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Stanley Kubrick is among film history’s most famous—and at times, infamous—directors, known especially for his visual mastery, inventive audiovisual effects, and his meticulous attention to detail.1 His thirteen films span forty-six years, from Fear and Desire, in 1953 to Eyes Wide Shut in 1999. Fascination with Kubrick’s work has only grown since the enigmatic man’s death a few months before the release of his final film.2 Correspondingly, analyses and reviews of the music in his films have become an increasingly popular topic. For instance, Kate McQuiston’s We’ll Meet Again: Musical Design in the Films of Stanley Kubrick explores the director’s precise and purposeful use of music in his films. McQuiston’s archival research helps craft a convincing and detailed analysis of Kubrick’s musical choices and forms, though the book’s format rendered it repetitious at times. Its two hundred pages reveal a well-researched study of Kubrick’s film music, including entire chapters dedicated to his most celebrated films (Lolita, 2001: A Space Odyssey, A Clockwork Orange, Barry Lyndon, The Shining, and Eyes Wide Shut). In addition, this book is accessible to undergraduate and graduate readers alike, though more challenging for those who are unfamiliar with the director’s works and with music history.

The three-part book begins with the author’s description of Kubrick’s overall

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soundscape, including his use of voices and narrative voiceover in his first six films, focusing especially on *Lolita* and *A Clockwork Orange*. McQuiston argues that Kubrick intentionally creates a sense of ambiguity in his films through the indefinite boundary between diegetic and non-diegetic sound, thereby “collaps[ing] the apparent distance between characters and audience” (62). In particular, she presents a compelling link between the narration in *Lolita* and its music. McQuiston provides an in-depth examination of scenes in which the narration coincides with specific musical pieces, namely the pop theme “Lolita Ya-Ya” and the classical “Love Theme,” showing that the juxtaposition of Humbert’s voice and the music informs the audience about his true, hidden motivations. Similarly, Christine Lee Gengaro’s book *Listening to Stanley Kubrick: The Music in his Films* examines *Lolita’s* music and its relation to Humbert’s character, but does not connect the music to the narration. McQuiston thus provides a novel approach to the study of the music in the film and its association with voiceover and character development, particularly since *Lolita* is often overlooked in analyses of the director’s film music in favour of Kubrick’s later works.

The author expands on this path of inquiry by examining the dialectics in the music of *A Clockwork Orange*, whose innovative soundtrack exposes the main character’s emotions. McQuiston addresses the way in which the film “crosses sonic barriers” and affects the emotional response of the audience by using “real world” music, or the audience’s music, in a violent, dystopian world. David Code also examines the dialectical pairings of music, but focuses on the music not composed by Beethoven, whose Ninth Symphony assumes an iconic status in the film: “But the main reason why the film’s intricate engagement with audio-visual culture remains underappreciated is...the significant imbalance discernible in most previous commentary towards the single most notorious component of its soundtrack [Beethoven’s Ninth].” In addition, Code mentions the effect of the music’s obscure diegetic boundaries but does not explore the subject further as McQuiston does. Indeed, McQuiston begins with a detailed breakdown of the first scene in the film, and then uses this as a springboard for an analysis of the whole movie. She also examines other pieces used in the film, such as Henry Purcell’s *Funeral Music for Queen Mary*, but still dedicates a later chapter to the role of Beethoven within the piece, providing a truly thorough analysis of *A Clockwork Orange*’s music.

In the next chapter of the book, the author states that the music in *Eyes Wide Shut* plays with the audience’s perceptions of reality and fantasy by dancing between diegetic layers. Kubrick interrupts and fragments the music to depict aurally the equally interrupted and fragmented communication between the troubled married couple in the film. Ligeti’s foreboding “Musica Ricercata” also serves as a means of communication between the audience and the main character, Bill, creating an indelible connection exemplified by its copious use in the film’s advertisements. Once more, McQuiston provides a detailed dissection of the film’s first scene, which, through Bill’s actions, reveals that the seemingly non-diegetic music of the introductory credits is in

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fact playing from the couple’s radio, blurring the boundary between reality and fiction. McQuiston’s meticulous examination is a strength in the chapter, as she analyses not only the overall impact the music has on the film, but also the impact it has on specific moments.

In Part Two, McQuiston closely examines the influence of audience expectations on Kubrick’s work. According to the author, Kubrick was “well aware of listeners’ tendency to anticipate, expect, and predict while they listen to music,” creating a sequential relationship through repetition that she calls “musical form” (66). The form fleshes out the atmosphere of the film, articulating ideas that cannot be conveyed verbally. She then examines how Kubrick subverts audience expectations, expectations engendered by these forms through the unconventional blending sound and music in The Shining. McQuiston seeks to show that this fusion extends the scope of “horror music.” Conversely, Jeremy Barham claims that Kubrick colluded in “the rapid appropriation in post-1960s mainstream cinema of musically avant-garde styles, pressing them into service as clichés for all manner of manifestations of the ‘Other.’” However, McQuiston asserts that the blending of sound and irregular placement was purposefully edited to create a sense of loss of control in the audience, mirroring the characters’ own powerlessness in the mysterious hotel. As the audience cannot know when to expect the music to appear, or even in what form it will appear, they are as imprisoned by the film as the characters themselves. While both analyses are convincing and detailed, McQuiston’s use of sheet music and archival documents from the Stanley Kubrick Archives in London lend even further strength to her arguments.

McQuiston also shows the subversion of temporal form in Barry Lyndon by considering how Schubert’s music is used anachronistically; the film is set in the eighteenth century, and the other music in the film all dates from the eighteenth century or earlier, except for the Schubert piece. The recurrence of the composer’s music is therefore significant, according to McQuiston, making a connection between Schubert’s late style and Lady Lyndon’s character. McQuiston argues that late style evokes certain associations in the audience—namely, the association with death—ideas then linked to the character of Lady Lyndon. While this analysis is original and thought-provoking, it assumes a deep knowledge of classical music from the audience, which is not always guaranteed. Gengaro’s analysis of the music’s relation to the main character’s stages of life seems more compelling in this case, as it provides a narrative context that strengthens her study.

In Part Three, McQuiston shows that the audience’s pre-existing musical and sociocultural knowledge creates meaning out of the film, just as the film can give new meanings to the music within it, in a process called mutual inscription. She begins with a second analysis of Lolita, this time focusing only on the music and providing a much more in-depth dissection of the soundtrack. McQuiston particularly focuses on the juxtaposition of pop music with the more “serious” classical music. Gengaro’s book follows much the same argument, but provides more context for the film than McQuiston, thereby strengthening the effectiveness of Gengaro’s argument and creating a clearer understanding of the irony and the significance of the contrasting themes in the film. Furthermore, McQuiston addresses several themes, such as forbidden love,

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Christine Lee Gengaro, “Listening to Stanley Kubrick”, 149.

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scandal, and the characters’ hidden motives, creating some repetition, because these ideas and their relation to dialectics were thoroughly discussed in her first analysis of Lolita.

Next, the author devotes an entire chapter to the examination of the music in 2001: A Space Odyssey. Many analyses of this film argue about the quality of the music itself rather than the role of the music within the context of the film; Alex North created an original soundtrack for 2001, but Kubrick chose to use previously-created music, sparking a heated debate. Some, like Lee Barron, believe that North’s soundtrack, created expressively for the film, is superior to the final product. Others such as Irena Paulus argue that the choice, placement, and editing of the music makes the result an original work in and of itself. For her part, McQuiston chooses not to argue about the quality or originality of one or the other, but instead seeks to objectively examine the significance of Kubrick’s choices. She provides detailed analyses of key scenes in the film and of the juxtaposition of Ligeti’s musique concrète to the classical compositions Blue Danube (Strauss Jr.) and Also Sprach Zarathustra (Strauss). The author shows that the songs themselves were transformed in meaning by the celebrity of the film, especially known for the iconic status its music assumed. Patterson’s article on the music in 2001 also explores the opposition between the tonal and the atonal, but in a broad sense. Indeed, McQuiston examines the pieces individually before commenting on their relationship to others. She also speaks to the link between the waltz in the film (Blue Danube) and circular imagery, a subject she explores further in the last section when she details Max Ophüls’ influence on Kubrick’s films. Because of her objective analysis, she does not seek to justify Kubrick’s musical choices, thus providing a unique and thorough contribution to the literature about music in the film.

Next, McQuiston examines the dialectical use of Beethoven in A Clockwork Orange and the profound impact of its use on the public and on later interpretations of Beethoven’s works. She considers how the music informs the characters and their relationships to power. She categorises the Ninth Symphony as a symbol of the antihero, a term which well describes Alex, the main character of the film. McQuiston also examines how Alex’s portrayal and his association with Beethoven’s music had an impact on popular culture. Galia Hanoch-Roe comes to much the same conclusion using the same process, but she also comments on the impact of the film on musicology, writing: “In the last decade, twenty years after Kubrick’s Clockwork Orange, in which the Ninth arouses extreme fantasies of violence and sex, it has provoked a polemic over music, gender, and sexuality, with a reading of the Ninth as rooted in masculine libidinal impulses.” McQuiston addresses this perception of a change in culture, but does not make the specific link to the field of musicology as Hanoch-Roe has.

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Finally, McQuiston returns to her comparison of circular symbolism in the films of Ophüls and Kubrick. She does so to demonstrate Ophüls’ influence on Kubrick, and so on the films’ inscription process itself. This chapter offers some of the most fascinating analysis of the book, especially the films’ music. The association between directors, though seemingly obvious when explained by the author, has been observed but never analysed in such detail, perhaps because of mainstream culture’s relative lack of familiarity with Ophüls’ works. For example, Barham briefly cites the metaphor of “inescapable circularity” in The Shining, but does not explore it further, nor does he make the link to Ophüls’ style. McQuiston’s comparative analysis explores the music in Eyes Wide Shut and shows that music inspired many of the audiovisual designs in both director’s films.

Overall, We’ll Meet Again offers a detailed examination of Kubrick’s relationship to the music in his works without seeking to comment on the quality of the music itself. The book was at times repetitive, but McQuiston’s writing is nonetheless engaging for fans and critics of Kubrick alike. The author’s detailed breakdown, sometimes down to the second, created a compelling argument, though it suffered somewhat from its narrow subject matter; while McQuiston claims to examine Kubrick’s film music in its entirety, she only mentions his first four films in the first chapter (Fear and Desire, The Killing, Killer’s Kiss, and Paths of Glory), and makes almost no reference to Spartacus, one of the director’s most well-known films. Nonetheless, the book is an excellent starting point for further analysis of Kubrik’s film music and is a useful tool for those studying musicology or for general enthusiasts.

For further reading:


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* Gengaro, Listening to Stanley Kubrick, 221.

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