



Issue 12: Book Reviews

Film's Musical Moments

By Ian Conrich and Estella Tincknell (eds.)

Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006. ISBN 0-7486-2345-0 (pbk). ISBN 0-7486-2344-2 (hbk). 19 illustrations, xiii + 226pp. £ 16.99 (pbk), £ 50.00 (hbk)

A Review by Lara Hrycaj, Wayne State University, USA

Film's Musical Moments is a refreshing look at music in film, specifically musical performance within film. Conrich and Tincknell present this collection of essays as an alternative to previous studies on music in film by exploring "musical moments" instead of analyzing traditional Hollywood musicals and film music scores. The essays in this collection focus on musical moments primarily found in non-mainstream Hollywood and international film. This book does not use music or film theory as its primary mode of analysis but relies on a cultural approach, which makes it accessible to both scholars and non-scholars of film and music. However, some music and film theory, particularly genre theory, is used. Conrich and Tincknell define film musical moments as being more than "just the conventional song and dance numbers in musicals" and include musical performances in many non-musical films like animation, comedies, biopics, and post-classical films (1). Also, these musical moments can be "a particular point of disruption, an isolated musical presence in a non-musical film which is most notable for its potential to disturb the text through its unexpectedness or at times excessiveness" (2). The types of music under analysis vary between jazz, opera, country, pop, disco, Bollywood, and many other music genres in between.

The book is divided into four sections -- 'Music, Film, and Culture'; 'Stars, Performance and Reception'; 'The Post-Classical Hollywood Musical'; and 'Beyond Hollywood'. While these sections serve as a reference point, some of the essays could fit in other sections since they have overlapping and interrelated subject matter with essays in other sections. The title of the Beyond Hollywood section could falsely give the impression that the essays found in the other three sections are primarily Hollywood or American film. This book is diverse in its selection of essays, focusing on non-Hollywood cinema, such as Australian films *Muriel's Wedding* (P.J. Hogan, 1994) and *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (Stephan Elliott, 1994); New German Cinema by directors Werner Schroeter, Hans Jÿrgen Syberberg, and Alexander Kluge; Danish comedies from the 1930s; and the Bollywood film *Hum Aapke Hain KounÉ!* (*Who am I to YouÉ!* Sooraj R. Barjatya, 1994). Also, *Film's Musical Moments* examines non-mainstream film like cult and teen films. The book does not shy away from discussions of sexuality in relation to music and film. Gregory Woods and Tim Franks's 'Music, Film and Post-Stonewall Gay Identity' along with Jonathan Rayner's section on *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* in his chapter on the ABBA

musical, can be used to discuss homosexuality and film musical moments. Female sexuality in relation to music can be found in the country biopics analyzed in Bruce Babington's chapter and the teen films examined by Scott Henderson.

At first glance it seems Tincknell's 'The Soundtrack Movie, Nostalgia and Consumption' is another essay on *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994) and *Boogie Nights* (Paul Thomas Anderson, 1998), but her chapter seems to take a slightly different stance in its approach to these films' soundtracks. These two films along with *Forrest Gump* (Robert Zemeckis, 1994), use music, specifically popular music, "as a way of evoking the cultural moments of 'the sixties' and 'the seventies,'" but they do so in different ways (132). Tincknell utilizes Fredric Jameson and his ideas from *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Verso, 1991) that nostalgic texts can depict 'pastness' with the "use of musical quotation and pastiche, in its knowingness about textuality and the relationship between texts" in its restructuring of the past as a level of style" and this music can give a film an "instant -- and depoliticized -- history" (135). All of the films Tincknell discusses use music stylistically to situate history. The musical moment between Mia and Vincent in the twist dance contest to Chuck Berry's 'You Never Can Tell' (1964) is viewed as being outside of the other music used in *Pulp Fiction*; it "goes beyond stylistic allusion" because music and the moment serves a narrative function. While this may be true, there might be other musical moments in *Pulp Fiction* that go beyond stylistic allusion like the scenes of Mia playing Dusty Springfield's 'Son of a Preacher Man' (1968) and Urge Overkill's cover of Neil Diamond's 'Girl, You'll Be a Woman Soon' (1994). While not necessary, reading John Mundy's analysis of the phenomena of the twist dance craze and the twist inspired Hollywood films found in an earlier chapter of *Film's Musical Moments* seems to shed more light on Tincknell's analysis of the twist contest in *Pulp Fiction*.

Ian Conrich's chapter on cult films and parody of musicals is an area that could be rich for further research. The ideas of the karaoke cinema-sing-a-long events featuring both classical Hollywood films like *The Sound of Music* (Robert Wise, 1965) and *Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939) to cult films like *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Jim Sharman 1975) -- is something that might be explored more closely with attention to the recent theatrical release of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer's* "Once More, With Feeling," a sing-a-long version of the 2002 musical episode from the Josh Whedon created television series. The defining of the sub-genre horror-musical offers a cross-genre space that challenges the utopian elements of classical Hollywood musical "with songs marking suicide, hanging, murder and pain" or other subjects of perversion found in horror and cult film while at the same time mixing two genres known for appealing to audiences "looking for sites of cultural allegiance, and amplified pleasures where subversion, excess and the absurd exist" (129-130). Conrich seems to tease with his description of Takashi Miike's Japanese horror film *Katakuri-ke no kTMfuku* (*The Happiness of the Katakuris*, 2001) as homage to *The Sound of Music*. More about this Japanese cult film might yield some interesting cross-cultural findings besides adding more to the cross-genre elements of the horror-musical. Conrich's chapter works well with other chapters in this book like Henderson's section on *Tank Girl* (Rachel Talalay, 1995) and its homage to the Hollywood musical, along with Woods and Franks' sections on *South Park: Bigger, Longer, and Uncut* (Trey Parker, 1999) and *Zero Patience* (John Greyson, 1993). The analysis of these parodies of musicals complement Conrich's analysis of *Joe's Apartment* (John Payson, 1996) and the horror-musical.

By not looking exclusively at film musicals, Film's Musical Moments alternative take on film music and performance, offers much to the study of music and film. Conrich and Tincknell situate this book in relation to other works on film music, film musicals and popular music in film (for example Claudia Gorbman's *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music*, British Film Institute, 1987; Rick Altman's *The American Film Musical*, Indiana University Press, 1987; and Jeff Smith's *The Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular Film Music*, Columbia University Press, 1998), and this collection of essays could be used to complement these other works. The complementary nature of many of these chapters in this book has already been pointed out, but says something about the areas that either need more study or are beginning to be researched more seriously. Conrich and Tincknell provide a book that "demonstrates the ways in which new debates can be opened up around music and cinema as cultural forms and practices which have tended to be treated as bounded rather than interrelated" (12). *Film's Musical Moments* is the first from the 'Music and the Moving Image' series edited by Kevin Donnelly, and if this book is any indication of what the later books in this series will be like, the study of music, film, popular culture, and other media will continue to open up, offering new or fresh perspectives within each respected field while being complementary and interrelated with one another.

[ABOUT](#)[EDITORIAL BOARD](#)[ADVISORY BOARD](#)[SUBMISSION GUIDELINES](#)[LINKS](#)[ARCHIVE](#)

Institute of Film & Television Studies, University of Nottingham, University Park, Nottingham, NG7 2RD, UK
E-Mail: scope@nottingham.ac.uk | Tel: +44 (0)115 951 4261 | Fax: +44 (0)115 951 4270

[CSS](#) :: [XHTML](#)