

through the synthesis of its elements, with the total effect equaling more than the sum of its parts, classical film critics and practitioners believed cinematic unity was retained through redundancy and overdetermination, not through a true synthesis of elements.¹⁵

The gap between theory and reality that Caryl Flinn observes here has a couple of important consequences, for the music as well as for those composing it.

The romantic style to which many Hollywood composers felt themselves heir provided a musical separation from vulgar realities. This is the classic formulation about Hollywood aims and results as well, and in this way the romantic idiom seemed to be ideal for Hollywood films.¹⁶

The musical conventions were as follows: “nondissonant if mildly chromatic harmonies, monophonic textures, broad, sweeping melodies, and lush instrumentations.”¹⁷ Romantic music tended toward large forms and appealed generally to the sensuous, the emotional, and the inexpressible. These were exalted nineteenth-century notions, and they applied across cultural fields. Byron and Shelley, Delacroix and David, the titanic Beethoven, Bayreuth, all bespeak a kind of heroic individualism, and the notion of art that transcends context and external consideration.¹⁸

By the birth of film in the late nineteenth century, however, many cultural observers and artists and even musicians were feeling that the time for these things had passed. Other impulses had come to the fore. The outsized forms of Wagner or Gustav Mahler coexisted with smaller, more humanizing alternatives: in the narrative and visual arts with Ibsen and Chekhov and the Impressionists, in music with the ethnomusicological efforts of Béla Bartok, Sabine Baring-Gould, and Ralph Vaughan Williams, for instance.

They also coexisted with more troubling, and even more agonized, expressions. Positivism, along with Darwin, Marx, and Freud, was giving way to naturalism, cubism, and especially the crises rising out of the First World War (Dada, not to mention overwhelming destruction): all came to collide with what now seemed oblivious Wagnerian largeness, which was felt to reflect