
Citizen Kane, Hollywood's Golden Age and Concert Composers

Concert Composers in Hollywood's Golden Age and Citizen Kane

In chapter 13 of *Reel Music*, Hickman discusses the development of cinema music through Hollywood's Golden Age and how it relates to concert music. Hickman explains that concert composers didn't often write music for films, but nonetheless their voices and expertise was very influential to film music. The main reason that concert composers stayed out of film was because the "assembly-line production" style of Hollywood films didn't give composers the time nor level of control they were used to in writing for concerts (Hickman, 153-4).

There are two main genres of concert music that inspired film composers in the 1940s: expressionism and American nationalism. One of the major players in expressionism was Arnold Schoenberg. Schoenberg never wrote a film score himself, although according to Hickman, he was hubristically interested, however, his prowess in expressionism and serialism influenced film music history when his student Hanns Eisler brought them to his Hollywood scores (Hickman, 156-7).

American Nationalism was a genre pioneered by Aaron Copland. His style, described by Hickman features "strong intervals, syncopated rhythms, [and] colorful orchestration," which can be seen influencing the work from artists such as John Williams and Leonard Bernstein, (57). Unlike Schoenberg, Copland scored four films which cemented his symphonic style into film music for good.

Orson Welles' magnum opus *Citizen Kane* (1941) was scored by Bernard Herrmann, a prominent composer and pioneer of film noir scoring. Hickman suggests a handful of themes (not leitmotifs) that pervade the film, most notably the "power theme," "waltz theme," and "rosebud theme," (Hickman, 161). Hickman suggests that these themes are quite varied throughout the film, to great effect as the variations control the tone. For example, the power theme is first realized when Thompson enters the vault [0:17:47], where it is slow and monophonic, played on an oboe. This creates a moody, suspenseful effect that speaks to the mystery of Charles Foster Kane (Orson Welles), while recognizing the great power of his legacy. In contrast, a vastly different version of the power melody is used after the announcement of Kane's first marriage [0:47:35]. The notes vary slightly to put it in a major key, but the rhythm is the same, albeit quite uptempo. The richer texture played on light strings and warm brass give a happier feel, conveying that this "power" is positive; Kane is at the height of

Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

GET HELP

both his career and personal life.

After this point, the score returns to the “somber” style that “lacks warmth,” (ibid.) which reflects the dark turn that Kane’s life takes as his marriage crumbles. This is perhaps used to greatest effect in the breakfast montage described by Hickman [0:51:50-0:54:09] where Kane and Susan Alexander Kane’s (Dorothy Comingore) relationship builds rapidly. Even the humorous parts of the score, which may be almost warm, are jarring as they cut to an agitated tone as the partners quarrel.

gradesfixer.com

Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

GET HELP