

But unlike later writings, these early primers do not have to reach so far back for respectable models. Here is an essential point.

In 1920 Puccini, and program music too, are still more or less contemporaneous. If this music was not quite cutting edge, it still maintained a high level of respectability, as well as a considerable popular currency. We have seen how film used classical music to garner respectability, but we may also allow that, as suggested in our introduction, much of this respectable music was also simply familiar.⁴¹ Elmer Bernstein and Roy Prendergast, and the silent period figures too may have been rationalizing slightly, but their points are also true.

Why is this important? Because it means that film music appropriations were not only mere appropriations. Film musicians and later composers too, as well as the audiences who heard them, were using materials to which they had valid relations. It also means that when outside music was brought into cinematic settings, the culture and conditions and associations of that outside music were also brought in.

As an example, film organist Gaylord Carter matter-of-factly says that “my score [for *The Thief of Baghdad*] consists of a theme for ‘The Thief’ character that I composed, material from [Rimsky-Korsakov’s] *Scheherazade* of course. . . .”⁴² “Of course;” for Carter, Ali Baba and *Scheherazade* just go together. They, along with their literary and musical and cinematic expressions, simply belong. In a similar sense Carter also used the *Dies Irae* from Berlioz’s *Symphonie Fantastique* for the unmasking scene in *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925), feeling that he had merely, and quite justifiably, transposed one generation’s macabre to another’s.⁴³

So, while film music figures worked to justify themselves and overcome musical prejudices, they also just acted naturally, or at least continued to do what others had done before. George Antheil, writing in 1936:

Picture music is more closely allied to the dramatic forms than to the symphonic. By its very nature it must be loose in form and style. It is, quite simply, a kind of modern opera. And operatic music must certainly follow the emotional content of its drama and its accompanying poetry. Unless it does so, it will seem totally beside the point. This is just as true with picture music.⁴⁴