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Unheard Possibilities: Reappraising Classical Film Music Scoring and Analysis

Visual Text and Musical Subtext: *The Cossacks* (George Hill, 1928): A 21st-Century Composer's Journey in Silent Film Scoring

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Visual Text and Musical Subtext: *The Cossacks* (George Hill, 1928): A 21st-Century Composer's Journey in Silent Film Scoring

Robert Israel

- 1 This piece aims to contextualize my contribution as ethnomusicologist, composer, orchestrator, arranger, conductor, choral director, producer, music contractor, and music editor for Turner Classic Movie's presentation of MGM's 1928 production of *The Cossacks*, directed by George Hill, with additional sequences directed by Clarence Brown. Working within a limited budget; doing research into the film's historical era and the musical practices of the culture in which it takes place; finding source material, ethnic instruments, and musicians specializing in specific ethnic styles of music performance; and, other formidable challenges which I will outline here. It was not my goal to merely attempt a historic recreation of scoring practices of the 1920s, but to build upon classic scoring techniques from a contemporary point of view. Musical styles have changed vastly since the premiere of *The Cossacks*, but the fundamental aspects of combining music and moving image are relatively unchanged.
- 2 First, I will begin with some background on the problematic production process of the film, and some historical footnotes; I will touch upon scoring practices contemporaneous with *The Cossacks*. This is followed by a discussion positing songs and lyrics as providing subtext to filmic images in the effort to dimensionalize a viewer's experience of the film, and an examination of some of the hazards and remedies of historical and ethnomusicological research, revealing the necessity of composing and arranging music which accurately represents the ethnic and cultural context of the film story. The piece ends with a few words on the actual composing and recording process, and on how everything is finally brought together.

Tolstoy in Hollywood: from MGM (1927) to TCM (2013)

- 3 In the fall of 1927, one of Hollywood's most famous screenwriters, Frances Marion, was summoned to the office of Irving Thalberg, who was the head of production at MGM Studios in Culver City, California. He gave her the assignment of drafting a treatment of Leo Tolstoy's 1878 novel, *The Cossacks*. Having recently written for MGM an adaptation of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, her immediate reaction was to request a release from the project because she "couldn't face the ordeal of distorting another Tolstoy novel;" Thalberg listened to her objections and, not being dissuaded, said, "Start tomorrow morning and bring me a rough treatment by Friday" (Marion 167-68). The original studio reader's report from July of 1925 gives this assessment of *The Cossacks*: "The plot, if it could be said to have one, is too thin for pictures" (Beauchamp 412). In spite of this, and after going through three scenario treatments, and losing the opportunity to have Viktor Tourjansky direct the film, production moved forward with its second director George Hill and the fourth adaptation by Frances Marion. But it was doomed to continue to be rewritten countless times, and the end result is that the completed film could not have been more different from Tolstoy's original story. Tolstoy's protagonist, Dmitry Andreich Olenin, is a disillusioned Muscovite nobleman joining the military to live among the Cossacks in a village amid Chechen rebel hostilities, where he encounters a young couple seemingly falling out of love, himself taking an interest in the girl only to discover that he is merely an object of curiosity, that he will never be accepted as part of the Cossack village, and leaves shattered and dejected. In Marion's adaptation, the protagonists are a young couple in love in a Cossack village at war with the Turks, and a touch of intrigue is provided by the arrival of a prince from Moscow (a mere supporting character) with orders from the Czar to marry a Cossack village girl. MGM had enjoyed a tremendous success with the pairing of John Gilbert and Renée Adorée in King Vidor's 1925 classic *The Big Parade*, so it is no surprise that the studio believed they could produce another hit by bringing the two stars together in yet another romantic photoplay, and Russian-themed pictures had become all of the rage in Hollywood.
- 4 Arthur Sherwood, the movie critic for *The Outlook*, in July of 1928, wrote, "It's getting so that if a movie reporter can avoid more than one Russian picture a week . . . he, or she (and they), are lucky" (427). This appears to be validated by *New York Times* critic Mordaunt Hall, who wrote in a 1929 review of a Russian-themed story that, "there is an excellent idea, one dealing with Russian refugees in Paris, which is something so far new to the screen and a relief from the usual routine story."¹ Judging by a sample list of Russian-themed films produced between 1927-28 (I have counted fourteen productions including *The Cossacks*), one may ascertain that Sherwood's opinion may not be too much of an exaggeration.
- 5 In the eighty-six years that had passed since that autumn day, when Thalberg gave Marion her task, little has changed in the way studio producers manage film production assignments. Instead of being summoned to an office for a meeting, I was contacted by telephone in the early part of 2013. The programming department at Turner Classic Movies in Atlanta, Georgia, called me in Los Angeles. We had originally discussed the possibility of my doing a music score for a large period piece that took place in Scotland. Having recently done research on Scottish folk songs for the 1927

Laurel and Hardy comedy *Putting Pants on Philip*, it seemed a very timely offering. Things, however, changed quickly, and I was then commissioned to score *The Cossacks*. Dennis Millay, who was the Director of Programming at the network, was one of the producers whom I had worked with on many projects for TCM, and his care and support of every project was something that I had come to rely upon. He explained to me that in his research into the film, he learned from documents held at the studio archives collection that a score had been prepared in 1928 for *The Cossacks*, but that they could not locate any discs, let alone documentation that the score had ever been recorded; and no copy of the printed score could be located. I would have to start at the very beginning and conduct intensive research on the subject at hand.

Researching Silent Film Scoring Practices

- 6 Although *The Cossacks* was written by one of Russia's greatest authors, the film story's cultural base is distinctly Ukrainian. The difference between Russian and Ukrainian cultures can be compared with the differences between Chinese and Japanese cultures, or American and British cultures—strong similarities do not mean that they are the same. Thus, Marion's screen adaptation dictated the necessity for careful research of the ethnic aspects of the film. The distinct multiethnic flavors that are a part of *The Cossacks*—in the film Ukrainian, Russian, Romanian Gypsy, and Turkish cultures are explored—were key in creating a variegated fabric for the musical setting. Ernő Rapée, one of the prominent pioneers of film scoring, some of whose recorded scoring work includes the Fox Movietone presentations of *Sunrise* (F.W. Murnau, 1927), *Seventh Heaven* (Frank Borzage, 1927), *Street Angel* (Frank Borzage, 1928) and *What Price, Glory?* (Raoul Walsh, 1928), published a book in 1925 on the subject of music and motion pictures and offered this advice when providing music for a feature film: "Firstly, determine the geographic and national atmosphere of your picture" (13).
- 7 Focusing on the foundational ethnic element, it was during the course of my research into Ukrainian culture and its music that I was delighted and inspired to discover many fine composers, including the opera composer Semen Hulak-Artemovsky (1813–1873), Mykola Leontovych (1877–1921) and Kyrylo Stetsenko (1882–1922), who are still well known for their choral music compositions, and particularly the music of Mykola Lysenko (1842–1912), who is to Ukrainian music what Tchaikovsky is to Russian music. The excellent work of all of these composers has a meaningful place in my score to *The Cossacks*. I also researched traditional Ukrainian folk songs and went so far as to research Ukrainian wedding customs (more on this detail later).
- 8 It has been my experience that films that present themselves in strongly identifiable cultural backgrounds often benefit from the use of folk music representing the same culture. In Joseph Carl Briel's score to D.W. Griffith's volatile US Civil War film, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), the homecoming of the "Little Colonel" (which remains one of the film's most intensely emotional sequences) is underscored with the famous song *Home, Sweet Home* (1823) by Henry Bishop and John Howard Payne (previously the basis for an eponymous Griffith feature) and Stephen Foster's *My Old Kentucky Home* (1853). Briel's restraint in his orchestration, relying primarily upon quiet strings and an occasional solo wind instrument, demonstrates his understanding of supporting the tender visceral images presented in this sequence. The quiet simplicity of Griffith's direction is enhanced, but never undermined, by the two well-known songs. As the "Little Colonel"

returns home after being at war for many years, he is greeted by his beloved younger sister. Unable to hold back her tears, she embraces her brother and then they move to the front door entrance. From inside of the house, his mother (not seen by the camera) reaches out to her son, takes his arm with her hand, and then moves up to wrap her arm around the back of her son's neck welcoming him inside. Should the lyrics of Bishop and Payne's song come to mind, that, "There's no place like home," it will become an even greater emotional experience for the viewer while watching and hearing this scene.

- 9 Armas Järnefelt's use of Finnish folk songs in his score to Mauritz Stiller's *Sången om den elröda blomman* (*The Song of The Scarlet Red Flower*, 1919) is no less effective, with its adaptations of the beautiful and melancholy melodies that are to this day well known by Finns throughout their country. There is a particularly dramatic sequence in which Swedish actor Lars Hanson, who plays the spoiled son of a landowner, has been caught one evening in an illicit rendezvous with a young girl who works on his father's farm. The following day both are turned out separately: she for her indiscretion, and the boy for openly defying his father. Seeing the girl on a deserted road, the boy hails a ride from a passing wagon and callously leaves the girl behind alone. Whereas he, as a man, can arrogantly face his unknown future, she, on the other hand, fears her fate as she is a female without references and will find no place to survive but in the depraved environment of a bordello. Järnefelt's musical selection for this sequence is the Finnish song *Syntymistään Sureva* (*Lamenting Her Birth*, 1904) by Toivo Kuula. The first stanza to this sad song goes:

Oh, my poor and wretched mother, when you gave birth to me,
You enslaved me to suffer in the misery of the world.

- 10 The boy's stoic defiance of his circumstances, combined with that of the girl's restrained but doleful countenance (she is dressed in funereal black), are powerful dramatic visuals, which Kuula's tragic melody and song text serve to enhance and give greater depth to.
- 11 The works of American director John Ford are known to feature countless examples of using popular folk songs to score and dimensionalize scenes of varied emotions. One may discover that his practice of suggesting American folk songs as musical background extends back to his earliest years as a director. A notable example may be found in his 1918 film *Hell Bent*, in which towards the end of the film, the actor Duke R. Lee bids farewell outside of a woman's home and sings the song *Sweet Genevieve* (1869) by Henry L. Tucker. The lyrics ("O, Genevieve, sweet Genevieve, the days may come, the days may go, but still the hands of mem'ry weave, the blissful dreams of long ago") appear onscreen. The sweet melancholy of Tucker's melody brings an emotional depth to the moment, otherwise lost without it. This last example is a solid representation of the practice of what may be termed a "direct cue," in which a song's lyrics appear on screen. It was a common enough practice in filmmaking during the silent film era.
- 12 In *The Cossacks*, no direct cues of this sort appear, but there are many moments in which musicians appear as part of the *mise-en-scène*, thus giving an indication of what might be expected insofar as musical setting is concerned.
- 13 My mentor, Gaylord Carter, had told me that a common practice of the day was the use of songs to provide a subtext to onscreen action. I have since seen numerous cue-sheets (a method of suggesting musical selections to film accompanists, which could be compiled from a well-stocked theater music library) that have employed this

technique, substantiating his claim. Comedic actor Harry Langdon worked on compiling cue-sheets for some of his own feature films, including his comedy *The Strong Man* (Frank Capra, 1926). For one sequence, Langdon makes a rather well-humored musical suggestion—a song to be played at a specific moment of the scene. Through a case of mistaken identity, Langdon has gotten into a taxi cab with a woman of questionable virtue—she, being a common thief, is attempting to retrieve a wad of stolen cash she has stashed in Langdon’s pocket without his knowledge. While sitting close together in the back seat, the woman makes her move to retrieve the stolen money. Langdon is suddenly shocked and mortified when he feels the woman’s hand groping him off camera. This role reversal works incredibly well thanks to Langdon’s unusual baby face and the very sly acting of Gertrude Astor. Harry Langdon’s musical suggestion for when he is groped is the 1924 hit *Oh, Lady Be Good!* by George Gershwin. The practice of using popular songs to broaden filmic textures or provide a subtext has been consistently employed and still is today. Notable examples include *Born to Be Wild* by Steppenwolf used in *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1969), *Where is My Mind?* by the Pixies in *Fight Club* (David Fincher, 1999), and *Just Dropped In (To See What Condition My Condition Was In)* by the First Edition in *The Big Lebowski* (the Coen brothers, 1998). In all these examples, the music and images are so carefully integrated that one may wonder if the music had been composed for this film sequence. In particular, the visual setting of the First Edition song, which is a pseudo-psychedelic dream of Jeff Bridge’s character, “The Dude,” is a brilliant parody of the musical genre.

Scoring *The Cossacks* in 2013

- 14 So the question was: how do you employ these scoring techniques when studying *The Cossacks*? It is one thing to adapt a sizeable portion of the violent and dramatic finale from Piotr Tchaikovsky’s *Manfred Symphony*, Op. 58 when underscoring a sequence in which the Cossack ataman and his son are being tortured by the Turkish Sultan’s guard, another to adapt a tender and beautiful melody from one of Mykola Lysenko’s operas as a love theme. But it is categorically another matter when adapting songs to provide a musical setting. The text of a song must also be considered as it may conflict with the sequence to which it is being adapted. As an example, in *The General* (Buster Keaton, 1926), after the fade out of the climactic battle sequence between the Northern and Southern armies, a title card reads, “Heroes of the day.” After the title card, we fade-in on the victorious Southern army marching home with the main character, Johnnie Gray (Keaton), in the lead. The ubiquitous Civil War song, *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*, may appear a logical option as it is authentic to the period and would echo the main character’s first name. The problem, however, is that this song was composed by Patrick Gilmore, who was a military band leader for the Northern army and he had dedicated his song to, “...the Army and the Navy of the Union,” as proclaimed on the cover of the music’s first publication in 1863.
- 15 As I began to study the film version of *The Cossacks*, I also started my ethnomusicological research by collecting traditional Ukrainian folk songs, exploring Ukrainian classical music, researching prominent Ukrainian poets and their works, learning about traditional Ukrainian culture, and simply trying to make sense of the materials I was amassing. The reason for this endeavor goes back to what Rapée had indicated concerning the geographic setting of a film. By understanding something of

the cultural setting and the cultural language, it would then be possible for me to create a musical fabric unique to this film. Hugo Riesenfeld, another prominent film scorer during the 1920s, wrote,

The musical stores of every country are assiduously combed for melodies that will create just the right illusion. When that remarkable film *Grass* [Merian C. Cooper, 1925] was being prepared for public presentation, the services of an authority on the music of Eastern tribes were called upon. For *The Vanishing American* [George B. Seitz, 1925], rare and little-known songs of the Indians were utilized. In *Deception* [Anna Boleyn, Ernst Lubitsch, 1920], original music written by Anna Boleyn and Henry VIII was dug out of the forgotten archives. (60)

- 16 The view put forth by one of the highest standards of film scoring of the 1920s echoes contemporary views and practices. However, it is not enough merely to select existing musical compositions and “paste” them to a scene; instead, it is necessary to make careful adaptations of the source music and to rework the material into something that feels natural and organic to the film source.
- 17 In *The Cossacks*, there is a scene [1:17:13] in which the main character, Lukashka (played by John Gilbert), lays in wait for the carriage of a Moscow prince—the Czar has ordered this prince to marry a Cossack woman, Maryana (Renee Adoree). Although Lukashka and Maryana are in love with one another, through a series of misunderstandings between the two, Maryana, in a fit of anger, agrees to marry the prince. Lukashka plans to defy the Czar’s orders by abducting his beloved from the prince, while they are *en route* to Moscow. He paces slowly near the rocks of a dusty and breezy section near a gorge. There is a tension and suspense that builds within this scene in spite of minimal action—it is the deceptive calm before the storm. For this moment, I adapted Modest Mussorgsky’s 1879 song *On the Dnieper*. Originally composed for vocal soloist and piano accompaniment, the tempo is slow and deliberate, with the piano providing chordal accompaniment in the form of tremolos (rapidly quiet repeating notes). The vocal line is melodically simple yet inherently dramatic, as it is composed in a minor key. To use this piece in its original form would work against the *mise-en-scene* in that the sparse piano accompaniment along with baritone voice would hardly support the building drama and vast outdoor space in which Lukashka is waiting to commit an act most certainly at the risk of his life.
- 18 In an effort to highlight the film’s Cossack theme, I orchestrated the passage using woodwinds, percussion, cimbalom and strings. The darker colors of the English horn, clarinet and bassoon create a sense of mystery and foreboding; the strings play quiet and hushed tremolos to intensify the suspense; timpani (a deep sounding drum-like instrument) quietly plays with an occasional swelling of volume in its trilled notes as if a thunder in the distance can be heard foreshadowing an approaching storm; and the cimbalom (a wire stringed instrument played by striking the strings with tiny mallets) plays the melody creating a haunting and captivating effect.
- 19 “Dizzying” would be an apt term to describe the process I encounter when familiarizing myself with a subject for scoring, but then add hunting down accurate musical representations upon which to base my own compositions, and then determining the orchestral instruments I would like to use (or that which is suggested by onscreen action), I must be able to fit this into the constraints of the determined budget. Apart from ethnomusicological research and budgetary limitations (which I am not authorized to go into), there is the very serious matter of creating a solid structure for the music score. *The Cossacks* does not have a particularly complex story; in fact, part of

its unique charm is that it invites viewers to feel as though they are witnessing a slice-of-life in a typical Cossack village.

- 20 Following in the footsteps of the great Richard Wagner, whose development and use of the *leitmotif* in his operas as a way of helping to musically define characters and symbols through the use of distinctive themes and motifs, Ernő Rapée suggests a classic method of film scoring: “embody everyone of your important characters with a theme. Undoubtedly there will be a Love Theme” (13). This advice would be echoed in a *New York Times* article ten years later in which famed composer, Max Steiner, would be quoted as saying, “Every character should have a theme.”² The hazards of following this path, however, can be one of tedium through redundancy, and interrupting the narrative flow of a sequence by feeling obligated to announce a character theme in spite of the action on screen. Regarding the first point, the overuse of thematic material can feasibly unravel the structure and design of music scoring material by undermining its welcome. Among the many techniques available to a composer when creating the score setting is that of composing variations of source material. As an example, Rapée suggests in his book how a music director might approach creating simple variations of music material (in this case a love theme) being used in a score for a feature film:

[P]lay one chorus as a violin solo, then have all the strings play it; the next one can be played on the Oboe or Cello and so forth. If you have exhausted all variations and particularly if the situation is of a dramatic sort have your men play that same chorus $\frac{1}{2}$ a tone higher or lower. As long as you vary your instrumentation or your tonality, it will not get tiresome. (13-14)

- 21 As an example of the second point, the opening of *The Cossacks* introduces us first to the village, and then to the two primary female characters: Maryana and her mother, the Widow Akoolena, who are in the fields raking hay [0:02:20]. From the distance, the women from the village who are working with them announce that their men (the Cossacks) are returning from battle. We see in the distance men on horseback riding slowly. As they approach, we can see that they are being led by their ataman, they are singing, one is beating drums to keep time, and they are pulling Turkish prisoners bound in ropes along the path to their village. As there is no direct cue to indicate what they are singing, it became a question for me how to best represent these characters, define the geographic setting, and ultimately to be appropriate to the narrative setting. My research led me to a very famous Ukrainian folk song entitled *Yikhav Kozak Mistom* (A Cossack Rode Into Town). The first stanza sets the tone for the rest of the song and roughly translates to:

Rode, Rode a Cossack into town,
Under hoofs the stones cracked one!, two!,
Under hoofs the stones cracked, and one!

- 22 The song continues in the spirit of a romance about a Cossack’s longing to be with a beautiful girl. And it is precisely this song that evoked in me, and members of my orchestra, when viewing the scene of Cossacks singing cheerfully on the occasion of their homecoming, the feeling of viewing and *hearing* something ethnically authentic. The sequence is interrupted by a Turkish prisoner’s attempt to escape. The ataman fires a single pistol shot and kills the fleeing prisoner. Having settled this matter offhand, the Cossacks continue their song with even more spirit.
- 23 It is during their singing that we are introduced to the ataman’s son, Lukashka, played by John Gilbert. He daydreams lazily in a meadow, disinterested in the return of his

Cossack brothers; only when he is being insulted and referred to as the “Woman Man” does he playfully rebuke his offenders. My view is that it would have been a mistake to interrupt the singing chorus just to introduce a character theme simply because John Gilbert has made his initial appearance, as they are clearly singing to the drum beat and the scene has yet to transition to its concluding moment. Furthermore, we know nothing about this character or his motivation, so to impose any musical adjectives might destroy the objective development of how the audience learns about who Lukashka is and why. There is, however, the opportunity to underscore and punctuate the moment through orchestration, when his comrades hurl their jibes at him. I had intended the orchestration effect to be as subtle as possible, and for me, it was an evident course, as the idea is presented by the film itself. The sequence begins with orchestra and male singers only [0:03:11]. When the two Cossacks begin with their disparaging remarks and refer to Lukashka as the “Woman Man,” I introduce a solo flute line [0:04:06] which is highly embellished so as to bring out the instrument’s feminine qualities, and then the chorus is taken over by the female singers.

- 24 It is not enough to create character themes, ethnic themes, villain themes, love themes, and clever variations if all of the elements cannot be codified into a convincing whole. *The Cossacks* presented uniquely challenging musical scoring because of the production’s inherent ethnic flair with sequences ranging from: Cossacks trick riding on horses, a Romanian gypsy dance, the arrival of an entourage of a Russian Moscow prince, a Ukrainian betrothal ceremony, and a battle within the walls of a Turkish city. Some of the questions that haunt me during such demanding film scoring projects is whether or not such attention to details is even necessary. And even if I feel that most of these details may go by viewers unnoticed, is this worth all the effort?
- 25 In the June 1926 edition of *Motion Picture News*, the publicity department at MGM published a vast offering of their product including an announcement of *The Cossacks*. “A stupendous undertaking involving the importing to America of a celebrated band of Cossacks, 250 in number, at a cost of a quarter of a million dollars.”³ Occasionally, there is truth in advertising, and as I studied the details of this film, I discovered through my cultural research that MGM had clearly performed their research when shooting this production. Frances Marion wrote of feeling “stirred [...] by the Russian dancers and the tintinnabulations of the balalaikas, tambourines, and barabans” (Marion 168), recalling a scene which does not appear in the final cut. I felt that my challenge was monumental as it was incumbent upon me that my own research efforts be on a par with that of the studio’s from almost ninety years earlier.
- 26 “Unchanged since the days of the first Zaporagians [sic]—the ancient and holy betrothal ceremony of the Cossacks,” as one of the film’s intertitles read while a very beautiful sequence unfolds [1:08:10]. Taking place in the home of the character, the Widow Akoolena, the *mise-en-scene* features a group of singing female villagers accompanied by two balalaikas and the traditional Ukrainian instrument, the Bandura (it looks and sounds like a balalaika, only twice the size and deeper in tone). Through discussions with Ukrainian colleagues and countless online videos, it was agreed that the film represented traditional customs rather accurately. The sequence may be divided into three significant passages: the arrival of the bride to be, the swearing upon the holy relic, and the oath upon the holy bread. In Ukrainian life, music and singing plays a profound role in the carrying out of these traditions. For the first sequence [1:08:35], I adapted a chorus from Artemovsky’s opera *Zaporozhets za Dunayem* (The

Cossacks in Exile Beyond the Danube), but I used and adapted a different text from the great Ukrainian poet, Taras Shevchenko (1814–1861), which is sung in the Ukrainian language, and starts:

Do not pursue a rich woman,
She shall drive you from the house.
Do not pursue a squalid one,
For thou shalt never sleep.
Marry for a carefree life
To have a Cossack fate:
Whether you're clothed or naked,
What will be, will be.⁴

- 27 When the holy relic is brought forth, I wrote a simple text (all texts were prepared in the Ukrainian language), which I then set to my original composition:

Marriage is Holy.
Love is Sacred.
Sacred is Love.

- 28 When the holy bread is brought forth, I adapted the well-known Ukrainian song of good fortune, *Mnohaya Lita*, which means to have many years of health and happiness.

- 29 Much to my dismay, I discovered that in the town where I made my recordings (Olomouc in the Czech Republic), there were no reliable bandura or balalaika players to be found; therefore, I had to be creative when scoring this sequence. Using the only resources available to me, I arranged the music for full choir, strings, winds, mandolin, and cimbalom, the last two instruments taking the place of the missing guitar-like instruments. Despite the occasional vicissitudes of my work, such challenges inspire creativity and determination, which may ultimately lead to very rewarding results. It was pure serendipity that a few of the choir members were Ukrainian; their natural understanding of their mother tongue was a great asset in helping the rest of the choir solidify their pronunciation of the Ukrainian texts. Near the beginning of the film after the Cossacks have returned to their village from battle with the Turks, a call to prayer has been rung on the four church bells [0:06:30]. A chorus by Mykola Leontovych⁵ provided a beautiful religious musical setting. Through my research I was able to find this composition, whose text is about how the Turkish army had been vanquished in battle by the Ukrainians. The male soloist in the choir had the style and emotional fervor necessary to make the music truly authentic in disposition.

- 30 The “direct cue” in a silent film, as mentioned earlier, can relieve a composer of the burden of selecting a musical selection for a sequence featuring musicians, singers, and dancers. But when faced with a scene in which musicians and singers are performing a wordless song, a scene in which there are no titles or text to offer any hints or suggestions as to what the characters are singing, how does one begin to address such a challenge?

- 31 For me, one the most demanding moments of scoring is when the Cossacks decide to tease and humiliate the John Gilbert character, Lukashka, who refuses to fight and shed blood, (not for any cowardly inclinations, but rather he sees no point to warfare), and prefers to dream of willowy brooks and flirt with his sweetheart, Maryana [0:18:09]. She has mixed feelings about her beloved Lukashka because he has not demonstrated his manhood in battle, and the villagers call him the “Woman Man.” The humiliation culminates with the Cossacks binding Lukashka and dressing him in women’s clothing, even placing a flower garland upon his head. Tied to a post, Lukashka is furious, as he

looks upon his people. His father has heard the rabble and discovers that his son is the laughing stock of this incident. When Maryana is asked what she thinks of the “Woman Man,” she says, “He’s not my sweetheart—I hate him!” Disgusted, she joins the rollicking crowd in pelting her beloved with wine grapes. It is soon after this point that a cut shows a Cossack stopping the assault, and then leading the villagers in song. But what song? Considering the meticulous details within the actual production itself, and the fact that MGM imported an actual Cossack band from across the world at great expense, these details demonstrated a level of artistic integrity that simply could not be ignored. It would be egregious to assume that any simple folk song would satisfy as a musical background. Through countless hours of pondering, struggling, and research, I discovered an even greater impediment that lay before me.

- 32 In the 1920s, after the Bolsheviks had come to power, the Ukrainian language was banned, and a devious process obfuscating Ukrainian culture was furtively implemented. One of the results of this practice is that the original lyrics of many Ukrainian folk songs were replaced by Soviet approved texts. One such case involves perhaps the most famous of all Cossack songs, *Oy Ty, Halyu* (Oh You, Halya), a cautionary song about going off with strangers. In the current popular edition of this song, a young girl named Halya is enticed by a group of Don Cossacks to go to the forest. She goes, is brutalized, tied to a tree that is set upon fire; she cries out for help and is heard, but is not rescued. Two other Cossacks remark that they heard her cries in the field, too far away to be of help. In the Soviet rendition, the Cossacks are not in the least the heroes and even appear ineffectual. How could this possibly be in the most famous of all Cossack songs? After committing weeks of research addressing this question, I discovered that this is not what the original song is about. Kazakh (Kazakhstanian) soldiers are the ones who entice Halya. When she cries for help, Cossack soldiers hear her cries, vanquish the brutes and save her life.⁶ Now that I understood what the song was originally about, it was impossible for me not to feel the connection between poor Halya being tied to a tree on the one hand, and Lukashka being tied to a post dressed as a young girl as he is being taunted on the other. And I would wager that the 250 Cossacks at MGM would have known the original verse:

Traveling Khazars
Returning from the Don (river),
Stopped by the home of Halya,
Urging her to go out with them.
Oh you, Halya, young Halya!
You were persuaded to go!

- 33 When the crowd erupts in song, suddenly, the transformation of the raw emotions comes to the fore in a visceral and meaningful sense. Lukashka’s humiliation is even greater, and so is his fury after he has broken away from the crowd. It also provides a greater sense of violence to the fight that follows this, when Lukashka’s father is intent on whipping his son because he, too, feels shamed.

A Brief Reflection Upon a Musical Journey

- 34 Apart from being an ethnomusicological researcher for more than two months leading up to the recording, I also had to act in several other capacities to complete my assignment. As a composer, I composed, adapted, orchestrated and printed more than three thousand pages of orchestra score and parts. As a musician, I conducted all ten

three-hour sessions over the course of more than one week, and I performed all of the keyboard parts as well. And as producer, I was responsible for booking the concert hall for recording, for hiring the orchestra, the recording team, the audio post production team. I also had to edit and assemble the more than sixty separate cues into its intended order with my editor, constantly being aware of the technical criteria established by the television broadcast network. And finally, I had to watch and listen to the film's final edits several times—with the film running at ninety-two minutes, more than fifteen hours of viewing time were necessary for me to feel satisfied that I could submit the final recording to my employers.

- 35 So many details, most of which will go unnoticed by the general audience, may prompt further questions: "Why even bother with details?" MGM devoted endless hours and years to this production, and the details may be observed within the moving images of this feature. "Why not take shortcuts?" I could not allow myself to compromise my artistic integrity, but more importantly, it is my goal to try to bring out as many of the rich details in this film through my score so that it may be possible for viewers to see some of the beautiful things I have seen while composing for *The Cossacks*. Whether or not one believes that God or the Devil is in the details, to become conscious and aware of the countless details within a major motion picture production requires work, patience, and persistence. As a form of art appreciation, it also demands study, reflection and an open mind. For those individuals who are seeking to gain experiences beyond the joys of relaxing entertainment value, it behooves such individuals to allow for repeated experiences of the same subject, because with each additional encounter, something new may present itself and even surprise or inspire the viewer. This is the goal of appreciating any form of art, and there is no reason, from my point of view, to ever undermine the opportunity to create a score worthy of scrutiny, reflection and repeated hearings. This is the process through which I must venture every time I prepare to score a film.

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ABSTRACTS

Music scoring of film is one of the most potent techniques for defining and dimensionalizing moving images; in silent film, musical fabric has formidable powers to broaden and evoke emotional and intellectual responses simultaneously. Silent film scoring is an especially volatile process because the music serves in place of the dialogue and its vocal nuances, and the sound effects and soundscape—it is one of the most misunderstood disciplines of the cinematic arts. This paper will discuss my musicological research and its results for *The Cossacks* (1928); the scoring process (composing, adapting, and developing musical subtext); and score recording. In detailing the production of contemporary silent film scoring, I intend to reveal the importance of creating a score that compliments and possibly exceeds a film's artistic merits. Interpreting visual text and fleshing out subtext through musical scoring can elevate a simple film sequence into a richly complex artistic expression.

Créer une musique pour un film est une des plus puissantes méthodes pour définir, et donner une dimension supplémentaire aux images mouvantes ; dans le cinéma muet, la texture musicale a le pouvoir formidable d'amplifier et des convoquer simultanément des réactions émotionnelles et intellectuelles. Concevoir la musique d'un film muet est un processus particulièrement délicat, car la musique tient lieu à la fois de dialogue et de nuances vocales ainsi que d'effets et d'ambiance sonores – c'est une des disciplines les plus méconnues des arts du cinéma. Cet article porte sur ma recherche musicologique et ses résultats, pour le film *Les Cosaques* (Hill, 1928) ; le processus de création de musique de film (composition, adaptation, et conception d'un contexte

musical) ; et enregistrement. En observant de près la production contemporaine de la musique d'un film muet, je souhaite révéler l'importance de créer une musique qui complète voire surpasse les mérites artistiques d'un film. Interpréter un texte visuel, et en étoffer le contexte grâce à la bande musicale, peut transformer une simple séquence en une expression artistique riche et complexe.

INDEX

Keywords: The Cossacks, film scoring, musicological research, reappraising film historiography, soundscape, score production

Mots-clés: Les Cosaques (Hill, 1928), composition de musique de film, musicologie, environnement sonore, réévaluation de l'historiographie filmique, production de musique de film

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