

Abstract

The article introduces the topic of film music's relationship to the built environment of cinema: sets and settings. The first section maps music onto James Sanders's analysis of New York City sets, based on selected movies discussed in the book *Celluloid Skyline* (mostly 1930s-40s). The focus is on the brownstone façade, the street, and the courtyard. A second section takes up the repeated musical use since 1953 of a single setting, a Scottish castle, including a Tamil film of 2000. The argument is that two key components of the structure of cinema--music and architecture--are sometimes in direct dialogue.

CONSTRUCTED MELODIES: FILM MUSIC AND ARCHITECTURE

Film music responds to and helps construct narrative, character, and emotion. But it also, sometimes literally, bounces off the physical filmed environment. This article aligns music with sets and settings, the built and found structures of cinema. In the first section, about studio sets, I rely on a seminal study of one favorite filmic site, New York City: James Sanders's *Celluloid Skyline: New York and the Movies*¹. This is an exhaustive and incisive survey of how Hollywood filmmakers have worked with the components of a massive metropolis, using them as building blocks in the giant nursery of studio backlots and the actual urban forest, on location. Throughout, Sanders stresses

the duality of this creative process: studios want to render New York as accurately as possible, but they also move subtly to shape the mythic, even iconic cityscape that every film viewer in the world has learned to accept without question. As an ethnomusicologist, I found this so close to my own approach to how music works in film²--accurately or stereotypically--that I decided to try mapping music onto Sanders's visual case studies. He catalogs every single aspect of city architecture, from the waterfront to the penthouse, from the slum to the sleek office. This includes the city streets and facades, which anchor the discussion below of how music relates to the physicality of film.

The second section of this essay extends the discussion to how music dialogues with on-location structures, such as a small Scottish castle called Eilean Donan, which has been used as a setting for a number of films and television series over the decades. By thinking about both sets and settings, I point to the range of possibilities for a fuller exploration of film music and architecture.

The Set: New York and Paris

The Bourgeois Brownstone

In *Celluloid Skyline*, Sanders dissects two closely-related films based on the bourgeois brownstone row: *Life with Father* (1947, dir. Michael Curtiz, music Max Steiner) and *The Heiress* (1949, dir. William Wyler, music Aaron Copland). As an experiment in mapping film music onto architecture, this pairing is ideal: two prominent

composers and directors almost simultaneously bouncing off the same built version of a fictional New York. Both movies are taken from hit plays based on books about life among the bourgeoisie of lower Manhattan in the nineteenth century. So they share many filmmaking tasks, particularly period placement and architectural detail. One could hardly find more controls on the musical variable, as both scores were nominated for Oscars. The two immediate questions are: do Steiner and Copland actually set the façade and street to music? and if so, do their visions diverge? The answer to both is—yes.

Life with Father comes from a much-read memoir by the son of a stockbroker about his autocratic but lovable dad. Given the simplicity of the scoring, it seems that Steiner quickly sketched out a main title theme that could run through most of the film, covering both the father and his proud townhouse. Occasionally, this theme spills over to the oldest son patriarchally, and the boy also gets most of what's left over musically, a romance theme for the get-the-girl subplot. As a main title, the theme is monochrome. It lacks the common second contrasting section of early studio main titles, which can signal narrative complexity. Instead, it plays over and over with increasing orchestral insistence and variety against sepia, framed photographs of Old New York, pairing architecture with music even before the narrative starts. Steiner's solution is simple: go Irish. His jaunty melody has the tell-tale rhythmic moves and motifs of the music-hall Irish sound of the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. From the start, this film wants to set the action firmly in a certain mythic New York, visually and sonically.

Now, things could change as we move to the film proper, which opens on our first view of the brownstone row. But they don't. As the very same theme plays humorously

and sentimentally (bassoon), we see a curbstone with the name Day. An Irish cop approaches an Irish servant, who is scrubbing the steps because “that’s the way Mr. Day likes it.” This emphasis on the façade as a site of social construction yokes music to architecture very concretely. Throughout *Life with Father*, virtually every time the action moves to the steps and the street, the main title theme comes back, in different guises – sped up, galloping to match a carriage, slowed down for emotion, or simply neutral as a locating device. Yes: a composer can set a set, and give it a geographic and narrative grounding. Here, narrative architecture demands varied treatment of the theme, but seems secondary to the brute physicality of New York life—all economically situated on a Hollywood backlot.

The Heiress harbors some narrative similarity to *Life with Father*—an autocratic father—but is more complex in all respects, since it began life as a deeply psychological character study in Henry James’s novel *Washington Square* before its Broadway adaptation. As the studio wanted this to be a prestige film, they spared no expense and time in set design, sending art director Henry Horner to New York on and off for an entire year to sketch period New York bourgeois townhouses (a 1949 title specifies “a hundred years ago”). James Sanders’s analysis of the set includes ground plans of the actual brownstone, from 1845, since he knows which one Horner used as a basis, side by side with the modified design Hollywood needed to suit the demands of cinematography and the script. The filmmakers built more of a parlor than the architecture of the day allowed, so as to locate the romance of the heiress, Catherine Sloper. This is of musical interest, since it allows for a place to put the piano on which her duplicitous, weak-willed suitor,

Morris Townsend, could woo her with an anachronistic eighteenth-century French parlor song, “Plaisir d’amour.” This is a key narrative feature, absent in the Henry James novel. The architectural accommodation of a musical object—the piano--as a powerful narrative device in a designated space added to the set will return below, in a radically different type of New York film, *Dead End*.

Another musical animation of a set design brings the viewer to a garden back of the house, not featured in the Broadway play, but written into the original novel. To locate music and architecture, it is important to go back to all the sources that filmmakers use to construct staged reality. For the garden dance scene, instead of actual period music, the composer, Aaron Copland, was asked to supply simulated society dance tunes. Pre-composed and imagined period music coexist on the soundtrack seamlessly. In a way, it seems odd that Copland would be called on for this task, given the quantity of available salon music that could have been used for free. It also runs counter to the studio’s selection of this composer as a modern, prestigious figure for their “art” film. Their choice reflected Copland’s fairly recently-achieved status as the paramount musical shaper of American ideals, struggles, and lifestyle through his popular ballet scores and the score for that quintessential national epic, *Our Town* (1940) and, just before *The Heiress*, *The Red Pony*, also based on American literature. Yet in the case of the garden scene, simulated accuracy was decided to be more to the point than modernist updating.

Reviewing the different sound-sight pairings within a film helps to clarify both studio practice and composers’ ambitions. Unlike Max Steiner, Copland wanted to set the brownstone as part of a thoroughly original, contemporary symphonic score that would

start with the main title and work through a number of striking themes. But Copland was betrayed by his director, William Wyler, who felt it was more sensible to insert the romance theme as the second section of the main title, much to Copland's disgust. Only recently has a recording been made that attempts to reconstruct the composer's original intentions. But Copland did have his way with the music for the brownstone façade. It recurs repeatedly, despite the narrative's obsession with the interior patriarchal space of the living room and, secondarily, the passionate parlor. Sanders zeroes in on the use of sliding doors and the hallway as key psychological agents in outlining the narrative of the father-daughter duel and the failed romance. The relations between these dominant interiors and the more generic street exteriors make a strong cinematic statement. The arrival and departure of the characters needs definition, so Copland provided a musical setting for each of these interstitial moments. Like the rest of the score, there is nothing "New York" about this music. It is pure Copland, whether wistful, businesslike, or poignant, or even highly dramatic at the very end of the film, when the suitor bangs on the door and is refused entry by the heiress.

One way to get some leverage on this compositional stance is to peek into Copland's few other filmscores. He makes similar moves for every movie. In *Our Town*, the opening presents a scene somewhat like that of *Life with Father*: it is breakfast time and the camera comes down the street and shows us the house facades viewed through the transit of a paper boy, a walk-on player that matches the cop and the maid in New York. Unlike Steiner, but like his work elsewhere, Copland offers the same type of yearning Americana that also turns up in *The Red Pony*, about the American West. This

composer believes that architecture needs music to construct a place and tone, but not in a way that will spatially locate the action. Rather, he wants music to offer its own aural architecture. The local logic of the New York brownstone, New England village, or California cabin will not dictate his vision. All places, all narratives are capital-A American. In fairness, Copland himself saw this in reverse. He says: “The only problem I had with *The Red Pony* was that it was shot on the same ranch that was used for *Of Mice and Men*. Now I ask you: If you had to look at the same landscape every day, could you think up different music?”³ While it doesn’t support the relative homogeneity of Copland’s overall approach to film scoring, this statement does confirm the idea that a composer has a strong need to align music with architecture.

The Working-Class Street

Moving beyond the bourgeois brownstone to the working-class streetscape opens up new lines of communication between sets and music. Three films of the 1930s share several strategies, while sharply differing in other ways. *Street Scene* (1931, dir. King Vidor, composer Alfred Newman) created a New York template: “more than any other single film, it was *Street Scene* that established the iconic role of the tenement street within New York movies.” It is a set that contrasts sharply with the upscale environments described above: “unlike the elegant but silent row-house façade, every inch of the tenement’s exterior pulses with life,”⁴ and, eventually with the vernacular music of the neighborhood. But first, the movie opens with an obviously constructed shot of the

skyline, looking east towards the Chrysler Building, then the newest symbol of city luxury and style, accompanied by what would eventually be known as “New York” music. This cosmopolitan, upbeat sonic branding of Manhattan is based on the jazzy, urbane sound of George Gershwin, and appears in many a movie.

Next, the camera cranes down into a working-class neighborhood to the tune of “East Side, West Side,” an 1895 song that came to epitomize New York. Originally heavily Irish (“me and Mamie O’Rourke” are the named characters), the song matches the feel of *Life with Father* in terms of the setting/music pairing. This New York reference began with early sound film. In *The Jazz Singer* of 1927, the landmark talkie that moved cinema into the sound age, “East Side, West Side” appears on the score at the opening, featuring streetscape shots that locate the action on the Jewish Lower East Side, unlike the interethnic Upper West Side of *Street Scene*. This oscillation of Manhattan “sides” will continue down through *West Side Story* (shot partly on the East Side). What doesn’t change much in this stream of New York filming is a fixation on, or frequent return to, the city’s paved exteriors and facades, not surprising, given the longevity of the “New York” set on every studio backlot.

Street Scene’s music moves from the score’s suggestion of an idealized New York childhood to an embodied one as we see kids singing “The Farmer in the Dell” as a game song. This set-up relies on a strong association between children, street games, and city sets that would prove durable, down through Spike Lee’s *Crooklyn* in 1994. The move to source from score is almost permanent in the film. The studio did not ask Newman to write a full-blown score to underline the drama and pathos of the script, outside of a brief

gesture for the most melodramatic moment, a domestic murder. Almost the only other time we hear an orchestra comes at the opening of the second act of the script, 36 minutes in, where a reprise of the main title “New York music” offers solid narrative support for the storyline. This sense of music as pillar solidifies at the ending, when the opening music and skyline shot return together.

For the rest of the time, scattered source music helps to flesh out the talky, street-bound action, very much showing the origins of *Street Scene* in Elmer Rice’s successful play. Unlike the move from stage to screen in *The Heiress*, *Life with Father*, and *Dead End* (discussed below), *Street Scene* rarely gets cinematic. Instead, it relies on the variety of ethnic accents, intermittent spontaneous music, and strong interaction among stereotyped and well-acted characters who represent differing points of view about New York lower-class life. Not surprisingly, given the prevailing characterization of Italians, it is they who do most of the singing. A small segment of overlapping street cries by a junk man and ice cream vendor, along with an overheard music lesson (also given by an Italian), supply aural ornamentation to the stable architectural setting.

So *Street Scene* offers simple and effective solutions to the music-architecture pairing. The bookending of the impersonal, glamorous city, with its musical complement, and the lack of continuous symphonic narrative support allows the working class to sing for itself on the steps of its brownstone apartment house. It is an approach that seems highly resonant of the early 1930s, and not just in New York. A quick trip to Paris allows for a comparative view. In the same year as *Street Scene*, so not a case of intertextual influence, René Clair created *Sous les toits de Paris* (Under the Roofs of Paris), the first

of his series about working-class life. Clair was quite vocal about his distrust of synchronized sound and used it sparingly in this period, so any introduction of music is important in these films. Like *Street Scene*, *Sous les toits* opens with a skyline-level view of a metropolis and then moves down into the neighborhood, an enormous set made to look authentic. Just as accurately, the music provides a popular French song—aptly titled “Sous les toits de Paris”—of the type that was sold in sheet music form by hawkers, who taught the crowd the words. This communal activity, combining set and song, is what we see as the camera cranes down, with the melody rising in volume to synchronize with the visual approach to the song circle. Finally, the camera settles in at ground level, inside the group, where the viewer becomes part of the action. At the end of the film, as in *Street Scene*, we return to this opening moment with a reprise of the song circle as the camera cranes up and out and the music fades.

Comparison makes the absence of symphonic city music in the Parisian film glaringly obvious. No jazzy glamor, just the voices of the proletariat. Perhaps this is appropriate for the French 1930s moment, but Elmer Rice’s New York play is no less leftist than its European counterpart. The answer possibly lies in the different ways that filmmakers and studios can build a mythic city, even while agreeing on basics of set design and rough content. A full comparative history of what role music plays in this image-building would be revealing. The constructed image of Paris shown in *Sous les toits*, including the accordion, influenced European ideas about Paris, and makes its way to Hollywood in stereotypes such as those in *An American in Paris* (1951), where Gershwin’s New York music is exported and blended with local sights and sounds.

But not every movie is so easy to pigeonhole. *Dead End* (1937, dir. William Wyler, music Alfred Newman) shares so many basic traits with *Street Scene*, including the composer, that it has to be seen as a successor. But its internal construction, particularly the music-architecture interplay, is so much denser and multilayered that it calls for a closer reading. Common to the two films is the bookending of a crane shot down from and back up to a setpiece city, in and out of a working-class neighborhood, again accompanied by “New York” music. Neither has a full symphonic score, relying on sonic sources that are close to the sets. Both share concerns for the generational fate of the poor. But while *Street Scene* is visually sparse, theatrically stagy, and talky, *Dead End* moves farther down the line towards the emerging genre that would eventually be labeled noir. The set is ingenious and immense [fig. 1], including a simulated East River, the lighting is technically virtuosic, the cast of characters is complex, and the role of music more imaginative. Geographically, this film mirrors the earlier: located on the far East Side instead of the West Side, the imaginary cityscape of the opening and closing looks west towards and out-of-scale view of Rockefeller Center and the Waldorf-Astoria, so fully complements the glamor of the main title.

This view is interrupted by a didactic scroll, telling us that the rich have moved into the poor neighborhood on the banks of the East River, building a high-rise, “and now the terraces of these great apartments look down into the windows of the tenement poor.” As the camera obligingly follows this view into the slum, the New York glamor music might shift perspective, but it obstinately does not. Even as the camera unflinchingly shows a woman dumping a pitcher onto a neighbor’s head, or our future hero, unkempt

and dirty, dragging a trash-can into the street, the orchestra plays through, offering Newman's lovely muted trumpet-violin duo. The high-rise and its doorman enter the picture, as morning comes to the neighborhood: the milkman is on his route, a cop rouses a vagrant from a bench, and the point of view briefly shifts to a rare interior shot of a



Fig. 1. Glamor vs. grit: the high-rise and slum of *Dead End*.

woman raising the shade. Unlike the situation in Clair's Paris, the tenement dwellers have no musical voice; the studio ethnomusicologist sleeps through the whole first act of the drama. And it stays that way well into the scoreless film, until a musical object in a charged space dramatically breaks the silence.

This moment comes after the narrative establishes these facts: our hero Dave is close to his childhood sweetheart (ethnically unpegged) Drina, but is drawn to the next-door rich blonde. Meanwhile, native son Babyface Martin, henchman Hunk in tow, is returning to the block to see his old mother and his own childhood girl. Eventually, Dave will shoot him dead. All along, a group of ragged delinquent boys, including Drina's brother, function as Greek chorus. In the successful predecessor play, these ragamuffins take up most of the space, speaking in a meticulously spelled-out New York dialect. These nicely-realized "dead end kids" would go on to star in a whole string of films, eventually as the "Bowery Boys," who became less socially menacing and more innocently entertaining as time went on. The musical solution for *Dead End's* layered narrative not only suits the built reality of the set, but also contributes to it. The main sonic actor, of all things, is a player piano.

This demanding object appears in a café, not mentioned in the stage version, so it is a deliberate construction for film, a piece of character architecture that exists mainly for its musical voice. Babyface and Hunk retire to this café three times, so this set's appearance is not as incidental as it might seem: once after his old mother utterly rejects him, the second after his old flame, who has become a hooker, walks away, and the third when he broods about how to recoup these emotional losses by kidnapping a rich kid

from the high-rise. This trilogy of scenes stars the piano. Upon first entering the café, the sidekick throws in a coin to start the music. Babyface is enraged: “turn that thing off!” he cries. But it’s not so easy—Hunk has to kick the piano to get it to shut up. “I thought some noise might cheer you up,” the sidekick says, but clearly it hasn’t. The next time the pair comes in for a drink, after the sweetheart scene, the piano is already switched on. The Italian owner comically sizes up the situation and dramatically unplugs the instrument. These two moments provide just about the only comedy in a very dark film, literally and metaphorically.

Why does Babyface want to kill the player piano? Perhaps the answer lies in the music. It’s archaic, more 1900 than 1930s. Maybe it reminds him of the youth he now looks back on bitterly, having been rebuffed by his mother and girlfriend, so it works as narrative architecture, here located in a special space that exists only for this purpose. Rarely does music dictate the built reality of a movie’s storyline, though above, I mentioned this possibility with the piano-in-the-parlor placement in *The Heiress*. This approach is reinforced and dramatically extended in the third café scene. This time there’s a set-up shot. Dave hears the faint sound of the mechanical plinking from his tenement window before we see the gangsters in the restaurant. The music has escaped the confines of its box and room and is taking over the soundscape of the neighborhood. Gloomy Babyface has lost his power over the song, as he scowls on a seat.

In a remarkably structural way, the pianola persists as the action shifts out into the street, playing interminably (way longer than a nickel’s worth of investment should allow) through the next shot sequence. It becomes aural architecture after losing its

immediate narrative thrust. The gangsters move down under the river pier with their accomplice and scheme out the kidnapping. Only then does the music stop, as Dave confronts the bad guys, gets knifed and socked and thrown into the river. Suddenly a new sound arrives: hectic jazz, correctly contemporary with 1937, and eventually it turns from score to source as we see the rich folks dancing, high up on their terrace. Mopping his brow, the doorman becomes the working-class ethnomusicologist, saying “you’d think if they didn’t have to work, they’d sit quietly and have a nice beer.” Class conflict, the engine of the original drama, finally enters the film through architecturally-placed music.

This new narrative focus will play out in two scenes that shift from a static to a more fluid sense of what music can do architecturally. The first brings the



Fig. 2. Rage against the machine: Hunk silences the player piano, *Dead End*.

Dead End Kids into the sonic sphere. Located centrally between the high-rise and the slum, they can mediate the soundscape. Their leader snatches the song from the terrace—“Boo Hoo”—and mocks it. His class-driven sarcasm has found a suitable target. The song was actually current (written by Carmen Lombardo), and allows him to make fun of the poor little rich kids who can cry over love rather than poverty, suiting the progressive discourse of the *Dead End* play and film.

The subsequent entry of the jazz band changes its function. Dave is staging a break-up with the glamor girl. The 59th street bridge emerges as backdrop, certainly an early use of that architectural feature as a romantic setting. Here the background jazz is the precursor to the Gershwin-esque setting of the bridge in Woody Allen’s *Manhattan*. This musical softening of an identifiably New York object marks a sharp screenplay departure from Sidney Kingsley’s stage drama *Dead End*, which describes the structure as “powerful and brutal in the stone and steel which it plants like uncouth giant feet on the earth.” Not very romantic, but indicative of how Hollywood turns practical architecture into myth. In the film adaptation, the jazz stands for the rich girl’s world, which Dave is giving up in solidarity with his neighborhood and attachment to Drina. As she regretfully leaves the field of love, the socialite retreats to the high-rise, and the music stops as the gate shuts: an architecture-music pairing seals the scene. This careful

timing contrasts sharply with the non-stop playing of the earlier pianola cue, which just kept on running mechanically. In this bridge-backed scene, music works in a more traditional way as narrative support, showing the fluidity of function and affect that this versatile sonic medium as it complements architectural detail.

Dead End has room for only one more musical moment, at the very end. The boys joke about Drina's brother Tommy having to go to reform school, and their songster leader remembers the kid named Smoky that Tommy might meet there. Smoky used to sing "about an angel," referencing the American prison song "If I had the wings of an angel, over these prison walls I would fly." The Dead End kids warble this tune as they exit stage right into an uncertain future. The movie should move directly to "The End" after this one-time appearance of locally-generated sung music that gives the neighborhood a voice. Instead, the reprise of the New York symphonic sound and rising crane shot take over the screen. The message might be: what you've just seen is merely another moment in the life of the unfeeling city, with its seven million stories.

In *Dead End*, music goes architectural, beyond the basic mission of helping to build a sense of place, character, and message. After the framing establishing scenes, the ensuing sonic sparseness only accentuates the importance of musical intervention into a largely silent soundscape. Physically, music creates and nurtures the café space as a central node of sentiment. The player piano's release into the environment functions almost spatially. Through the low-high contrast of the archaic pianola and the jazzy, up-to-date terrace, time and space become multidimensional in ways that a standard, surging score does not allow. Giving the Dead End Kids some musical initiative in their satire and

commentary, instead of relying on the heavy-handed dialect of the stage play, helps to construct them as a physical, identifiable unit that would endure over the next decade as a monument to a certain sensibility that spills over from Depression to wartime America.

Echoes of this 1930s discussion between the music and architecture of the New York street resonate in the work of Spike Lee. In 1994, he wanted to carry on the tradition of setting the brownstone façade for *Crooklyn*, but had trouble with the opening shot of black children playing street games, a scene that echoes *Street Scene*'s establishing shot. Those games had been largely forgotten. In *Do the Right Thing* (1989), Lee had already stressed the street sensibility, playing out the generational and interethnic tensions that recall *Street Scene*, including the locals' argument about which music is better. Here it is salsa vs. rap, far removed musically from the earlier film's jazz vs. classical debate, but the visual and structural effect is similar. And just as the player piano in the café brought things to a boil for Babyface Martin in *Dead End*, Radio Raheem's boombox triggers fateful rage in another Italian café, in this case a pizza parlor. Lee has shown that the architectural placement of musical objects can still be dramatically effective in contemporary New York cinema.

The Construction Site

To round out the Hollywood audio-vision of New York, the possibility that the set might itself construct the music needs mentioning. This happens in *Tap* (1989, dir. Nick Castle, composer James Newton Howard) a vehicle for dancer Gregory Hines and a

stellar back-up cast of veteran hoofers. Son of a famous tap dancer, in search of a comeback after a prison stint, Max Washington refuses a job in what he sees as a phony Broadway tap-based show. To illustrate the former street-cred authenticity of tap, he moves everyone outside. Alert to city sounds, he picks up work noises from a construction site--rhythmic jackhammers and all—to build a routine that the dancers joyously improvise on. As this sort of street action was not likely to be easily filmable in actual 1980s Manhattan, the crew created it all on a studio backlot. It's an interesting throwback to old American cinema that parallels Max's anachronistic, and similarly mythic, approach to creative work.

Consciously or unconsciously, Castle's scene echoes what happened on a backlot 57 years earlier, when Rouben Mamoulian shot *Love me Tonight* in 1932. Set in a mythic Paris, this movie has some flavor of the same year's *Sous les toits de Paris*, discussed above, in its appeal to French working-class solidarity through sound. *Love me Tonight* is often cited by film historians and buffs as an innovative rethinking of the stage musical (it has Rodgers and Hart music). The opening of the filmed version, starring the French-American pairing of Jeanette MacDonald and Maurice Chevalier, is one of those strikingly inventive moments. Street sweeping, blacksmithing, and other everyday Parisian activities build up on the soundtrack, a tough task in 1932, and turn into a city symphony that finally enters Chevalier's apartment as he gets out of bed. He shuts the window, declaring that Paris is too noisy for his taste. Mamoulian's move might be an extension of the 1920s European big-city portrait (e.g. Ruttman's 1927 *Berlin: Sinfonie*

einer Grossstadt, “Symphony of a Metropolis,” with its musical title) into the audible space now available to moving pictures.

The Enclosed Courtyard

With its intensely closed architectural space, replicating a Greenwich Village courtyard, *Rear Window* (1954, dir. Alfred Hitchcock, music, Franz Waxman) triangulates the moves made by the earlier *Dead End* and *Sous les toits de Paris*. Sanders points out that the courtyard offers “*perceived* privacy [which] grows from the sense that, while others *might* be looking, it is reasonable to act as if they are not.”⁵ Much of the time, we see the crowded, tiered and often open apartments and fire escapes through the eyes of the voyeuristic Scottie, bedridden and bored. People keep exposing themselves to view, sometimes flagrantly. But what about aural exposure? The tenants often play their own private music, so they do seem to be imagining that while others *might* be listening, it doesn’t matter. Mostly, they use the radio—Miss Torso and her warm-ups in underwear, Miss Lonelyhearts and her imagined romance. Even at 2 in the morning, someone apparently has the radio tuned to a pop song, and no one complains.

One character, The Composer, is the exception to this indifference, occasionally making a sonic statement with his live music-making. Sometimes he’s private, sometimes public, drawing in friends, and eventually even Miss Lonelyhearts, but often he’s private, working on the composition that will eventually flower as the real-life studio composer Franz Waxman’s “Lisa” song, which trademarks the film and the glamorous character

Lisa. But when The Composer moves to jazz, *Rear Window* draws on a sensibility that harks back to *Dead End's* upscale terrace, with its hot-band brashness. This gesture looks around the corner to the emerging scores of films such as *The Man with the Golden Arm* that will identify jazz with urban angst and danger.⁶ It happens at the very opening of the *Rear Window's* main title, starring the cymbals reminiscent of Shelley Manne's *Golden Arm* score. Jazz suggests something dynamic, and underscores two tense moments: the murdered-dog scene and the dangerous digging that Lisa does in search of criminal evidence. So despite the cozy courtyard atmosphere that provides light music, geniality and occasionally comedy, the fact the space is still an urban one, so possibly menacing, allows the music to conceptually complement the architecture.

This extra potential that live, rather than mediated, source music offers the architecture is reminiscent of *Sous les toits de Paris*. But a large gap still separates the New York and Paris sensibilities. In the French film, as in *Rear Window*, the camera peeps into windows to watch the residents' daily life. But the Parisians are all singing the title song, which has penetrated their private spaces from the very opening shot of their heartfelt collective performance around the song-promoter. Here, the closed communal space suggests that private musical behavior can be viewed from outside, yet it is a sign of social bonding, rather than individual preference. Having the camera as the voyeur, rather than a single observer, such as Scottie, reinforces the impression.

In summary, focusing on New York locations and relying on James Sanders's insights suggests the many ways that architecture and music meet and interact on the set. They might often ignore each other, but their moments of mutual acknowledgement can be meaningful. Both set and music are studio constructions. To round out the discussion, it's time to move from the set to the *setting*, a pre-existing, free-standing architectural unit. As a transition, a film with a strong interest in alternating set and setting comes to mind. In Jacques Tati's *Mon Oncle* (1956), the deadpan signature character M. Hulot moves between his classic old Parisian neighborhood (St-Maur), overstuffed with energy and conviviality, and the hypermodernist house-set of his social-climbing sister. Every single time we see old Paris, we hear the stereotyped sound of an accordion band, straight through the whole scene. Tati contrasts this ethnographic sonic wash with the spare dialogue and amusing mechanical sound effects of the sleek, spare residence. These two sound units, one score, the other sound design, create a music-architectural coupling that becomes increasingly overdetermined, even overbearing, as the film wears on. With only modest musical diversions at a factory and on the highway, this binary sonic siting allows the viewer to contrast the open, animated social world of an actual Paris neighborhood with the gated, contained space of a house taken literally out of the pages of the French home design magazines of the day.

Complicating this set-up is the fact that within St-Maur, the filmmaker built a set—Hulot's odd little walk-up apartment--requiring the comic figure to snake through a set of stairs to reach the "real" street. In a sense, this suits the character, who is himself a piece of mobile architecture, always visible through height, dress, and gait, and identified

sonically mostly through his silence. This allows the viewer to enjoy the steady sight-sound pairing of neighborhood and music and to concentrate on the sight gags that highlight the narrative.

The Setting: A Castle in Scotland

Eilean Donan is a small Scottish castle “situated by the picturesque village of Dornie on the main tourist route to the isle of Skye.” It won the Icons of Scotland award in 2007 for “best historic attraction” and “best castle.” (www.eileandonancastle.com, accessed 7/14/12). This medieval structure on a tiny island lay in ruins for some 200 years until Lieutenant Colonel John McRae-Gilstrap completely restored it (1911-32). So in a sense, the castle setting is itself a set, contemporary with the growth of the studio backlot. No surprise, then, that some location scout noticed it ca. 1950, and that it has been regularly rented as a film setting for some sixty years, at least since 1953’s *The Master of Ballantrae* (dir. Michael Powell, composer William Allwyn). Every one of these films—and some BBC television series—came to grips with how to deal with the castle musically, and they arrived at very different answers. So Eilean Donan is the ideal case study for the question of how filmmakers solve the question of how to set a setting, as opposed to a set.

One way of sorting out the solutions is by noticing that some take the building very seriously, while others are more playful. To put it another way, there are non-ironic

and ironic ways of composing to a castle. The brief survey below covers only a sample of the rich possibilities that a setting affords creative minds.

Non-Ironic Approaches

The Master of Ballantrae is an extremely free, upbeat adaptation of a complex and often grim 1889 swashbuckling novel by Robert Louis Stevenson. It centers on the conflict between two high-born Scottish brothers over politics, inheritance and a woman. Starring Errol Flynn in a late role, the film centers on Eilean Donan as the main site of action, aside from a Caribbean pirate interlude. Allwyn, who produced over 100 film scores for British studios, had to set the



Fig. 3. Eilean Donan in its first starring role, *The Master of Ballantrae*.

castle immediately, since the backdrop for the brief opening credit sequence consists only of a technicolor, static, somewhat distant shot of the structure. Like Steiner in New York, Allwyn goes for a strong symphonic, non-ironic statement of locale. The surging strings suggest the approach of Max Bruch's well-known violin showpiece, *Scottish Fantasy*, composed at the time the novel came out (1880) and other such standard-repertoire depictions of Scotland, which date back at least as far as Mendelssohn's "Scottish" Symphony (1842). Throughout, Williams's film score pays little attention to the vernacular, in the by-then time-tested manner of earlier Errol Flynn vehicles, such as Erich Korngold's seminal *Captain Blood* (1935). In the swashbuckler genre, there tends to be little irony, beyond the obligatory witty repartee of the dashing hero. So when it's about capital S Scottish history and romance, you play it straight.

Highlander (1986, dir. Russell Mulcahy, music Michael Kamen). This is a fantasy flick that had sequels and turned into a television series. Two medieval immortal Scotsmen carry on a duel to the death over the centuries. After the opening combat in a New York parking garage, the camera rises to show us sixteenth-century Scotland, of course at Eilean Donan. The heroic brass theme is only vaguely local, but as the troops progress over the bridge, we see a band in regalia with pipes and drums, but we don't

hear them. It's a common enough option for driving the setting home by—non-ironic—distancing from the vernacular sources.

But later in the film, in a pensive sunset moment, a lone piper is playing what sounds like an actual *pibroch* tune. As the camera swings around to meet him, score turns to source to locate the sound, with the castle glowing in the distance. The duality of accuracy vs. myth, which Sanders spends a book describing for New York, carries across the Atlantic and everywhere mainstream movies go. You can have it both ways. One could follow the tracks of the *Highlander* vehicle in all its media directions and see how Scottishness plays out over time.

Ironic Approaches

The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes (1970, dir. Billy Wilder, composer Miklos Rozsa) is a film built on parody and irony. Holmes and Watson meet a mystery lady, and at a certain point they have to go to Scotland to solve their puzzle. It seems there's a clue in a castle. They bicycle from castle to castle, including Eilean Donan, and the high-adventure score gets interrupted each time by a piercing bagpipe. Inevitably, audiences laugh when I present this clip. Finally, the exhausted trio stretches out for a picnic by a loch and Watson complains that they have been to various castles fruitlessly, and have “been assaulted by bagpipes at every turn.” This is a rare cinematic moment of self-reflexive ironic commentary on a film's own score, even as the action is unfolding. The castle-Scotland bond is broken down and exposed as a device. Not often do film music and architecture run into this type of roadblock on their appointed narrative pathway.

Kandukondein, kandukondein (2000, dir. Mani Rathnam, composer A. R. Rahman) comes up with a completely different ironic music-setting perspective, from Tamil Nadu, India, where the local powerhouse film industry is called Kollywood. Right around the time this movie was released, *The Guardian* ran a feature story about people in Scotland earning money from Indian tourists who travel to see the castles in Indian films (including Bollywood, the North Indian cinema system). This article reminded me that in fact, I knew one of those case studies very well, as it appears in a film featured in an essay for *Global Soundtracks: World of Film Music*, the volume I was starting to assemble.⁷

Kandukondein is an adaptation of Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*. Among the several six-minute "picturizations," as they call the inserted song-and-dance sequences of Indian film, one takes the couple to the Pyramids in Egypt. It features a mix of Indian and possibly mideastern ethnic outfits and moves. A bit later, for no particular narrative reason, the couple find themselves in and around Eilean Donan. The immediate stimulus might have been that this heavily-used setting had appeared shortly before in an extremely popular Bollywood film, *Kuch kuch hota hai* (1998, dir. Karan Johar, composer Jatin-Lalit), that the Tamil film team must have seen.

The romantic duo, Meenu and Srikanth, play out and riff on the myths and tropes of the Highlands and fairytales. Appearing first as a distraught captive princess, visually reinforced by occasional glimpses of stern medieval British guards, Meenu scampers in and out of interior and exterior spaces freely enough. Srikanth, in some sort of Celtic period garb, sings his love song as he searches for her, but in no time they are on the

bridge and by the shore. It is an appropriation of European elements that these Indians, singing in Tamil, are just having a good time with.

A. R. Rahman, soon to be famous in Bollywood and then in Hollywood (*Slumdog Millionaire*), was trying out his Chennai cosmopolitanism in this early score, which freely mixes western and Indian components, often piled up in layers. Synthesizer sounds float over a mix of Tamil folk drumbeats and western percussion. The prominent flute sound blends the Celtic and the Indian. This continual code-switching and code-superimposition also plays out visually in several ways. Meenu switches from sari to a European dress, matching music-choreographic moves. Inside the castle, she has a vision of herself and Srikanth as castle-dwellers, shifting clothes and moving into a semi-flamenco dance style. Outside, she comes over the bridge in the dress as the score blends in a stereotyped “Riverdance”-style Celticness. Then Srikanth moves the flute from score to source as he plays for Meenu. The moment an Indian romantic lead pulls out a flute, the deep cultural reference is Krishna, in his childhood guise as the mischievous shepherd-boy charming the comely dairymaids. Yet the instrument is not Indian, but rather resembles a sort of Celtic black transverse flute.

Kandukondein's castle is good clean post-colonial fun. Perhaps it parallels Billy Wilder's Viennese-Jewish freedom to play with the myth of Sherlock Holmes and the Highland castle. In any case, neither film plays it straight with Scotland.

It would be pedantic, if informative, to track down every filmic use of Eilean Donan. Other standard settings beckon: the Eiffel Tower, the Taj Mahal, the Great Wall... films return again and again to familiar places, usually ornamenting them with some

well-known musical adornment. But that's just a guess—probably many surprises lurk in the search for this type of music—architecture pairing.

Coda

For a final case, I'd like to move off the mainstream to the lesser-known currents of world cinema. It is a short film in an urban setting with no dialogue: music and architecture can talk directly to each other. Andrzej Munk (1921-61), a highly influential but short-lived Polish director, created a brief movie in 1958 that sums up some of the thinking above, *Spacerek staromiejski* ("A Stroll in the Old City," music Andrzej Markowski (available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-VPaULLyuM>). A radiant and curious young girl of eleven, carrying her violin case home from her music school, continuously reacts to and helps to create the sounds of the city. They emanate from the exteriors and interiors of the recently-rebuilt Warsaw Old City, with war-scarred edges toward the river.

The soundtrack carefully amplifies, and sometimes electronically modifies, the various sounds. As a composite, they make a subtle ensemble of Polish life: voices from the music school and choirs are firmly and unreachably attached to institutional buildings. In other sequences, the girl actively works with what she see and hears: plucking her violin while organ pipes are being tuned in the church, using her bow to conduct the scraping of a street-sweeper in a shot reminiscent of *Love me Tonight's* Parisian construction, interrupting rhythmically-working shoemakers by playing on their

bottles of liquids, changing the sound of a fountain with her hand in a 1950s electronic *musique concrète* move and spraying a policeman, in a move from silent-film comedy, watching some tough boys stage a mock battle in the ruins, coping with a menacing barking dog—the little blonde surveys and sometimes intervenes in the acoustic space of a big city.

Spacerek says that we live daily life on a sound-stage that is also a bricks-and-mortar reality. Set and setting overlap, and the audience can be actors in the aural-architectural drama of daily life. There might be a local social subtext in this short, theatrical film. Perhaps the classical music of the lesson is the voice of authority from which the girl must escape to find her own pathway through a recently deeply-scarred social order that has somehow managed to reconstruct its fortresses of school and church, even as the next generation is already preparing its war games and the police dogs are ready to pounce. Such a reading might jibe with the way music plays into other Central European cinema in the age of state socialism (ca.1948-89). But the softness and good humor of *Spacerek* tone down any such easy interpretation, stressing instead the dialogue between music and architecture, in a way that both points back to historical film and ahead to electronic experimentation by removing words from the scene. In this film, sounds and buildings carry on their own conversation, one I hope can continue in a discussion about how two strong-minded elements of cinema structure can talk to each other.

¹ James Sanders, *Celluloid Skyline: New York and the Movies* (New York: Knopf, 2002). Along with a useful conversation with Sanders, I am grateful to Maya Slobin for key examples and insights, along with Kathryn Kalinak, Katie Trumpener, Wesleyan colleagues Scott Higgins, Elijah Huge, Joe Siry, my students, and helpful listeners who responded to the lecture version in 2012.

² Mark Slobin, ed. *Global Soundtracks: Worlds of Film Music* (Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008).

³ Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland Since 1943* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 89.

⁴ Sanders, *Celluloid Skyline*, 157.

⁵ *ibid.*, 233.

⁶ For my analysis of *Golden Arm* as adaptation, see Slobin, *Global Soundtracks*, 35ff.

⁷ Joseph Getter and B. Balusbrahmniyan, "Tamil Film Music: Sound and Significance," in *Global Soundtracks*, 114-51.