

Cinemusical meanings in motion pictures: Commerce, art, and Brando loyalty . . . or . . . De Niro, My God, To Thee

Morris B. Holbrook*

Graduate School of Business, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027, USA

- *The theme of art-versus-commerce has surfaced in many motion pictures but serves here to juxtapose three otherwise disparate films that draw upon the power of jazz as a force toward the dramatic development of character, plot, central themes, and other cinemusical meanings. Specifically, via the significance of its ambi-diegetic music, New York, New York (1977) shows the elevation of artistic integrity (Robert De Niro as Jimmy Doyle) over commercialism (Liza Minnelli as Francine Evans). In Heart Beat (1980), the raw honesty of a committed-but-doomed creative genius (Art Pepper) provides nondiegetic music that signifies the self-destructive degradation of a key protagonist (Nick Nolte as Neal Cassady). Finally, in The Score (2001), the appealing nature of diegetic jazz in a cinemusically-enriched nightclub environment helps to explain why a soon-to-be-reformed criminal (Robert De Niro, again, as Nick Wells) would risk everything in collaboration with two bizarre partners (Marlon Brando as Max Baron and Ed Norton as Jack Teller) in hopes of a payoff big enough to allow him to retire from a lucrative career in crime in order to run his legitimate jazz venue and to settle down with his true love (Angela Bassett as Diane Boesman).*

Copyright © 2007 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Introduction

This essay examines the role of diegetic, nondiegetic, and ambi-diegetic film music in advancing the dramatic development of plot, character, and other cinematic content in general and in contributing cinemusical meanings that reflect the socially significant art-versus-commerce theme in particular, as found in three illustrative motion pictures: *New*

York, New York (1977), *Heart Beat* (1980), and *The Score* (2001). Overall, it appears that – as part of the cinematic consumption experience – film music performs services in the co-creation of value by producers and consumers (Vargo and Lusch, 2004), whereby value emerges as an interactive relativistic preference experience (Holbrook, 1999a; Holbrook, 2006c in Lusch and Vargo, 2006). In this connection, the broad relevance of film music for issues of concern to marketing and consumer researchers has been described elsewhere (Holbrook, 2003, 2004a) in terms of four main

*Correspondence to: Morris B. Holbrook, Apartment 5H, 140 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10024, USA.
E-mail: mbh3@columbia.edu

ways in which cinemusical meanings relate to important aspects of consumption, markets, and the consumer culture (Holbrook, 2006a).

Product placement: movie-soundtrack albums

First, music in films involves a kind of *product placement* in which various tunes, songs, compositions, or performances that appear in motion pictures become cultural offerings in the form of movie-soundtrack recordings that compete for patronage in the marketplace for musical recordings (Holbrook, 2004a). For example, soundtrack albums for two of the films discussed in the present essay are currently available on www.amazon.com – *New York, New York* (1977, customer reviews = five stars, sales rank = #50,252) and *The Score* (2001, two stars, #151,923) – whereas the soundtrack recording for the third film *Heart Beat* (1980) is apparently out-of-print and not even available on Ebay, all of which says something about the comparative commercial success of the three films and the ancillary material licensed therefrom.

Product design: diegetic, nondiegetic, and ambi-diegetic music in films

Second, film music plays a role as one key component in the *product design* of a motion picture (Holbrook, 2003, 2004a). From this perspective, film scholars, musicologists, and other commentators have traditionally distinguished between two major types of music in films – namely, *diegetic source music* (on-screen performances that enhance the realism of the *mise-en-scène*) and *nondiegetic film scores* (background music or underscoring performed off-screen to advance a film's dramatic development of character, plot, or some other cinematic theme) (Metz, 1974; Monaco, 1981; Gorbman, 1987; Kalinak, 1992; Chion, 1994; Gabbard, 1996; Tan, 1996; Smith, 1998; Buhler *et al.*, 2000; Kassabian, 2001; Rosar, 2002; Stilwell, 2002). Other sorts of music in film fall *in between* these diegetic and

nondiegetic categories (Hagen, 1971; Atkins, 1983; Altman, 1987; Chion, 1994; Smith, 1998; Buhler *et al.*, 2000; Kassabian, 2001), tending to *blur the traditional boundaries* and including a type that we might call *ambi-diegetic film music* (performed on-screen like diegetic music but designed to advance the dramatic development in a manner similar to nondiegetic music) (Holbrook, 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b, 2005d, 2006a, 2006b; *cf.* Marks, 2000; Biancorosso, 2001; Rosar, 2002). In the latter connection, Rosar (2002) comments that “composers and film makers alike . . . have not infrequently used source music to create a mood or achieve a dramatic effect as an alternative to underscoring” (p. 10). Biancorosso (2001) provides a specific example, drawn from Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), in which the bells of a mission tower sound the death knell for the Kim Novak character: “On the one hand, the music seems like a component of the diegetic soundscape; on the other, the sound of the bells comments upon the scene nondiegetically as well as being a realistic element of it” (#51). The present essay will focus on all three types of film music where they appear to be most relevant to key aspects of cinemusical meaning in the product design of the three films under consideration – namely, ambi-diegetic music in the case of *New York, New York* (1977); nondiegetic music in the case of *Heart Beat* (1980); and diegetic music in the case of *The Score* (2001).

Symbolic consumer behavior: performing and listening to music as a form of symbolic consumption

Third, when the characters in a film engage in various music-related consumption experiences, the relevant cinemusical meanings serve as one aspect of *symbolic consumer behavior* that works toward advancing the dramatic development of character, plot, and other cinematic themes. Here, performing or listening to music constitutes just one more form of symbolic consumption that combines with clothing (Armani), accessories (Coach),

jewelry (Tiffany), automobiles (Lamborghini), furnishings (Maurice Villency), and other opportunities for drawing on the significance of brand names or of product-related associations to limn the nature of a character's personality, to move the plot forward in some way, or to develop other relevant cinematic themes (Holbrook and Grayson, 1986; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1993). Thus, in the films reviewed here and comparable to other aspects of symbolic consumer behavior (props, costumes, décor, scenery, and so forth), we glean important meanings concerning the nature of various characters' motives, dispositions, or values from the ambi-diegetic musical performances by Liza Minnelli and Robert De Niro in *New York, New York* (1977); from the metaphorically jazz-enriched nondiegetic cinemusical context surrounding Nick Nolte, John Heard, and Sissy Spacek in *Heart Beat* (1980); and from the diegetic offerings by Cassandra Wilson and Mose Allison in *The Score* (2001).

Themes of social significance: art versus commerce

Fourth, the cinemusical meanings of diegetic, nondiegetic, or ambi-diegetic film music may express, reflect, or signify various *themes of social significance* to students of marketing and consumer behavior. Such socially significant themes may concern issues of interest from the viewpoint of macromarketing theory, public policy, human welfare, quality of life, ethics, or other broad aspects of the consumer culture. One such issue that has attracted attention in recent times involves the theme of art-versus-commerce as it pertains to the conflict between the need for artistic integrity and the demand for popular appeal in the production of *motion pictures* (Holbrook, 1999b; Holbrook, 2005e); in the offerings of *professional musicians* (Kubacki and Croft, 2004; Bradshaw and Holbrook, 2007; Bradshaw *et al.*, 2006a; Holbrook *et al.*, 2006); and in the *combined* focus on the cinemusical representation of *musicians in films* (Holbrook, 2005b, 2006b; Bradshaw *et al.*, 2006b).

Preview

In sum, the present essay will examine three types of film music – namely, diegetic, nondiegetic, and ambi-diegetic jazz performances – as they relate to the venerable theme of art-versus-commerce in three otherwise disparate films that draw upon the power of jazz to generate cinemusical meanings that depend, respectively, on the aspects of semiosis or signification described previously: *New York, New York* (1977); *Heart Beat* (1980); and *The Score* (2001). A synopsis of the relevant homologous comparisons – that is, a summary of the key parallels and contrasts to be explored in what follows – appears in **Table 1**.

Method

The approach pursued here stems from the interpretivistic tradition (Hirschman, 1989) or postpositivistic ethos (Sherry, 1991) that has recently emerged as an alternative perspective on the study of consumer behavior (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1992). Insights drawn from this turn toward interpretation have often taken the form of autoethnography (Holbrook, 1996, 1998, 2005c) or subjective personal introspection (a.k.a. SPI; Holbrook, 1995). This is not the place to defend such approaches at length – beyond noting that, over the past 20 years, semiotic or hermeneutic analyses (Holbrook and O'Shaughnessy, 1988) and autoethnographic or SPI approaches (Holbrook, 1995) have received detailed justifications in the literature via arguments that continue to surface in periodic updates (Holbrook, 2007). The output of such postpositivistic approaches typically appears in a form such as that evinced by the present interpretive essay.

Commerce: he's delightful, he's delicious, . . . he's . . . De Niro

In the present interpretation, Martin Scorsese's *New York, New York* (1977) presents a central character in the form of a dedicated jazz musician, played by Robert De Niro, who refuses to compromise the integrity of his art

Table 1. Comparisons among three films presenting the art-versus-commerce theme

	<i>New York, New York</i> (1977)	<i>Heart Beat</i> (1980)	<i>The Score</i> (2001)
Director	Martin Scorsese	John Byrum	Frank Oz
Cinematographer	László Kovács	László Kovács	Rob Hahn
Music director or composer	Ralph Burns	Jack Nitzsche	Howard Shore
Cinemusical focus	Ambi-Diegetic	Nondiegetic	Diegetic
Representative of art	Jimmy Doyle (Robert De Niro)	Neal Cassady (Nick Nolte)	Nick Wells (Robert De Niro)
Artistic manifestation	Georgie Auld's postswinging tenor sax solos	Carolyn Cassady (Sissy Spacek)	Nick/Robert's dedication to NYC jazz club
Representative of commerce	Francine Evans (Liza Minnelli)	Art Pepper's alto-saxophone improvisations	N/R's star power as heroic safe-cracker
Commercial manifestation	Popularity of FE/LM's singing	N.Y.C. publishers	Huge \$\$\$ rewards for risk & skill
Role of music	Ambi-diegetic contrast: JD/RD's artistic integrity Versus FE/LM's commercialism	Market success of <i>On the road</i>	Diegetic songs by Cassandra Wilson and Mose Allison to establish NYC club as worth the risk
Denouement	JD/RD as happy jazz musician and successful nightclub owner	CC/SS as a compromising conformist in suburbia	NW/RD as a domesticated tax-paying jazz-club owner

and who stubbornly preserves the purity of his creative vision despite a price paid in the loss of a loved one. Specifically, this film offers us some scope for a reading of the De Niro character as a martyred jazz purist whose refusal to compromise with the forces of commerce leaves him in a state of romantic if not financial or musical exile. Just about where we want him if we happen to be a little bit idealistic about possibilities for the artistic integrity of jazz in films.

I admit that this interpretation, which reflects the impressionistic aspects of the approach pursued here and which I shall develop more systematically in what follows, involves a high level of subjectivism – akin to that celebrated by proponents of reader-response theory, by advocates of resistant readings, by supporters of autobiographical criticism, and by those predisposed toward interpretive insights drawn from SPI (for reviews, see Hirschman and Holbrook, 1992; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1993; Holbrook, 1995). In other words, I plan to offer a reading of *New York, New York* that cuts across the grain of conventional interpretations and that, in the tradition of reception studies, may indeed contradict – at least, partially – the intentions of the film's director Martin Scorsese. Hence, in order to inoculate the reader against the interpretive liberties that I plan to take, I shall begin with a brief account of what I would regard as the party line – the conventional wisdom, the received view – concerning the meaning of this film as found, for example, in the writings of Gabbard (1996).

Gabbard (1996) does an excellent job of summarizing the highlights of *New York, New York* and of placing it into the context of Scorsese's career as a director. Specifically, he sees this film as “a brief history of popular music” (p. 267) in general and as a “‘love note’ to the great musicals of classical Hollywood at the same time that he wanted to critique the genre” (p. 268) in particular. This latter, somewhat ambivalent project invites a certain level of paradox, irony, or even self-contradiction that gains considerable reinforcement from a review of the myriad influences that Gabbard lists as examples of Scorsese's

wide-ranging self-attributions. These include the improvisational aesthetic of such films as *Shadows* (1960) directed by John Cassavetes; George Cukor's *A Star Is Born* (1954) starring Judy Garland; Bing Crosby's enactment of a "lovable heel" in *Blue Skies* (1946); the ill-fated relationships between Doris Day and Lee Bowman in *My Dream Is Yours* (1949) and between Ida Lupino and Bruce Bennett in *The Man I Love* (1946); Marlon Brando and James Dean in Elia Kazan's *On the Waterfront* (1954) and *East of Eden* (1955), respectively; John Ford's cinematography; Welles, Godard, Fellini, Kurosawa, and Mizoguchi; Fred Astaire in Vincente Minnelli's *The Band Wagon* (1953); swing recordings by the Dorseys, Goodman, Shaw, Krupa, and Django Rheinhardt; and the sets designed by Boris Leven for *Alexander's Ragtime Band* (1938), *The Silver Chalice* (1954), *Giant* (1956), and *West Side Story* (1961). The jaded reader might be tempted to ask, "What else is there?" It seems that this list of influences includes practically every facet of filmmaking. Hence, we might conclude that Scorsese has politely implied that he was influenced by *everything*; so let's just get on with it and look at the film for what it is.

What it is – according to Gabbard (1996) – is an evocation of "the art versus commerce dichotomy" (p. 268) as represented by the contrasting characters of Jimmy Doyle (Robert De Niro) and Francine Evans (Liza Minnelli). Jimmy/Robert is a dedicated post-WWII swing-rooted but bop-friendly jazz musician with a tough-arrogant-or-even-obnoxious attitude toward music, a penchant for improvisation (both as the musician Jimmy and as the actor Robert), and a fierce devotion to his art. Francine/Liza is a colorfully-costumed visually-stunning pop-oriented big-band singer with a sweet but assertive personality, a dependence on scripted-choreographed-and-rehearsed material (both as the singer Francine and as the actress Liza), and a flair for commercial success. And – despite a strong physical attraction between the two – never the twain shall meet.

The rather lumbering plot documents how the lives of Jimmy/Robert and Francine/Liza converge for a while but ultimately diverge –

dragging on for anywhere from 137 to 164 minutes, depending on whether you are lucky enough to get hold of the early cut version or must endure the more recent full-length re-release. Along the way, we note that the film builds a carefully devised series of binary oppositions, as follows:

Jazz	:	Pop
Jimmy Doyle	:	Francine Evans
Art	:	Commerce
Robert De Niro	:	Liza Minnelli
Improvisatory	:	Scripted
Obnoxious	:	Sweet
Dedicated	:	Ambitious

Hence, this series of homologies does indeed establish key tensions that demand some sort of resolution. The debate concerning *how* these conflicts are resolved seems to hinge on whether we focus on the nonmusical aspects of the film (as does Gabbard) or on the ambidiegetic music that (in my view) tells its story more definitively.

Gabbard (1996) seems to face something of a quandary regarding how to interpret this motion picture. Toward this end, he makes extensive use of biographical material on Scorsese and a heavy reliance on the film's visual narrative and verbal dialog. Thus – even while acknowledging that Scorsese has expressed a great love for the music of the Dorseys, Goodman, Shaw, and Krupa (pp. 270, 280) – Gabbard pays more attention to the fact that, during the stages of film production, the director expressed admiration both for the songwriters who composed the music and words for Francine/Liza's featured numbers (John Kander and Fred Ebb, respectively) and for the talents of Ms. Minnelli herself: "Scorsese was taken with Minnelli during their collaboration, and he stated that he found her to be a major talent" (p. 272). Gabbard also makes much of the fact that Scorsese worked again with Ms. Minnelli, briefly but abortively directing her in a play (*The Act*) from which he ultimately withdrew (due, he said, to lack of experience in the theater). But if such indices of revealed preference deserve credulity, surely we must acknowledge the rather lengthy

display of mutual compatibility between the director Martin Scorsese and the actor Robert De Niro – a close association that has continued over the decades through no fewer than eight motion pictures such as *Mean Streets* (1973), *Taxi Driver* (1976), *New York, New York* (1977), *Raging Bull* (1980), *The King of Comedy* (1983), *Goodfellas* (1990), *Cape Fear* (1991), and *Casino* (1995). Clearly, if Scorsese has demonstrated long-term loyalties, we would have to credit them primarily to De Niro rather than to Minnelli.

Nonetheless, Gabbard (1996) interprets *New York, New York* as validating the right-hand Liza-dominated side of the aforementioned homologies at the expense of the left-hand Robert-centered side. He bases this judgment primarily on the film's visually commanding production numbers featuring Evans/Minnelli in what he considers to be her triumphal role as pop diva: "Ultimately, the film, released at a moment when the fortunes of jazz were close to the nadir, seems to lose interest in the music, while celebrating the spectacle of Liza Minnelli in performance" (p. 268). Thus, in Gabbard's view, the ethos of the film deserts Jimmy/Robert's art-for-art's-sake jazz in favor of Francine/Liza's art-for-mart's-sake pop so that "when Minnelli performs, the audience is asked to regard her as a great entertainer" (p. 272): "lavish attention to Minnelli's performances is often at the expense of the film's representation of jazz artists" (p. 272). Artistic integrity, in Gabbard's reading, loses out to commercial appeal and to the glitzy gloss typical of the Hollywood musical in full flower: "*New York, New York* reveals again and again that Scorsese's real sympathies lie with the more accessible art of Liza Minnelli, not to mention the work of her mother and father" (p. 276). Thus, Gabbard states repeatedly in various ways that "Francine is the decided winner over Jimmy" as part of the film's "obvious project of celebrating the talents of Liza Minnelli" (p. 278): "Scorsese has in effect handed his film to Liza Minnelli and asked audiences to lose themselves in her seamless presentations of the Kander and Ebb songs" (p. 282). In other words, Gabbard sees a

valorization of the Pop-Francine-Commerce-Minnelli-Scripted-Sweet-Ambitious side of the aforementioned homologies at the expense of the Jazz-Jimmy-Art-De Niro-Improvisatory-Obnoxious-Dedicated side.

The main problem with Gabbard's interpretation of *New York, New York* is that it depends primarily on the glitzy visual impression made by the film and on its snappy verbal dialog rather than on a careful and critical audition of its ambi-diegetic music. Indeed, the judgment offered by Gabbard suggests that he has not really attended to the music performed on-screen in this motion picture and has not really responded to its rather insistent ambi-diegetic cinemusical meanings. For I would contend that these ambi-diegetic cinemusical meanings found in *New York, New York* develop Jimmy/Robert's and Francine/Liza's characterizations while elaborating the theme of art-versus-commerce in ways that belie the interpretation proposed by Gabbard. In making this case, let us listen first to the jazz performances expertly mimed by Robert De Niro to enact tenor solos dubbed in by the swing veteran Georgie Auld and then to the song stylings of Ms. Minnelli singing in her very own inimitable voice.

We first encounter Doyle/De Niro – minus his saxophone – at a celebration of V-J Day in 1945 during a huge dance party for enlisted personnel where Jimmy/Robert hits on almost every young woman in sight, including the conspicuously unattached Evans/Minnelli. Here, Francine/Liza resists Jimmy/Robert's advances – repeating "no" so often that this insistent line attains a sort of comic gaiety – while Jimmy/Robert manages to be so aggressively obnoxious as to become almost endearingly funny. Behind this scene, we hear the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra running through a major portion of its impressive repertoire ("I'm Getting Sentimental Over You," "Song of India," "Opus One," and the rest). This ambi-diegetic cinemusical environment establishes the swing-oriented origins for the slightly more bop-friendly tenor sounds of Jimmy/Robert (channeling Georgie Auld) that set the tone for jazz-as-art in the remainder of the film. Soon, at an audition, we find Doyle/De Niro

playing "too loud" for the tastes of an audience-oriented club manager who wants to hear something mysteriously referred to as "she-bang." Whatever she-bang is, it must be pretty awful because De Niro avoids it like the plague. Rather, as the film unfolds, he treats us to a jazz-purist, artistically-centered reading of "Once In a While" (via a *cappella* tenor, played slowly and mournfully, under a street lamp); fast-paced saxophone flourishes to nameless tunes (while auditioning for the Frankie Harte band and while touring with this rather conventional dance-oriented ensemble); a rehearsal of "Takin' a Chance on Love" (in which he shows a rather high-handed perfectionist's intolerance of the difficulties experienced by the band members in playing his overly ambitious arrangement); thoughtful, almost lugubrious, ballad-tempo versions on both tenor and piano of "New York, New York" (a song whose music he composes for Francine/Liza); an up-tempo blues played with a group of black musicians in Harlem (showing that he can hold his own with a front line of highly accomplished jazz instrumentalists); a set of tunes that includes "Honeysuckle Rose," "Just You, Just Me," and a very fast blues (performed impressively with a similar group of musicians in Harlem); and a recapitulation of the slow and thoughtful approach to playing "New York, New York" (at his own jazz club called "The Major Chord," where he has achieved financial success as a nightclub owner and where his artistically-dedicated critically-recognized music has earned him a feature story on the cover of *Down Beat* magazine). In short, Jimmy/Robert's long years of fidelity to his jazz-oriented artistic integrity have ultimately achieved something close to the "major chord" that he mentions early in the film as his personal emblem of success, where everything comes together in satisfying harmony – the only exception in Jimmy/Robert's life, the only dissonance in his major chord, being . . . Francine/Liza.

Without belaboring the trials and tribulations of Jimmy/Robert's and Francine/Liza's love affair, we can chart the lesson for our

art-versus-commerce theme by briefly reviewing the nature of the Evans/Minnelli singing style. In this spirit, let us emphasize that this is not the place to engage in the recently popular sport of Liza bashing or to comment on the untoward aspects of Ms. Minnelli's alleged drug rehabilitations, matrimonial indiscretions, and husband molestations. These should remain facets of her personal life best left to the celebrity-obsessed privacy-invading gossip columnists, paparazzi, and network-television newscasters. What does concern us, however, involves a very public manifestation of the Minnelli persona – namely, the way that she routinely murders otherwise worthwhile songs in a manner for all to observe and deplore.

More specifically, in appraising the work of Liza Minnelli as a vocalist in *New York, New York*, let us begin by acknowledging that, at a minimum, an artistically viable singer must be able to carry a tune. This, unfortunately, is a talent that Ms. Minnelli conspicuously lacks – as she has demonstrated throughout her career in one histrionically off-key performance after another, usually with an air of breathless excitement that suggests she has every expectation that at long last, this time, she will produce vocal sounds that correspond to some degree with the notes she is trying to sing. I do not believe that the significance of this point can be overemphasized in general and certainly not with relevance to the cinemusical meanings of *New York, New York* in particular.

Arguably, the vast majority of successful pop singers – not to mention master jazz vocalists – sing in tune. In the area of pop, recall Bing Crosby, Lena Horne, Doris Day, Rosemary Clooney, Frank Sinatra, Perry Como, Barbra Streisand, Andy Williams, Aretha Franklin, Linda Ronstadt, or Celine Dion. In the area of jazz, consider Nat Cole, Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan, Chris Connor, Mel Torme, Carmen McRae, Marlene VerPlanck, Meredith D'Ambrosio, Diana Krall, Stacey Kent, or Jane Monheit. Even those with raspy, hoarse, androgynous, or otherwise challenged voices usually manage to zero in on the notes they are trying to hit. In this connection, think of Louis Armstrong, Billie Holiday, Chet Baker,

Ray Charles, Janice Joplin, Dr. John, Joe Cocker, Rod Stewart, or Ricki Lee Jones. Very, very few singers achieve success without a firm sense of musical pitch. Such occasional exceptions to the general rule might include Fred Astaire, Tony Bennett, Madonna, Judy Garland herself, and most conspicuously – *most* conspicuously! – Judy's own daughter... Liza Minnelli.

No matter what she looks like (on which, I'll refrain from commenting) or how energetically she bats her mascara-encrusted eyelids (ditto), by virtue of her inveterate tendency to sing profoundly off-key, I personally find it nearly impossible to listen to the song stylings of Liza Minnelli. Nonetheless – as a service to you, Dear Reader – I have done exactly that throughout the entire two-and-a-half-hour length of *New York, New York* and, after recuperating sufficiently to return to more worthwhile labors, have this to report: Put simply, Liza Minnelli *demolishes* the musical integrity of the songs she sings in this film.

Consider, first, her pushy intrusion into Jimmy/Robert's audition – where, uninvited, she launches into a shaky-voiced rendition of "You Brought a New Kind of Love To Me" – to which he plays obligatos convincingly enough to get them a job as a boy-girl act. From one perspective, she helps to get him some work. From another, she plunges him into a commercial gig from which it takes him years to recover musically. When we next see Francine/Liza singing "Once In a While" with the Frankie Harte Orchestra, the hallmarks of her singing style begin to emerge all too clearly. Intonationally challenged, she seldom hits a note dead-on but prefers to sneak up on it by sliding from below or gliding from above to its general vicinity, relying on the width of her wobbly vibrato to cover the general range where, with luck, the correct pitch lies somewhere within her very broad margin of error. To a musician – such as, we infer, Jimmy/Robert – the effect resembles fingernails on a blackboard. Further – in pushing the volume level of her declamations way past the point of her capabilities – the louder Francine/Liza sings, the more off-key she gets. The descriptors that leap to mind involve

words like "screeching," "bleating," "braying," "mewling," or "caterwauling" – except that Francine/Liza is louder than that – something like an angry moose, a wounded mountain line, or a stuck pig. Further, Francine accompanies her distressing vocalizations with a repertoire of exaggerated body gestures that constantly annoy witnesses to the cinematic spectacle without managing to distract us from the musical carnage that transpires on the soundtrack.

Still with Frankie Harte's dance band, Francine/Liza again displays her outlandish cinemusical persona on "You Are My Lucky Star" – to which Jimmy/Robert responds, with what can only be heavy irony, by awkwardly leading the reluctant applause of the understandably inattentive audience. More of the same follows in "The Man I Love" – at the conclusion of which, after a demonstration of arm-waving hand-gesticulating finger-wiggling body language that would do credit to a cheerleader for the Dallas Cowboys, she manages to end on three notes representing the three key words in the song's title with each one resoundingly off-key in its own unique way that sets it apart from the others. She deals a similar deathblow to "Just You, Just Me," just before announcing to Jimmy/Robert that she is pregnant and wants to return to New York to have their baby.

So here come some of the film's heavy implications concerning the art-versus-commerce theme. Without the crowd-pleasing charms of Francine/Liza, the dancers dwindle to the vanishing point. Francine/Liza is replaced by Bernice Conrad – a devastating caricature of the Minnelli-type singer, hilariously enacted by Mary Kay Place. Bernice/Mary Kay treats us to comical versions of "Blue Moon" and "Do Nothin' 'Til You hear From Me" – both of which illustrate the ludicrous extremes to which the commercialistic ethos can sink while simultaneously making the point that even the absurdities of Conrad/Place are nowhere near as aurally painful as those routinely dispensed by Evans/Minnelli.

But, after Francine/Liza and Jimmy/Robert finally break up, Evans/Minnelli bounces back

with a vengeance – sort of like one of those ghouls or zombies in a horror movie that won't go away no matter how many times you kill it. Thus, do we encounter Francine/Liza's hyperdramatic and resolutely-mawkish exhibition of over-reaching on "But the World Goes 'Round'" (and 'round and 'round and 'round). Thus, too, must we endure her ridiculously extravagant performance of "Happy Endings" in a motion-picture scene reminiscent of Busby Berkeley. Thus, three, are we subjected to her quintessentially hyperbolic reading of New York, New York (to which she herself has written some transcendently corny lyrics) – which she performs "her way" amidst self-obsessed, wide-eyed, arm-waving, torso-twisting, super-inflated excitement that propels her toward an appalling finale of almost sublimely excruciating proportions. Though Jimmy/Robert claps politely, when he visits Francine/Liza's dressing room, he can only mutter that he saw "sappy endings," that she has "found another way" of doing his song, and that he is proud of her "in a way."

All this culminates a bit earlier in a crucial scene that represents the ambi-diegetic cinemusical pivot point for the entire film. In this scene, Francine/Liza goes up to Harlem to hear Jimmy/Robert and to meet with a Decca executive who wants her to sign a lucrative recording contract. Jimmy/Robert emerges from a cubicle in the men's room, where he has been smoking something suspicious with some other members of the mostly-black band. After a conversation about Francine/Liza's singing contract, Jimmy/Robert returns to the bandstand to accompany a fetching and musically hip version of "Honeysuckle Rose" by a beautiful African American singer (the gorgeous Diahnne Abbott, who was De Niro's real-life wife at the time). In context, Diahnne Abbott is everything that Francine/Liza is not – statuesque, poised, ultra cool, musically expert, artistically centered (not to mention, literally, married to De Niro). After this – while Francine/Liza sits there gulping a glass of wine despite her pregnancy and conspicuously not applauding the efforts of her cinemusically vibrant rival – Jimmy/Robert launches into a

postswing, proto-bop version of "Just You, Just Me". Francine/Liza misinterprets this choice of material as her cue to come forward to join her husband in song. But, as she makes her move toward the stage, we see Jimmy/Robert's eyes fill with horror. Clearly, he feels upset on several levels at once. First, he resents Francine/Liza's success, her recording contract, her sell-out to the forces of commercialism. Second, paradoxically, he feels jealous of the very popularity and commercial appeal that he disapproves so deeply. Third, he knows from bitter experience how she sings "Just You, Just Me" – as do we, Dear Reader – that is, extremely badly indeed. So, fourth, he worries with justification that he will be humiliated in front of his mostly black and very savvy musical friends. All this converges to inspire Jimmy/Robert to make an abrupt switch to a mercurially rapid blues – something that Francine/Liza cannot possibly try to sing – as if to say, "whatever you do, don't come up here on this bandstand." She is embarrassed and flees from the club. Metaphorically, at last, he has driven a stake through her misbegotten cinemusical heart.

Taken together, the dramatic development attributable to the ambi-diegetic cinemusical meanings in *New York, New York* does much, in my opinion, to vindicate the left-hand side of the homologies that we listed earlier – that is, to support jazz over pop, to privilege art over commerce, to elevate improvisation over scripting, and to exalt the obnoxious-but-dedicated Jimmy/Robert over the sweet-but-ambitious Francine/Liza. The evidence for this judgment comes from the on-screen music and the manner in which it raises artistic integrity over crowd-pleasing commercialism as a continuous theme and a pattern of characterization in this particular film. Robert/Jimmy stands for art, Francine/Liza for commerce. As I have tried to show, on ambi-diegetic cinemusical grounds, the former clearly wins the competition between the two. Hands down.

Viewers and readers are left to wonder whether the arguments just put forward do or do not capture the intentions of the director

Martin Scorsese. Clearly, our verdict on this point hinges on whether we do or do not imagine Mr. Scorsese to be tone deaf. On the tone-deaf hypothesis, implicitly held by Gabbard (1996), Martin Scorsese inserted elaborate production numbers featuring Liza Minnelli in order to celebrate the wonders of her entertaining stage presence as a song stylist. Indeed – in the exorbitant flourishes of “But the World Goes ‘Round’”, “Happy Endings”, and “New York, New York” – she entertains us mercilessly to within an inch of our lives. On the darker and more uncompromising interpretation that I favor, Scorsese knows perfectly well that Minnelli sings off-key and – though too polite to say so publicly – has evinced this sensibility by letting her create her own unintentionally self-parodic display of excruciatingly out-of-tune performances that comment reflexively on her own excesses in a way that consistently advances the theme of anti-commercialism in this film.

By the way, I do not deny that – being a man of good musical taste – Gabbard (1996) himself also experiences considerable discomfort with the offerings by Liza Minnelli in *New York, New York*. After all, at one point, he explicitly refers to the “excesses” evinced by her “highly mannered style of singing” (p. 272). Later, he sees her “posturings” (p. 282) as “narcissistic” (p. 279) and, in an obscure footnote, confesses his “dismay” at the film’s “lavish attention to Liza Minnelli” (p. 314).

But Gabbard (1996) does appear to give short shrift to this film’s valorization of jazz as an art form. In this, he contrasts the spirit of Scorsese’s movie and its saxophone-playing hero with that of the master saxophonist Art Pepper, who – in his autobiography (Pepper, 1979), as quoted by the epigraph for Gabbard’s chapter – voices a deep devotion to the rapturous ecstasies involved in jazz improvisation:

I forgot everything, and everything came out. I played way over my head... I searched and found my own way... I played myself, and I knew I was right... I blew and I blew, and when I finally finished I was shaking all over;

my heart was pounding; I was soaked in sweat... And that was it. That’s what it’s all about (p. 476).

As he concludes his critical discussion of Scorsese’s film, Gabbard (1996) asks, “Why is there nothing in *New York, New York* like the passage from Art Pepper’s autobiography that begins this chapter?” (p. 282). The world of motion pictures had to wait a couple of years for the answer. And herein lies the topic for the next section.

Art: Arthur Edward Pepper, the beat, and the heart of jazz – stars fell on algolagnia

One of my greatest jazz heroes of all time is... Art Pepper. I place this great West Coast alto saxophonist – who first came to prominence in the 1950s and managed to hang on into the 1980s – right up there with Bird and Diz, Lester and Teddy, Bud and Thelonious, Mulligan and Baker, Brubeck and Desmond, Farmer and Golson, Miles and ‘Trane, Oscar-Ray-and-Herbie, the Modern Jazz Quartet, Bill Evans, Tal Farlow, Hampton Hawes, Jim Hall, Gary Burton, Keith Jarrett, and all the rest of the jazz luminaries that I hold in awe. To my ears, Pepper filled his playing with a haunting melodic inventiveness, a matchless sense of rhythmic urgency, and a profound purity of conception. He owned a completely distinctive sound on the alto sax and was one of the very few players instantly recognizable after only a few notes of soloing. Sticking mostly to jazz standards and tunes composed on the chord changes of familiar pop tunes, he played with a sense of passion and a depth of emotion seldom equaled by other players of his day. He expressed and inspired a feeling of ecstatic involvement in his music. Put simply, Arthur Edward Pepper was, as his name implied, the essence of... Art.

That’s the good news.

The bad news is that, throughout most of his adult life, Art Pepper was a hopeless junky – heroin being his preferred narcotic of choice – a self-destructive miscreant who devoted most of

his energy to scoring his next fix, who wallowed in unrepentant masochism, whose addictive propensities toward algolagnia kept him constantly afoul of the law and often in prison, and who dedicated himself so single-mindedly to the pursuit of iniquity that he barely had any time left over to nurture his transcendent musical abilities. Documenting all these sordid details of his squalid existence, Pepper (1979) wrote an autobiography that told all about his drug-induced status as a hardened criminal, that bitterly recounted all the myriad injustices perpetrated upon him by a long list of former friends and ex-partners, that left this reader with a deep sense of hopeless despondency over the possibility of his ever leading a productive life, and that revealed only one clearly estimable virtue in the man – namely, his complete commitment to . . . honesty.

Indeed, Art spared no pains in telling all about himself, however bad it could and did make him look to the eyes of the world. The same open honesty that filled his book also characterized his playing and was, perhaps, essential to his greatness as an artist. The same pain that pervaded his written pages also poured forth through his horn in an endless stream of wounded agony. One could not read . . . or listen . . . without seeing and hearing it. And all this shows up – enigmatically, compellingly, as Art – in both his recordings and his autobiography (Pepper, 1979).

Shortly before Pepper's death from a stroke in 1982, Don McGlynn created a documentary entitled 'Art Pepper: Notes From a Jazz Survivor' (1982). In this film, we find the jazz giant – somewhere between defiant and pathetic – raging at the world and expressing various paranoid feelings of persecution mixed with delusions of grandeur. Pepper declares himself to be a genius and – seeing him immersed in the detritus of his daily surroundings – we are tempted to discount his claims as self-inflating hyperbole. But then, if we think about it, we realize that he is absolutely right. Few jazz performers have risen to the musical heights of Arthur Edward Pepper. Few musicians have attained such an exalted level of jazz as Art. And few stars have fallen so low, so deeply

into a masochistic shambles, so far into Algolagnia.

Thus – through his life, career, and music – Art Pepper becomes available as a free-floating signifier linked to the meanings associated with a key protagonist from the *ménage à trios* portrayed in the film directed by John Byrum entitled *Heart Beat* (1980) (shot, incidentally, by László Kovács, the same cinematographer who filmed *New York, New York*). Based loosely on a vaguely autobiographical account by Carolyn Cassady (Sissy Spacek) of her relationship with Neal Cassady (Nick Nolte) and Jack Kerouac (John Heard) during the period when the latter was composing such stream-of-consciousness beat-generation treasures as *On the Road* (1957) and *The Subterraneans* (1958), *Heart Beat* manages quite powerfully to convey the general sleaziness and desperation of the poetic but perverse existence – in the service of art – pursued by its male anti-heroes (especially Neal/Nick, who was the model for Dean Moriarty in *On the Road*). In one scene, so repugnantly disgusting that it attains an almost exalted level of sick humor, we see Kerouac/Heard writing his deathless prose in a filthy latrine where his opium-dazed friends come to vomit into the mephitic toilet at his elbow. In another, we follow Cassady/Nolte as he does a drug fix in a men's room cubicle, rapturously participates in a torrid up-tempo jam session, and then wanders forlornly through the streets – begging for a piece of bread at the bakery and washing his face with ice at the fish monger's. When the film is not documenting the rampant non-conformity – bordering on squalor, verging on depravity – of these beat-generation luminaries, it devotes gleeful attention to satirizing the foibles of 1950s families who live in tract houses, raise 2.4 perfect children, plant-weed-mow-and-water their lawns, and watch totally mindless television programs. At one critical juncture, Cassady/Nolte sneaks into the back yard of such an establishment to smoke a joint while we see not one but two televisions in the distance simultaneously playing that masterpiece of dumbed-down mid-1950s conservatism – *The Ozzie and Harriet Show*. Later

– after the threesome has taken up residence as a *ménage à trois*, in a scene that seems more comical than dangerous – Neal/Nick and Jack/John plant large marijuana bushes in their garden.

So what kind of nondiegetic music do we need to represent such characters? Composer Jack Nitzsche offer us a pretty, innocent, lilting leitmotif to accompany Carolyn/Sissy whenever she makes one of her grand entrances or one of her appearances as a long-suffering but devoted spouse and friend or whenever Neal/Nick or Jack/John thinks about her in her absence. This theme covers an octave and a half, via a soothingly pretty melodic sequence, in waltz time: $F^{\wedge}-\downarrow F^{\#}, \uparrow G^{\wedge\wedge}, \uparrow E^{\wedge}-\downarrow G^{\#}, \uparrow A^{\wedge\wedge}, \uparrow D^{\wedge\wedge}, \uparrow C^{\wedge}-\downarrow B, \downarrow G^{\wedge\wedge\wedge\wedge}$. For example, the first time we see Carolyn/Sissy – at a fancy restaurant where Neal, Jack, and Neal’s girlfriend Stevie (Ann Dusenberry) dine with an old friend of Neal’s who has a lot of money and treats them to a lavish lunch – the diegetic music comes from a piano quietly playing in the huge dining area. Before a propitious pause, this piano builds a vertically ascending scale, just as the wealthy friend announces the arrival of his date. At the exact moment when we see Carolyn/Sissy enter, dressed all in white and looking ravishingly beautiful, the diegetic piano shifts to a full nondiegetic orchestra playing the $F^{\wedge}-F^{\#}-G^{\wedge\wedge}-E^{\wedge}-G^{\#}-A^{\wedge\wedge}$ theme. Early in the film, this leitmotif continues to accompany Carolyn/Sissy, in her comparatively liberated days as an art student, dressed like a fashion model from *Vogue*. Whenever Neal/Nick or Jack/John thinks about her longingly and lovingly, we hear $F-F^{\#}-G$ in the background score. After Carolyn/Sissy starts having babies – three by the movie’s end – and Carolyn-Neal-and-Jack move into their tract house in the bowels of middle America, Carolyn/Sissy looks more like a Madonna, but the waltz theme remains the same. At the conclusion of the film, an estranged Neal/Nick drives around in a psychedelic school bus (during his Ken Kesey phase), and Jack/John rides off in a taxi cab to nowhere (perhaps a plane to St. Petersburg, where he dies in 1969 at age 47 in relative obscurity). Following a voiceover in

which Carolyn/Sissy proclaims that they did nothing wrong (but just did it first) and muses philosophically that compromises are like dentist appointments (damned if you do, damned if you do not), she places a sprinkler on her lawn, right in front of the blue-and-white Nash Metropolitan that sits in the driveway of her quintessential 1950s tract house. The nondiegetic orchestral music swells to a reprise of the $F-F^{\#}-G$ theme.

So what kind of background music do we need to contrast vividly with this sweet-sounding nondiegetic waltz theme in ways that establish the dramatic departure from conventional norms represented by the two male characters? Here, the manners of treating Jack/John and Neal/Nick contrast rather tellingly. Jack/John is presented primarily *as* music, while Neal/Nick is represented primarily *by* music in general and *by* Art Pepper in particular.

Thus, early in the film, Carolyn/Sissy’s voiceover introduces Jack/John as a “struggling novelist” who sits at his mother’s kitchen table, tapping furiously on an old portable typewriter and creating “jazzed-up stories” about artists and musicians he knows in New York. In Carolyn/Sissy’s description, Jack/John writes the words as if they are notes to a saxophone solo. At this point, cutting through a nondiegetic arrangement for big band by Shorty Rogers in the background score by Jack Nitzsche, we hear the instantly recognizable saxophone of Art Pepper as the scene shifts to an encapsulated montage of Jack/John’s and Neal/Nick’s trip by car to the West Coast. Later in the film – at the decisive moment of artistic gestation when Jack/John slots a roll of paper towels into his typewriter and announces that, with the help of a few bennies, he will now finish his book so that, some day, he can have a house in the hills – he further proclaims that he will “play this thing” (the typewriter) like Charlie Parker. Hence, the metaphor that constantly accompanies Jack/John’s literary efforts is that of a jazz musician blowing the saxophone, a soloist wailing on his ax, Bird on a flight of spontaneous improvisatory creation. Those who have read *On the Road* – the major

book that resulted from this style of composition – know that Kerouac's convoluted, meandering, free-form, stream-of-consciousness prose does bear at least some resemblance to his self-congratulatory image of himself as a sax-playing jazz improviser.

Meanwhile, all this leaves us with the issue of what sort of background music, in this context, would best signify the debased debauchery of the Neal/Nick character. As already intimated, the answer is... Arthur Edward Pepper! Art Pepper went into the studio to record his contributions to the soundtrack for *Heart Beat* in March of 1979 – close to the moment when his monstrously lamentable autobiography hit the bookstands. But, by that time, he had long since achieved the dubious distinction of iconicity as a paragon of drug-dependent self-punishment. He had established a solid reputation as a hardened criminal, willing to commit any felony to support his narcotics habit – including, for example, an armed robbery at a gas station, to which he cheerfully confesses. Whose music – loaded with such unsavory connotations – could possibly be a better match for the degradations of Neal/Nick?

Heart Beat begins with Art Pepper soloing over a big-band jazz score in the background as we watch scenes of Neal/Nick and Jack/John motoring from New York toward the West Coast. Flourishes from Art accompany their almost comical tactics for ripping off gas and supplies from a service station on a lonely country road. Art's clarion call signals the perversity of Jack/John fornicating with Neal/Nick's girlfriend Stevie/Ann in the back of their big stolen car while Neal/Nick watches from a few feet away. Later in the film, Art's alto – this time, *a cappella* – sets the stage for a scene in the squalid apartment on Haight Street where Neal/Nick asks a pregnant Carolyn/Sissy to marry him. Still later – when Neal/Nick leaves a jazz club, begs for some bread, and wanders to a coffee shop where he sips coffee, smokes cigarettes, and thinks about his troubles – we hear the slow, mournful saxophone of Art Pepper with piano accompaniment in the background. This distressing music leads to a

moment when Neal/Nick sees his old girlfriend Stevie/Ann going into an apartment building with a sailor, follows them, beats up the sailor, and begins an adulterous fling with Stevie/Ann (all the while protesting illogically that he loves Carolyn/Sissy). After this initial tryst, we again hear Art Pepper – this time playing furiously at a frantic tempo as Neal/Nick drives at warp speed to catch the train for his day job as a conductor and continuing as Neal/Nick further pursues his two-timing affair with Stevie/Ann while Pepper's pungent solo surges in the background. Later still, when Jack/John's book achieves success and he travels to New York to appear on talk shows amidst a flurry of publicity for his heralding of the "beat generation," Neal/Nick (ironically, the very prototype of the beatnik via his thinly disguised role as Dean Moriarty in Kerouac's book) stumbles around the streets of San Francisco – drinking, smoking dope, and eventually getting busted by an undercover policeman – all to the tune of Art Pepper's symbolically significant alto saxophone.

So, throughout *Heart Beat*, Art Pepper serves as a sort of running nondiegetic commentary on the sociopathic tendencies of the Neal/Nick character. This role for the off-screen Pepper reaches a kind of apotheosis and begins to bleed into the mise-en-scène in one vivid scene at a jazz club. The scene begins with noises coming out of a cubicle in the men's room (recalling Doyle/De Niro in *New York, New York*). Soon five guys who have been fixing in the toilet, including Neal/Nick, file out and head back into the club where they perform an extremely hot, sweaty, up-tempo jazz piece featuring in-tandem soloing by cornet and alto – the latter dubbed, of course, by Art Pepper. The music – flashing by at 320 beats-per-minute – seems wild, perspiration-drenched, out-of-control (like Gabbard's epigraph, quoted earlier). All this mirrors Neal/Nick's sensibilities, as echoed by the frenetic music. But maybe the most telling moment in the scene occurs as the five guys leave the toilet cubicle. After the first four have walked past the camera, the last man stops, turns, goes back, and re-emerges carrying... his alto

saxophone. This man bears an undeniable – indeed, an alarming – resemblance to... Art Pepper.

Brando loyalty: how do you keep the music paying?

In previous sections, we have encountered two important cinemusical principles that apply to the creation of more or less effective ambi-diegetic and nondiegetic music in motion pictures. *Principle One*, as illustrated by the ambi-diegetic work of Liza Minnelli in *New York, New York* (1977), proposes that – to convey the impression of artistic integrity as a singer in the movies – one must be able to carry a tune. *Principle Two*, as exemplified by the nondiegetic performances of Art Pepper in *Heart Beat* (1980), holds that authentic creativity in the form of cinemusical honesty – playing from the heart – may deepen the communicative power of background music performed by even the most unsavory real-life character.

We now arrive at a third principle that governs the success of cinematic productions and that extends beyond the ambit of mere music to cover the broader aspects of acting in general. Specifically, *Principle Three* maintains that convincingly realistic acting requires a commitment to delivering one's lines intelligibly in the language in which they were written. In the case of American or British films, for example, Principle Three demands that an actor speak English in a manner that viewers can understand. I realize, of course, that certain notable exceptions have appeared – say, *The Thief* (1952); *Sweet and Lowdown* (1999); or *Traffic* (2000). But, most of the time, we really do need to hear a movie star say something that we can decipher.

As in the case of Principle One, I shall convey the force of Principle Three by focusing at some length on an exception that appears to prove the rule. In this spirit, let us ask ourselves what would happen to an American actor who is afflicted by a chronic inability or an inveterate unwillingness to speak clearly but who none-

theless perseveres. Let us imagine an almost charismatic fellow – manly, strong, athletic, and muscular in his youth – with darkly handsome good looks and with a repertoire of body language, physical gestures, and facial expressions that elevates him without question to the immortal pantheon of thespian greatness. But let us further suppose that when this gifted star opens his mouth to speak, what comes out is pure mush. That his voice – which, to fit his screen persona, should sound macho – emerges as whiney, wimpy, and whimpering. That his singing – which, in good conscience, should never have been foisted upon the movie-going public – is excruciatingly inept. That in one Oscar-winning performance, he actually wears a dental prosthetic device to help himself mumble better. That his enunciation – which, to our horror, deteriorates over his lifetime in direct proportion to the magnitude of his always-burgeoning box-office appeal and the size of his ever-mushrooming paychecks – puts one in mind of the famous efforts by the Greek Demosthenes to learn oratory by practicing at the seashore with pebbles in his mouth. That – until his recent passing – he diligently perfected this skill in the slurring of words to the level of a high art. I refer, of course, to... Marlon Brando – an actor of the most elevated celebrity to whom audiences have steadfastly remained as faithful or as “Brando Loyal” as it is possible to imagine.

To illustrate this sad case of an over-inflated ego fueled by star power via a recent film that draws on the telling use of diegetic jazz to develop the theme of art-versus-commerce, I offer for consideration a motion picture starring (again) Robert De Niro and Edward Norton, featuring Marlon Brando, directed by Frank Oz, and entitled *The Score* (2001). Besides indicating the film's place in the great *score*-related tradition of heist-based action-suspense movies, the title of this motion picture reminds us of the considerable financially-remunerative star power invested in its production by signaling the extent to which each actor *scored* in terms of monetary compensation for appearing in the film – Marlon Brando (77 years old, \$10 million); Robert De

Niro (57 years old, \$15 million); Edward Norton (32 years old, \$6.5 million). Further, the title draws our attention to the film's *score* – a jazz-inflected postfusion nondiegetic drone created by Howard Shore (rhymes with “score”) in a spirit that one critic found evocative of Miles Davis but that does not crackle with anything remotely resembling the energy of that great trumpeter's work in (say) *Ascenseur Pour L'Échafaud* (1958). Fortunately, as we shall see, this background music is amplified diegetically via various atmospheric jazz performances by the likes of Cassandra Wilson and Mose Allison.

In *The Score*, we witness the enervating spectacle of one great actor working at the peak of his powers (De Niro) playing opposite an over-paid and bloated “superstar” who has sunk beneath the nadir of even his own past public affronts to our cinematic sensibilities (Brando). Partly reading and partly improvising his lines in a sort of grotesquely lisping and effectually unintelligible pixie voice, Brando rolls his ponderous corporeal bulk from one seated or sprawling position to the next, mauling his speaking part and putting one in mind of nothing so much as Jackie Gleason after several martinis, Orson Welles on Quaaludes, or Orca playing the role of a beached whale. Thus, one critic comments perceptively that “Brando . . . looks and sounds as if Truman Capote had swallowed Sydney Greenstreet whole” (Lou Lemenick in the *New York Post*, July 31, 2001, on-line @ www.nypost.com).

This cinematic disaster becomes all the more poignant when we recall that Robert De Niro's first great motion-picture success came in his Oscar-winning role as the young Don Vito Corleone in Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather Part II* (1974), playing a youthful version of the older character in *The Godfather* (1972) for which Brando had himself won an Academy Award two years earlier. Ironically, though both achieved industry-wide adulation by playing the same character in different films, *The Score* captures the first and last time that the two renowned actors appeared together on-screen. This makes it seem all the more regrettable that their one-and-only joint

appearance represents such a travesty. Or is it high camp raised to the ultimate degree? Or is it some sort of woefully misplaced postmodern self-parody? Or is it a nose-thumbing gesture aimed at insulting the movie industry and its patrons? Hard to say – but supremely disquieting from whichever of these competing viewpoints one adopts.

In *The Score*, Robert De Niro plays the role of Nick Wells – the owner of a jazz club called “NYC” in Montreal – balancing a discreet affair with Diane Roesman (Angela Bassett) against his secret life as a master criminal who has developed his safe-cracking skills to the level of a high art. Marlon Brando's character – Max Baron, who fences the jewels stolen by Nick/Robert and with whom Nick/Robert has been working for many years – needs a few million dollars to repay a debt to a ruthless gangster (Teddy Salda, whose ominous menace lurks at the film's periphery). Toward this financial end, working with the young and cocky Jack Teller (Edward Norton), Max/Marlon has planned an intricately choreographed heist of an incalculably valuable seventeenth-century golden-and-jeweled French royal scepter from the vaults in the bowels of the Montreal Customs House. If successful, Nick/Robert will get 6 million dollars for his efforts (a lot even in Canadian money) – more than enough to permit him to retire from his precarious secret life of crime, to repay the mortgage on his jazz club NYC, to keep this legitimate business going, to clear the debts accumulated via his lavish consumption habits, and to marry the fetching Diane/Angela (who has made a crime-free environment the condition for her willingness to abandon her career as an airline stewardess in favor of matrimony). In return, all Nick/Robert has to do is . . . most of the work.

Nick/Robert badly wants to negotiate this lifestyle switch, to keep his nightclub open, and to wed Diane/Angela. However, Max/Marlon's plan to snatch the priceless scepter from the Montreal coffers in collaboration with Jack/Edward directly contradicts Nick/Robert's two self-imposed cardinal rules for

safe-cracking decorum – namely, (1) always work alone and (2) never operate in the city where you live. Besides his unwillingness to break-and-enter in his own neighborhood, Nick/Robert feels an aversion toward the young, cocky, and potentially careless Jack/Edward (who has attained his insider position at the Customs House by pretending to be a mentally retarded assistant janitor named Brian). When Jack/Edward tries his Brian act on Nick/Robert, the latter becomes enraged. Thus, Max/Marlon has a formidable job of persuading to accomplish – a need to draw to the fullest extent on whatever rhetorical skills he possesses.

Notice the perhaps unintentional parallel between Jack/Edward as Brian and Max/Marlon. Specifically, neither chooses to make himself clearly understood. Instead, each makes verbal unintelligibility a major part of his on-screen persona. The irony is that, even at the heights of his most linguistically-challenged/verbally-disoriented/mentally-retarded babbling, Jack/Brian/Edward is far/far/far easier to comprehend than Max/Marlon on even his best day.

Here, Dear Reader, is my paraphrase of Max/Marlon's speaking part in the tense scene during which he must bring all his rhetorical powers to bear on the challenge of persuading Nick/Robert to participate in the scepter-snatching caper – that is, to convince him that undertaking this high-risk/high-reward opportunity in crime promises a payoff that justifies the chances of being caught, sent to prison, and losing not only the jazz club but also his paramour Diane/Angela.

MAX/MARLON

Enters the NYC Club . . . muttering to himself inarticulately.

NICK/ROBERT

Asks him how he is.

MAX/MARLON

Mumbles . . . mumbles . . . mumbles something about a magic word.

NICK/ROBERT

Says that he'll do the job.

MAX/MARLON

Mumbles . . . mumbles . . . mumbles something about making sense.

NICK/ROBERT

Says that his part of the deal will have to be 6 million dollars.

MAX/MARLON

Mumbles . . . mumbles . . . mumbles something about a telephone operator and some paramedics.

NICK/ROBERT

Says that doing the job in his own backyard imposes risks that justify being paid what's right.

MAX/MARLON

Mumbles . . . mumbles . . . mumbles something about paying what's right . . . and gives Nick/Robert the finger.

NICK/ROBERT

Says that he wants to pay off his mortgage, own the jazz club free-and-clear, and – after this – abandon his life of crime.

MAX/MARLON

Mumbles . . . mumbles . . . mumbles something about pigs eating his brother.

NICK/ROBERT

Repeats that he's finished with crime.

MAX/MARLON

Mumbles . . . mumbles . . . mumbles something about hoping that she's worth it.

Thus inspired, Nick/Robert rushes forth; snatches the scepter in one of the most intricately implausible capers ever captured on the silver screen (with tours through the Montreal sewer system, patched-in laptop computers seizing control over electronic surveillance devices, the explosion of a safe filled with water, and so forth); achieves righteous retribution over the insidious Jack/Edward (via a nicely-prepared double-double-cross); and, implicitly blessed by a smile of satisfaction from Max/Marlon, happily subsides into the lifestyle-switching contentment of domestic normality with Diane/Angela (whom we see him greet with the good news as she returns to the airport from her job as a flight attendant).

Clearly, only one thing could save this otherwise shaky movie from the problem of pushing its violations of verisimilitude past the breaking point – namely, the judicious

deployment of first-class diegetic jazz. More specifically, to position Nick/Robert's participation in the dangerous scepter snatch as a remotely plausible possibility, he must want very badly to settle down to the lifestyle of a domesticated tax-paying jazz-club owner (as he refers to himself with evident satisfaction near the film's conclusion). The indubitable charms of Diane/Angela handle the domestication-related half of this problem. Solving the tax-paying half requires that the jazz club be a really cool place with really good music.

Partly, this necessary effect is achieved by the décor of the NYC Club, owned and run by Nick/Robert as a legitimate front for his clandestine criminal activities. Like his well-appointed apartment (dark hues, plush seating, tasteful furnishings, subtle lighting, plentiful liquor bottles, and a space-age kitchen where he skillfully prepares sumptuous dishes for Diane/Angela, who finds his pasta better than what she gets when her plane trips visit Rome), the nightclub exudes a deliciously opulent atmosphere (dark hues, plush seating, tasteful furnishings, subtle lighting, plentiful liquor bottles, and a classy bar that features an impressive array of elegant blue glass). Who wouldn't want to quit the rat-race headaches of the safe-cracking business so he could hang out in a joint like this and start each day with a stiff Scotch-on-the-rocks while leafing absently through the inconsequential daily mail?

But mostly, the positioning of the NYC Club hinges on the film's use of diegetic jazz to explain the efforts by Nick/Robert to make this really cool place – this soul-satisfying music-escape – the decorous and law-abiding epicenter of his reformed domesticity and reformulated lifestyle. The film achieves this effect through its diegetic deployment of jazz as part of a realistic *mise-en-scène* that justifies Nick/Robert's desire to remain a nightclub owner. Toward this end, *The Score* – as might be suggested by at least one of its title's multiple meanings – offers some rather excellent scene-setting, ambience-defining, environment-establishing source music that deserves our attention for its role in elucidating what could

possibly motivate Nick/Robert to undertake a criminal escapade of such enormously risky proportions. If successful, the heist will make it possible for Nick/Robert to relax into the life of a jazz-club owner who gets to sit around, sip Scotch, consort with Diane/Angela in connubial bliss, and listen to all this good music for free.

And what *is* this “good music”? Here, I bypass the functionally adequate background score created by Howard Shore – the composer for a long line of illustrious movies ranging from *After Hours* (1985) to *The Lord of the Rings* (2001, 2002, 2003), *The Aviator* (2004), and *A History of Violence* (2005). Shore provides a rather monotonous, moody, modish nondiegetic quasi-jazz background that features Tim Hagans on muted trumpet in a way that one critic compared to Miles Davis – but that resembles the relatively anemic fusion-oriented Miles of *In a Silent Way* (1969) more than the fired-up bravura Miles of *Ascenseur Pour L'Échafaud* (1958). The compilation parts of the background to *The Score* do revisit the Miles of the late-1950s playing “Autumn Leaves” with Cannonball Adderley from the latter's classic album entitled “Somethin' Else” (Blue Note, 1958) as well as Thelonious Monk doing “Round Midnight” (Blue Note, 1947) and Clifford Brown performing “Easy Living” (Blue Note, 1953). This proliferation of artists associated with Blue Note suggests that a compilation-soundtrack album might have originally been envisioned. But, unfortunately, it never materialized. Instead, what we get is a pure soundtrack recording that revisits only Howard Shore's repetitive background music (Varese Records, 2001), also managing to omit Diana Krall's “I'll Make It Up As I Go” (which serves as a backdrop to the closing credits). At any rate, in the film itself, the underscore and nondiegetic compilation pieces give a sense of the cool, hip, dangerous environment surrounding the main plotlines. But it is the diegetic jazz performed at the NYC Club that convincingly establishes a music-enriched artistically-centered environment to explain the inclination of Nick/Robert toward retiring to a life of mellow listening as a law-abiding

tax-paying jazz-club owner. Specifically, I refer to cinemusically striking on-screen performances at the NYC Club by Cassandra Wilson and Mose Allison.

Early in the film, accompanied by a piano-bass-and-drums trio, Cassandra Wilson – the still-youthful darling of the jazz cognoscenti – performs a sultry version of “You’re About To Give In” that sets the mood and establishes the luxuriant, musically hip feeling of Nick/Robert’s jazz club. The camera pans past Cassandra, wearing a sexy red dress with a plunging neckline, en route to finding Nick/Robert at the bar, where the main storyline quickly continues.

Later, in a similar fashion, the camera pans past the legendary Mose Allison – hunched over his keyboard, accompanied only by bass – singing “City Home.” As the visual image finds Nick/Robert and Ed/Jack in conversation, the latter gesticulates in the general direction of the great Mose and subliminally mutters two words that can be gleaned only by resorting to the DVD’s subtitling feature: “He’s good.”

Good Mose is, for sure. And so, likewise, is Cassandra. All this establishes art (in the form of jazz at the NYC Club) as a force that trumps commerce (in the shape of the hero’s criminal activities). Indeed, this use of diegetic jazz-related source music would almost render the film worth seeing for its own sake if only these performances did not flash by so quickly – namely, in less than 1 minute for Cassandra-and-Mose combined (under 40 seconds and under 20 seconds, respectively). On another DVD feature wherein the director comments on the film as it unfolds, Frank Oz confesses that he would have liked to show more of Cassandra and Mose but that he was a “slave to the story.” In other words, he needed to dispense with the diegetic jazz quickly in order to get back to Nick/Robert because, after all, that and not diegetic jazz is what the action-minded attention-deficit ticket-buying mass-market motion-picture audience has come to see.

The latter consideration strikes me as somewhat unsettling, rather contradictory to the rationale for the film’s denouement, and

reflective of the real commercially-motivated rather than artistically-inspired response to the question, “How Do You Keep the Music Paying?” The answer is that you keep the story focused on the criminal adventures of Nick/Robert – where Robert gets three times the fee for playing this movie role (15 million America dollars) that Nick demands for the risky job of stealing the scepter (6 million Canadian dollars). In this, paradoxically or ambivalently, you shape the diegetic cinemusical meanings to work partly in the service of art but also, as constrained by the limits of audience tastes, to fit the dictates of commerce as embodied by the star power of our central protagonist – always remembering that, hey, “He’s Delightful, He’s Delicious, . . . He’s . . . De Niro.”

Conclusion

This essay has examined the role of film music in advancing the development of cinemusical meanings such as the art-versus-commerce theme via the use of ambi-diegetic jazz in *New York, New York* (1977), nondiegetic jazz in *Heart Beat* (1980), and diegetic jazz in *The Score* (2001). In this connection, generally speaking, the inclusion of jazz in a motion picture (1) represents a form of product placement (leading to marketable offerings in the shape of soundtrack albums); (2) serves as a key element in the product design of a film (ambi-diegetic dramatic performances, nondiegetic background score, diegetic source music); (3) provides symbolic consumer experiences whereby characters reveal consumption-related aspects of their personalities (via the cinemusical meanings of their musical tastes); and (4) reflects the development of socially significant themes such as the dramatic tension between art (the drive toward creative integrity) and commerce (the quest for popular appeal or market success). Pursuing these perspectives, in particular, the present paper draws on interpretivistic approaches (semiotics, hermeneutics) to surface jazz-related cinemusical meanings expressed in the form of an interpretive essay (autoethnography, SPI). A formal

presentation of this essentially impressionistic account appears in the homologous comparisons shown in Table 1. From this formalization, the various uses of ambi-diegetic, nondiegetic, and diegetic jazz emerge in ways that share a common structure to convey the cinemusical tension between art (creative integrity) and commerce (popular entertainment) in the three illustrative films under consideration. Overall, as hinted by my subtitle, commodification ("Brando Loyalty") fails to triumph over artistic integrity ("De Niro, My God, To Thee").

Acknowledgements

The author gratefully acknowledges the support of the Columbia Business School's Faculty Research Fund.

Biographical note

Morris B. Holbrook is the Dillard Professor of Marketing, Graduate School of Business, Columbia University. His research focuses primarily on commercial communication – that is, entertainment, the arts, media, and advertising – with a special emphasis on applying interpretive, semiotic, and hermeneutic analyses to the symbolic aspects of audience responses to films, music, and other art forms.

References

- Altman R. 1987. *The American Film Musical*. Indiana University Press: Bloomington, IN.
- Atkins IK. 1983. *Source Music in Motion Pictures*. Associated University Press: East Brunswick, NJ.
- Biancorosso G. 2001. Beginning Credits and Beyond: Music and the Cinematic Imagination, ECHO 3 (1), on-line @ www.humnet.ucla.edu/echo/volume3-issue1/biancorosso/biancorosso.html
- Bradshaw A, Holbrook MB. 2007. Remembering Chet: Theorising the Mythology of the Self-Destructive Artist As Self-Producer and Self-Consumer, *Marketing Theory* 7: 115–136.
- Bradshaw A, McDonagh P, Marshall D. 2006a. No space – new blood and the production of brand culture colonies. *Journal of Marketing Management* 22(5/6): 579–599.
- Bradshaw A, McDonagh P, Marshall D. 2006b. Response to 'art versus commerce as a macro-marketing theme'. *Journal of Macromarketing* 26(1): 81–83.
- Buhler J, Flinn C, Neumeier D (eds). 2000. *Music and Cinema*. Wesleyan University Press: Hanover, NH.
- Chion M. 1994. *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* Gorbman C (ed and trans.). Columbia University Press: New York, NY.
- Gabbard K. 1996. *Jammin' at the Margins: Jazz and the American Cinema*. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL.
- Gorbman C. 1987. *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music*. Indiana University Press: Bloomington, IN.
- Hagen E. 1971. *Scoring for Films*. MixBooks: Emeryville, CA.
- Hirschman EC (ed.). 1989. *Interpretive Consumer Research*. Association for Consumer Research: Provo, UT.
- Hirschman EC, Holbrook MB. 1992. *Postmodern Consumer Research: The Study of Consumption as Text*. Sage Publications: Newbury Park, CA.
- Holbrook MB. 1995. *Consumer Research: Intro-spective Essays on the Study of Consumption*. Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Holbrook MB. 1996. Reflections on Rocky. *Society & Animals: Social Scientific Studies of the Human Experience of Other Animals* 4(2): 147–168.
- Holbrook MB. 1998. Journey to Kroywen: an ethnosopic auto-auto-auto-driven stereographic photo essay. In *Representing Consumers: Voices, Views, and Visions*, Stern B (ed.). Routledge: London, UK; 231–263.
- Holbrook MB. 1999a. Introduction to consumer value. In *Consumer Value: A Framework For Analysis and Research*, Holbrook MB (ed.). Routledge: London, UK; 1–28.
- Holbrook MB. 1999b. Popular appeal versus expert judgments of motion pictures. *Journal of Consumer Research* 26: 144–155.
- Holbrook MB. 2003. A book-review essay on the role of ambi-diegetic film music in the product design of Hollywood movies: macromarketing in La-La-land. *Consumption, Markets and Culture* 6: 207–230.
- Holbrook MB. 2004a. Ambi-diegetic music in films as a product-design and-placement strategy: the

- sweet smell of success. *Marketing Theory* 4(3): 171–185.
- Holbrook MB. 2004b. *Pivotal Ambi-Diegetic Cinemusical Moments in Five Jazz Biopics*, Working Paper, Graduate School of Business, Columbia University: New York, NY; 10027.
- Holbrook MB. 2005a. Ambi-diegetic music in the movies: the Crosby duets in *High Society*. *Consumption, Markets and Culture* 8(2): 153–182.
- Holbrook MB. 2005b. Art versus commerce as a macromarketing theme in three films from the young-man-with-a-horn genre. *Journal of Macromarketing* 25(1): 22–31.
- Holbrook MB. 2005c. Customer value and autoethnography: subjective personal introspection and the meanings of a photograph collection. *Journal of Business Research* 58(1): 45–61.
- Holbrook MB. 2005d. The ambi-diegesis of *My Funny Valentine*. In *Pop Fiction – The Song in Cinema*, Lannin S, Caley M (eds). Intellect: Portland, OR; 48–62.
- Holbrook MB. 2005e. The role of ordinary evaluations in the market for popular culture: do consumers have ‘good taste’? *Marketing Letters* 16(2): 75–86.
- Holbrook MB. 2006a. *Ambi-Diegetic Cinemusical Meanings in the Crime-Plus-Jazz Motion-Picture Genre: Pete Kelly’s Blues, The Cotton Club, and Kansas City*, Working Paper, Graduate School of Business, Columbia University: New York, NY; 10027.
- Holbrook MB. 2006b. Reply to Bradshaw, McDonagh, and Marshall: turn off the bubble machine. *Journal of Macromarketing* 26(1): 84–87.
- Holbrook MB. 2006c. ROSEPEKICECIVECI Vs. CCV – The resource-operant, skills-exchanging, performance-experiencing, knowledge-informed, competence-enacting, coproducer-involved, value-emerging, customer-interactive view of marketing versus the concept of customer value: ‘I Can Get It For You Wholesale.’ In *Toward a Service-Dominant Logic of Marketing: Continuing the Discussion, Debate, and Dialog*, Lusch RF, Vargo SL (eds). M. E. Sharpe: Armonk, NY.
- Holbrook MB. 2007. Photo essays and the mining of minutiae in consumer research: ‘bout the time I got to Phoenix. In *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Belk RW (ed.). M. E. Sharpe: Armonk, NY.
- Holbrook MB, Grayson MW. 1986. The semiology of cinematic consumption: symbolic consumer behavior in *Out of Africa*. *Journal of Consumer Research* 13: 374–381.
- Holbrook MB, Hirschman EC. 1993. *The Semiotics of Consumption: Interpreting Symbolic Consumer Behavior in Popular Culture and Works of Art*. Mouton De Gruyter: Berlin/New York, NY.
- Holbrook MB, O’Shaughnessy J. 1988. On the scientific status of consumer research and the need for an interpretive approach to studying consumption behavior. *Journal of Consumer Research* 15: 398–402.
- Holbrook MB, Lacher KT, LaTour MS. 2006. Audience judgments as the potential missing link between expert judgments and audience appeal: an illustration based on musical recordings of ‘My Funny Valentine’. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 34(1): 8–18.
- Kalinak K. 1992. *Settling the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film*. University of Wisconsin Press: Madison, WI.
- Kassabian A. 2001. *Hearing Film: Tracking Identifications in Contemporary Hollywood Film Music*. Routledge: New York, NY.
- Kubacki K, Croft R. 2004. Mass marketing, music, and morality. *Journal of Marketing Management* 20(5/6): 577–590.
- Lusch RF, Vargo SL (eds). 2006. *Toward a Service-Dominant Logic of Marketing: Continuing the Discussion, Debate, and Dialog*. M. E. Sharpe: Armonk, NY.
- Marks M. 2000. *Music, Drama, Warner Brothers: The Case of Casablanca and The Maltese Falcon*. In *Music and Cinema*, Buhler J, Flinn C, Neumeyer D (eds). Wesleyan University Press: Hanover, NH; 161–186.
- Metz C. 1974. *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*. Oxford University Press: New York, NY.
- Monaco J. 1981. *How to Read a Film: The Art, Technology, Language, History, and Theory of Film and Media*, Revised Edition Oxford University Press: New York, NY.
- Pepper A. 1979. *Straight Life: The Story of Art Pepper*. Schirmer Books: New York, NY.
- Rosar WH. 2002. Film music – what’s in a name? *Journal of Film Music* 1(1): 1–18.
- Sherry JF Jr. 1991. Postmodern alternatives: the interpretive turn in consumer research. In *Handbook of Consumer Behavior*, Robertson TS, Kassarian HH (eds). Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs, NJ; 548–591.

- Smith J. 1998. *The Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular Film Music*. Columbia University Press: New York, NY.
- Stilwell RJ. 2002. Music in films: a critical review of literature, 1980–1996. *Journal of Film Music* 1(1): 19–61.
- Tan S (ed.). 1996. *Emotion and the Structure of Narrative Film: Film as an Emotion Machine*, Barbara Fasting (trans). Lawrence Erlbaum: Mahwah, NJ.
- Vargo SL, Lusch RF. 2004. Evolving to a new dominant logic for marketing. *Journal of Marketing* 68: 1–17.