

HISTORY GOES TO THE MOVIES: HANS ZIMMER, RIDLEY SCOTT, AND THE PROPER LENGTH OF THE *GLADIUS*

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In his article “Hollywood’s German Fantasy: Ridley Scott’s *Gladiator*,” Marc A. Weiner does something that is quite novel in the literature of film as history. He bases an historical reading of Scott’s Roman epic film (2000) on a close analysis of two seminal music cues.¹ Briefly told, the film’s narrative is an invention that draws on certain historical elements—the death of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius in AD180 and the succession of his son, Commodus—but develops a fictional story around the character of General Maximus Decimus Meridius, a Spanish farmer and landowner turned soldier who, having defeated the barbarians of the north in a battle in Germania, is betrayed by the treachery of Commodus. (Maximus’s Spanish origins are perhaps the only link between this essay and the research interests of the dedicatee of this book.) Maximus becomes a slave, then a gladiator, and finally a saviour of Rome; he is the gladiator of the film’s title and the story concerns his journey.² Weiner’s reading of the film focuses on the musical underpinning of two key moments: the first an evocation of the opening bars of the Prelude to *Götterdämmerung* (with its echoes of the prelude to *Das Rheingold*) that accompanies the audience’s first view of the ancient city of Rome; the second, a reminiscence of the opening of Siegfried’s “Funeral March” that is heard at the moment when Maximus, a masked gladiator, reveals his true identity to Commodus at the conclusion of a great battle in the arena of the Coliseum. The Wagnerian emphasis emerges from the study in which Weiner’s essay is published, a collection of writings on *Wagner and Cinema*.

Of course there is more to Weiner’s reading than a consideration of the music alone; as he writes, the function of the music is reinforced by a number of other signs within the film, iconographic, textual, cinematic and so forth. But while the vision of Rome that is

¹ Marc A. Weiner, “Hollywood’s German Fantasy: Ridley Scott’s *Gladiator*,” in *Wagner & Cinema*, ed. Jeongwon Joe and Sander L. Gilman (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), 186–209.

² A detailed study of the development of the script by two of its three different writers—David Franzoni, John Logan and William Nicholson—each of whom brought particular dramatic qualities to the final filmed version, may be found in Jon Solomon, “*Gladiator* from Screenplay to Screen,” in *Gladiator Film and History*, ed. Martin M. Winkler (Malden MA, Oxford and Carlton Vic: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2005), 1–15.

the starting point for his discussion is defined equally in significance by cinematic imagery and music, the import of his second example is attributable to the music cue alone.

Scholars of the potential or particular character of film as history do not in general pay much heed to music or, if they acknowledge music as an element that differentiates film history from written history, they do not accord it a function of any importance. Hayden Whyte may have coined the term “historiophoty” to cover the role of images in film history, but no such term has appeared to capture the role of music. For Marnie Hughes-Warrington, for example, music has only ancillary functions: it serves to “foster the conscious appreciation of films as illusions” and becomes a merchandising and marketing element that assists saturation promotion of the film.³ Her last observation could certainly be said to be true of the soundtrack to *Gladiator*: as the recipient of a number of industry awards and nominations, the original soundtrack spawned a sequel, *More Music from the Motion Picture Gladiator* (2001), and a cinematic clone in the Franzoni-Zimmer collaboration *King Arthur* (2004).⁴

Scholars of music in film, on the other hand, ascribe a central role to the affective power of music. In direct contradiction to Hughes-Warrington’s idea that music distances the viewer from the filmic illusion, Anahid Kassabian, for example, asserts that music functions to draw the viewer into the illusion. Music, according to Kassabian, is “at least as significant as the visual and narrative components that have dominated film studies. It conditions identification processes, the encounters between film texts and filmgoers’ psyches.”⁵ Weiner introduces a different element into the debate: for him it is not just the presence of music but the particular style of the music—in this instance, the evocation of the music of Richard Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen*—that invests these scenes in *Gladiator* with what he calls “ideological importance.”⁶ His discussion beautifully exemplifies Robert Rosenstone’s recognition that “[an] important part of [a] film’s creative strategy for rendering the past comes in its use of the soundtrack . . . to render historical complexities not easily obtainable by the written word.”⁷ Taking Weiner’s

³ Marnie Hughes-Warrington, *History Goes to the Movies: Studying History on Film* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 157 and 166.

⁴ For a discussion of the *King Arthur* soundtrack as an attempt to recreate the success of *Gladiator*, see the unattributed “*Filmtracks* Editorial Review.” Accessed October 2012, http://www.filmtracks.com/titles/king_arthur.html.

⁵ Anahid Kassabian, *Hearing Film. Tracking Identifications in Contemporary Hollywood Film Music* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), 1.

⁶ Weiner, “Hollywood’s German Fantasy,” 186.

⁷ Robert A. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to our Idea of History* (Cambridge Mass and London: Harvard University Press, 1995), 149. He gives the single example, from the film *Walker*, of the use of joyous music as a counterpoint to images of death and

article as its point of departure, this essay aims to look more broadly at the soundtrack to *Gladiator* with a view to suggesting how, and in what ways, the music contributes to our engagement with the film. In so doing, I will look at elements that are not considered in Weiner's discussion: the role of Lisa Gerrard (Hans Zimmer's creative collaborator), the shaping influence of the film's genre on musical style and choices, and the fact that the soundtrack references iconic elements of the music of other composers than Wagner, most notably Gustav Holst. Since, it is claimed, music mediates in very particular ways between the film and its viewers, I will attempt to scrutinise the potential of Hughes-Warrington's statement that "Any search for the reality of historical films is thus a search for viewer responses."⁸

***Gladiator* facts and figures**

Gladiator is loosely based on events that occurred in the Roman empire in around AD 179–180. It has been described as a remake of the 1960s Hollywood film *The Fall of the Roman Empire*; Ridley Scott attested to the influence of two other films, *Spartacus* and *Ben Hur*.⁹ A nineteenth-century painting entitled *Pollice Verso (Thumbs Down)* (1872), by French artist Jean-Léon Gérôme, was also an important source of inspiration for the film's gladiatorial motif. As in Shakespeare's so-called historical plays, events and characters are freely interpreted and historically real characters exist alongside others who are inventions or composites. The result is a mixture of fact and fiction in which, as Martin M. Winkler notes, "the story takes precedence."¹⁰ Riding on the back of the film's success, and of its interest as the first historical epic set in Roman times to be produced in Hollywood since the mid 1960s, Winkler, a classical scholar, assembled a volume of essays devoted to various aspects of the film, with an emphasis on its status as historical. The conclusions of the writers, who included the film's historical consultant, were generally negative on this count: "Right from the opening scene, the film's historical inaccuracies are, well, legion."¹¹

destruction in war. A similar example occurs at the end of the opening battle sequence in *Gladiator* and will be discussed below.

⁸ Hughes-Warrington, *History Goes to the Movies*, 111.

⁹ http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Gladiator_%282000_film%29.

Accessed December 2012. An excellent synopsis of the plot may also be found on this site.

¹⁰ Martin M. Winkler, "Gladiator and the Traditions of Historical Cinema," in *Gladiator Film and History*, ed. Winkler, 17.

¹¹ Allen M. Ward, "Gladiator in Historical Perspective," in *Gladiator Film and History*, ed. Winkler, 31.

Hans Zimmer, Ridley Scott, and the proper length of the *gladius*

Aside from Weiner's eloquent but selective discussion, consideration of the music of *Gladiator* is situated at the opposite end of the discourse continuum from the academic critiques of the film as history: blog discussions of the Holst estate's lawsuit claim over alleged plagiarism of "Mars" from Holst's *The Planets*, an online review of the soundtrack CD and an online interview with Hans Zimmer hardly tip the scales. This despite the fact that the soundtrack album was a significant success for Universal and Decca, selling more than three million copies worldwide.¹² Zimmer received an Oscar nomination for the score, though in fact it was the result of a number of collaborations, most notably with Lisa Gerrard, but also with German film composer Klaus Badelt and *duduk* virtuoso Djivan Gasparyan.¹³ Though it did not win the Oscar, the soundtrack attracted a host of other nominations and awards,¹⁴ which has led to the claim that the soundtrack, along with those to *Titanic* and *Star Wars*, is "one of the most important in the modern age of soundtracks" in terms of mass recognition of film music as a genre.¹⁵

According to the author of the most substantial discussion of all the music of the film, an unsigned online *Filmtracks* "Editorial Review" of the soundtrack compact disc, "The overwhelming success of the score within the film (for most viewers), however, is what gave true life to the music, and *Gladiator* has since become recognised as being, at the very least, in tune with Ridley Scott's vision of the film." Weiner's article has suggested a very specifically focussed way in which this might be said to be true, but unfortunately, as he himself admits, it is likely that "Few of its viewers will have recognized the Wagnerian allusions, fewer still the resulting inter-textual connections, and probably not even all that many the references to Hitler and the Nazis, and therefore not to the Weimar Republic either, for that matter."¹⁶ I will come back to the question of recognition later, but for the moment it is sufficient to say that Weiner's reading of Scott's vision, however eloquent and persuasive, is probably not what the editorial reviewer had in mind. If the latter's assertion has any validity though—and the response of viewers as reflected in the sales of the soundtrack strongly suggest that it has some—might one not expect that those academic commentators who devoted so much energy to their discussion of Scott's vision of the film might have given some attention to the music? The film-maker's perspective on the importance of the music to his/her film is

¹² *Gladiator: Music from the Motion Picture* (CD), U.S. Decca, 467 094–2, 2000.

¹³ Gerrard's was the only significant thematic contribution. *Filmtracks* Editorial Review.

¹⁴ For a list of nominations and awards, see <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0172495/awards>, accessed December 2010. Nominated for an Oscar for best soundtrack, which it did not win, the *Gladiator* soundtrack has nonetheless won other prizes, including a Golden Globe and a Grammy.

¹⁵ *Filmtracks* Editorial Review.

¹⁶ Weiner, "Hollywood's German Fantasy," 204.

rarely considered, though Natalie Zemon Davis quotes director Gillo Pontecorvo's description of his "great moment" in filmmaking as the point "when you have nearly finished the cutting, and you begin to put the music and the visual together. In this moment, you see the object and the purpose come alive."¹⁷ A hint of something similar comes through the special features interview with *Gladiator* script-writer Bill Nicholson, who accedes that "music has an immense role to play in this film," and speaks of the fine cut of the film, though very good, "not quite working" before the music was added to it.¹⁸

There are three references to Hans Zimmer in Winkler's edited collection *Gladiator Film and History*. In the first essay in the book, Jon Solomon notes that, at a turning point in the opening battle, "Hans Zimmer's music modulates from the rousing 'battle waltz' in $\frac{3}{4}$ time to an adagio victory hymn."¹⁹ His single sentence hardly nuances the details nor the effect of this musical modulation, in which a fortissimo orchestral tutti dissolves into a passage in which foregrounded strings play a quiet major-key version of the opening minor "heroic" theme, still in $\frac{3}{4}$ time but a tone lower in pitch and slowed right down, with accents shifted and the melody stretched across bar lines so that metre is almost imperceptible. This transformational moment has been commented on elsewhere: the changes in the musical tempo, timbre and dynamic level accompany a visual and oral transition as the sounds of the battle fade and images dissolve. I am reminded at this point of the film of George R. R. Martin's description of hand-to-hand combat in his novel *A Clash of Kings*, his "battle fever": "[How] time seemed to blur and slow and even stop, [how] the past and the future vanished until there was nothing but the instant, . . . there is only the fight, the foe, this man and then the next and the next and the next . . . death is all around you." Though the fighting continues unabated, the on-screen carnage is distanced by the music, which produces "anempathy."²⁰ The term is from the French critic-musician Michel Chion, and refers to music that seems to exhibit conspicuous indifference to what is going on in the film's plot, creating a strong sense of the tragic out of an apparent incongruity of affect.²¹ Tempo, dynamic, falling phrases, and an end cadence on the minor sub-mediante are all features that problematise the notion of the

¹⁷ Natalie Zemon Davis, *Slaves on Screen: Film and Historical Vision* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 7 and n. 9.

¹⁸ See "Echoes in Eternity: Release and Impact," Special Features Disc, *Gladiator*. Tenth Anniversary Two-Disc Edition, Universal DVD 8276866-B [2010].

¹⁹ Solomon, "Gladiator from Screenplay to Screen," 6.

²⁰ According to James Buhler, Caryl Flinn and David Neumeier eds., *Music and Cinema* (Hanover NE and London: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 178. George R. R. Martin, *A Clash of Kings* (London: HarperVoyager, 2011), 773.

²¹ As cited in Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 24. The term originally referred to music that occurred within the dramatic scene and is adapted here.

“victory hymn” at this point in the film; even as Maximus announces victory: this is a battle in which, no matter who wins, men have died and brutally, as Maximus reflects when distancing himself from his soldiers’ post-battle carousing. More than a hymn to victory, this moment looks forward to Marcus Aurelius’s question, “what has it all been for?” The description “victory hymn” would better be reserved for the triumphant version of the “hero” theme that follows Maximus’s revelation at the conclusion of the great battle in the arena of the Coliseum.

Arthur Pomeroy, writing on “The Vision of a Fascist Rome in *Gladiator*,” has four sentences for the music in which he elides two distinct families of music within the film and blurs their affective functions:

Hans Zimmer provided the film with a stirring neo-Wagnerian score, as is most obvious during the initial fighting in Germany [*sic*]. This changes to a parodic waltz in the Battle of Carthage sequence. Yet the music associated with Maximus when he appears alone on screen separates him from the rest of the characters. He is given an exotic, vaguely Arab-Celtic motif by Lisa Gerrard, as befits the erstwhile Spanish landowner and head of a family, not the general and leader of the gladiators.²²

It is hard to know where to start with the carelessness of these comments. First of all, as Weiner has shown, the neo-Wagnerian elements of the score would seem to be deliberate and are certainly deliberately placed, and not in the opening battle sequence, which is most often noted for its resemblances to Holst’s “Mars.” The same musical elements appear in the Barbarian Horde [Battle of Carthage] sequence; though reordered, there is no significant “change,” parodic or otherwise. Both sequences subvert the waltz’s origins as a triple time accompaniment to social dancing, but such subversion is well within an established tradition of demonic waltzes—including Liszt’s four *Mephisto* waltzes and Ravel’s *La Valse*—which may or may not be parodic in intent. Finally, Pomeroy ignores the purpose of Lisa Gerrard’s feminising themes, which are not really all that exotic in content, though their sound is deliberately different from and a contrast to that of the orchestral cues. The vocalise heard at the start of the film, admittedly accompanying a shot of Maximus alone though it does not function as a leitmotiv for his character, is a melodic elaboration over a dominant pedal of the chords 5/3, 6/4, 5/3, and soon resolves into the main heroic theme as the Roman military camp comes into view. The other, heard over the closing titles, is clearly based around an ascending triadic major scale. The truly “exotic” colouring (at least in terms of the western symphonic tradition in which Zimmer’s music generally sits stylistically) comes from instrumentation, most notably the *duduk*, which is associated not with Maximus specifically but with the geographical

²² In *Gladiator Film and History*, ed. Winkler, 121.

setting in North Africa.²³ Several authors in this collection are at pains to reproach the film for its errors: its Latin language mistakes, its erroneous representation and use of gladiatorial weapons. Proximo should really be called Proximus, we are told, while the inscription over the gladiator school in Rome should really be “Ludus Magnus Gladiatorum (or Gladiatorius)” and not “Ludus Magnus Gladiatores.”²⁴ In the light of such exactness, what are we to make musically of Pomeroy’s notion of Arab-Celtic, and its alleged association with the Spanish landowning class?

The editor himself, Martin M. Winkler, leaves the reader in no doubt either of his wide-ranging cinematic expertise nor his low opinion of the score. In a list of the soundtrack’s derivative elements he notes,

The music score of *Gladiator*, composed by Hans Zimmer, carries overtones of Carl Orff’s *Carmina Burana* and is heavily influenced by orientalisng film scores ranging from Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *Medea* (1969) to Franc Roddam’s television *Cleopatra* (1999). This list can easily be expanded [it isn’t]. In its use of silly Latin, however, *Gladiator* is on its own.²⁵

In a book that is so particular about the major ancient sources (reproduced between pages 173 and 204), about the exact length of the *gladius*, or about who contributed what to the various drafts of the script, it is revealing and disheartening that so little care is taken to get the musical details correct. Lisa Gerrard does not get a mention here—except obliquely, for those who know where the “silly Latin” comes in the film. One assumes the reference to *Carmina Burana* is loosely inspired by Zimmer’s use of a choir, though this is in fact a Zimmer fingerprint, and Orff does not immediately come to mind, except fleetingly, and then at a stretch, in one short moment of the film. Again, the use of the choir is specific to certain scenes, as are the so-called “orientalisng” elements, presumably again linked to the *duduk*. Such a sweeping generalisation hardly does justice to different sound worlds of the film, nor does it testify to the writer’s musical discrimination.

Nit-picking is a speciality of bloggers—among whom one might well include this group of writers who, despite their assumption of superior expertise, share with the fans an emphasis on “verisimilitude of historical details and viewer point scoring,” a claim to

²³ Ian Lacey, “Hans Zimmer and the *Gladiator*: An interview with the film music composer,” *Film Music on the Web*, ed. Ian Lacey. <http://www.musicweb-international.com/film/Zimmer.html>, accessed 15 November 2010, 2.

²⁴ Ward, “*Gladiator* in Historical Perspective, 38–39.

²⁵ Winkler, “*Gladiator* and the Traditions of Historical Cinema,” in *Gladiator Film and History*, ed. Winkler, 28.

superior knowledge of detail than that displayed in the film.²⁶ Bloggers love to collect bloopers, continuity errors, visible crew and equipment and so forth, and display them on sites such as Movie Mistakes (www.moviemistakes.com). So far, bloggers have detected 172 “mistakes” in *Gladiator*.²⁷ Overwhelmingly these are continuity errors (including accidentally visible crew or equipment) but fans also pick up anachronisms or factual errors analogous to the kind of mistakes that engage the scholars, with their narrower focus on the film’s faithfulness to the classical record. Hughes-Warrington is inclined to regard these fan responses as significant, even as she categorises Movie Mistakes as “hardly representative of Internet users’ receptions of historical films.” Since comments are often accompanied by an invitation to the reader to “look again” or “look carefully,” she reads them as evidence that viewers are not totally absorbed in the filmic illusion, but “critically aware of how film art is and might be done.”²⁸ Interestingly, I did not find one comment about the music in the list of 172; comments on the music are found on different and dedicated sites in which historical elements of the film are not discussed. The music discussions are self-referencing. Does that mean that, like the scholar commentators, blogging fans do not see the music as part of the film’s historical enterprise? And if so, what is the music’s function?

“A very German intellect at work”: Musical Choices in *Gladiator*

The first thing to note about the soundtrack to *Gladiator* is that its composers have made no effort to reproduce the musical sounds of ancient Rome, presuming these could be known. Neither did Hans Zimmer make a conscious effort to replicate the soundtracks of earlier Roman epics.²⁹ The soundtrack is a contemporary reworking, in both style and semiotic encodings, of the music of the classical Hollywood symphonic soundtrack as it developed from the 1940s and 1950s.³⁰ From an historical point of view, then, the music is completely anachronistic—anachronistic in terms of the film’s content, but not of its genre as an historical epic. Drawing on ideas put forward by Timothy E. Scheurer,³¹ I would argue that it is genre, not historical content, that determines the musical approach to the underscoring of character, setting, spectacle and narrative development in

²⁶ Hughes-Warrington, *History Goes to the Movies*, 159.

²⁷ See also the list of “goofs” on imdb at <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0172495/trivia>. Accessed December 2012.

²⁸ Hughes-Warrington, *History Goes to the Movies*, 160.

²⁹ Lace, “Hans Zimmer and the *Gladiator*,” 2, 3.

³⁰ On the origins of Hollywood’s “symphonic” film music tradition, see David Cooper, *Bernard Herrmann’s “The Ghost and Mrs Muir”: A Film Score Guide* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 28.

³¹ Timothy E. Scheurer, *Music and Mythmaking in Film: Genre and the Role of the Composer* (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland & Company, Inc, 2008).

Gladiator and that genre is signalled by the use of the “heroic” French horn for the opening title sequence of the film.

Encoding the heroic

The film begins with an image of a hand moving over the top of long golden wheat in an open field. The music is similarly unspecific: atmospheric sounds on flute, *duduk* and guitar resolve into the above-mentioned low (dominant) pedal, above which we hear a woman’s voice humming wordlessly against foregrounded guitar figuration as we catch our first view of Maximus (who is, after all, a Spaniard). We do not know it yet, but image and music set up a link to the theme of death and the afterlife: visually through the link between wheat and the goddess Prosepine; sonically through the voice of Lisa Gerrard.³² As our view of the Roman encampment in Germania takes shape, however, we hear a noble Mahlerian melody on the French horn.

Scholars agree that the information conveyed by music in film is culturally encoded, with well-established associations and conventions deriving from the traditions of theatrical and orchestral practice over centuries, particularly those of the late nineteenth century on which the classical Hollywood symphonic score has drawn. So it is with this theme: instrumentation alone would be sufficient to signal the heroic topic of the movie, though in this case instrumental colour is reinforced by motivic content and key.³³ Signification and recognition are instantaneous.

The melody itself, though conventional to the genre, is not necessarily typical. The minor key, the inward-turning falling contour stand in contrast to those heroic themes, based on fanfares, that feature rising gestures and the open intervals of fifths and octaves and convey enthusiasm and energy (think, for example, of the main themes of John Williams’ scores for *Superman* or *Star Wars*). Maximus—and Rome—may be contemplating victory in Germania, but the theme hints at more complicated outcomes.

In considering the basic melodic shape of the opening horn theme, the “hero’s theme,” it is useful to revisit Derek Cooke’s lexicon of expressive equivalences—not with a view to becoming caught up in the more problematic aspects of his work, or a discussion of more contemporary theories of musical signification, but simply to observe how the theme employs decipherable codes that have been used in a similar way and in

³² The link with death is made concrete later in the film, when the same vocalise is used to accompany Maximus’s discovery of the hanging bodies of his wife and child.

³³ Zimmer’s over-reliance on the key of D minor in this and subsequent scores has become a point of contention for some commentators. See for example, the *Filmtracks* Editorial Review of the soundtrack to *The Dark Knight Rises* (written July 2012). Accessed January 2013, http://filmtracks.com/titles/dark_knight_rises.html. Fortuitously, for technical reasons, the theme is heard on screen in Eb minor. For those with perfect pitch, this tonality retains something of the character of Eb major as an heroic key, but sombre.

similar contexts by other composers.³⁴ The *Gladiator* theme enacts a sequence of gestures over sixteen bars (repeated with coda).³⁵ The first, a rising motive, takes the theme from 5-1-3 (minor) to a resting point on 2. A second, sequential phrase, repeats the same motive with a small variation but over a major triad on the mediant, taking the melody to the upper fifth. The sequential major version of the opening phrase to some extent ameliorates the theme's tragic ambience, suggesting momentarily a more resolute or affirmative affect, but relief is fleeting as the theme moves on to the fifth's neighbour tone, the minor sixth. From the upper fifth, the theme returns to the minor third and from there, after a series of prolongations around the third, to the tonic key note.

We may therefore characterise the melody as having the following dominant affective components: the rise from 5-1-3 (minor); a subsidiary sequential rise from 5-1-3 (major); an overall span from the fifth (lower octave) to the minor sixth (upper octave); the falling cadential phrase 5-(4)-3-2-1. Each phrase ends with an actual or implied falling second: predominantly the falling *pianto* motive historically associated with grief, and including, in the coda extension of the cadential tonic, the “anguished” chromatic inflection of the Phrygian flat supertonic (see Fig.1).³⁶



Figure 1

Of the opening melodic incipit, Cooke writes,

If the major version of 5-1-3 stresses joy pure and simple, by aiming at the major third, the minor version expresses pure tragedy, by aiming at the minor third.³⁷ And

³⁴ Kassabian argues that viewer competence is based on recognition of such codes, learned through experience. *Hearing Film*, 23.

³⁵ Discussion of the music in this essay also draws on published piano transcriptions by John Nicholas of selections from the score. See Milton Okun ed., *Gladiator: Music from the Motion Picture* (New York: Cherry Lane, 2000).

³⁶ Raymond Monelle, *The Musical Topic: Hunt, Military and Pastoral* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006), 4–5 (*pianto*); Cooke, *Language of Music*, 78 (Phrygian minor second). According to Cooke (p. 78), falling minor seconds have a different affect according to whether they occur: in relation to the fifth (context of flux) or the key note (context of finality). In the latter case, the affect of the minor second is felt more intensely as a chromatic intrusion.

³⁷ Cooke has earlier argued the case for his reading of the “strong contrast between the ‘natural’ pleasurable major third and the ‘unnatural’ painful minor third.” Cooke, *Language of*

to move upward *firmly and decisively* from the lower dominant, *via* the tonic, to the minor third gives a strong feeling of courage, in that it boldly acknowledges the existence of tragedy and springs onward (upward) into the thick of it, as composers have realized.³⁸

We may note other “heroic” uses of a similar motivic incipit: for example, in the second movement of Beethoven’s *Eroica* symphony, a funeral march and, reinforcing the Wagnerian connection, in several of the motives associated with Siegfried in the *Ring* cycle,³⁹ most notably the one linking Siegfried’s heroism to what Raymond Monelle calls the central motive of Death (see Figs. 2–4).⁴⁰

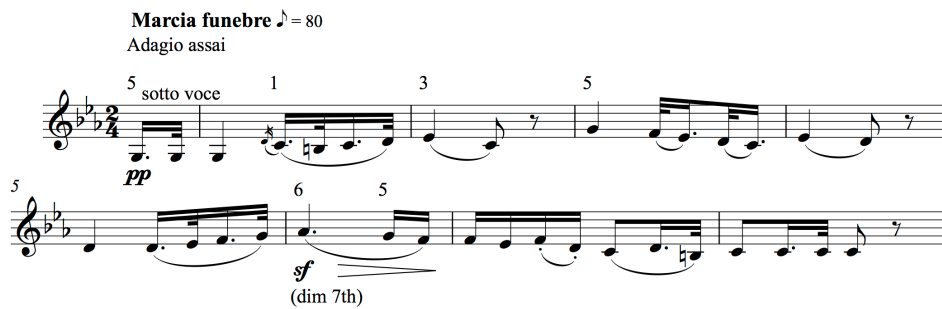


Figure 2. Beethoven Symphony No. 3 Op. 55 “Eroica,” second movement “Marcia funebre.”



Figure 3. Motive of Siegfried’s heroism, from Siegfried’s horn call in Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

Music, 60.

³⁸ Cooke, *Language of Music*, 125.

³⁹ See Cooke, *Language of Music*, 125 (example 56d) and 127 (commentary). See also Robert Donnington, *Wagner’s Ring and its Symbols: The Music and the Myth* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), 301 (motive 78, “Siegfried’s heroism as acceptance of his destiny”) and 303 (motive 83, “Relinquishment”).

⁴⁰ Raymond Monelle, *The Sense of Music: Semiotic Essays* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 78.

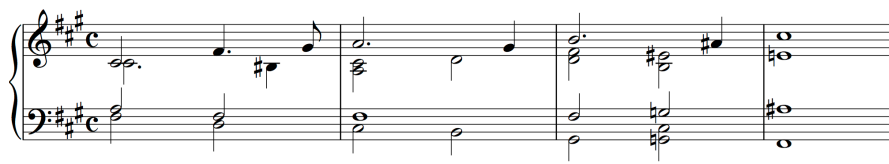


Figure 4. “Death” motive from Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

Death and heroism walk arm-in-arm through these examples but they are inflected differently by pitch register, accents, metre and tempo, harmonisation and instrumental colour, by what comes after and, most importantly perhaps in film, the dialogic relationship between music and image. All three themes are contained by the movement from the lower octave fifth to the upper octave minor sixth. The theme of Siegfried’s heroism, however, has a very different affect because of the way the minor sixth is harmonised: “normally the note of anguish, [the minor sixth is] here transfigured into joy by being harmonized with its own major triad.”⁴¹

Cooke writes of the descending 5-4-3-2-1 (minor) that it expresses an incoming painful emotion, in a context of finality [the return to the keynote], acceptance of, or yielding to grief, including “the despair connected with death.”⁴² A darkly shaded hero this, actively courageous but one whose courage is already overshadowed by premonitions of suffering and grief linked to loss, servitude and death. All this is communicated subliminally to the viewer in less than two minutes in the first statement of this, the hero’s theme, though its portent is reinforced by the recurrence of sections or variations of the theme at key points throughout the movie. In one such variation, the tragic potential of this heroic theme is realised unambiguously: the initial 5-1-3 (minor) is immediately followed by a shift of octave register that allows the phrase to descend through 4-3-2-1 in the lower octave. Change of octave (another Mahlerian feature) and a strong plagal emphasis convey acceptance and surrender, while the use of low register instruments imbues the theme with foreboding. As is so often the case in opera, the theme tells us things about the hero that he himself may not yet know.

***Gladiator* and the issue of intertextuality**

Zimmer himself has expressed great satisfaction with the opening battle as a piece of composition, calling attention to various elements: its deconstruction of the Viennese waltz, its thematic inventiveness and the intellectual trick of its tonal organization.⁴³

⁴¹ Cooke, *Language of Music*, 127.

⁴² Cooke, *Language of Music*, 133.

⁴³ Lace, “Hans Zimmer and the *Gladiator*”; see also “Hans Zimmer: Composing *Gladiator*,” Interview, Special Features Disc, *Gladiator* Deluxe Collector’s Edition, Universal DVD DU

Discussion of the battle scene music, the so-called “Gladiator Waltz,” has focused on the partial but unmistakable resemblance of one of its motifs to an idea in “Mars: Bringer of War” from Gustav Holst’s *The Planets* (composed 1914–1916). The Holst Foundation and the publisher J. Curwen & Son brought the action in 2006, timing which attracted some comment given that the movie was released in 2000. A spokesman for Curwen alleged that the matter was brought to the courts when attempts at a private settlement broke down, but it did not escape notice that the soundtrack had, in the meantime, gone platinum. Zimmer insisted that the similarity was accidental, but the charge of plagiarism gained credence through the lawsuit. All documents relating to the charge and the defense have disappeared from the Web, leaving fans and detractors to debate the issue on artistic grounds alone.

Like Strauss’s *Zarathustra*, “Mars” has certain iconic features which have found their way into a number of compositions besides *Gladiator*.⁴⁴ Some of these, like the generation of chromatic tension over a rhythmically insistent pedal-tone ostinato, or the use of the tritone, are rather more generic in character. But though the overall sound is quite dissimilar, the similarity in profile between the opening sections of the Battle waltz and “Mars” is striking. But it is with the parallel first inversion brass chords at about the two minute mark that the similarity becomes more overt, though the Zimmer passage takes its shape from the guitar transition from quadruple to triple metre and its motivic and harmonic components are entirely consistent with what has been set up before. It is also worth noticing the differences of detail: Holst’s major third triads generate different discords against the pedal ostinato (minor 9th, 11th, 13th, or flat supertonic) and the syncopations across the barlines have the effect of ironing out the irregularities of the 5/4 metre. Zimmer maintains the relentless forward impetus of his triple metre without syncopation, building volume and textural density through characteristic two-fold repetitions of 4-bar units.

The whole question of intertextuality is one that occupies scholars of film music since references of allusions to other composer’s music are a not uncommon feature of this genre of music. Kassabian states baldly that “all music refers to other music.”⁴⁵ Other

32097; UI-86387 (2000).

⁴⁴ Most examples come from rock music. King Crimson’s “The Devil’s Triangle” (1970) contains their version of “Mars.” See Andrew Keeling’s analysis at <http://www.songsouponsea.com/Keeling/Keeling-InTheWakeOfPoseidon.html>. Accessed December 2012. The rising tritone melodic incipit is instantly recognizable in Writing on the Wall’s “Shadow of Man” (1968); other examples employ Holst’s distinctive triplet percussion ostinato though in general the 5/4 metre is smoothed out. I am indebted to Stefan Firca for this insight. See Stefan Firca, “Circles and Circuses: Carnavalesque Tropes in the Late 1960s Musical and Cultural Imagination” (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 2011), 55–57.

⁴⁵ Kassabian, *Hearing Film*, 51.

scholars unpack the same proposition with varying degrees of sophistication, drawing on Julia Kristeva's often-quoted remark that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another."⁴⁶ Perhaps this feature is a vestige of the practices of the days of silent film, when musicians culled their accompanying selections from classical and light classical libraries. David Cooper has coined special terms to act in place of value-added concepts such as "pastiche," "allusion" or "influence." Cooper distinguishes two forms of intertextuality: "extra"- and "intraopus." Extraopus intertextuality exists "where an association has been established by another composer or creative artist, and brings with it not merely the sonic character of the quotation, but something of the original context."⁴⁷ Such is certainly the case with Zimmer's Wagner allusions, as Marc Weiner has persuasively shown, though the practice can elicit very different responses. The author of the *Filmtracks* editorial review of the two *Gladiator* soundtrack compact discs, an intelligent and thoughtful discussion, finds the "blatant use" of Wagner impossible to ignore. In the case of Maximus's self-identifying arena speech to Commodus, also discussed by Weiner, this writer critiques the reference to Siegfried's funeral march as "tarnishing the cue's momentous impact." Issues of taste clearly weigh into such comments and are difficult to arbitrate. The transformational effect of this particular music, however, can be clearly appreciated by a comparison of the same speech, with a different accompaniment, on the *More Music from the Motion Picture Gladiator* compact disc.⁴⁸ There is anecdotal evidence that Russell Crowe at first refused to speak these lines.⁴⁹ He is reported to have said that with his abilities as an actor, he could make "even garbage sound good." However, I would endorse Weiner's view that the music, indeed this particular music, lifts the speech from the mundane to the mythic. And here is the clue to the true character of the film: for this is myth, not history and "In [myth] history evaporates."⁵⁰

There are significant differences between the Wagner references and the evocations of Holst. The Wagner references are calculated, conscious and instantly recognisable, suggested by and reinforcing a complex of references evoked by visual imagery.⁵¹ The

⁴⁶ Cited in Cooper, *Bernard Herrmann's "The Ghost and Mrs Muir"*, 27.

⁴⁷ Cooper, *Bernard Herrmann's "The Ghost and Mrs Muir"*, 27.

⁴⁸ Decca 013 192-2, Track 4 "Homecoming," and especially from c.1'18" to 2'43." As a compendium of preliminary, alternative and abandoned music cues, the whole CD is a fruitful comparative source.

⁴⁹ See William Robert Rich, "Gladiator," at <http://screenplayhowto.com/screenplay-analysis/gladiator-screenplay-analysis/> (refused to speak lines); Bill Nicholson's speech to the International Screenwriters' Festival at <http://www.screenwritersfestival.com/news.php?id=3> (great actor claim). Both accessed December 2012.

⁵⁰ Scheurer, *Music and Mythmaking in Film*, 15, citing Roland Barthes.

⁵¹ In the case of the entry into Rome, the visual reference is to Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of*

Holst is allegedly unconscious, probably not deliberate and even if recognisable, subsumed into a very different sonic context. It is an open question whether Zimmer's referencing of Holst at this point can be seen to carry the same weight of significance as his later referencing of Wagner, other than the obvious association of Mars as the Roman god of war and, astrologically, with masculine attributes. Zimmer's "Gladiator Waltz" is not the same as Holst's "Mars." Though both pieces share stylistic features that instantly evoke the military topic, they are, in the end, very different pieces of music, but subversion is a musical outcome common to both. Raymond Monelle writes that Holst's 5/4 metre "parodies the march [a characteristic signifier of the military topic] by making it unmarchable."⁵² Zimmer's demonic waltz entails a double dislocation of the conventional idea of battle music and of the waltz as a polite genre of social dancing.⁵³

The Waltz displays characteristic features of Zimmer's compositional practice and musical style—Cooper's intraopus intertextuality. It is put together from the repetition, combination, superimposition and accumulation of relatively small motivic elements, none complex in themselves. Zimmer builds tension and dynamic through this layered approach to his handling of motifs, against the background of which, in this score, more identifiable themes emerge. Zimmer's Waltz harnesses images of disruptiveness: the structural use of the tritone (an interval famous as representing the devil in music), the demonic waltz tempo, the discords generated by the clashes between fixed ostinatos and moving parts, the dark colours of low strings and brass, the pounding percussion. It also contains fingerprint melodic elements that have been likened to other of his scores: the horn fanfare that accompanies the Roman horseback charge against the barbarians, for example, has been rightly compared to Zimmer's score for *Pirates of the Caribbean*. (Again, this is not to everyone's taste.)

There is no romantic second theme in this score, as there is no on-screen romantic interest, though love is one of the central themes. The redemptive female, as represented by Lisa Gerrard's vocals, is inextricably linked to death (another Wagnerian connection perhaps?). The film ends, like the battle scene, with a (major key) Gerrard vocalise. As the "words" are non-lexical vocables, one can only speculate as to its intended import. Again, however, this is no "victory hymn," though it does seem to signify release into death, as the last appearance of Zimmer's triple-time "Earth" variation of the hero theme

the Will, which leads Weiner's discussion towards the Third Reich and its leaders' passion for Wagnerian music and mythology.

⁵² Monelle, *The Musical Topic*, 180.

⁵³ In this context it is intriguing to consider the nineteenth-century link between the waltz, seen as exemplifying sexual abandon and lust, and the Dance of Death. See Robert Samuels, *Mahler's Sixth Symphony: A Study in Musical Semiotics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 119 ff.

resolves the movie in peace. (Is it just an accident of phonetics that the second and perhaps the only “real” word of the text is “shalom” [“Peace” in Hebrew]?)

“An old-fashioned story, rather well illustrated.” Ridley Scott.

It is probably impossible to reconcile the incommensurable opinions that collect around *Gladiator*. Clearly flagged by its soundtrack as belonging to the genre of historical epic, its combination of partly historical, invented and a-historical elements make it unacceptable to most historians, though even some concede that it captures some general mythic truths about ancient Rome.⁵⁴ Natalie Zemon Davis is prepared to view films such as *Gladiator*, films with “a fictional plot but with a historical setting intrinsic to the action” as “historical,” but Hughes-Warrington cautions that Davis’s is a minority view.⁵⁵ Hughes-Warrington herself advances the notion that “What makes a film historical . . . is its location in a timebound network of discussions . . . on what history is and what it is for.”⁵⁶ A film may or may not be historical, but a film is not conventional history. And the most unconventional element of this film from a historical point of view is its soundtrack. Logic demands, therefore, that any discussion of the film should include the same careful consideration of the music score as of the other components. Indeed the score points towards a different reading of this film, not as history, but as myth.

Musically, the score of *Gladiator* is deeply rooted in convention though not always conventional. And yet even here opinions polarise. The overt Wagner references that are so imaginatively suggestive to Marc Weiner are blatantly obtrusive to the *Filmtracks* reviewer. For the latter, the Holst referencing in the great battle sequence becomes even more problematic when reproduced in the Barbarian Horde segment. The casual dismissals of the score as “orientalising,” “Orffian,” neo-Wagnerian, or “vaguely Arab-Celtic” are uninformative and unspecific, even though specificity is an espoused value of the historical critique.

In the end, however, this is Hollywood. Spectacle and sound, digital effects and computer enhancements all work towards a single end: “to encourage viewers to see the temporality of the diegesis as artifice.”⁵⁷

⁵⁴ T. P. Wiseman, “*Gladiator* and the Myths of Rome,” *History Today* 55.4 (April 2005): 43.

⁵⁵ Hughes-Warrington, *History Goes to the Movies*, 26, citing Natalie Zemon Davis, ““Any Resemblance to Persons Living or Dead”: Film and the Challenge of Authenticity,” *The Yale Review* 86 (1986–87): 457–82.

⁵⁶ Hughes-Warrington, *History Goes to the Movies*, 191.

⁵⁷ Hughes-Warrington, *History Goes to the Movies*, 74.