

The associations which individual members of the audience may have in relation to a certain piece of well-known music are quite beyond the control of the director of a film in which it is used; indeed it may produce an effect on the individual entirely different to the one he wants, or it will almost certainly produce a distraction (which may occur at a vital moment in the plot and spoil the whole effect of the film), because of these private reminiscences which are evoked by the music.²³

Huntley is motivated by more than just snobbery. For him it is not only that quotation is tired, it is also dangerous. Precomposed music can upset film hierarchies (narrative explicit, ideology effaced), and unduly open up the traditional narrative film.

These two sets of dismissals and warnings set the tone for a whole generation of film music commentators to come. To one degree or another, they all repeated the same refrains.²⁴ Writing on early film music practice, Charles Berg observes that

the employment of mechanical pianos and random phonographic accompaniments . . . indicates the rather narrow and arbitrary attitude toward music that prevailed. These mechanical accompaniments which were not capable of responding to the shifting moods and situations on the screen eliminated the possibility of music giving any substantial dramatic support to the film.²⁵

Berg's observation, written in the 1970s, is based on historical documentation, but his judgments about dramatic support are similar to the sentiments of his own contemporaries. Many commentators from this period are not so much historians or rigorous scholars as informed and passionate aficionados. As a result, instead of observing patterns and identifying causes, much of what they write aggressively advocates, prescribes, and forbids. Their views on classical music are much affected.

Roy Prendergast is skeptical about the usefulness of previously composed music. "The music for [concert music films], however great on its own merits, was really the antithesis of good film music, for it was certainly not conceived with the dramatic requirements of the picture in mind."²⁶ Is this true? Frequently what we intend is not the same as what we accomplish, and yet something is accomplished. Prendergast's objection does not hold, until we look more closely at what underpins it.