

CINEMA: A PRIVILEGED WAY OF ACQUIRING INTIMACY WITH JAZZ STANDARDS

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THIS CHAPTER SUGGESTS THAT THROUGH CINEMA jazz musicians gain a wealth of emotional and cognitive references that may intensify their involvement with the Great American Songbook¹. The point here is not to defend a definitive, ontologically correct version of a song as it appeared in a film, to be reproduced *verbatim* in subsequent interpretations. On the contrary, I would like to propose that a concern for the individual character of a song can potentially open up its interpretation — perhaps even that it could, ultimately, free the performer from the *need* to interpret. The more a performer learns to care about a song, the more she or he will be able to ‘trust’ its melody as it is. Saxophonist Branford Marsalis considers that «one of the things that jazz musicians have forgotten how to do is just play songs. If you play it at the tempo it was meant to be played, it kind of spells it out for you, so you just have to not get in the way of it — just get out of the way of it and let it exist»². If we want to defend freedom of interpretation, we have to acknowledge that this freedom can manifest itself best when applied to and contrasted with a well-defined material whose features must be strong enough in the interpreter’s mind as to remain identifiable by the listener beyond the process of interpretation. Pianist Michael Kanan reflects on this issue:

When people want to play songs from the Great American Songbook, I encourage them to just start out knowing what the notes are, and *then*, let your imagination take you where it’s going to. These songs were meant to be *sung* — they were written to be sung, and in that sense I don’t think they have to be a totally exact science, that it has to be down to the last sixteenth note you sing it exactly this way. I mean, the song still has to be *phrased* — but let’s start with what it is that we’re going to phrase. We have to have some starting point and not just going to vague-sounding jazz right away³.

¹. The research for this chapter is largely based on interviews conducted with three musicians, to whom I extend my gratitude: Michael Kanan, Scott Hamilton, and Sonny Rollins.

². MARSALIS 2014, online, 02:09.

³. KANAN 2018.

MUSICAL AND TECHNICAL FEATURES OF A SONG

A starting point would be to get acquainted with what we might define as the ‘firm features’ that give a song its identity (i.e. the objective elements that will serve as material to be interpreted):

1. The melody and its rhythm;
2. The harmony;
3. The lyrics;
4. The verse.

The traditional authoritative source to study these features is the sheet music produced when the song was published, for it contains them all in accurate form. By ‘accurate’ I do not mean to imply that the sheet music’s content is set in stone⁴, but simply that it is often the best document to approach a song as it was initially conceived, before it became coated with the cumulative interpretative layers of multiple jazz versions. For example, the constant reharmonisation of songs that has become common in jazz practice⁵ tends to eventually obfuscate the original compositions, and in such cases it is informative to consult the sheet music. In a blindfold test conducted by Leonard Feather for *Down Beat*, saxophonist Coleman Hawkins commented on his colleague Dave Pell’s recording of Kay Swift’s and Paul James’s ‘Can’t We Be Friends’: «I liked this alright, but you know... the harmony of this piece is very pretty the way it was written; they didn’t have to change it. You lose more than you gain»⁶.

Sheet music was used by jazz musicians in the studio, as reported by Gene Lees in his account of the recording session for John Coltrane’s *Ballads*⁷: «Excepting ‘It’s Easy to Remember’, the quartet had never played any of the tunes before. They arrived with music-store sheet music of the songs. Coltrane, McCoy Tyner, Jimmy Garrison, and Elvin Jones would discuss each tune, write out copies of the changes they would use, semi-rehearse for a half hour, and then do it. Usually the tune was done in one take»⁸. In saxophonist Scott

⁴. See for example GARBNER 2010 for a study of the many differences, including in the piano part and the lyrics, to be found in successive sheet music versions of Shelton Brooks’s ‘Some of These Days’.

⁵. Branford Marsalis calls it the ‘jazz disease’ (MARSALIS 2011).

⁶. HAWKINS 1957.

⁷. Impulse! A-32, LP album, 1963.

⁸. LEES 1963. Stanley Dance describes a similar procedure at Coleman Hawkins’s recording session for *Today and Now* (Impulse! A-34, LP album, 1963): «Bob Thiele, the a. and r. man [...] had very properly brought some music with him. The leader looked it over, blew the melodies gently and handed the sheets on to Tommy Flanagan, who studied them casually and played a few bars of each at the piano. They would take care of the ballad segment of the program, and Coleman kept returning to David Raksin’s ‘Love Song from *Apache*’ [Robert Aldrich, 1954], obviously developing an affection for this pretty, previously unrecorded tune» (DANCE 1963). See also drummer Eddie Locke’s brief recollection of the session in DANCE 1974/1979, p. 160.

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Hamilton's experience, too, pianists often referred to sheet music when studying a song they wanted to perform: «I learned most of the standard songs on the job — just playing with a lot of different guys and many different chord changes. The very best song players, like Dave McKenna or Jimmy Rowles, often looked at the original sheet before changing the harmonies. Guys like that really knew the literature. Of course Tommy Flanagan and Hank Jones as well»⁹. In the published sheet music the melody, its rhythm, the lyrics and the verse are likely to be as close to the composer's and the lyricist's intentions as they can possibly get. The harmony, however, although always informative, is more problematic: it might have been written by an editor or an arranger, and sometimes does not work well when applied to a jazz context. Because of these issues, Michael Kanan thinks of the harmony of a song as something to be discussed and adapted in function of the situation:

I've come to think of harmony as a negotiation between the players — a happy negotiation. On a good day at least, it's a happy negotiation. The bass player that I just played with on this tour, he knew a lot more, we'll call them 'sheet music changes', than I did. For certain songs, he knew stuff that I had never heard or played, and he would say «oh well, check this out in this section» and I would play and «oh yeah, that's really nice». And then I say, «how about in the A section we play this». I think that's a good dialogue to have. How are we going to approach the harmony of this song? As long as we all agree on the melody, now let's have a discussion about the harmonic background of the song¹⁰.

Kanan's insistence on «agreeing on the melody» is telling. Musicians whose repertoire is centred around the Great American Songbook tend to consider that a song's most important component, precisely, is its melody¹¹. Kanan continues: «The song is the melody and the lyrics together, that's really the song. Melody, we can find in what we would call a 'totally correct' version, that's easy to find, in the sheet music. The harmonic underpinning of a song, that's always going to be open to interpretation. So I try to learn a song from the top down, from the melody down, so that every note of the melody has to be justified in the harmony, in some way»¹². Scott Hamilton even suggests that the melody *contains* the harmony, but he also provides a contrasting point of view to Kanan's position: «I was careless about melodies as a young guy but now I think they are more important. They give you the correct harmony if you pay attention. But there are no rules — Jimmy Rowles used to change the melody to fit the chords he wanted to play»¹³. To be sure, we

⁹. HAMILTON 2018.

¹⁰. KANAN 2018.

¹¹. For once artists agree with legal minds, for in U.S. law a song can be copyrighted just with its melody and lyrics if there are any — no piano part (no harmony) is needed. For the law, a song is its melody. See KERNFELD 2006, p. 41.

¹². KANAN 2018.

¹³. HAMILTON 2018.

all agree that in the improvised context of jazz «there are no rules», and that any material can be treated in any possible way. But the interpretative freedom of the jazz musician lies in the openness and creativity of her or his treatment of a well-defined material, rather than in the seemingly ‘open-sounding’ or ‘original’ lack of reference to that material that is the consequence of insufficient knowledge of it. Saxophonist Sonny Rollins insists on this point: «Don’t let anyone fool you. Melody is difficult to play — great control is needed. Many players work fast and overlook detail. This is unfortunate, for in the detail of a song lies much of its beauty»¹⁴.

As we have seen, the go-to source for gathering such details about a song is the published sheet music. Cinema can serve as an informative and inspiring complement. In classic Hollywood film versions both the singer’s deliveries and the orchestral arrangements tend to be closer to the sheet music than in jazz recordings. The latter remain the best source to learn jazz phrasing and practice, evidently; but film versions, like ‘straight’ recordings by (usually) white singers¹⁵ might be better sources to learn the ‘firm features’ of these songs, the melody, rhythm, harmony, lyrics and verse as they were initially meant by the composer and lyricist. Even so, one has to be careful when learning a song from a film. In some cases the information is so highly manipulated that it misrepresents the song entirely. A telling example can be found in *Pal Joey* (George Sidney, 1957). The double-entendre lyrics by Lorenz Hart for ‘Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered’, as they appear in Act One, Scene v of the show’s libretto (1940), are either replaced by dull alternatives or cut out entirely¹⁶. Lost are such teasingly evocative trouvailles as:

- Horizontally speaking / He’s at his very best;
- Vexed again / Perplexed again / Thank God I can be oversexed again;
- He’s kept enough / He’s slept enough / And yet where it counts / He’s adept enough.

Or the following, from the short reprise of the song at the end of Act Two, Scene iv:

- Romance – finis; / Your chance – finis; / Those ants that invaded my pants – finis¹⁷.

In the show version, Richard Rodgers’s poignant melody gains both bite and depth from the contrast with the witty sexual innuendo of the lyrics. Once censored for the Sidney film we are left with conventional words that make the melody sound sentimental and oversweet. The distortion of the song’s character is further augmented

¹⁴. ROLLINS 1962.

¹⁵. Branford Marsalis advised me to learn Broadway songs from white singers like Doris Day or young Frank Sinatra, because they stay closer to the written melody than, for example, Billie Holiday (MARSALIS 2001).

¹⁶. The reprint of the published sheet music, as it appears in *The Rodgers and Hart Collection* (Milwaukee, Hal Leonard, 2003, pp. 38–41), only features one chorus of lyrics. «Until I could sleep where I shouldn’t sleep» becomes «When love came and told me I shouldn’t sleep», while «And worship the trousers that cling to him» becomes «And long for the day when I’ll cling to him». Even sheet music can be misleading.

¹⁷. See O’HARA 1940/2016, pp. 128–130 and pp. 189–190 for the complete lyrics.

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by the turgid, strangely militarist colour scheme of the scene (epaulettes gold, battleship green, field grey), the oppressive garishness of the sets and furniture, and the dubbing of Rita Hayworth's voice¹⁸. How richer a place the world would be if we could hear the original lyrics in Rita Hayworth's mouth! Granted, we do get some form of compensation for this loss in the added line¹⁹ «the way to my heart is unzipped again» — with Hayworth throwing her peignoir on the floor at the word «unzipped», before she enters the shower. The accumulation of barriers that shield her naked body (paravent, nightgown, shower door — the little we see being a reflection in a mirror) is in itself a complete rebuttal of the song, and in spite of this last-minute redeeming touch, the spirit of Rodgers's and Hart's 'Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered' is shamelessly betrayed in this film.



ILL. 1: Rita Hayworth sheds her peignoir in *Pal Joey*.

JAZZ MUSICIANS, CINEMA, AND TV

What role did cinema play in the development of a repertoire of standard songs in jazz performance practice? Did jazz musicians gain exposure to these songs in the cinema, in addition to the radio, recordings and concerts? Sonny Rollins answers positively: «When

¹⁸. In spite of Jo Ann Greer's beautifully unassuming singing, the dubbing adds to the stuffiness of the scene by emphasizing its artificiality. The original lyrics can be heard, sung by Vivienne Segal, on the 1951 Columbia Masterworks LP album ML-4364 *Pal Joey* by Lorenz Hart and Richard Rodgers.

¹⁹. Not present in the original Hart lyrics, but perhaps inspired by the song 'Zip' in Act Two, Scene 1 («I met her at the Yankee Clipper / And she didn't unzip one zipper»). See O'HARA 1940/2016, p. 151.

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I was growing up in the 1930s, we didn't have television. All we had was movies. So we went to the movies every week²⁰. And that's where I saw a lot of American Songbook songs. Louis Armstrong would appear in some movies. A lot of the music that I heard was from the movies»²¹. Rollins continues with what seems to be, judging from his enthusiastic tone, a much cherished youth memory:

I'll tell you a funny story. I went to the movies one day, up near where I lived at in New York, and I went to the movies and I was in there and I saw Coleman Hawkins come into the movies! Yes, so he came in, and I didn't know. I watched him, I saw him come in, and he went and he sat down IN THE FRONT ROW of the movies. Ha ha ha ha! I said, wow, it's funny, Coleman sitting in the front row. Ha ha ha! I believe the movie was called *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim*. It was a Betty Grable movie. That's all we had. In those days we had the movies, we had the radio²².

I would like to think that Hawkins sat in the front row to ensure that he would hear the soundtrack well and be in a good position to absorb the music. Although this is just a wishful guess, it could be understood as an indication that jazz musicians of that era went to the cinema in part to hear new songs. Scott Hamilton, for one, acknowledges that cinema played a significant role in his exposure to standards, especially once Hollywood films were made widely available on TV²³:

I have always loved watching movies and grew up watching the Hollywood movies of the 30s and 40s on TV. But I probably learned most of the old songs I know from jazz records. Sometimes I am even surprised today when I watch a Fred Astaire film and realise which songs were in it. I think most of the older musicians learned those songs from the atmosphere — the way I learned the pop songs of my youth: radio, dances, movies and recordings. However, I think it is an interesting study — a lot of the jazz literature comes from Broadway and Hollywood. I love hearing some of them in the original version. The times when I have been introduced to a song through the movies is more common in films of the 60s and 70s. Johnny Mandel, Henry Mancini, even Burt Bacharach²⁴.

²⁰. This is in line with census data that states that in the 1930s, an impressive 65% of the U.S. population went to the movie theater once a week. See PAUTZ 2002.

²¹. ROLLINS 2018.

²². *Ibidem*. *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim* (George Seaton, 1947) posthumously featured unused songs by George Gershwin, including 'For You, For Me, Forever More'. Coleman Hawkins would go on to record this song on *At Ease with Coleman Hawkins* (Moodsville MV 7, LP album, 1960). Hawkins and pianist Tommy Flanagan play the verse to the song, which seems to indicate that they were reading from the sheet music.

²³. By 1958, some 3700 feature films produced before 1949 had been sold to television stations by Hollywood studios. See CONANT 1960, p. 137.

²⁴. HAMILTON 2018.

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CULTURAL, EMOTIONAL AND NARRATIVE FEATURES OF A SONG

In addition to the important musical/technical information they usually carry in a more-or-less straightforward way, films also provide at least two more defining features of a song, that we can add to the list sketched above:

5. The dramatic and narrative context of the inserted song;
6. The broader cultural background of the song.

Let us consider point 6 first. A film is a bubble in time. If we experience a song in the context of a film produced in the same era as the one in which the song was written, or even better, if the song was written specifically for a film²⁵, we get a wealth of additional elements that help us make sense of the song and create a space for it in our minds. How people dress and do their hair, how they dance, how they sing, how they look at each other and talk to each other, and most importantly, perhaps, when it comes to the 1930s–1950s, what *hat* they wear — all of these elements surrounding a song are like the harmonics that raise up from the fundamental sound of a bell. I do not suggest that we have to be consciously aware of any of that non-musical/technical information when we perform a song. You do not need to wear roller skates to give a convincing rendition of ‘Let’s Call The Whole Thing Off’; but if you have seen Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers slide gracefully across the small Central Park square in *Shall We Dance* (Mark Sandrich, 1937), chances are the song will be a little dearer to you.

Turning now to point 5 of our list: the narrative context of the song. Michael Kanan insists on the depth of meaning that the storyline brings to a song:

The main thing that cinema does for me is that it gives me context. When I take a piece of sheet music, that’s a blank slate: this melody, these lyrics, this music, and I can think of it however I want. But seeing it in the film, that’s like one finished version of the song that’s in the context of a story. I may or may not want to borrow from that, but it’s just another beautiful reference that I can use. You have something else to refer to, it is this really worked out and finished product, and it’s part of a story. So there is this whole other side to it. It’s not just the lyrics of the song, but why is this character singing these lyrics in this moment. You have the background of how the stories are interacting, and what it means to the characters as well, so there’s a whole other emotional scope to the song, beyond just the lyrics of that one tune²⁶.

²⁵. Examples include Richard Rodgers’s songs written for *Love Me Tonight* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1932), Irving Berlin’s for *Top Hat* (Mark Sandrich, 1935), *Follow the Fleet* (Mark Sandrich, 1936), and *On the Avenue* (Roy Del Ruth, 1937), Jerome Kern’s for *Swing Time* (George Stevens, 1936) and *You Were never Lovelier* (William A. Seiter, 1942), George Gershwin’s for *Shall We Dance* (Mark Sandrich, 1937) and *A Damsel in Distress* (George Stevens, 1937), Harold Arlen’s for *The Sky Is the Limit* (Edward H. Griffith, 1943). That most of these films featured Fred Astaire is a testimony to how meticulous he was in his effort to bring together story, music and dance.

²⁶. KANAN 2018.



ILL. 2: Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers skate dance on ‘Let’s Call the Whole Thing off’ in *Shall We Dance*.

This emotional, esthetic, and bonding reaction to a song from a film then impacts positively on the motivation to play a song in a purposeful way:

When I was a kid, ‘The Days of Wine and Roses’ was one of the songs that I learned out of the *Real Book*. And when I saw the film²⁷, besides learning some great little harmonic things about the way it was originally scored... it’s a devastating movie about alcoholism, and what it did to a relationship. I could never play it as this happy swinger after seeing that movie. Off course, it makes much more sense to me now, after seeing the film. And I can’t even remember if the lyrics were part of the film originally. What hit home for me was the music for the opening credits, the orchestral arrangement of the melody for the opening credits was so beautiful. The same with ‘Stella by Starlight’, in the movie *The Uninvited* [Lewis Allen, 1944]. In that one for example, the emotional background of the story didn’t really do anything for me. It was kind of a corny movie, a ghost story. The movie itself didn’t do a whole lot for me.

²⁷. *The Days of Wine and Roses* (Blake Edwards, 1962).

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But hearing the orchestral score for the main melody... wow! What a moment *that* was. It can go either way²⁸.

Kanan continues: «If you're going to play standards, you really have to have a reason to play them. You have to be *connected* to the music. You have to *love* it — you have to love the material. If you love the material, you're going to really want to learn it»²⁹. It is this connection to the standards that our experience of cinema has the potential to enhance. When films present a song they are unique amongst other sources (sheet music, recordings) in appealing to visual, aural, emotional, and cognitive aspects: they offer what are usually clearly delineated musical/technical features, embedded in a fully developed story, along with less easily definable aspects pertaining to the subjective realm of perception: mood, character, atmosphere, 'aura' of charismatic actors/singers/dancers. The fullness of the experience (image, sound, dance, lighting, camerawork, acting, storyline) is able to create a strong impression on the prospective performer of a song. All these elements feed off each other and strengthen the emotional connection with the song, and its presence in detail in one's memory³⁰.

TRANSFERAL OF NON-MUSICAL/TECHNICAL FEATURES TO THE AUDIENCE

Which of these emotional and cognitive occurrences might be transferred to or perceived by the listener of an instrumental performance? This question is similar to another one, much debated amongst jazz musicians: is it important for an instrumentalist to know the words of the songs she or he plays? Will it make any difference to someone listening to her or his performance? Saxophonist Jimmy Heath neatly sums up the issue at hand:

Let me tell you a story about Ben Webster. I was over in Copenhagen, and Ben was living over there, and Ben asked me did I know the words... he wanted to play 'For Heaven's Sake', the song that Billie Holiday [sang], and he said that, you know, every time he played a love song, he learned the words. Then he could speak the words on his horn. You see what I'm saying? And so I was talking to him and Johnny Griffin, Johnny Griffin said «I don't need no words, I play the saxophone, I play notes» — but the difference in people. Now, if I was playing 'Lover Man' — the song, the ballad [...] I'm gonna try to get the inflexions of the voice. Our instrument is supposed to be... have a voice! We're all trying to imitate the human voice. That's why Johnny Hodges,

²⁸. KANAN 2018.

²⁹. *Ibidem*.

³⁰. See WOODY – MCPHERSON 2010, p. 414, about the interactions between emotions and memory: «information encoded while in a particular mood is most readily recalled and conveyed later while in the same mood».

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and Paul Gonsalves, and Ben Webster could play a ballad and touch people.
Because they... they wanted to *sing* a song³¹.

We observe a radical difference of approach between Webster and Griffin, one considering the lyrics essential, the other superfluous³². Scott Hamilton, leaning on the Webster side of the argument, considers the lyrics to be a valuable aid: «I learned a lot of lyrics from working with singers and I think it helps to know them — both with the meaning of the song and as a guide for phrasing»³³. Even musicians that do not play a woodwind instrument sometimes agree with this position. Michael Kanan comments: «I find myself that the lyrics help me to phrase the melody. If I'm playing in a trio where I'm the one playing the melody, if I remember the lyrics to the song, I'm always singing them to myself when I have to play the melody, because it helps me to phrase the song better. And it also gives me an emotional starting point»³⁴.

In a sense, the jazz custom of interpreting a vocal song in an instrumental context is an odd one³⁵. In the absence of words, the semantic content conveyed by the lyrics of a song is lost, at least to a listener who does not know them already. As noted by Jerrold Levinson, «Jazz instrumental interpretation may dispense with *any* acknowledgment [of the song's text and textual meaning]. This is not to deny that the best instrumental jazz players often *do* keep the text and its meaning in mind and, moreover, claim that their improvisations indeed *reflect* that»³⁶. Levinson does evidently not imply that they can *communicate* that meaning to the listener unacquainted with the lyrics. However, it might be that part of the unique appeal of consummate jazz instrumentalists comes from their ability to convey to their listeners the realisation that they are being spoken to — spoken to, perhaps, on a deeper, more complex and mysterious level than even the most sophisticated words do³⁷.

As with lyrics, the dramatic features of a film's plot are lost to a listener not familiar with them. But non-semiotical elements can potentially transfer well: the emotions carried by the lyrics and the drama, the mood and atmosphere of the scene, the character of the protagonists and of the song. These overlapping features are by nature ambiguous and

³¹. HEATH 2011, online, 00:31. A telling, if hard to verify story circulates about Webster. During a recording session, he reportedly stopped playing in the middle of a ballad. When asked by the sound engineer what was the matter, Webster answered: «I forgot the lyrics to the bridge».

³². One argument in favor of Griffin's point of view is that in many cases lyrics were added later to what started as an instrumental melody, as is the case for Victor Herbert's 'Indian Summer', Hoagy Carmichael's 'Stardust', or Duke Ellington's 'Sophisticated Lady'.

³³. HAMILTON 2018.

³⁴. KANAN 2018.

³⁵. It brings to mind Gustav Mahler's instrumental quotes of his own lieder in several of his symphonies.

³⁶. LEVINSON 2013.

³⁷. See BAUER 2014, p. 134: «Historically, African-American listeners have judged an instrumentalist's skill on the basis of his capacity to evoke qualities of spoken language, not merely mimicking the sounds of speech, but also convincing the listener that he is actually 'saying something' and 'telling a story'».

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subjective, but they can combine to make a jazz instrumental more or less deeply felt by the musicians and accordingly more or less convincing and moving to the audience. While the semiotic-type data (meaning of lyrics, story) cannot be transferred, meaning in a broader sense (all the elements that make a song meaningful to its interpret) will be perceived as present and appreciated by the listener.

FILM AS EMOTIONAL ENHANCER

V. F. Perkins advanced that cinema can procure determining life experiences³⁸. The idea that viewing a film is an event comparable in its importance to actual life events lends considerable weight to the argument that a film can exert a major influence on a musician's bond with a song heard in it. Cinema creates associations at two levels that matter in this discussion: between a song and a scene or character, and between the film itself and the life conditions in which the spectator has seen it³⁹. Thus hearing a song might bring back memories of a film, but also of the moment in our life when we have seen it, of someone we have seen it with, or further associations between the events in the film and similar experiences in our own life. This is equally true of the performer of a song and of its listener. We could imagine a kind of ecosystem involving the actors in the film, the performer and the listener: although they might each relate to it in entirely different ways their shared awareness of the song in the film's treatment will generate a cycle of added meaning and emotion, like the two overlapping concentric circles generated when two stones are thrown into a pool of water. Indeed we could envision a kind of unbroken stream of emotions flowing from the actor singing a song in a film to the jazz musician who sees that film and then plays the song, to members of her or his audience who hear it⁴⁰.

Research has shown that musicians tend to appeal to personal memories and to imagined situations in order to generate an emotion that will support a performance and make it moving⁴¹. Here too cinema can be of great help in providing a narrative able to trigger what Roland S. Persson calls «mood induction»⁴². If, with Perkins, we accept that seeing a film is a genuine life experience, then a performer can draw self-induced emotions

³⁸. See PERKINS 1972, pp. 134–57.

³⁹. See SMITH 1999 and DAVIES 2010 for a discussion of the associative process as it pertains to film viewing and music respectively.

⁴⁰. In a similar vein Carl Plantinga speaks of «emotional contagion» when he describes the emotional flux connecting an actor, and especially an actor's facial expressions, to the viewer. See PLANTINGA 1999, p. 243.

⁴¹. Very much like actors trained in the Stanislavsky method (adopted in the USA by the famous Actor's Studio).

⁴². PERSSON 2001, pp. 281–282. See also WOODY – MCPHERSON 2010, pp. 411–413. Persson's research showed that musicians appeal to what he terms «visualisation» as yet another strategy to fuel their

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from her or his memories of a film. In the more specific case of a song seen in a film, we could even conceive of a double emotional involvement at play, one with the film and one with the song, capable of generating especially vivid self-induced emotions for the performer of that song. Such a process can be useful in enriching the «emotional template» that is necessary to bring each song's singularity to the fore in Branford Marsalis's opinion: «It is possible for a musician to use the sound of his or her instrument, be it a saxophone or a voice, to create an emotional template, and you can tell when they are doing that because every song sounds different»⁴³.

Music and cinema share a strong ability to create mood. Mood is often construed as the equivalent of atmosphere, or 'vibe': something both vague and unavoidable that permeates our perception of a scene or of a piece of music — a kind of indefinable mist or glow that surrounds the central material (or that emanates from it) and that gives it a certain character. Mood also means an emotional state we might find ourselves in. Greg M. Smith proposes a more precise definition of the word, articulated around a useful distinction between mood and emotion: «Moods are expectancies that we are about to have a particular emotion, that we will encounter cues that will elicit particular emotions»⁴⁴. Mood is the milieu needed by emotions to manifest themselves. Within this understanding of the word we can see how the powerful mood that might be experienced in a successful rendition of a song in a film scene can subsequently help a musician to set up a stronger mood in her or his performance, and therefore a stronger expectancy in her or his audience that certain emotions are about to be expressed and felt.

YOUNG AT HEART

The comparatively complex genesis of Johnny Richards's and Carolyn Leigh's song 'Young at Heart' illustrates well the ambiguities of the meanings a song can take for its interpreters, depending on what sources they have been exposed to. The song originated in 1939 as an instrumental by Richards, titled 'Moonbeam'. Carolyn Leigh added lyrics in 1953, and Frank Sinatra's 1954 recording became one of the year's big hits. Finally, the song was used in the opening and closing credits of the 1954 Gordon Douglas film to which it gave its name⁴⁵. The film was based on *Four Daughters* (Michael Curtiz, 1938), in which the Mickey Borden character, portrayed by John Garfield, commits suicide. In the 1954 version, Mickey Borden becomes Barney Sloan and is played by Sinatra, who

performances with auto-generated sentiment. The power of cinematic imagery can evidently be of great avail in this process.

⁴³. MARSALIS 2014, online, 01:46.

⁴⁴. SMITH 1999, p. 113.

⁴⁵. See WHORF 2012, p. 132, TYLER 2008, p. 111, and STERRITT (NO DATE).

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requested that Sloan should survive his suicide attempt. Although co-star Doris Day felt that it diminished the film's impact⁴⁶, this new ending, far from being kitsch (except for the ghastly yellow rabbit given to her baby by Day⁴⁷) functions as a positive affirmation of life and love over despair and over the temptation to escape life's hardships by committing suicide⁴⁸.



ILL. 3: Doris Day and Frank Sinatra sing 'You, My Love' in *Young at Heart*.

What can we make of this if we now consider a jazz instrumentalist performing 'Young at Heart'? It is difficult to argue that knowledge of the lyrics is essential since the melody was conceived initially as an instrumental. We cannot say either that watching

⁴⁶. See STERRITT (NO DATE).

⁴⁷. I would not be surprised if the rabbit's name were Frank (Sinatra?) and if that baby were to become the main protagonist in *Donnie Darko* (Richard Kelly, 2001).

⁴⁸. In this happy ending Sinatra and Day sing their only duet in the film, Jimmy Van Heusen's and Mack Gordon's 'You, My Love'. Day's radiant, straightforward sincerity and Sinatra's vanquished bitterness produce a kind of Technicolor negative of Richard Wagner's *Liebestod* in *Tristan und Isolde*, not resolving in sterility and death but in fertile life.

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the film is essential, since the song became a hit before the film was released. However, because of the deeply-felt performances by both Day and Sinatra, we can posit that our connection with the song is incomparably more profound and satisfying if we have seen the film⁴⁹. As an instrumental, we have an engaging and happy song in an uncomplicated major key. With Leigh's lyrics added, the major-key happiness of the melody is enlarged into an optimistic celebration of the virtues of a youthful spirit kept intact through life — which is how we experience the song both in Sinatra's 1954 recording and in the opening credits of the film. In the closing credits, after we have witnessed and empathised with the journey of Sinatra's character, with his bitterness and despair, and with the final acceptance of the simplicity and beauty of (family) life, our experience of the song 'Young at Heart' is transformed. Its major key is now minor-tinged, its mellow light now projects disquieting shades, its warmth conceals a death-devoted coldness. The song has acquired a compelling shade of subdued pain, of fatality, and even of nihilism. It matters little if all three Sinatra versions (recording, opening and ending credit) are the same or not — the difference is not in Sinatra's delivery or in the orchestral arrangement, it lies in the shifting of *our* emotional point of view. We will always remember this profound development of the subtleties of our emotional involvement with the song and the character who sings it, and when we perform or hear the song we might experience it again — our minds might forget the lyrics and the images, but our hearts will not forget the complex emotions.

EPIPHANY

One last element remains to be taken into consideration. When we have learned a song from the sheet music or from a recording, then see it in the film it was written for, we sometimes experience a kind of revelation: we seem to suddenly witness the unveiling of the song's nature. As discussed in this article, this is due to the new layers of signification acquired by the song through image, storyline, and acting. But something more profound is at play. In the Fred Astaire — Ginger Rogers films, the songs literally seem to spring to life, as though the medium of cinema allowed them to gain an entirely new dimension that they lack when heard as plain music from a recording. What provokes such an uplifting and almost other-worldly effect?

⁴⁹. 'Young at Heart' is not sung by Sloan in the film, only by Sinatra in the credits. But we recognize Sinatra's voice as Sloan's, and therefore associate the song with the fictive character. Sinatra's intense acting is likely to generate in response an equally intense identification from the viewer/performer, colouring her or his conception of «Young at Heart». See PLANTINGA 1999 and GAUT 1999 about identification in film viewing (Plantinga prefers to think of «character engagement»).

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We have seen that for many musicians, the essential feature of a song is its melody. Richard Wagner goes even further when he poses «the axiom that *music's only form is melody*, that it is not even thinkable apart from melody»⁵⁰. What is so special about melody that it makes it all-encompassing? We could answer by defining melody, in a broad sense, as that which *moves* and which emanates from a single well-defined source, a definition that significantly applies just as well to the human voice⁵¹. In cinema, the camera shares these two characteristics. It is a sort of inverted music instrument: instead of a single source *emitting* moving sounds that form a melody, the camera is a single source *receiving* moving images that form a film shot. The effect of a well-crafted film shot, especially if the camera moves within it, is of a melodic kind⁵². To extend the poetic simile one step further, it is not only the film shot that is akin to a melody: by its own capacity for focused movement the camera itself partakes in the process that creates the film shot (or the melody in our analogy); the camera movements can metaphorically *become* a melody, and we can experience them as such⁵³.

The melodic combination of movement and of a single emitter, because it makes us perceive an instrument's sounds as if they were a person's voice, has an unmatched capacity to affect emotions — the etymology of the word, from the Latin «ex-movere», is telling in this regard. We are moved by what moves⁵⁴. Cinema is the art form of movement *par excellence*. Within the framework of our broad definition of melody we could therefore posit that part of cinema's emotional power comes from its inherent mobility. We could even infer that cinema is melodic in essence: a pretty tracking shot is like a melody⁵⁵. In a Fred Astaire — Ginger Rogers film, everything is movement, everything is melody: their dances, the changing lighting, the songs they sing, the way they look at each other, the camera circling around them and drawing us into the dance. These films have the ability to make a song's melody *more melodic*, which may explain why as they watch them many musicians experience nothing short of an epiphany.

⁵⁰. WAGNER 1861/1907, p. 333.

⁵¹. Other forms of melody exist that have multiple sources, as in Arnold Schoenberg's pieces using the *Klangfarbenmelodie* technique, but a single emitter helps us perceive a string of notes as being connected to each other and forming a continuous whole.

⁵². The synaesthetical translation from film shot (image) to melody (sound) is perhaps best exemplified in the miraculously fluid camera movements that grace Jean Renoir's films of the 1930s, and especially so in *Partie de Campagne* (1936) and in *La Règle du Jeu* (1939).

⁵³. I do not mean to suggest that a camera actually records sound, or that it evolves in the diegetic musical space of the film, but simply that if we compare how a musical instrument functions with regards to sound and how a camera functions with regards to the moving image, the resulting effect of the camera's movements, and these movements themselves, can be considered to be similar to a melody.

⁵⁴. An analogy with sex is perhaps not entirely out of place here.

⁵⁵. To paraphrase the title of a famous song by Irving Berlin.

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