

DOKTORI DISSZERTÁCIÓ

HUBAI GERGELY

THE TREATMENT OF ARTISTIC INTEGRITY
IN THE AMERICAN FILM INDUSTRY:
REJECTED FILM SCORES IN STUDIO FEATURES DURING
THE HOLLYWOOD GOLDEN AGE, 1933-1948

TÉZISFÜZET

SZÍNHÁZ- ÉS FILMMŰVÉSZETI EGYETEM

2022

Témavezetők:

Tallér Zsófia, egyetemi tanár

Stóhr Lóránt, egyetemi docens

The Treatment of Artistic Integrity in the American Film Industry explores the less-discussed area of rejected film scores as seen through the examples of films scored up until 1948 (the end of the classic studio era). As such, the dissertation explores the Hollywood contributions of five emigrant composers. George Antheil, Igor Stravinsky, Arnold Schoenberg and Alexandre Tansman are the representatives of those immigrant artists who were seemingly welcomed by America and in particular Hollywood, but eventually they failed to significantly contribute to American filmmaking. The story of Hungarian-born Miklós Rózsa is used as an example to understand what the other four composers were missing so that they ended up with so many rejected scores.

The basic concept for this dissertation can be traced back to the publication of my book entitled *Torn Music* (2012). The research in that volume centered on the obscurest of film scores which are referred to as "rejected film scores". This is a special type of musical accompaniment that was written and (usually) recorded for a specific film, but wasn't used in the final cut for one reason or another. What makes these unused scores so fascinating is that they are often linked to some of the most important titles of cinema history ranging from *2001: A Space Odyssey* to *The Exorcist* or *Chinatown* to name a few well-know examples. In each case, the mere existence of an alternative version offers a fascinating "what if" scenario to some of the most widely analyzed movies from Hollywood – and this doesn't even account for the lesser-known titles, some of which will be discussed in the following chapters.

Focusing on 300 titles, *Torn Music* was meant to be a simple case-by-case study with little regard to the general name recognition of the films involved. Hollywood classics were listed alongside European cult horrors or independent art house films with only the chronology providing any semblance of narrative. This approach lent the book a sort of fragmented, anthological feel, but it also obscured a concept that came to my mind during the preparation of the manuscript, namely that certain rejections were very strongly linked by different cultural issues. Since the connected titles were often several pages apart from each other and got separated by unrelated films, these finer points were lost in the manuscript assembly, though many of them weren't properly articulated in the first place.

The dissertation is structured in the form of four quarters, each of which traces the work of five composers. The five comprehensive discussions complement each other in a way that the main characters in one case history may appear in other ones as side characters to emphasize the close-knit relationship between the immigrant composers in the studio era. Although the five stories (four failures and one success) follow different people in slightly different time periods, I believe that the interrelated plotlines and the parallel reading of the four case histories

will eventually result in a new image, a previously untold version of Hollywood's history examined through the somewhat distorting lens of film music history.

The opening chapter of the dissertation promises three things to be accomplished: the first two (an attempt at synthesizing the history of rejected Hollywood scores in the studio era and a closer examination of key texts) are attempted in the main body of the thesis. The third goal of drawing new conclusions in order to dismiss the currently favored narrative is pinpointed in several other parts of the dissertation, so perhaps it's best to summarize them here more clearly.

1) The current significant volumes of film music history clearly put the blame on the studios and the producers when it comes to explaining the neglect of Schoenberg, Stravinsky and company. My comparative study of the four case histories on the other hand shows that all four of the composers usually brought up in these discussions committed a number of serious mistakes that lead to their downfall.

a) Antheil wasn't very diplomatic to his colleagues and acted as an independent rebel within a system that valued camaraderie. When the tide turned within the Paramount music department, he was immediately removed from the system.

b) Schoenberg had no concept of how film music worked. Although he claimed to have a serious interest in cinema, his real focus was seeing how film could benefit his music instead of how his music can benefit a film. When he did get interested in one film (*The Good Earth*), he got invested too early on, starting to work from the book as opposed to doing the "normal thing" and waiting for the final cut.

c) Stravinsky's first major mistake was overpricing himself within such a competitive field; by the time he got a hang of the financial aspects of film scoring, he started to make a mistake similar to Schoenberg: he got involved too early and worked from scripts rather than waiting for the finished film or a signed contract.

d) Tansman's mistake was the lack of flexibility as he simply couldn't keep up with the constantly changing demands and ideas of David O. Selznick. Perhaps worse than this is the notion that the Polish composer had no respect for the producer, which again is related to the social skills all successful film composers must possess.

e) As opposed to them, Rózsa used his own style (which wasn't modernistic, but was "modern enough" for Hollywood) to carve out his own niche in specific fields (thrillers, historical pictures, etc.) As such, he managed to become part of the establishment when he was eventually given a long-term contract by MGM in 1948.

2) While the filmmakers are frequently brought up by contemporary historians, the relationship of contract composers and freelance composers is rarely brought up in the discussion. Unfortunately this also means that we simply neglect the fact how Hollywood studios had an extremely strong sense of self-preservation against "outsiders" without a fixed studio contract. Even when it was viewed as an ideal destination for European immigrants, who could become millionaires if they succeeded in the film business, the studios could be unbelievably brutal with anyone who didn't have a signed contract with one of them. These case studies involving some of the greatest composers of the 20th century are the most striking testaments one can find in the whole industry – and even Rózsa felt that his treatment was different inside and outside the system.

3) To put it bluntly, Hollywood wanted to be modern without being modernist. The studios wanted to capitalize on the name recognition of people like George Antheil, but they didn't want to put up with the personal antics that came with the fame. And the producers definitely wanted to share the limelight with Schoenberg and Stravinsky, but didn't want their music unless it was tamed by a contracted professional at their disposal. The mutual disrespect, the preconceptions and the theoretical disagreements didn't allow for any meaningful collaboration between the filmmakers and the composers who didn't consider film a valid art form apart from its entertainment factor. Despite making the occasional snide comment, Rózsa accepted film as a legitimate art form.

When framing this story in contemporary film music history, we read the same story in every interpretation of the four case histories: strong-minded composers kept their artistic integrity in the face of a ruthless industry. But if we look at the problem from another angle, the major producers also had artistic integrity they wanted to maintain: they wanted to make money and wanted Academy Awards like everyone in Hollywood, but they also believed they made artworks that kept their names alive. When faced with composers who thought differently about what art consists of, the producers naturally chose to keep their artistic integrity instead of submitting themselves to one of the lesser crewmembers. Somehow, we still don't think of film producers as "artists" in any sense of the word, which means our exploration of artistic integrity in Hollywood cannot be completed until we change our mindset on this question.

Publications on the topic of Rejected Scores

Torn Music. Los Angeles: Silman-James Press, 2012.

"Mending the Torn Curtain" in *Partners in Suspense*. Ed: Steve Rawle and K.J.Donnely. 2017,
pp. 165-173

Murder Can Be Fun: The Lost Music of Frenzy. *Hitchcock Annual*, 2011/16.

Torn Pages: Essays on Rejected Film Scores. *Film Score Monthly* 2012/09-2015/06

Liner notes for John Corigliano: *Music from the Edge* (2012)

Liner notes for Phillip Lambro: *Los Angeles, 1937*. 2012