly for motion picture use.

As to audience overfamiliarity with classical literature and their disdain of excerpting, such feelings were not evident at the screenings I attended of Anderson's Carmen or Intolerance, both of which contain bits and pieces of numerous larger works from the standard orchestral literature. Pastiche scores understood in light of musical allusions in dialogue with the narrative pictured on the screen may be a much more sophisticated art form than the haphazard mishmash they are stereotyped to be. Also, with the attention span of the so-called MTV generation, not to mention the propensity of many classical radio stations to play excerpts as standard policy, the use of the original pastiche scores may now fulfil the exact same purpose that they did in the 1920s — particularly for audiences whose most extended span of attention is spent in coming to see a silent film!

You never know what people will or will not accept until you try. As an example, in 1988 I acted as musical director for a college production of Victor Herbert's 1913 operetta Sweethearts, in which the original libretto was used — a libretto by Fred de Gresac with Harry and Robert Smith that has been described as 'old fashioned' and 'musty'27. The audiences quite enjoyed the performances, including the incredibly clumsy joking allotted to the comic villain. Hunsberger admits to the plastic nature but undeniable appositeness of much of the utility music, and indeed some of his audiences identify these little pieces as being by
the famous composers — such as Tchaikovsky — whose better known works envelop these little musical links by Gaston Borch and his confrères. Hunsberger's only criterion for what works is a matter of quality — which again is personal opinion, in his case an educated one — and he does not hesitate to replace music which seems to him overly commercial or artistically inferior. Anderson, however, tries to use the exact utility pieces specified in the cue sheets, in keeping with her concept of film/music integrity, and no complaints have surfaced; this indicates, as I think both scholars will agree, that the film music 'hacks' of the silent period were always professional, if commercial in their outlook.

Finally, despite strong arguments against using the original cue sheets on the grounds of their perceived musical ingenuousness or dramatic baldness, I feel they should be heard — if only once. As many operas work infinitely better on the stage than a musician's individual study of a piano score would indicate, cue sheets need to be performed in order to evaluate whether they do or do not appropriately support the films for which they were designed. At the very least, even when different approaches and new scores are essayed for silent films, cue sheets provide a cultural framework for the interpretation of a film, and I would urge composers preparing original scores to take advantage of the resource as a gloss even when they do not wish to use it as a model.

Synchronized scores also present a fascinating and at the same time frustrating documentation of what audiences expected and what cinema orchestra practice was by the late 1920s. Warners' principal idea behind Vitaphone was to present accompanying acts, largely involving singing, and a first-rate orchestral accompaniment to silent films; the idea of dialogue was not seriously considered at first\textsuperscript{28}. However, when Warners and Fox began releasing films as a rule with synchronized music-and-effects tracks, the response was mixed. It appears that people preferred a live orchestra to a recorded one, though they preferred a recorded orchestra to a live theatre organist.

For one thing, the orchestra in the pit gave an added sense of occasion. This sense of occasion and pride in public events and social rituals is well
documented by many films, and the public dressed up to go to the cinema as they did to go to other public venues. In some instances, it was suggested that cinema attendance, particularly when ‘palaces’ became the norm in the 1920s, should be treated as a social occasion on a par with going to the legitimate theatre, a concert, or an opera. Extant programmes for the Eastman Theatre in Rochester, New York, suggest that patrons might consider booking places in the mezzanine (which were the only reserved, and therefore the plushest and most exclusive, seats in the theatre) as an agreeable activity for their dinner-party guests. Synchronized scores (and their sound-on-film descendants) had the effect, perhaps more than has been realized, of taking this occasion and cheapening it29 – putting the turtle soup in a can, as it were30.

However, in their capacity to give to a modern musician insight into the aural world of the audience of 1929, these recordings are invaluable. Orchestral players had different priorities about ensemble, intonation, and handling of their instruments than today’s impeccably precise musicians31. There are many elements in the playing that modern conservatory teachers simply forbid and modern conductors would not tolerate – portamento (slides) in the strings; percussive, clipped attacks and plenty of vibrato in the brass; little or no vibrato in the woodwind parts; and a much more forgiving attitude towards matters of intonation, within the ranges of single instruments and between sections in the orchestra. I and a clarinetist friend of mine, who is a graduate of the Eastman School of Music, recently listened to a 1926 recording of Edward Elgar’s Enigma variations performed by the Royal Albert Hall Orchestra under the direction of the composer. My friend conceded that it was an exciting performance, but noted that the orchestra did things as a matter of performance style that the Eastman conductors would call sloppy.

These sounds date the performance for many people, musicians and non-musicians alike, and by one argument might distance them emotionally from the work. However, in combination with the images on the screen, performance practices contemporary with the films might have the opposite effect of drawing the audience further into the illusion of intimacy with the culture of the time, much as the foreign-sounding Indian music brought out Indian facets of the films it accompanied. With the
passage of sixty-five years, the distancing from the experience and the nearly total disappearance of the art of silent film accompaniment in its original form has left a cultural gap that can nonetheless still be filled by the remaining recorded scores.

The most important work in preserving synchronized scores as a single undertaking was the touring exhibition of The Dawn of Sound, which was put together by the UCLA Film Archive, the Museum of Modern Art, the Library of Congress, and the George Eastman House. The collection was taken from films that had originally been presented with sound-on-disc, and was therefore limited to Warners, First National and MGM releases. The most influential films in the collection in terms of sound usage were, of course, the Warners releases of 1927–28, since Vitaphone was their particular baby. The scores that UCLA restored from the original discs were a revelation; in particular, the range of sound that was captured was astonishing. Alan Crosland’s Old San Francisco (1927) is by no means a masterpiece, being a bizarre racist melodrama with a chaotic climactic earthquake sequence, but the combination of a visually glistening print with an aurally glistening synchronized score made the film a much more artistically convincing document than it had any right to be.

It must be stated that, as a musical work, Hugo Riesenfeld’s score for Old San Francisco is far inferior to his sensitive and evocative score for Sunrise (1927), being a workmanlike pastiche with some extremely seedy fake Orientalia in the Chinatown sequences, but it is performed with tremendous vigour and nuance. I enjoy the film and its score as a whole because I do not have an intellectual problem – perhaps to my discredit – with the musically and socially objectionable themes that it presents, simply because it works well on its own merits. Musicians, and especially musicians engaged in providing new musical accompaniments, have problems with the synchronized score on a number of levels, the most basic being the rather obvious selection of echt-Spanish themes, echt-Irish themes, and echt-Oriental themes that the compiler/conductor used. With our greater awareness of world cultures and better information about musical and sociomusical practices, the use of these motifs seems not only naïve but at times insulting. Why always use castanets whenever Dolores Costello and her father, the ‘Spanish’ characters, appear? Why play a jig when Charles Emmet Mack, the ‘Irish’ hero, enters the scene? And why, especially, must we hear a pentatonic scale (just the black keys on the piano, for you laymen in the audience) and a xylophone going ricky-ticky-tick whenever Warner Oland, the traditional ‘Oriental’ villain, descends into his underground dragon-festooned hideout?

The perhaps unpalatable answer is that all the overdrawn ethnic and racial stereotypes depicted on the screen were answered simply and directly with equally overdrawn stereotypes portrayed in the music, evoking the actors’ characterizations in a manner congruent with the unabashedly melodramatic narrative. In some ways, a failing of some modern accompaniments is that they try to achieve a musical sophistication in modern terms which is alien to the considerable sophistication that even the most egregious of these films had in their own terms. The cinema organists and conductors of the silent period, sophisticated craftsmen in their own right, adopted an approach in suiting music to film content – a term, in this instance, encompassing action, characterization and tone – that is now denigrated because of its seeming straightforwardness.

In practice, the subordination of the music to the film content, byaurally reinforcing the structure of the film narrative, allows the audience to participate more deeply in the unfolding of plot and character. The best scores of the period are both straightforward and undeniably thrilling in the way they suit their materials. They are not unlike a Verdi opera to a good libretto by Cammarano or Boito, the two librettists Verdi worked with who maintained their literary identity in the face of Verdi’s insistent demand for convincing dramas; good material is closely allied to splendid music.

Unfortunately, not all synchronized scores – perhaps even not many – stand up to a comparison with Verdi, and several extant late silents are burdened with poor synchronized scores. It appears that as the novelty of synchronized scores wore off and the attention of studios turned to dialogue films, the quality of both score compilation and orchestral performance dropped substantially even at the largest studios. Jacques Feyder’s The
Kiss (1929) was both Greta Garbo’s and MGM’s last silent film, and it was released with a synchronized score that consists primarily of Tchaikovsky’s Romeo and Juliet and the slow movement of his Fifth Symphony played rather badly over and over again—though the French horns finally get their part right by the umpteenth rendition at the end of the film. If this was the case at MGM, the situation at smaller studios was worse.

One film whose score seems pretty rank today is Tay Garnett’s The Spieler (1928). The score was compiled by Josiah Zuro, the house maestro at Pathé (and a conductor at the prominent Rivoli Theatre in New York), and recorded on the RCA Photophone system. Due both to the rapidly shrinking economic viability of silent films in 1928–29 and Pathé’s patchy fortunes as a producer, the compilation was apparently rapid and the performance, distractingly sloppy. Variety’s reviewer actually praised the score34, but compared with other synchronized scores (notably Sunrise, or on a more typical level Old San Francisco), The Spieler seems very crude. Unfortunately, the score for the film is almost inescapable, for there are two short talking sequences, but it could hugely benefit from the treatment recently accorded Paul Fejos’s Lonesome (1928) in substituting live music for the music and effects track while allowing the dialogue sequences to be heard. The film has remained relatively unseen for many years, and it is Garnett’s first important work. Any takers?8

Eisenstein’s Alexander Nevsky (1937), with an original score by Sergei Prokofiev, provides an example of a score that did not even have an acceptable performance by the standards of the time; it was recorded ineptly, and performed by an excruciatingly incompetent orchestra35. Part of Prokofiev’s rationale for turning the score into his concert cantata of the same name was the horrible quality of the film recording. There was every justification for redoing the score under these circumstances, and the artistic content, quality and intent of the film as it is now seen on tour is enhanced by the performance of the music in a technically acceptable manner.

Perhaps the worst of all the late synchronized scores was assembled in Britain for Henrick Galeen’s After the Verdict (1929), recorded on the deForest Phonofilm system. The score for this film is so ineptly played, poorly recorded, and compositionally at variance with the tone of the production that it seems likely to have hastened the film’s demise at the box office. Although the film itself has a problematical closing sequence, it is another prime candidate for a new score.

Hunsberger and Anderson’s reconstructions of (non-synchronized) film scores have been aimed at more or less canonical films; The Birth of a Nation, Intolerance, Wings, The Covered Wagon, The Hunchback of Notre Dame, The Last Command, The Mark of Zorro. There are, however, less known films in which the musicological application of scholarly techniques would be helpful, and a score restoration would perhaps aid the film considerably, for instance William Furst’s score for Cecil DeMille’s Joan the Woman. Also, some archives have preserved fascinating musical materials for films that no longer exist. Universal had a special score compiled and printed in individual parts for John Needham’s Double (1916); this was evidently supposed to be part of a series of closely coupled Universal music/film releases, of which little is known36. Also, in the course of UCLA’s Vitaphone restorations, many music-and-effects discs have surfaced for films whose picture elements are partly or wholly lost.

Let me, however, repeat my plea for respect of original musical sources; however dated the synchronized scores or cue sheets may seem to modern ears, the composer/compilers had a tradition upon which to draw, and a set of standards as criteria. It was, after all, their livelihood, and the most prominent cinema conductors had an acknowledged proficiency, just as their orchestras had to maintain a certain performance standard. Modern composers may believe that ‘film music is film music’, but film historians are beginning to understand the difference between current approaches and what was done sixty-five years ago37. Historically grounded restorations are more likely to serve their films, whatever the musical language finally used, than restorations that do not take into account the original context of the film, including the original score.

Two major tours with live accompaniment, for instance, have been undertaken with films originally produced as sound prints: City Lights (1931), with a score by Chaplin (but orchestrated and con-
ducted on the track by Alfred Newman), and Alexander Nevsky. The rationale for the Nevsky reconstruction was discussed above, but for the Chaplin film the question arises, Why present the film with live music (as reconstructed by Carl Davis), when the soundtrack brilliantly pokes fun at itself as a soundtrack? I refer of course to the opening sequence, where Chaplin is discovered asleep on a public monument, and Henry Bergman delivers a speech that is represented on the soundtrack as electrical muddle. It may be that Chaplin preferred live music, but having accepted the compromise of a synchronized score, this compromise is now (in a small way) an integral part of the artwork. Undoubtedly, modern performances of the film with a live orchestra are more sonically satisfying to present-day audiences and have the greater sense of occasion described above but questions do arise: (a) the sound recording on the original film is perfectly acceptable, and the orchestra under Newman is competent if not world class; (b) the film was never originally presented with live accompaniment, because cinema orchestras had largely vanished by 1931; (c) if the live accompaniment option had still existed, the film itself may have been rethought — the soundtrack parody has little point, other than funny noises, when done live.

Carl Davis’s reconstruction of Louis F. Gottschalk’s score for Broken Blossoms was undertaken because Kevin Brownlow and his associates David Gill and Patrick Stanbury were convinced of the score’s considerable quality. This project could have benefited the study of silent film music and the silent film experience immeasurably by reproducing a score that had considerable impact upon its original audiences. Gottschalk was both a trained, successful New York theatrical musician and a man with strong production ties to the film industry (much like Victor Schertzinger). Unfortunately, Carl Davis’s reorchestration of the work is, to my mind, very much opposed to commercial American orchestration practice in the 1910s. Little of Gottschalk’s music remains in orchestral parts to provide a model, but there are a few sources. Victor recorded some of his music, especially a duet from The Tik-Tok Man of Oz (which does not seem to have been tampered with or reorchestrated for the acoustic recording process) that shows an orchestrator with a rather delicate sense of colour. Davis’s extensive use of tuned percussion in the latter part of the score was quite alien to practice, even in exotica. His ‘reconstruction’ is more of a ‘reworking’, unless one believes (and I certainly do not) that orchestration contributes little to the overall effect of a composition.

On the other hand, I must urge against the practice of doing silent film scores that make a pretence at period ‘feel’ if that feel is ineptly carried out; it is far better to maintain a credible artistic identity than to put on a costume that convinces no-one. The Alloy Orchestra of Cambridge, Massachusetts, was commissioned to create its first silent film score for the 1994 Pordenone presentation of Lonesome and performed it to great acclaim at the Telluride and Pordenone festivals this past year. There are elements in it which are marvellous; an important sequence in the film is the opening, with the two protagonists getting up and going to work at extremely noisy jobs, she as a telephone operator and he as a die-press operator in a factory. All this is set against the superimposed image of a clock marking the passage of time, and the increase of activity from the commencement of the day to when the noon whistle blows and the activity ceases. The cumulative sound of working provided by the Alloy Orchestra empathetically and idealistically evoked the precision and tumultuous effect of the images, to such effect that the sequence provoked spontaneous applause at its end.

However, this well-thought sequence was marred by what followed, which can be summed up in two points: misunderstanding and overdoing of the film’s cultural milieu, and melodic poverty. Since the story was set in 1920s New York City, the Alloy saw fit to provide several themes supposed to evoke the 1920s, and their poor quality and egregious technical errors, especially in the harmony, were pointed out by the film’s demanded use of Irving Berlin’s ‘Always’ (called for by shots of a phonograph record of the song, as well as the music and lyrics appearing across the image), a much better tune than anything they came up with. Nothing in the vast emotional and technical range of the film was echoed by a comparable emotional and technical range in the music. Part of the problem is that the Alloy (and other similar groups)
Musicology and the presentation of silent film

Fig. 8. Lonesome (1928). Barbara Kent and Glenn Tryon.

evince a greater sense of security when dealing with the surface of a situation than when evoking the emotions that dictate how that surface should appear.

I realize that cultural solecisms are an integral part of American motion picture aesthetics. No one, for instance, would suggest that the motivations, acting or set design of Michael Curtiz’s The Sea Hawk (1940) are an accurate reflection of Elizabethan warships or the actual obliteration of the Spanish Armada. I remember my father and I—we are both over six feet tall—chuckling over the cavernous captain’s cabin in Errol Flynn’s ship when we saw the film. These elements become secondary behind the sheer panache and competence in every element of the production, and the fact that the production itself belongs to a completely different genre and interpretation of history. What would be your feelings if someone recast the score of that film into compositions of genuine Elizabethan composers, such as Weelkes or Byrd, rather than leaving Korngold’s sweepingly Viennese-romantic score alone? Most people (particularly including trained musicians, I would venture to say) would find it ludicrous, and it would vastly irritate me.

However, if an ersatz film with a ‘genuine’ score is inappropriate, so is a genuine film with an ersatz score, as is Lonesome in its current touring guise. Again, it is a matter of what elements one seizes upon. The film is a genuinely emotional study of love and joy in the face of alienation and loneliness, and as such it has a timeless quality; but the settings are very New York, and a New York so far vanished that it has prompted a major architectural study and photographic recounting. The score’s lack of empathy with the culture I can only sum up by the idea of a man in the street thinking the 1920s was ALL bathtub gin, flappers and straw hats, so that seeing an actor in a polyester suit and a styrofoam straw hat is enough of the 1920s to satisfy him. The falsity of his image would be accentuated by placing this polyester actor next to an immaculately-restored 1920s automobile; the
actor is just playing at being a part of the culture to which the automobile actually once belonged. I would much prefer an avant-garde score that was not culturally related to the film to the Let’s Pretend score presented at Telluride and Pordenone.

Against this is the fact that the film has gone from being a museum-piece known to only a few specialists in the field to a recognized cinematic commodity, shown all over the globe. What is the ultimate goal? To get the film better known? No film historian I know has a kind word for Giorgio Moroder’s version of Metropolis, yet the film is much better known among the general public because of the rock score that Moroder attached to it. This is a question that becomes increasingly unanswerable in an age of ever-rapidly changing aesthetic criteria. (Look at recent issues of Variety—it refers to ‘the early 1890s’ as a historical epoch.) The Alloy Orchestra has made a great impression with their score, and has been successful in many venues throughout the United States, though their work does the film an artistic disservice (which, fortunately, it can withstand on its own ideological, pictorial and narrative merits).

The increase in the numbers of newly composed silent film scores is analogous to the hundreds of composers who turned to the librettos of Metastasio for over two centuries; the base material was so good that it invited reinterpretation. Many of the new scores are not only as thrilling in their overall effect as those originally presented, some are even better. Experimentation abounds in this field, and there are striking examples of brand new scores and instrumentations that make a solid musical impression while enhancing the emotional and cultural content of the film. Adrian Johnston’s work in British films has received considerable notice, and his score for Cecil DeMille’s The Cheat (1915), commissioned by Pordenone and subsequently performed throughout Europe, is an excellent example of contemporary training and instrumentation (he and two colleagues perform upon a variety of wind instruments, electronic and acoustic keyboards, and tuned percussion) coupled with a strong sense of the period displayed in the film. His is not an avant-garde approach, as the film is hardly revolutionary in style; depicting garden-party scenes with waltzes (lightly scored for violin, clarinet, and acoustic keyboard) and the ‘savage Japanese’ character of Sessue Hayakawa with spare but violently struck percussion simply reinforces and elucidates the dramatic import of the film – which is what good accompaniments do, in 1915 and today.

Other musicians afford novel approaches and experiments, but on the whole the most successful depend heavily upon the tone of the film to provide the basis for musical expression. Gabriel Thibaudet, the noted Canadian composer, has written scores in a variety of media to suit various films: a hallucinatory, lavishly scored piano concerto for Jean Epstein’s Chute de la maison Usher (1928), a strongly rhythmic brass quintet with percussion for John Ford’s Straight Shooting (1917), a brittle (and, from some accounts, technically challenging) string quartet for Arthur Robison’s Schatten (1922). The kaleidoscopic textures of Epstein’s film, the open grittiness and modest scale of Ford’s five-reel novella, and the sinuous bleakness of Lang’s early masterpiece provide a stylistic basis and impetus to aural imagination.

The impact of musical accompaniment upon a film’s reception has been recognized by the commercial end of filmmaking from an early point in film history. Clarence Sinn’s ‘Music For the Pictures’ column began appearing in the Moving Picture World in 1909, and he repeatedly stressed the importance of appropriate, sensitive accompaniment to film as a means of helping the pictures ‘come across’. Sinn was only the first of many commentators during the silent period, in such trade and professional music and film journals as The Metronome, Jacobs’ Orchestra Monthly, and The American Organist to stress the necessity of informed accompaniments for the motion picture.

With the degenerate state of historical education in the arts, most modern musicians have to approach silent film accompanying by the seat of the pants. To those who are unacquainted with the procedures involved in becoming a professional musician, giggling in clubs and recording studios or going to conservatories and ending up on the operatic stage or in a symphony orchestra may seem the ultimate artistic and aesthetic fulfilment. In reality, training to be a professional musician is a combination of high-school football practice and going to a welding academy. Musicians on the whole are less culturally rounded than business ma-
jors, and this tends to limit their cultural and aesthetic sensibilities in any field outside of the tone they produce from their instruments.

When trying to interpret silent film, a medium that is based upon vanished and sometimes nearly unrecognizable social and aesthetic criteria, reliance on standard professional training and 'inspiration' is not enough. Motion pictures and in particular American silent film built their success upon their direct emotional appeals to the audience; like nineteenth-century Romanticism, they wear their hearts upon their sleeves. It is impossible to fully enter the mindset of a culture that found certain modes of expression passionate, poignant, or otherwise compelling, and that we find overstated, saccharine or clichéd; but if we cannot do this, we need to come up with a mode of interpretation that makes these distant emotional appeals relevant to modern audiences.

To do this, historicism must be applied in varying degrees, if only to ensure that musicians, film scholars, and music scholars get at the heart of the film. I have decried scores that I do not care for, which many people seem to enjoy. My question is, what if the films had been presented with scores more in tune with the message conveyed by the images? I would hope for a rounded success, where the music subconsciously helps the audience to know more about why they enjoyed a particular silent film. That is the way to build our audience, and our knowledge as well.

Notes

1. Both Cinémemoire and Pordenone have been associated with recent publications dealing with silent film music and the practices of film accompaniment: Film scholar David Robinson’s *Music in the Shadows* (Gemono, Italy: Cineteca del Friuli/Griffithiana, 1990) is an informative catalogue of pictorial exhibition Robinson developed for the 1990 Pordenone festival. *Musique d’écran*, Emmanuelle Toutel and Christian Belaygue, eds. (Paris: editions de la réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1994), devotes considerable space to the new scores performed at Cinémémoire and Strasbourg; the book is a compendium of essays by European film historians and interviews with composers of new scores for silent films, including Adrian Johnston – whose work will be mentioned later in the present essay – John Cale, and collaborators Antoine Duhamel and Pierre Jansen.

2. For several years, Thomas Murray, a San Francisco-based silent film enthusiast, has been publishing “Live” Cinema Calendar, a newsletter giving the date and location of all upcoming silent film performances with live musical accompaniments that come to his attention. His November-December 1994 issue (vol. 3/11-12) list 124 such events occurring between November 1994 and September 1995 within the U.S., Canada and Europe – and his listing is not completely exhaustive.

3. As of 1994, professional symphony orchestras in Albany (New York), Albuquerque, Cedar Rapids (Iowa), Columbus, Erie (Pennsylvania), Fort Wayne (Indiana), Honolulu, Indianapolis, Miami, New Orleans, Omaha, Pittsburgh, Portland (Oregon), Providence, Richmond (Virginia), Rochester (New York), St Louis, San Diego, Santa Barbara, Wichita (Kansas), and Youngstown (Ohio) inhabit former cinemas built between 1916 and 1931.

4. Pordenone is primarily a festival for film scholars and archivists, and many of those who attend the festival could not care less about musical accompaniment – they are there strictly for films. Thus, the audience sometimes completely ignores the pianists for the festival, with the result that certain scholars confess to classifying the pianists as inferior to the composers and featured performers who appear. At the same time, the Pordenone committee (and the bulk of the festival audience) exhibits considerable appreciation of the pianists’ work, and the festival presents an unique opportunity for a variety of film accompanists to meet, exchange ideas, and hear each other.


11. A cue sheet is a set of instructions from a musician hired by the film production company to the musician hired by each local theater. It consists of a list of suggested musical themes, cued to particular sections of the film for which the cue sheet is prepared. The musical themes may be popular songs or sections of 'classical' works. Information on publishers is often included, so that music that is not already on file in the local theater's music library (kept precisely for the purpose of constructing scores based on the cue sheets' suggestions) can be ordered in; the cue sheet also notes which works required the payment of performance royalties to the ASCAP (American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers). Reconstructing a score from a cue sheet is relatively simple; on the other hand compiled scores in score format (usually a piano score used by the cinema's conductor), frequently do not identify the music used by title, thus presenting the modern scholar with the challenge of identifying a welter of musical snippets.


18. A recording of the opera with the original Houston Grand Opera cast was produced in 1976 by Deutsche Grammophon, 2707 083.

19. Schuller included a brief essay entitled 'The Orchestrator's Challenge' as part of the liner notes for his Treemonisha recording. He, in fact, does justify his approach by referring to the pre-war Broadway pit orchestras I refer to in my text, as well as 'the excellent clues' furnished by the Red Back Book arrangements; however the only show he refers to directly is Eubie Blake's *Shuffle Along* (1921), a post-war revue rather than an operetta or opera, and Schuller ignores the hundreds of orchestrated rags and genre pieces coming from Eastern publishers, which show an infinitely more sensitive and colorful approach than the starkly utilitarian Red Back Book arrangements—some of which border on incompetence. When Schuller mentions resisting 'the temptation to let the 'modern' twentieth-century orchestra of Ravel and Stravinsky, and even latter-day Broadway, creep into the work', he stands on solid ground; however he lets incomplete historical knowledge dictate an opposite approach. Rick Benjamin, director of the Paragon Ragtime Orchestra of New York, is undertaking a new orchestration of the work that is based upon the few published orchestrations directly ascribed to Joplin and an intimate knowledge of the orchestration practices evident in the works of the composers who wrote for the pre-World War One Broadway stage. Of course, this still cannot be labelled 'authentic', but it is a highly educated and empathetic guess based upon circumstantial evidence from several sources.

20. The compiled score and the cue sheet show identical music selections except for four short excerpts from pieces by the American composer Ethelbert Nevin (1862–1901), which appear in the cue sheet alone, probably because copyright restrictions prevented their publication outside of their original format. (I have been unable to identify the corresponding music in the compiled score).

21. One question that occurs to me is why Chaplin selected Arthur Lange as his collaborator on the score? My guess is that this is a further illustration of Chaplin's interest in dance and movement to music, for Lange's principal line of work was composing, arranging, and conducting popular dance music; in fact, he was the most sophisticated arranger of the late 1920s, and went far beyond the usual practice of simply orchestrating popular songs in dance-band format and actually provided elaborate versions of popular songs that were as much (or more) his work than the original composers'.

22. Anderson's article, "No Music Until Cue": The Reconstruction of D.W. Griffith's Intolerance', *Grif-thiana* 38/39 (1990), 158–172, is the most mu-
sically technical article to appear in a film journal; it is also the clearest demonstration, to those who are literate in both music and film, of the precision which can be attempted using musical sources as tools in film restoration.


24. Griffith's score for Birth of a Nation is discussed at length in Marks, Music for Silent Film.


29. Walker, op. cit., 97-98, notes the public's mixed feelings about synchronized scores as opposed to the pit orchestras.

30. The term 'canned music' was coined by John Philip Sousa in his article 'The Menace of Mechanical Music' (Appleton's Magazine, September 1906), decrying the increasing prevalence of recorded music and its subsequent degradation of both home and public music-making.

31. The rise of recordings as the primary medium for the diffusion of music is largely responsible for this change of musical taste, much as Sousa predicted. Precision survives the removal of the orchestra's physical presence from the 'performance' venue better than does vivacity or emotional intensity, and the possibility of re-recording poorly executed passages naturally leads to ever higher standards in the recorded product. The decrease in economic feasibility of live performance as compared to recordings not only leads to the adoption of precision as a primary criterion of quality, it also undercut the more charismatic criteria suited to live performance.

32. I have always found it wonderfully absurd that in this film the Swedish-born Oland plays a Chinese business man trying to pass himself off as a Caucasian – in musical terms, something of an A-B-A form!

33. Variety began paying closer attention to the quality of synchronized scores toward the end of 1928, and frequently complained about their musical and recorded quality. Among the major productions the magazine adversely reviewed in this regard were Masks of the Devil, Outcast (both 28 November 1928), Synthetic Sin, Scarlet Seas (both 9 January 1929), and Wolf Song (2 February 1929).


35. Russell Merritt goes into the circumstances surrounding the score for Nevsky in 'Recharging Alexander Nevsky – Tracking the Eisenstein-Prokofiev War Horse', Film Quarterly 48/2 (Winter 1995).

36. No-one, to my knowledge, has investigated Carl Laemmle's activities as a music publisher during the early 'teens; operating out of Chicago, his output was sufficiently important that he took out prominent advertisements in Jacobs' Orchestra Monthly, a leading American musical trade paper, from 1911 to 1914. Has anyone researched this?


38. The recording, issued in 1913 as Victor 17393, displays a considerable use of woodwind and harp, and a light use of wood-blocks, that place it rather out of the average run of acoustic recording orchestrotas, but well within the standard procedures employed.

39. Sally Frise in the 'Photoplaying' section of The American Organist, July 1927, p. 177, complains about a theatre manager who 'after we have searched the archives for early French and English music for "Monsieur Beaucaire", comes down to the pit and asks what is the idea of all the Jewish music?' – no doubt referring to the modal character of the music provided. Still, the point remains that 'early French and English music' performed in its original eighteenth century state (rather than, perhaps, a later arrangement by a nineteenth- or early twentieth-century composer) does not complement nineteenth- and twentieth-century narrative techniques.

40. New York Nineteen Thirty: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Two World Wars, edited by Robert A. Stern (Rizzoli International, 1987), studies the city by breaking down the types of building constructed in New York during that period by their function (theatre, single-unit dwelling, apartment house, restaurant, transit building) and then examining urban life in the context of these functions.

41. In certain contexts, where an ironic situation is implied in the plot, an accompaniment that reinforces a film may still appear to diverge wildly from the screen image; however, this if this technique is used indiscriminately, it quickly loses its force.