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Carter Burwell's Contribution to "the Coen touch"

Julie Assouly

"We have an informal, maybe even slightly formal agreement, that we're going to work with each other until we die... I'd be happy to do their films the rest of my life."
Carter Burwell (1987)

Introduction: the "Coen Touch"

- 1 Carter Burwell started his career in the film industry composing the music for the Coen brothers' first feature film, *Blood Simple*, in 1984, which also marked the beginning of their almost uninterrupted collaboration—*Inside Llewyn Davis* (2013) to this date is the only exception. Burwell has not only worked with the Coens on virtually all their films, but he fully participates in their creative efforts. A Harvard graduate in Fine Arts, he ended up in the movie business after the Coens' sound editor, Skip Lievsay, saw him perform in a club and asked him to collaborate on the brothers' independent debut (Robson 19). The result was above all expectations. The young directors had found a composer who could respond to their peculiar neo-noir sensitivity without being too overwhelming:

The score is downbeat and minimal, based around a simple, stark piano figure that Burwell twists and repeats endlessly. It's one of his subtler scores: while it undoubtedly makes a contribution to the tone of the film, you can almost forget it's there at times. (Robson 19)

- 2 Burwell managed to create a remarkably eerie but discrete score that somehow resonated both with the Coens' peculiar style and their equally peculiar character. It was the beginning of more than a professional collaboration; the three artists truly understood each other to such an extent that, an NPR journalist (2016) said, "You might call composer Carter Burwell the third Coen brother."
- 3 If critics like Roger Ebert and Paul A. Woods used the phrase "Coen touch" to refer to the Coens' distinctive style (based on dark humor and a quirky tone) and were then

followed by many film critics,¹ none of them defined what it means precisely. Dwelling on Kristin Thompson's similar remark regarding "the Lubitsch touch" that she judged "vague and not very helpful" (127), I will endeavor to provide my definition of the Coen touch for the purpose of this article. Going through the various uses of the phrase, Thompson underlines the major components of the "Lubitsch touch" that journalists use to describe "a moment of sophisticated sexual innuendo" (127). But there seems to be more to it. In the 1920s, critics associated it with "a type of sophistication not thought typical of American cinema" (128), probably deriving from "the Continental touch" that the German director was credited with and which Andrew Sarris defined as a "counterpoint between sadness and gaiety" (Sarris 1968, 66). The definition was then related to Lubitsch's aesthetics—in Peter Bogdanovich's words, "a style so recognizably his own" (128), "a humorously oblique and sophisticated directorial device" (128) and his "oblique dialog" (127). The Lubitsch touch also involved the way he could inject touches of his continental style into his Hollywood films, which was even more remarkable after the enforcement of the Hays Code as it enabled him to bypass censorship. For the purposes of the present article, I do not relate the Coen touch so much to an ability to bypass the studio's formatting power—although even their studio comedies (*The Hudsucker Proxy* [1994], *Intolerable Cruelty* [2003]...) remain peculiarly their own—as to their use of dark, quirky humor that, like Lubitsch's, is not typically American, and that I relate to their Jewish cultural background (Assouly 2015); the latter would be the equivalent of the "Continental touch" that made Lubitsch's Hollywood comedies so recognizable. I will argue, in contradiction with Roger Ebert who denied the presence of a Coen touch in *No Country for Old Men* (2007), that every single one of the Coens' films, regardless of their genre, bears this specific touch of quirky, deadpan, dark Jewish humor and touches of unexpected extreme violence that make them "recognizable as their own" (for instance, the mariachi band serenading a dying Moss in *No Country for Old Men*), also based on the parody of American regionalisms. I would also contend that, beyond their visual style (the shaky handheld camera of their first films, the very low shots on boots, the bird's eye views), it is the music composed by Carter Burwell that greatly contributes to this Coen touch.

- 4 By either creating unexpectedly dark scores that bypass classical generic conventions or, on the contrary, overplaying those conventions, Burwell's music undeniably plays an important part in making the brothers' films instantly recognizable. Considering their filmography as a whole, I will try to show how the composer's work impacts each film and fulfills functions that go beyond the merely illustrative. To try and grasp the importance of this effect, I shall consider three categories of films following Stefano Baschiera's threefold classification that I have slightly modified. Like him, I consider the "scored" films first, but then I chose to include to this category what he calls the "sound films" that emphasize silence and noise "in order to create a soundtrack aurally less dependent on music" (144) as in *Barton Fink* and *No Country for Old Men*. I have chosen to adopt a different classification because, like M. McDowell and the Coens themselves, I believe that silence and amplified noises are a distinctive feature of all their films. Baschiera's third category, "tracked films," corresponds to the "musical films" mentioned in the second part of this article that I have chosen to relate to the promotion of an American musical heritage. Finally, I end on a "hybrid" category in order to acknowledge, like Baschiera, that "on some occasions the categories overlap" (144).

Films with Prevailing Original Scores (and Adaptations of American Rarities)

Enjoying the silence

- 5 The Coens' eighteen films can be sorted into three categories. The first includes films governed by original music or preexisting traditional tunes arranged by Burwell, which is in fact the case of a majority of films: *Raising Arizona* (1987), *Miller's Crossing* (1990), *Barton Fink* (1991), *The Hudsucker Proxy*, *Fargo* (1996), *The Man Who Wasn't There* (2001), *No Country for Old Men*, *Burn After Reading* (2008), *True Grit* (2010), *Hail, Caesar!* (2016) and the *Ballad of Buster Scruggs* (2018). Yet in many of these films, silence and sound effects are often foregrounded at the expense of the music. These films are either genre films (mainly film noir and Westerns) that lay stress on contemplation, mystery, violence and eeriness, or comedies (slapstick and screwball) displaying very intense musical moments and surprisingly quiet ones. Joel Coen admitted in an interview:

If you look at the number of minutes of music in our movies, compared to most movies, we tend to use underscoring very little. It's a very short number of minutes of music, for the most part. Most movies are over-scored, I think, so the use of music in our movies is sometimes a little bit more minimal than you might expect.²

- 6 To the Coens and Burwell (Lim, NY Times 2008), the use and abuse of underscore has crippled a lot of Hollywood films since the classical era,³ to such an extent that "under-scored" films like *Fargo*, *The Man Who Wasn't There*, *No Country for Old Men* and even a comedy like *Hail, Caesar!*, may have been unsettling for mainstream audiences. I will thus use "under-score" as opposed to "underscore" to refer to films whose score is less conspicuous than in most films. It is also worth noting that overamplified sounds emphasize the discretion of the score.
- 7 For example, in *Barton Fink*, a combination of amplified sounds and eerie music "sparser and less melody-driven" (Robson 100) is used to convey the character's state of mind and personality more accurately, it seems, than a "classic" Hollywood drama score would. In fact, Burwell's scores are as peculiar as the Coens' protagonists. The hammering of a vintage typewriter, the noise of sticky wallpaper slowly peeling down a wall, the humming of an invisible mosquito, or the loud creaking of rusty bedsprings are amplified to express Barton's depressing environment, which is also a reflection of his own state of mind.⁴ A simple piano cue, coupled with such sound effects, signifies the main subject of the movie, his writer's block. *Barton Fink*'s score not only illustrates what is shown on screen, it truly is a component of the protagonist's characterization. In a way, the music is non-normative (it challenges the norm) because it is meant to help model an uncanny hero. Halfway between a comedy and a drama, the film includes darkly comic and dramatic elements and even borrows codes from the Gothic genre. The music participates in creating a fantastic atmosphere because it does not simply emphasize or amplify the feelings of the character, but creates doubt. It does not draw the audience towards one direction, the way a lot of Hollywood movie-scores do; instead, it reflects the blank page and the mental process of the character who is wondering how he ended up in such an absurd situation: the music expresses what the writer calls "the life of the mind," that is the very obsession that triggers his nervous breakdown.

- 8 Likewise, choosing to under-score *No Country for Old Men* (there are 16 minutes of music in the two hours and two minutes' film, including the end credits) participates in the tension-building process in a more efficient way any regular thriller score would. Skip Lievsay who was the sound editor on *No Country for Old Men* explains:
- Suspense thrillers in Hollywood are traditionally done almost entirely with music. [...] The idea here was to remove the safety net that lets the audience feel like they know what's going to happen. I think it makes the movie much more suspenseful. You're not guided by the score and so you lose that comfort zone. (Lim, NY Times 2008)
- 9 For instance, in the memorable coin-toss sequence, the amplified noise of Chigurh's plastic candy-wrapper unfolding on the counter in front of a puzzled shopkeeper is heard in a deadly silence [0:22:33]. Here, the absence of music greatly heightens the tension created by the killer's aura and sadistic attitude, increasing the already visible puzzlement on the man's face. In fact, this strategy may well have been popularized by Sergio Leone's spaghetti westerns. Although one may rightfully connect these films to the very emphatic music of Ennio Morricone, over-amplified sounds in a silent background enabled Leone to express situational irony or black humor more strikingly than music. A good example is the opening sequence of *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968) at the train station, when silence is only disturbed by the chirping of a canary in its cage, drops of water tapping on the brim of a hat, a door squeaking or the flapping of a coat in the wind, building up a palpable tension (Frayling 165). The loud, world-famous cue by Morricone only intervenes as the duel starts, to signify the presence of Charles Bronson, aka Harmonica, incidentally defined by the instrument he carries with him everywhere. Morricone's talent, replicated by Burwell, is also his faculty to gauge how conspicuous his score should be, depending on the type of film, the characters and the situations. For *No Country for Old Men*, Burwell had first suggested that the music "should emanate from the landscape" and tried "abstract musical sounds, just the harmonics of violin or some percussive sounds," but he came to the conclusion that it "destroyed the tension that came from the quiet" (Lim, 2008), which resulted in one of the most minimalist musical scores in cinema history.

Exaggerating genre conventions

- 10 Yet the Coens sometimes favor exaggeration over discretion, mocking genre conventions; this is usually the case in their comedies. Their second feature film, *Raising Arizona*'s small budget (\$6 million) partly accounts for its use of "stock music."⁵ Its opening credits start after a fourteen-minute-long prologue during which the hero explains his situation offscreen. A banjo tune can be heard in the background, "The opening theme" of Pete Seeger's "Goofing-Off Suite" (1955). Yodels (performed by John R. Crowder), taken from another tune of the same album entitled "Russian Themes with Yodel," resonate at a climactic moment, when the title appears on screen. This bold music choice is a foretaste of Burwell and the Coens' interest in American folk music; it participates in the directors' taste for American regionalisms and foreshadows their musical films and their collaboration with folk music producer and artist, T-Bone Burnett. In a very well-documented article, Jeff Smith explains that Seeger's "Goofing-Off Suite" was already a take on "Irvin Berlin, Bach, Beethoven and many others" (as can be read on the album cover): "The suite combines original music composed by Seeger with banjo renditions of folk songs, themes from the canon of Western classical

music, and Tin Pan Alley tunes such as Irving Berlin's 'Blue Skies'" (Smith 136). In the same article, we learn that Seeger was a major player on the folk music scene of the 1950s-60s and that his passion for this type of music was aroused while working at the Archive of American Folk Song in the Library of Congress. After that, he assisted Alan Lomax, who is often mentioned by the Coens as a reference; they even paid tribute to his colossal archive work by using his recording of Po' Lazarus in the opening sequence of *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000).

- 11 What might first have appealed to the Brothers and Burwell is the oddball quality of Seeger's album, which was really in tune with the unconventional caper comedy that *Raising Arizona* turned out to be, unlike any other contemporary Hollywood comedy.⁶ The theme of the song is introduced at the beginning of the film by Hi's Woody Woodpecker tattoo, and evoked through a possible parallel between Hi/the lone biker and Roadrunner/Coyote. Secondly, Seeger was actually doing what the Coens have endeavored to do throughout their career: Americanizing highbrow (mainly European) culture (e.g. Beethoven) and rehabilitating American folklores (e.g. promoting typically American music and instruments).
- 12 *Raising Arizona* tells the story of a lousy convenience store robber, Hi (Nicolas Cage) who goes back to criminal life after marrying a cop, Ed (Holly Hunter), who happens to be sterile. Wanting to start a family anyway, they abduct one of the "Arizona quints" from a well-off family; from then on, Hi cannot control his old bandit habits and keeps on robbing shops. In one of the film's most hilarious sequences [0:44:05], he is shown putting a pair of nylon tights on his head and threatening a young shopkeeper with a gun to steal a pack of diapers (although he can afford to buy it). Meanwhile, his infuriated wife, waiting for him with their baby in the car, decides to leave him behind to teach him a lesson. The six-minute-long chase scene that follows, paced by the unexpected juxtaposition of Pete Seeger's banjo and yodels and a 1980s "supermarket-tune"⁷ played on a synthesizer, creates a contrast that amplifies the comic effect. The supermarket music is supposed to be diegetic, but close attention reveals that, it has been adapted to evoke Hi's imminent failure; indeed, it is very similar to the music of his nightmares involving the "Biker of the Apocalypse." Set in a state (Arizona) in which many Western movies are set, the sequence plays with the conventions of this genre, constantly alluded to through the typical yodels (recalling the tradition of the singing cowboys like Roy Rogers⁸) and the conventions of the heist film (as Hi never takes his nylon tights off his head). The yodels and banjo evoke Frontier justice, the chase being a contemporary evocation of the "wild wild West." Indeed, the sequence starts with the 1980s music, and the yodels and banjo tune interrupts it the very moment a teenage shopkeeper starts shooting at Hi Western-style, quickly joined in that effort by a policeman.
- 13 Of course, the comic effect relies first and foremost on the disproportionate rage ignited by the petty theft. After running away madly, Hi bumps into a car and the music stops as the driver says: "You've got panties on your head son?" Hi threatens him with his gun, and the chase resumes along with the banjo/yodels combination quickly reinforced by the panicking drivers' screams. Then Hi is literally ejected out of the car and the chase continues on foot. The policeman is now running after him in a quiet, suburban neighborhood. Once again, the music stops completely when Hi is trapped in an enclosed garden. In the darkness, he fails to see a huge Doberman running towards him, until the last moment when the ferocious creature is stopped by its leash. The

yodels and banjo resume, but this time they do not evoke the Westerns or heist film, but a slapstick chase scene. Hi escapes, but is now followed by a pack of dogs and the policeman entering a bigger supermarket. Though using the same score, the chase now recalls Chaplin, the Marx brothers or even Benny Hill's burlesque chase sequences. Repeating the same pattern, the 1980s music is heard in the second supermarket, yet soon interrupted by the banjo tune that resumes when Hi is, once more, shot at by the policeman. The hysterical screams of women seem to herald the return of the yodels, while the arrival of the pack of crazy dogs marks the return of the burlesque. The butcher is the next to take a shot at Hi; a close-up of his smoking riffle reaffirms a connection to the Western, clearly evoking the gun-crazy reputation of the Arizonians. The chase ends when Hi exits the supermarket through the backdoor, and the noise of Ed's car braking puts an end to the music.

- 14 In this very long chase scene, Burwell's music arrangements seem to serve several purposes. First, they exploit the full potential of Seeger's original composition, as both comic and Western music. Second, the comic effect is built on a contrast between intense musical moments and silence that pace the whole sequence (the madcap character of the chase is also due to the constant screams of the secondary characters, which either intensify or herald the yodels). Finally, the music echoes the complete freedom the two brothers had been yearning for since the beginning of their young career, refusing to bend to Hollywood conventions and renewing the comic genre through hybridization.
- 15 Later in the same film, the fight sequence between Hi and the Snoats brothers, Gale (John Goodman) and Evelle (William Forsythe) shows how the music reinforces the film's generic hybridity, and at the same time mocks, and ultimately debunks, Hollywood conventions [1:03:55]. The sequence opens after Hi has received threats of being sued by Glen, the husband of Ed's friend Dot (Frances McDormand), whom he had punched after his proposal to "wife swap." As Glen is driving away, we hear an eagle chirping and Hi glances at the sky before returning inside his trailer. The bird's noise and Hi's quick worried glance, both tapping on Western conventions, foreshadow the face-off to come between Hi and Gale, which is staged as a mock-saloon fistfight. Indeed, the trailer is so exiguous that the comic effect mostly relies on the way the two men do not have enough room to fight "properly" and end up destroying the whole place. As in many action scenes in the Coens' films, the music is almost nonexistent; only steel drums and percussions can be heard occasionally, and they are mostly covered by the noise of furniture being broken, punches, cracking bones and loud screams, which makes the action both funnier and scarier. The music thus tends to discredit a fight that nonetheless seems choreographed. After punching each other, Gale finally manages to throw Hi through a thin wall. As he remains unconscious on the floor, action film music suddenly breaks the silence, and Gale imitates a *Rambo* posture magnified by a low-angle shot: he is holding a piece of wooden plank between his teeth, the way Stallone would carry his famous knife. The music stops with the fight as Hi is being tied up to a chair and the brothers kidnap his baby. In this sequence, Western and action film codes are caricatured and used to make fun of 1980s Hollywood cinema. This type of statement, also conveyed by the score, is typical of the Coens' first films, which seemed to delight in playing with film conventions and audience expectations.
- 16 Quite surprisingly, the brothers followed Sam Raimi's⁹ advice and chose to jeopardize their creative independence by accepting to make a big-budget comedy for Warner

Bros., *The Hudsucker Proxy*, which unlike *Raising Arizona*, was a critical and box-office failure. Closer to a pastiche than any of their other films, its plot is almost a remake of Frank Capra's *Mr Deeds goes to Town* (1936). Although the film was, in Todd McCarthy's words, "technically stunning," he considered it as a take on "old Hollywood pictures" that lacked both "emotion and humanity" (*Variety* 1994). Burwell chose famous Russian composer Aram Khachaturian's "Spartacus Ballet suite" (1955), performed by an orchestra for the main theme, and the very famous "Sabre dance" for the iconic hula hoop sequence [1:17:00]. This choice seemed very logical considering they were making a classical Hollywood pastiche. Although Burwell's choice corresponded to the nature of the project, the contrast with *Raising Arizona*'s yodels and banjo was very sharp, and the project itself was not really in keeping with the way the brothers had made their films so far, which might explain its failure. Incidentally, artistic integrity is a subject that has haunted the brothers from the start (it is the theme of *Barton Fink*, *Inside Llewyn Davis* and to a lesser extent *Hail, Caesar!*). *The Hudsucker Proxy*, though it has since been rehabilitated¹⁰ due to the Coens' immense success, lacked something essential: the complete freedom of spirit that had characterized their first four films due to blockbuster producer Joel Silver's overwhelming involvement. If it obviously bears the "Coen touch" (the suicide and hula hoop sequences obviously come to mind), it also bears the seal of a Hollywood major and lacks the "homemade" quality of their previous films (Assouly 448). Quite logically, this remark also applies to Burwell's score; though original and perfectly mastered, it is edited in a very classical way, avoiding counterpoints (contrasts creating irony) and unexpected changes of pace, thus completely contradicting his work on *Raising Arizona*. *The Hudsucker Proxy* remained a traumatic experience for the two directors, which explains a will to return to a more intimate project in 1996: *Fargo*.

Foregrounding a Multicultural US

- 17 For *Fargo*, Burwell composed a similar melancholy theme as *Barton Fink*'s, but adopted a more baroque style replacing piano with a violin. As both a crime story and a dark comedy, "the movie," in Burwell's words, was "to be bombastic enough that you might just believe it was a real police story and yet, also through bombast, maybe make you laugh just a little bit" (Robson 155). Written for a harp and a solo violin, the score at the beginning of the opening credits is inspired by Scandinavian traditional music that relates to the cultural background of the Dakota/Minnesota area, with its Swedish and Norwegian immigration. The music then builds up in the second half of the credits, and the harp and violin are joined by a full orchestra with percussions.
- 18 The score of *Miller's Crossing* (1990) was similarly based on an Irish traditional tune (recommended by lead actor Gabriel Byrne who is Irish), "Come back to Erin," adapted by Burwell and played by an orchestra. The Coens also chose one of the most famous Irish traditional songs, "Danny Boy," recorded by Irish tenor Frank Patterson specifically for the most violent sequence of the film, when Italian gangsters try to kill the Irish mob boss, Leo (Albert Finney): "the new version was paced to fit the finished scene as part of the score, rather than added in as a piece of music, and Patterson was able to watch the action and match the rhythm of his vocal to the unfolding violence" (Robson 79). The mastery of the sequence would deserve several descriptive pages that can be found in Jeff Smith's article. I would like, however, to emphasize how, in this film more than in their previous two, the ironic counterpoint resulting from the

unnatural association of what the Coens called "the 'Thompson jitterbug,' which refers to the horrific 'dance' performed by stuntman Monte Starr as his character's body is riddled with bullets" (Smith 144), and the very refined performance of the Irish tenor, has become the brothers' specialty and an essential element of the "Coen touch," which some critics have deemed "grotesque" but which I have described as pure black humor (311). In fact, the brothers and their composer simply pushed the limits of classical trope of the gangster film (the assassination of a rival by a group of heavily armed henchmen), but in doing so, they paved the way for other directors such as Quentin Tarantino, whose torture sequence on "Stuck in the Middle with You" (Stealers Wheel, 1972) in *Reservoir Dogs* (1991), released a year after the Coens' neo-gangster film, might be one of the most striking examples. Let us not forget, however, that Leone (again) probably pioneered this type of counterpoint in *The Good the Bad and the Ugly* (1966), in the scene when Sentenza (Lee Van Cleef) tortures Tuco (Eli Wallach) while an orchestra is playing a melancholy tune, "The Story of the Soldier." Finally, Burwell himself compares music to a narrator: "In *Miller's Crossing*, the music believes the character played by Gabriel Byrne is just a naïve and dreamy Irishman whereas he is in fact a cold-blooded, scheming gangster"¹¹ (quoted in Hildenbrand 70). The music is, therefore, no longer a background motif evoking the hero's Irishness; in effect, the score as a whole serves as a counterpoint that underlies the plot itself.

- 19 Incidentally, Burwell says the same of *Fargo*: "As the characters are written in the script, the people have a desperate cheerfulness that comes out in the worst situations. But there is loneliness and despair behind a lot of that cheerfulness. They live in a dark, cold climate, so hopefully that undercurrent to their cheerfulness can be played with the music" (Brophy 133). The difficulty, according to the composer, was to accommodate the generic complexity of a film that is supposed to be a thriller based on a true story but involving buffoon killers and regionalisms that undermine the drama to foreground comedy. His solution was to compose a music "that takes itself seriously" (Brophy 133), a Scandinavian folk melody played, notably, on a harp and a traditional fiddler called a hardanger (Brophy 134). The result was a score that perpetuated uncertainty regarding the film's tone and puzzled audience and critics, unable to decide whether it belonged to the crime genre or whether it was a comedy ultimately, deciding on the label "crime-comedy" (Leitch 2002, 289; Luhr, 2004, 16).
- 20 Considering this first category of score, it seems that defining what is an "original score" in the Coens' films can prove very tricky, especially for non-connoisseurs of American folk and traditional music. Much of the "original" scores are actually based on old American standards that only music specialists could possibly recognize (for instance, Seeger in *Raising Arizona*). Thus, Burwell's talent is also to exhume rarities and adapt them to serve the Coens' films, earning him (and Burnett) the title "music archivists" (Smith 149). In this respect, the Burwell-Coen collaboration pursues a common goal which is the promotion, and somehow rehabilitation, of American folklores. The Coens have made this clear throughout their career by emphasizing American regionalisms through accents, landscapes, traditions and art, often with a touch of dark humor. But music remains their favorite medium to achieve this goal, as demonstrated in their musical films.

The Musical Films: Promoting an American Musical Heritage¹²

The Big Lebowski: a "Musical Cult Comedy"

- 21 Although the previous paragraph demonstrated that even in films where original scores prevail, American popular music is extensively used by Burwell, *The Big Lebowski* (1998) and the so-called "musical films" that followed, go even further by putting music at the center of the film and integrating it into the diegesis. In *The Big Lebowski*, almost every character has a specific tune. Burwell explains in a 1998 interview that "this character, Jeff Lebowski, kind of scores his own life with his 8-track collection" (Robson 182). In this respect, the Coens' use of old standards to structure the narration inaugurates a series of films that includes, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000), *The Ladykillers* (2002) and *Inside Llewyn Davis* (2013). Quite logically though, Burwell played a lesser role in the making of these soundtracks, which were mainly assembled by T-Bone Burnett:

[...] a talented musician and arranger, [who] was a guitarist with Dylan's Rolling Thunder Revue. He first worked with the Coens on *The Big Lebowski*, advising on the popular music that comes so much to the fore in that film, helping to describe the movements and drives of each of the main characters through the tracks that are played while they are onscreen. He also brought his considerable musical skills and experience to bear on the likes of *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* and *Inside Llewyn Davis*. (Baker 2014)

- 22 Released in 1998, *The Big Lebowski* marks a turning point in the Coens' use of pop music in their films. What they did in this film was compared to Tarantino's work in terms of compilation scoring on *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) and *Pulp Fiction* (1994), that is to say relying almost exclusively on retro pop songs (Robson 182). Burwell collaborated with T-Bone Burnett to base his soundtrack on pop songs, make the arrangements, and he composed a pastiche of an electro-pop song by German 1970s band Kraftwerk, entitled "Autobahn." Bob Dylan's "The Man in Me" was chosen to be the theme song. The Coens selected the tunes very carefully based on Burnett's advice. The aim was, once again, to echo the spirit of the film: "Only a self-proclaimed music archivist would include an arcane Bob Dylan track, such as 'The Man in Me' over the credit sequence of *The Big Lebowski*" (Smith 149). The notion of teamwork is important to understand how the Coens make their films; selecting the right crew is, for them, an essential part of the creative process. To Jeff Smith, working with Burnett and Burwell "the Coens reinforce their position outside of mainstream Hollywood" (149) because of the two artists' taste for American rarities and unconventional scores, and their intimate knowledge of the Coens' work. Commenting on the choices made for the Busby Berkley-style dream, Josh Levine recalls:

From the beginning, they knew the soundtrack would be Kenny Rogers's song 'Just dropped in'. (Music—not just the original score but the use of popular songs from the sixties on—is perhaps more integral to the Coens's conception of scenes than I have so far explored. No doubt at this very moment someone is writing a PhD thesis on Pop Music as Ironic counterpoint to themes of the Coen brothers.) (149)

- 23 Although Levine's remark on ironic counterpoint¹³ is actually very relevant, as demonstrated in the previous paragraphs, the example he mentions proves the exact opposite. Indeed, the theme developed in Kenny Rogers's song (the account of an acid-

trip gone wrong) seems to fit the Dude's dream quite well—the character even admits experiencing “the occasional acid flashback”—and even seems to pace the whole sequence [1:20:05]. The images largely correspond to the lyrics: the first sentence evokes “the sundown shining in” when the Dude's shadow appears dancing, then the homemade decor shows the moon and clouds also mentioned in the song. Later, the song evokes a “dead end” represented in the dream by an empty bowling alley. The Dude dances as in a musical, till the dream becomes a nightmare resembling the acid trip described in the song (“I watched myself crawling down as I was crawling in”). Although Burnett did half of the work selecting music rarities, Burwell's arrangements were necessary. For this film, he composed genre music pastiches to complete the original soundtrack (a mock detective tune, German techno, and nightmarish elektronika).

***The Ladykillers*: a Touch of Black Humor, Gospel-style**

- 24 Burwell's role on *The Ladykillers* was equally limited but essential. For the brothers, choosing the Deep South to adapt a famous Ealing Comedy was a pretext to focus on music, the film focusing more on the music than on the heist itself. Ethan Coen admits “music is the film's voice-over” (Ciment 2004), and they even had specific baroque instruments made for the film. But contrary to the original version, the ironic counterpoint relies on a contrast between the crooks' activities, and the nature and lyrics of the songs used in the soundtrack, which are mainly gospels. As in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, the Coens chose to emphasize the rich musical heritage of the South through music, and ultimately to dramatize and caricature the generation and social gaps at the heart of the film. Each category of person has a specific music: Mrs. Munson (Irma P. Hall) loves Gospel, Pr. Dorr (Tom Hanks) is fond of baroque music and Gawain (Marlon Wayans) listens to hip-hop. The music largely contributes to the black humor and irony, especially in the second half as the crooks have to resort to murdering Mrs. Munson and fail miserably. For instance, when “the General” (Tzi Ma) is sent by the rest of the team to kill the old lady, he becomes the victim of a series of “accidents” causing his own death [1:27:46]. The two-minute sequence starts with a bird's-eye-view of Mrs. Munson sleeping in her bed, snoring slightly, as Roswell Sacred Harp Quartet starts performing a traditional gospel “Weeping Mary.” The General conceals his cigarette inside his mouth, as he has been doing throughout the film to deceive the non-smoking lady, and opens the door as the chorus distinctly sings: “They crucified the savior.” Approaching slowly, he intends to strangle the lady with a garrote, as the rest of the song is heard (“...and nailed him to the cross”). The music stops and the cuckoo of the Swiss clock springs out, making a terrible noise. Surprised, the general swallows his cigarette; the music goes crescendo and accelerates along with the action, a purely slapstick gag. Then the man drinks from the glass where the lady puts her dentures, and he steps on the cat while running out of the bedroom. His spectacular fall down the stairs ends with him crashing on the floor as the music keeps playing, ignoring the sudden violence of the scene. Here, the ironic counterpoint relies on the lyrics, recalling the previously mentioned examples.
- 25 It is true that Burwell's role is less important in the musical films, since his original compositions are overshadowed by the use of existing songs, and thus that Burnett plays a more important part in the making of the soundtrack. Yet contrary to *Inside Llewyn Davis*, in which complete songs are performed, in *The Big Lebowski* and *The*

Ladykillers, music editing and orchestration are very important, which explains why Burwell is credited as composer in these two films and absent from the other.¹⁴ Burwell also played a great part in the making of the Western anthology film, *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* (2018), whose six episodes demonstrate the whole palette of his collaboration with the Coens so far, crossing the border with the musical in the first eponymous story featuring Tim Blake Nelson as a singing cowboy.

Musicals Coen-style

- 26 Dwelling on Barry Langford's statement that "[t]he musical creates a hermetically enclosed generic world whose conventions and verisimilitudes are purely and peculiarly its own" (Langford 83), Stefano Baschiera relates the Coens' disregard for realism to their inclination for generic hybridity; to the noir and Western conventions that famously resurface in a majority of their films, he adds those of the musical that appear mainly through "three interconnected elements: artificiality, diegetic performance and homage" (147). This makes sense considering the importance of music in a majority of their films, as it often conveys extradiegetic content. One could easily have predicted the Coens' incursion into the musical genre, given the great number of live performances in *O Brother* or choreographed dream sequences in *The Hudsucker Proxy* and *The Big Lebowski* and the sailors' ball sequence in *Barton Fink*.
- 27 Their taste for musicals that fully bloomed in *Hail, Caesar!*, with Channing Tatum's memorable performance in a voluntarily camp, very elaborate number performed alongside a group of Gene-Kelly-ish sailors on a studio set. *The Big Lebowski* had introduced the Coens' fascination for Busby Berkeley's elaborate kaleidoscopic choreography that reappears in the same film through a stunning aquatic ensemble number starring Scarlett Johansson as an Esther Williams-ian mermaid holding a trident—a nod at Maud Lebowski's Valkyrie attire. As a metafilm set in Hollywood in the 1950s, *Hail, Caesar!* provided the Coens and Burwell with the ideal opportunity to fulfill their fantasy of making their own (mini) classical-era genre films. The composer explains, "A lot of film music is putting on a hat and being like an actor. In this case, I had to put on lots of different hats. But I love a challenge" (NPR 2016). He had to compose a Western ballad, a melodramatic piece, a show tune for the sailors' performance, a live orchestra music for the "aquamusical" (a take on Mervyn LeRoy's *Million Dollar Mermaid*, 1952) and a score for a biblical epic. Yet the film itself is not a musical and indulges in the recurring enigmatic, noir-flavored, but always subtle melodies recalling Burwell's previous compositions, particularly the ones he made for *Barton Fink* and *The Hudsucker Proxy*, both period pieces tending to associate comic elements with dramatic situations. This is also the case in *Hail, Caesar!* to some extent, as Burwell himself noted:
Hail, Caesar! is not especially cruel. But it's not as screwball as the trailer makes it seem. There's a serious theme going on but all this ridiculous stuff on top of that. The ridiculous stuff imposes itself on the serious theme in a way that's almost cruel. And that's when I can write comedy. When it's something cruel or dark. (Filmexperience 2016)
- 28 The composer gives a definition of the Coens' dark humor, which not only relies on visual effects and dialogues, but very much on music and sound effects.
- 29 As an anthology, *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* (2018) is a very unusual film that encompasses all the tandem's collaborative strategies, a sort of apotheosis after

seventeen films made together, and a perfect blend between original scores and traditional folk ballads, hybridization being, as generally acknowledged, the core of the Coens' cinema (Assouly, 2015). It is through humor and irony that the Coens chose to ironically revisit the singing cowboy subgenre in the first story of their Western anthology, starring Tim Blake Nelson as a singing, yet ruthless gunfighter who turns his carnages—in self-defense—into merry songs. After ironically “suiciding” an aggressive card player with his own gun triggered by Scruggs' repeated steps on one of the saloon table planks swinging violently, ravaging the man's head with short range gunshots, he improvises a merry song about his dead opponent, getting everybody to sing along and dancing on the bar [0:09:45]. “Little Joe Wrangler,” performed by Nelson himself as “Surly Joe,” was originally written by Friedrich Hollaender and Frank Loesser, with additional lyrics by the Coens who added a little irony to the tune. But what confirms Baschiera's reading of the Coens' taste for musicals, is the derealizing potential of the musical sequence, expressed more straightforwardly than ever by the protagonist's screened narration of the story and direct addresses and his final ghostly ascension to the sky, with poor computer-generated wings and a harp, reminiscent of Waring Hudsucker's merry ghost in *The Hudsucker Proxy*, which was equally disregarding of verisimilitude (and very cartoonesque).

- 30 Without receiving any directorial requirements, Burwell was, as always with the Coens, completely free to compose the soundtrack for the six independent stories as six different films with their own specificities and a lot of personal involvement on the composer's part. Each film corresponds to an episode of the history of the Western that is part of the mythologizing of American history during westward expansion, however not in the traditional way of classical Westerns, as dark humor is the dominant tone. The score is partly a pastiche with a touch of dark humor and cruelty (as demonstrated in the first story), as if to reassert the dark side of this historical period, largely disregarded during Hollywood's classical era. As explained by Burwell, the reason he has no difficulty scoring their films is because they understand each other.

The Hybrid films

Hybrid soundtracks: Finding a Balance between Creation and Homage

- 31 What is a “hybrid soundtrack”? All soundtracks are, to some extent, hybrid, as they generally blend original and preexisting pieces. However, the most distinctive feature of the Coens' hybrid soundtracks is to use both a very catchy original melody and a famous song that is played several times in the film as a leitmotiv (for instance, “The Same Old Song” in *Blood Simple* and “Somebody to Love” in *A Serious Man*). The soundtrack of *Intolerable Cruelty* would belong to this category, given that two songs by Simon and Garfunkel punctuate key moments in the film, in particular “The Boxer” (1965) which opens and closes the film.
- 32 Hybridity is one of the words that best describes the Coens' films aesthetically, narratively and musically. It is partly due to the multiple cultural references embedded in their films and their complete freedom regardless of conventions and box-office considerations. Hybrid soundtracks offer the possibility to create a dialogic relation between patrimony, personal memories and tastes on the one hand, and creativity on

the other. It also implies a dialogue between the composer and the directors. Speaking of *A Serious Man*, Burwell recalls: "Joel and Ethan had no suggestion about what the score should be. They just said, 'Well, this is what you've got. You've got Jefferson Airplane and F Troop and Sidor Belarsky'" (Schwartz 2009). The dialogue between directors/screenwriters and the composer is initiated by references that come from the formers' personal background and is meant to trigger a creative response on Burwell's part. Dwelling on the meaning of the songs and the governing emotion surfacing in the film—in this case, the uncertainty of death exemplified by Schrödinger's cat experiment—the composer's task is to musically suggest that the main character, Larry Gopnik (Michael Stuhlbarg), is equally in doubt. Hybrid scores are the ones in which Burwell's compositions echo the meaning of a lead song as far as lyrics are concerned, but also create a melodic counterpoint (for instance, "Somebody to Love" V. the ambiguous harp motif).

***Blood Simple's* "Same Old song": Dramatic Irony**

- 33 Burwell composed a very peculiar score for *Blood Simple*:

In his title track, dark rumbles in the piano's left hand notes sharpen into a scattered, eerie half-motif. The lighter flutters of the right hand occasionally resolve to half satisfaction, but there's a palpable restlessness in what's become Burwell's instrument of choice (Klein).

- 34 And yet it still allows the American soul standard "It's the Same Old Song" (1965) to play a great part in the narration. The song can be heard three times. First, when the barman Meurice (Samm-Art Williams) plays it on the jukebox, and then steps onto the bar to perform a quick dance step, shot with a close up of his Converse trainers. Meurice is from Detroit and prefers Motown to the Texan country music favored by the locals, including his boss Marty (Dan Hedaya). Playing this song is a way to assert his cultural identity as a black Northerner in a traditionally white Southern state. The song also defines him as "cool," creating a discrepancy between him and the other characters to whom he barely speaks, which also makes him the only innocent character in the film. The second time, the song is heard from behind Marty's office door, as Ray (John Getz) is trying to cover up his supposed death. In this case, it is a contrapuntal use of the tune that expresses situational irony (Marty is still alive), but it also has an informative function, warning Ray that Meurice is in the next room. The song also closes the film, as Visser's (M. Emmett Walsh) dead body is laying in a pool of blood at Abby's (Frances McDormand) apartment; once again it is used "anempathetically" (not emotionally in tune with the action, according to Michel Chion's terminology), but this time it is nondiegetic and allows the narration to express a commentary: the song is somehow related to death and the lyrics tend to trivialize it. This first attempt at combining an original score and a famous song contributed to invoking contrapuntal irony, which became a recurring pattern in the Coens' films, a technique they further developed in *A Serious Man*.

***A Serious Man* (2009): Truth Is... Lies**

- 35 *A Serious Man* might be the Coen brothers' most personal project, given that they attempted to recreate the Jewish suburban Minnesota of their childhood in the 1960s. The film plays on the sharp contrast between two opposite worlds: the very spiritual,

family-centered, traditional Jewish community, and the liberated, sex-drug-and-rock'n'roll-centered "outside world," which some members of the religious community would like to experience. Caught in the middle of the 1960s social and cultural revolution, Larry Gopnik seems to have lost his bearings. The piano theme composed by Burwell for the film expresses this profound doubt and is contrasted with Jefferson Airplane's hit "Somebody to Love" (1967), which stands for a whole generation. Burwell commented:

I found it was useful to have a motif that would repeat endlessly, to suggest that no matter what goes on in the film, he's not really getting anywhere. He's blocked at every point in his personal, professional, and spiritual life. And there's something about the delicacy of the harp that I think, on the one hand, seems sympathetic to this character's travails, but, on the other hand, is a little bit funny, because in fact none of these characters reveals any delicacy whatsoever. (Schwartz 2009)

- 36 The composer explains in the same interview that he thought Gopnik was stuck between two worlds, just like Schrödinger's cat (the theme of his lecture).
- 37 His situation, and for that matter the atmosphere of the film, is very reminiscent of *Barton Fink*. The contrast between tradition and modernity is presented as a central theme from the very beginning of the film. It opens on a traditional Jewish shtetl tale in Yiddish, accompanied by a variation (for violins) on Burwell's main theme. After a fade to black, the opening credits, with the inaugural electric guitar solo introduction of Jefferson Airplane's song, unfold. Starting the film inside an ear canal is also a highly symbolic choice and provides the song with a special status. Symbolically, it comes from inside the boy's body and is therefore the quintessential diegetic music. It is also a self-referential element that recalls the "drain shot" in *Barton Fink* [1:24:00].¹⁵ The brothers started practicing self-quoting from their second film on and made it a tradition that tends to reinforce the circularity of their films. Going back to an eerie piano theme, which is very similar to the one he composed for *Barton Fink*, Burwell seems to participate in the self-reflexive effort himself.
- 38 The Jefferson Airplane's song is heard at several moments in the film as a leitmotiv: it symbolizes the freedom of the 1960s on the one hand (e.g. in Larry Gopnik's sex fantasy with his neighbor), but it also expresses, through its lyrics, the doubts and spiritual questioning experienced by people during this troubled period. "When the truth is found to be lies, and all the joy within you dies, don't you want somebody to love?" This particular sentence seems to illustrate Larry's situation after his wife leaves him for a "friend of the family." And the old and wise Rabbi Marshak, whom Gopnik desperately tries to meet for counseling during the whole film, seems to have understood the importance of the song that he knows by heart. Coming from the rabbi's mouth, the lyrics seem to bridge the gap between the religious and the secular, the old and the new generation, modernity and tradition. This is all the more interesting if you consider that most of the band's members (whose names are given by the old man) were actually Jewish. The last occurrence of the song marks the film's conclusion, a shot on a tornado approaching—a possible metaphor of Gopnik's dark future. The irony in Gopnik's life is that he does not realize that he would live better with his doubts than with some terrible certainties, such as his concerning blood test results materialized by the approaching tornado at the end of the film. As in *Blood Simple*, the use of a recurring pop song juxtaposed with a simple cue emphasizes the discrepancy between two opposite worlds, two different states of mind, which give way to the very distinctive Coenian ironic counterpoint when they collide.

Conclusion

- 39 Music is never decorative for the Coen Brothers. Nor is it meant to transcend their films, to become more iconic than the films themselves, the way scores from *The Good the Bad and the Ugly* (1966), *The Godfather* (1972), *Star Wars* (1977) or *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) tend to do. Yet the Coen/Burwell association is in many ways comparable to the Spielberg/Williams, Leone/Morricone or Burton/Elfman tandems regarding the way artistic intimacy fuels their creative effort. Burwell's scores participate in the creation of the Coens' cinematic world in terms of how it reflects their personal tastes (they sometimes have music rarities or specific tunes in mind while writing the script that they ask Burwell to dwell on), provides narrative content (it often conveys information about the plot) or creates an ironic counterpoint (music and sound effects are central to the Coens' dark humor). In the light of this study, Carter Burwell's role in their moviemaking process proves essential because it not only fulfills the brothers' expectations, but evinces the same philosophy of filmmaking, that is that the art of film should not be abide by norms or trends, nor should it be dictated by studio requirements. More than musical tastes or talent, what Burwell shares with the Coens is the complete freedom to make the films/music they want (Nayman 165). The scoring of these films is never canonic, as reflected in the three categories that structure this article ("scored," "musical" and "hybrid"). What they have in common is not that their allegiance to genre conventions or even a specific method, but the way they almost systematically serve to ironically comment on the story, as well as on film history. In this respect, Burwell's contribution to "the Coen touch" is highly significant. His scores participate in a broader pattern that has pervaded the Coens' work for almost 40 years now—a tendency to blend the highbrow and lowbrow (folk music and classical music) or more precisely to rehabilitate what was once deemed to be lowbrow (folklores and regionalisms).

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NOTES

1. Woods, 2003, Ebert 2007, Zach Sharf 2015, Dan Webster 2018, Peter Debruge 2019, Douglas Brode 2019.
2. BBC Music interview, January 10, 2014, quoted in "Inside Llewyn Davis and the music of the Coen Brothers" www.getintothis.co.uk/2014/01/the_music_of_the_coen_brothers/, January 24, 2014. (Accessed June 2019)
3. John Ford himself complained about *Cheyenne Autumn*'s (1964) score "I thought it was a bad score and there was too much of it – didn't need it. Just like in *The Searchers* [1956]: with that music they should have Cossacks instead of Indians" (Bogdanovitch 1978, 106). Similarly, Orson Welles complained about the music composed by Heinz Reimhold for *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947) as being so "old-fashioned" that it made Grisby's line "I want you to kill him" sound "absurd" for lack of subtlety (Bogdanovitch 1992, 195-96).
4. The music and sound treatment in *Barton Fink* is quite comparable to what K. J. Donnelly explains about the scores of the first four films of the *Saw* franchise (2004-7): first "there is a convergence of sound effects, ambient sounds and music;" second "there is no solid demarcation between incidental music and sound design: consequently, sound effects can sound synthetic and music can sound like sound effects" (Donnelly 104).
5. Limited budget did not allow the Coens to use expensive music standards so they favored "stock music," which means royalty-free. For example, in *Blood Simple* they chose "It's the Same Old Song" written by Motown trio of composers Holland, Dozier and Holland, and performed by The Four Tops in 1965. However, this version was too expensive, so they ended up using Neil Diamond's. Being music connoisseurs, the Coens were very upset not to be able to get what they really wanted. When the directors' cut was released, The Four Tops' version had become free of charge, which enabled them to substitute it to Diamond's (Robson 20).
6. As a matter of fact, the decade saw the release of a great number of slapstick- or screwball-influenced comedies, including *Beverly Hills Cop* (Martin Brest, 1984), *Ghost Busters* (Ivan Reitman, 1984) and *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (Robert Zemeckis, 1988), as well as social comedies like *Tootsie* (Sidney Pollack, 1982), *The War of the Roses* (Danny DeVito, 1989) and *Working Girl* (Mike Nichols, 1988). If the diversity of this selection is not entirely surprising (any genre can be parodied), the emergence of science-fiction comedies like *Ghost Busters* or the animation-noir hybrid *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* are worth mentioning, as they both position *Raising* within a trend and yet outside of it due to the Coens' unconventional use of dark humor and violence. Although the technique used in *Roger Rabbit* was just an enhanced version of a process used by Robert Stevenson in *Mary Poppins* in 1964, it fully exploited the cartoonesque potential of *Raising Arizona* released a year earlier.
7. In my view, a background music, particularly common in the 70s and 80s, that put the buyers in a friendly atmosphere and was interrupted by announces from time to time. It was then replaced by the radio.

8. The brothers were so keen on this typically American character that they made him the hero of the first short story of their latest movie *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs*, released on Netflix in 2019.
 9. Joel Coen had met Sam Raimi while working as assistant editor on *Evil Dead* (1981) and they became friends.
 10. There is a better appreciation of this film now that the Coens are very famous Academy-Awarded directors and favored by the critics, and there is also a better understanding of their use of intertextuality that viewers in 1994 were not familiar with and adds to the film's metafilmic interest.
 11. The original interview with Carter Burwell was published in *Transfuge* Hors-série n°4 (Feb. 2008): 52.
 12. This section will be shorter as it won't include *O Brother Where Art Thou?* whose soundtrack is mainly composed of pre-existing tunes gathered by Burnett and *Inside Llewyn Davis* on which Burwell did not work.
 13. The term in itself has several meanings depending on the context. The one I am referring to, mostly, is the "use of contrast or interplay of elements in a work of art" (Merriam-Webster), which is a regular feature in the Coens' films (e.g. contrasting music and voice-over or music and image to create irony). It also refers to a more technical concept in music described as "the combination of two or more independent melodies into a single harmonic texture in which each retains its linear character." (Merriam-Webster) Although this latter definition may also apply to some of Burwell's compositions, the Coens and himself usually refer to the word "counterpoint" in its first acceptation. For example, in *Fargo*, they call a counterpoint the contrast created by the use of the very austere theme (illustrating Marge's methodical approach tracking down the killers) in sequences involving Jerry, a morally dubious, clumsy and idiotic character. "Burwell and the Coens enjoyed the pairing of such a somber theme with Jerry's character because they believed it captured his pathetic quality." (Jarvis 51)
 14. Burwell is mentioned in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* because he worked together with Burnett on the film, which also contains entire songs.
 15. A very peculiar shot that mimicked the camera diving inside a sink pipe in Barton's room, following a noise coming from another hotel room (probably Charlie's).
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ABSTRACTS

Composer Carter Burwell started his career in cinema on the Coen Brothers' first film *Blood Simple* (1984) and made the soundtracks of all their films so far, except *Inside Llewyn Davis* (2013). A journalist went so far as to call him "the third Coen brother" (Greiving, NPR, 2016), which in fact reflects both the professional and the spiritual connections that have developed throughout the last thirty-six years between the three men. Sorting the Coens' films into three categories based on the nature of their soundtracks - scored, musical and hybrid films - this paper proposes to emphasize Burwell's contribution to the Coens' cinematic world. It will dwell specifically on what Roger Ebert, among others, called "the Coen touch", a mix of dark humor and irony, sometimes resulting from a counterpoint created by contrasting the music and other features (image, dialogue), sometimes resulting from a sparse yet meaningful soundtrack.

Carter Burwell a débuté au cinéma en composant la musique du premier film des frères Coen, *Sang pour Sang* (1984) et a depuis composé les bandes originales de tous leurs films à l'exception d'*Inside Llewyn Davis* (2013). Un journaliste l'a même surnommé le troisième frère Coen, ce qui reflète bien la connexion professionnelle et spirituelle qui s'est construite entre les trois hommes au cours de ces trente-six dernières années. Cet article propose de mettre en exergue la contribution de Burwell à l'univers cinématographique des frères Coen en séparant leurs films en trois catégories s'agissant de leur accompagnement musical (musique majoritairement originale, préexistante ou hybride). On s'attardera en particulier sur ce que Roger Ebert, entre autres, nomma la « touche Coen », ce mélange d'humour noir et d'ironie résultant tantôt d'un contrepoint obtenu par un contraste entre la musique et une autre composante (image, dialogue), tantôt d'une musique discrète mais pleine de sens.

INDEX

Keywords: Carter Burwell, Coen Brothers, Coen touch, dark humor, film genres, ironic counterpoint, music, musical films, original scores, soundtracks, Western

Mots-clés: Carter Burwell, Coen touch, contrepoint ironique, frères Coen, genres, humour noir, musique de film, bande originale, Western

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