

Cinematography and Media Studies

Parallel between Film and Theatre Music

Petru MĂRGINEANU

UNATC "I.L. Caragiale" Bucharest,

Romania

petru@margineanu.ro

Abstract: *Film and theatre music evolve like DNA spirals. They distance and approach each other constantly, in a fluid and graceful concealing, permanently chained to one another. For the one who composes both, the artistry builds itself on*



learning the rules of time, extremely precise and terrifically vague at the same... time. From aesthetics to style and afterwards to studio technique, film and theatre music follow the same path of minimum resistance like the one from mountain towards the fields or, on the contrary, they stubbornly choose the hardest path, even though they root from the same creative river.

Keywords: *music for film, music for theatre, filmmaking, film score, theatre score.*

How to cite: MĂRGINEANU, Petru (2020) "Parallel between Film and Theatre Music", *Concept* 2(21), pp. 157-166.

At the end of the 1980s, I constantly witnessed the audio mixing of films, paying special attention to the changes brought to the music editing. It was an evolutionary labor where the components changed on the go – the calculation in the sound editing booth never quite matching the reality of the mixing room. The music was usually recorded at the Mihail Jora Hall of the Romanian Radio Broadcasting Company, if it was composed for large orchestra, or at the T3 Studio of the same company, if it was composed for chamber orchestra or other types of chamber ensembles, such as string quartet or piano trio. But there was also a wonderful time for Romanian film music – the time of the Cinema Orchestra. At first conducted by maestro Paul Popescu, one of the most imaginative

Romanian conductors and, later, by maestro Mircea Cristescu, the Orchestra was disbanded in 1965, after only six years of existence (Căliman, 2011, p. 67). It somehow survived, thanks to conductor Mircea Cristescu who turned it into an independent orchestra – one of the best in the country – providing concerts in the country and tours abroad. From a stylistic point of view, the film music of those years generally fell into three main typologies.

Symphonic or chamber music, of Neo-Romantic or Neoclassical inspiration, seasoned with modernist elements in smaller or larger doses, dominated the films of the time, especially period dramas or historical films. *Mood music*, big-band or jazz-inspired, was the second typology and was found more in films with current issues, especially in comedies. *Experimental music*, other than that from avant-garde contemporary music, was either electronic music, which surfaced relatively rarely, because in those years there were very few composers who had access to the technology needed for this musical genre, or *musique concrète* built from exploitation in musical key of noises. *Musique concrète* was usually recorded in the studios of the Radio Broadcasting Company, but also in the great hall at Buftea, with instrumentalists from the Radio Estrada Orchestra, which was in itself a big band.

Electronic music was most often recorded in the personal studios of the composers, who sometimes resorted to an instrumentalist who added to a structure made by means of sound synthesizers. In the latter part of the 1980s, synthesizers began to be able to reproduce, at different quality levels, sounds specific to natural instruments: stringed, brass or percussion instruments. Called *sampling*, this process recorded the entire range of a musical instrument note by note, then distributed these recordings to the synthesizer's keyboard. Consequently, the composer had the opportunity to record in his personal studio other genres besides electronic music. These authors often collaborated with theaters across the country on their plays. At the same time in the 1980s, Romanian theatre resorted to limited musical formulas, instrumentalists recording the music in advance, or – less often – becoming part of the distribution of the play, performing the music on stage for each performance. Film and theatre music was not released by Electrecord on disc, although there was some demand for it. Moreover, authorities rarely objected to instrumental music, thus allowing, for example, the editing of the albums Funky Synthesizer volumes I and II by composer Adrian Enescu. These records were Western both in name and graphics, but most of all in content. A film composer with more than fifty feature films, Adrian Enescu has composed theatre music throughout his entire career, constantly collaborating with directors Alexandru Darie and Dan Pița, in the few plays the latter directed.

Both film and theatre music pose common problems, but also specific ones. The first element to be identified is the aesthetic one. The music must belong to the unitary aesthetics of the film or the theatre performance, depending on the requirements of the script or of the dramatic text, and most of all on the director's vision. The latter has the power to completely change the expectations derived from the initial texts, and the composer must prove his ability to adapt the aesthetics of his musical creation in the most malleable of forms (Cooke,

2010, p. 102). Of course, music streams from the creativity of the one who gives birth to it, but in cinema and theatre it encounters a path filled with obstacles, snaking its way in a zigzag pattern. This first step, understanding the adaptation of a certain aesthetic that often significantly reduces the composer's creative freedom, is perhaps the most difficult. There are few composers who can express themselves in different aesthetic worlds with a certain ease. For others, it is a challenge that often brings them to the brink of failure. Each composer swims freely and gracefully in the pool of his own comfort. For some of them this pool is extremely interesting when viewed from the outside, in some cases the walls of the pool are transparent, so that the music is easier to admire. Most can only exist in their own pool. They can't get out of the water, they can't leave their shelter, they definitely can't go out into the world. It is a terrifying isolation in a comfortable, but painfully limited aquarium. That is why most composers should not look towards film and theatre music. This involves a certain type of inner training that, through constant exercise, minimizes ego and pride. In cinema and theatre, only one person is entitled to ego and pride. Not the actors, no matter how great they are, nor the playwright, if he is contemporary with the cast, but the director. Without him, everyone involved would sound like an orchestra trying to tune itself. You can sometimes cut out a fragment of a familiar sound theme, but this is generally overwhelmed by a large number of instruments that play each to their own. All this strange sound carousel stops instantly when the director appears, a conductor with ordering potential over chaos.

It is interesting to note that, among the performing arts, theatre offers you an aesthetic, while film imposes it on you. If the theatre spectator fails to concentrate or is simply bored, he can look at the walls, count the ceiling lights or the folds of the curtain. The cinema spectator is completely captive in a world of darkness, wherever he wants to look outside the screen he will only discover the obscure, so he will give in to the magic of the screen, which is not necessarily a bad thing, if the film is good. As not enough films are good, being forced to engorge on them to the last bite can be unpleasant, especially when out of politeness, and out of regret of throwing away the money on the ticket you decide, stoically, to stay on the darkened barricade until the final credits remind you it's time to be free again. In the United States, the most expensive rates for video commercials are not on television, as in Europe, but in cinemas, precisely because the captive viewer has nowhere else to look, so he will pay full attention to the advertisement. Extrapolating, of all the performing arts, cinema has the greatest power to manipulate the spectator, precisely by not forcing him to attend the show, but rather to become part of the show. Any inattentive or bored viewer will quickly give in to the screen, a natural consequence of inattention and boredom.

Once the aesthetics of the play or film are determined, which is not necessarily an exact science, the style of music is next. Aesthetics and style do not necessarily correspond, they can be complementary. For example, it often happens that a classical play is reinterpreted in a modernist manner, and the music of the play thus becomes a key element



in defining the nature of that modernism. A performance of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was staged in the early 1960s at the Lyceum Theatre in London, starring Sir Alec Guinness (picture on the left). The aesthetics definitely belonged to a Shakespearean drama, but the style was not only modernist, but very niche: the era of Nazism. If the style manages to meet the requirements of aesthetics, then everything will end well. This performance was a great success at the time, both in terms of audience and critical acclaim, which does not happen very often. From Romanian theatre we remember Ștefan Iordache's *Hamlet* from the Nottara Theatre from the seventies, directed by Dinu Cernescu in a studio hall in an intimate manner unusual for this text, Ion Caramitru's *Hamlet* from Bulandra from the eighties, under director Alexandru Tocilescu and, to close a circular arc in a ternary

key, Adrian Pintea's *Hamlet* from the National Theatre in Craiova directorially orchestrated by Tompa Gábor. A common general aesthetic, special styles, no exaggerate modernism, different directorial visions. Theatre offers the magic through which the action of a story



*Anda Caropol and Ștefan Iordache in "Hamlet",
Directed by Dinu Cernescu,
"C.I. Nottara" Theatre, 1974*

takes place in real time, where no performance is a repetition of the previous one. The egregore created by the concentrated crowd of spectators adds weight to each line, is a strong energetic vibration and relatively constant in intensity, with peaks that depend on which moment of the song satisfies the audience the most. Film can also impress through acting, but not at the authentic level of the theatre performance.

*Ion Caramitru – Hamlet,
Directed by Alexandru Tocilescu,
"L.S. Bulandra" Theatre, 1985*



*Adrian Pintea and Ozana
Oancea – "Hamlet", directed
by Tompa Gábor,
National Theatre Craiova,
1997*

After aesthetics and style, the moments in which the music should intervene must be identified. Most of the time, both the film and the theatre performance have musical covers, necessary to create the emotional premises of entering and exiting the story. If in cinema the final credits belong to music as the main actor, music that represents the last conclusion of the story, which appears after the last line and after the last frame, in theatre the final music is the sound designed to support the applause of the audience calling for the actors back on stage. The film sometimes appeals to what the great sound engineer Anuşavan Salamanian called “the exit through Sărindar”, referring to the extension of the final music beyond the final credits, that accompanied the spectators on their exit from the hall – the cinemas on the former 6 March Boulevard, currently Regina Elisabeta, had the exit in Sărindar Street, currently Constantin Mille. Such a musical extension of the performance is common in theatre, not at the end, but at the beginning. Often the music starts in the foyer, accompanying the spectators to the wardrobe or – where it exists – to the buffet. The role of this music is obvious – preparing the spectator for the atmosphere of the performance. In the early days of silent film, the two-funnel gramophone had been invented in France. One funnel was directed towards the inside of the hall or tent where the screening took place, providing musical background, the other was directed towards the outside, to advertise passers-by (Wierzbicki, 2009, p. 24). I participated to theatre performances where, both at the beginning of the play and during the intermission, there was a speaker with music from the performance directed towards the sidewalk because the spectators gathered there to smoke.

Film music is considered to be diegetic or non-diegetic, and this classification is also valid for theatre music. Diegetic music is the totality of music that is heard by the characters in the shot – or on stage. In film there are frame music or additional music, a radio or maybe a music heard from the neighbors. The truly creative part is non-diegetic. The premise of characters on stage where a music that they are unaware of is heard is interesting. Do viewers realize this? Even if the music used in theatre usually refers to passages – entrances – exits, sometimes you find a support music for a certain exchange of lines or even a monologue. Just as in ancient times religion offered what the state lacked, a spiritual component, so does film or theatre music offer a certain state based on a certain emotional vein that makes the acting slide in smoothly, with the grace of a figure skating duo.

I wrote my first film music when I was a student, and my first theatre music a few years later. It is interesting how my debut film had a theatrical dramaturgical component, and my first theatre performance a cinematic one. *Love and Hot Water*, the 1992 film by director Dan Mironescu, is a story of survival on the fringes of society, in decrepit blocks surrounded by mountains of garbage, a situation still present to this day in that respective neighborhood, thirty years later. *Petru*, the play by playwright Vlad Zografî, directed by Cătălina Buzoianu, was first staged in 1998 at the Bulandra Theatre. Tsar Peter I, craftsman of the transition of medieval Russia to the modern era, takes a long European tour, often incognito, to understand the workings of the Western world – he works as a carpenter in a

shipyard where no one knows who he is, and with what he learns there he will build an imperial fleet, the first in Russian history. Vlad Zografi's text refers to his visit to the France ruled by Louis XIV, the Sun King. I was fascinated by three things working on this play. By the historical event of which I had no idea, so well rendered by the playwright, the masterful interpretation of Cornel Scripcaru in the main role, and the depth



"Petru", directed by Cătălina Buzoianu, main role – Cornel Scripcaru, "L.S. Bulandra" Theatre, 1998

with which a seemingly frail lady, whom I knew well from the childhood at the creative house from Cumpătu, united all the components of a play together, proving to be a conductor with five batons in each hand.

For the film, I stylistically proposed two musical sources, one in accordance with the image and the other in contradiction. The first resorted to the world of synthesizers, of mood music composed of musical sound effects, called drones; the second source appealed to Late Baroque music that contrasted sharply with the film's awful exteriors. Coincidentally, the music for the play *Petru* was also built on two sources, the first being the image of an ancestral, visceral Russia, with male choir icons immersed in strange sounds, at the limit of exploiting noise in *musique concrète*, the second source being inspired by Baroque court music drawn from the creation of Jean-Baptiste Lully, the court composer of the Sun King who, if you investigate further, turned out to be Giovanni Battista Lulli, a top graduate of the Florentine school of composition. Of course, I could have chosen together with Cătălina Buzoianu fragments from her creation, but I suggested to build a court music by myself that would contain some *clues* and *tricks*, as these small inventions are also called. Thus, the Baroque themes I wrote contained either musical instruments that had no place there, or melodic-harmonic writing solutions that were imported from another time.

But the most important lesson learned from the composition of theatre and film music is the temporal dimension. Film, of course, works with fixed times, well measured with a quality timer. The film was watched together with the director and the sound engineer, you were shown the music sequences and you were offered the freedom to propose representative style and musical themes. If the main themes were accepted, you would start composing, usually in chronological order for an accumulation of musical ideas towards the end. Once the themes were chosen and approved, the rest came together naturally and somewhat by itself. When the music recordings were over, the music was edited on film, and it went into the mix. In theatre, things are as different as can be. Everything is in constant motion, the performance evolves smoothly, no scene lasts the same a second time. In *Petru* there was at a certain moment a dialogue between Cornel Scripcaru and Mariana Mihuț that Cătălina Buzoianu wanted to illustrate with a certain theme, which accumulated and grew towards the end, important dramaturgically. After composing the theme, I had a discussion with the sound engineer of the theatre to see what technical solution we can choose so that, regardless of the duration of the dialogue, the end of the music comes in at exactly the set time. I chose the option to create three separate musics of different lengths, which were identical until the end, where each was longer than the previous one. The sound engineer played all three simultaneously and decided, depending on how the scene was set in time, to use the right option. It turned out to be a



"Marlene", directed by Cătălina Buzoianu,
Main role – Emilia Popescu,
Comedy Theatre, 2002

good idea that has since been used in other performances. If the time of film is exact and the time of theatre is fluid, the neutral nature of the archetypal time exists somewhere in the middle. Some of us have a privileged relation with time, others never manage to catch up. Cronus' sickle offers no mercy, and in the end, the hourglass offered to everyone at birth is a precious gift – everyone's chance to withstand entropy.

A few years later, Cătălina Buzoianu called me again to write the music for *Marlene*, with Emilia Popescu in the lead role. That was a completely different challenge – I rethought the orchestration of the songs performed by Marlene Dietrich to bring them to another time, but also to another dimension. Strangely, this performance had a fixed, cinematic time. The film *Occident*, directed by Cristian Mungiu, which we were working on at the same time, has – like any film – a fixed time. Composing its music involved many variants of music, each with its own time. The ternary structure of the story required a very precise balance between what appears in the first act or in the second, and how they all intertwine in the

final act. The music I was writing had from the very beginning fluid times that ended up being fixed only towards the mix. It was the only film in my experience as a composer where I didn't know until the last moment if my music would go in the film or not.



"Occident", directed by Cristian Mungiu, 2002

Most of the time, if you screen a play, you risk getting a weak film; just as turning a movie into a play is not the happiest of ideas. Theatre is an art of conventions related to acting, the nature of scenography and the credibility of dialogues. The actors speak louder, so that all the spectators can hear them. The tree on stage is made of cardboard – if you accept that it is a tree, everything is fine. If you don't, you're not suitable for theatre. It puts our imagination and abstract thinking to the test, while the film pays attention to the smallest details – as the cinema screen is very large. Both of these performing arts involve different sets of conventions that we often naturally, instinctively and intuitively accept, and this acceptance is the gateway to two magical worlds without which the world would be a desert. The silver screen of cinema and the unique, unrepeatable diamond of theatre.

References:

1. CĂLIMAN, Călin (2011) *Istoria filmului românesc*. București: Contemporanul.
2. COOKE, Mervyn (2010) *A History of Film Music*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
3. WIERZBICKI, James (2009) *Film music: A history*. New York: Routledge.

Online references:

1. ANDRONESCU, Monica (2020) *Pe vremea când Adrian Pintea era Hamlet...* [online]. Available at: <https://amfiteatru.com/2020/08/05/pe-vremea-cand-adrian-pintea-era-hamlet/> (Accessed: 21 October 2020)
2. BEATON, Cecil (1951) *Sir Alec Guinness as Hamlet* [online]. Available at: <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw67403/Sir-Alec-Guinness-as-Hamlet> (Accessed: 21 October 2020)
3. IONESCU, Dana (2020) *Un „Hamlet” acid ca o „revoluție care ar fi putut începe de la Grădina Icoanei”* [online]. Available at: <https://amfiteatru.com/2020/02/05/un->

hamlet-acid-ca-o-revolutie-care-ar-fi-putut-incepe-de-la-gradina-icoanei/
(Accessed: 21 October 2020)

4. MORARIU, Mircea (2020) *Teatru online. „Petru” sau teatru fără conflict* [online]. Available at: <https://amfiteatru.com/2020/05/13/teatru-online-petru-sau-teatru-fara-conflict/> (Accessed: 21 October 2020)
5. SABET, Masood (2018) *Moving Along the Cartesian Coordinates* [online]. Available at: <https://melcon.blog/2018/09/28/moving-along-the-cartesian-coordinates/> (Accessed: 21 October 2020)

Performance references:

1. *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare (1974). Directed by Dinu Cernescu [‘C.I. Nottara’ Theatre, Bucharest. 8 February]
2. *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare (1985). Directed by Alexandru Tocilescu [‘L.S. Bulandra’ Theatre, Bucharest. 30 November]
3. *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare (1997). Directed by Tompa Gábor [‘Marin Sorescu’ National Theatre, Craiova. 5 January]
4. *Marlene* by Pam Gems (2004). Directed by Cătălina Buzoianu [Comedy Theatre, Bucharest. 23 February]
5. *Petru* by Vlad Zografi (1998). Directed by Cătălina Buzoianu [‘L.S. Bulandra’ Theatre, Bucharest]

Filmography:

1. *Dragoste și apă caldă* (1992) Directed by Dan Mironescu [Film]. București: România Film.
2. *Occident* (2002) Directed by Cristian Mungiu [Film]. București: Temple Film.

Petru Mărgineanu is a graduate of the music composition department of UNMB. He composed the music for over fifty films, TV series and plays. He collaborated with directors such as Mircea Daneliuc, Nicolae Mărgineanu, Sergiu Nicolaescu, Șerban Marinescu, Cristian Mungiu or Ovidiu Georgescu. He has won numerous film music awards, including three UCIN awards and an APTR award. In theatre he collaborated with directors like Radu Apostol, Cătălina Buzoianu, Răzvan Mazilu or Ana Mărgineanu. He is currently a PhD student in filmology at UNATC, under the scientific guidance of Professor Ovidiu Georgescu, PhD.