

that it implied, then another key strategy in the bid for musical acceptance involved a more fundamental appropriation of the classical than any mere quote. This form of appropriation was seen by a key cadre of musicians and musical scholar/critics as being not only unmusical and obsequious, but as positively transgressive. "Transgression" is not used here in Edward Said's sense of a discomfiting but ultimately productive crossing over. For the critics in question, sin literally lay at the door. Film musicians ignored, or were even ignorant of, dire cultural conditions to which they were ultimately contributing, for which they were finally at least partly responsible. I will return to these criticisms, but for now I will set forth some of the actions that gave rise to them.

Film music rationalization appears in a number of guises. One of the most important of these is demonstrated by Max Steiner.

Often complimented as the man who invented movie music, Steiner would reply, 'Nonsense. The idea originated with Richard Wagner. Listen to the incidental scoring behind the recitatives in his opera. If Wagner had lived in this century, he would have been the Number One film composer.'⁶

Film composers sought to appropriate the reputation and culture of their forebears, or at least the most respectable of them. Steiner's comment is not as modest as it might seem, for he was very much aware of film music's lowly reputation. Rather than being monarch of that paltry kingdom, Steiner deftly conflates high opera and melodramatic movie scoring, thus bringing himself into fellowship with Wagner, and bringing the entire film composer fraternity with him.

This connection is urged throughout early film music discourse. Steiner, again:

In my early days in Vienna, Richard Strauss and Gustav Mahler had enormous influence on all budding composers, and theirs were the styles everyone tried to emulate. Later we became aware of the French school, of men like Debussy and Ravel, followed by the great impact of Stravinsky. And of course Beethoven, Mozart, and Brahms were all basic to us. We sort of inhaled them as we grew up.⁷