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Cinema and popular music, a multifold relationship. The cases of Ennio Morricone and David Lynch

ABSTRACT: The aim of this article is to discuss the complexity of the relationship between popular music and cinema. Since its very birth, cinema has established a solid collaboration with music. When films had no sound, music (back then played live) had the crucial role of creating moods, underlining specific sequences, and in general making speech not too missed. When sound appeared, *musicals* became immediately a dominant genre (and a rich source for business: cinema halls themselves, but also music-sheets and recordings). Shortly after, the subtle art of film music developed, granting — to film and music histories alike — some of the finest composers of the whole 20th century (Bernard Hermann, Nino Rota, John Williams, Ennio Morricone...), or allowing great composers and musicians in their own right, to deliver some of their best works in form of soundtrack (Miles Davis' *Lift to the Scaffold* or Duke Ellington's *Anatomy of a Murder*, just to focus on jazz only).

Whether film music must be considered a form of 'serious' or 'popular' music is still source of debate, and definitely not in the scopes of the present essay. Instead, the point I wish to make here is that, regardless of its nature, the interaction between cinema and popular music is made of literally dozens of possible combinations, making this relationship one of the most interesting among the many existing within an art, cinema, which makes of multimediality and multimodality its primary strength (let alone identity: up to the point that a good portion of the early years of film studies were spent in deciding whether, after all, cinema could be considered an art of its own, or simply a combination of pre-existing arts). The analysis will proceed in a rather linear manner, by simply taking two case-studies: Ennio Morricone, a most celebrated film composer, and David Lynch, a cult-director who has established a strong bond with popular music in his cinematography. Perhaps unexpectedly, the case of Morricone will be only in part employed to discuss his scores for the likes of Leone or Pasolini: more attention will be devoted to his not-so-well known (at least outside Italy) activity as pop songwriter and arranger. When it comes to Lynch, instead, the analysis will try to cover more or less *all* his interests in popular music, including his long-lasting professional collaboration (and personal friendship) with composer Angelo Badalamenti.

KEYWORDS: popular music, Ennio Morricone, David Lynch, soundtrack, songwriting, cover versions, Angelo Badalamenti, Mina

1. Ennio Morricone: music for cinema and cinematographic music

The Honorary Academy Award given to Ennio Morricone in 2007 sounded to many music and cinema lovers as a true liberation. Eight *Nastro d'argento*'s, six *David di Donatello*'s, four *Bafta*'s, one *Leone d'oro* and an endless

series of other less famous prizes. But that little statue, just never. A curse! Like the grape for the fox or *Moby Dick* for Captain Ahab.

Five nominations, since 1979 onwards, but never his name after the sentence "The winner is...", even when it looked obvious, even when it looked due. Then, on February 2007 the curse was dismissed, for the most melancholic and/or significant motivation, depending on how one looks at it: the career award. The one that is indeed given to the greats, but also the one that is given when you think that there will not be many more occasions to do it (Morricone was 82, when he got the Oscar).

A more cheerful way to look at it is to think that, in a way, there is a bit of everything in that Oscar. A bit of the *Scion Scion* from *A Fistful of Dynamite*, a bit of the coyote howling of *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, a bit of the hypnotic four-note redundancy of *The Legend of 1900*, a bit of the fragmentary crescendo of *The Professional* (for those who remember it), and a bit of all the rest. And the rest stands for more than 500 — yes: five hundred — soundtracks.

1.1. From serious to popular music

The relationship between Morricone and popular music has been rather peculiar, and it certainly did not start as a vocation. Born in Roma,¹ he received his musical education in "S. Cecilia" Roma Conservatory, where he got a diploma in composition (with Goffredo Petrassi), band instrumentation and trumpet. His ambition was to work in the serious music, and for all his life (except perhaps for the last few years) he never really got rid of the sensation that, after all, no matter how great a film-composer he is considered, his best and most innovative works have been completely overlooked. A fundamental encounter for his musical education was the group Nuova Consonanza, composed by musicians and composers interested in avant-garde and experimentation. It is here, while trying to become a relevant avant-garde composer in the Italian panorama (a role that history would certainly have given him, if it was not so busy considering him the greatest living film-composer), that the bases for his soundtrack trademarks were set. During these years, indeed, Morricone developed a true passion for three compositional patterns, among others: 1) the associations, in a score, between two or more apparently incongruent instruments; 2) the courage (back then, not irrelevant) of mixing musical styles and languages that are supposed to be ideologically (if not formally) unbridgeable; and 3) the tendency to a music that seems to have images as its natural complement. The first pattern informs us on why he would decide to employ such instruments like a pan flute, or a *scacciapensieri* (that odd tongue-sollicited folk instrument coming from Southern Italian tradition) together

¹ Among the many sources for studying Morricone's life and work, I recommend Sergio Miceli, *Morricone, la musica, il cinema* (Milano: Ricordi, 1994).

with analogously unexpected chamber ensembles, or synthesizers, or pop-rock combos, in so many of his scores. The second feature suggests an eclecticism that will be a leit-motiv all over his career; while, for the third pattern, it is enough to browse the titles of many of his serious compositions: *Le vecchie mura di Calcata* (The old walls of Calcata), *Il gioco degli insetti nel sacro bosco* (The game of the insects in the sacred forest), *Gocce nella caverna di Frasassi* (Drops in the cave of Frasassi), *Chiaro di sole nella cupola di S. Pietro* (Bright sunbeams in St. Peter's cupola). Not just images, not just scenes: it is more like fragments, sequences, even shots. A musical jargon that is already cinematographic.

Needless to say, the life of a serious avant-garde musician was not astoundingly wealthy, and Morricone had soon to accept artistically-less-challenging jobs, in the name of making ends meet. In 1955, he was hired as musical arranger for several orchestras, and asked to arrange and/or write songs that were to become smash hits in the Italian pop tradition. Fortunate partnerships were established, a.o., with singer-songwriter Gino Paoli (arrangement for his most famous song *Sapore di Sale* plus songwriting for *Nel Corso*), Joan Baez (for whom he wrote *The Ballad of Sacco and Vanzetti* and *Here's To You*), and several others.

1.2. A little robbery from the Shadows

After a few years of work with pop songs, in 1961 circa, Morricone wrote his first film-score, for a movie named *Il federale* (*The fascist*, for the international market) directed by comedy-specialist Luciano Salce. More comedies (by Salce himself and Camillo Mastrocinque) followed the year after, and it was not until 1964 that the encounter that eternally linked Morricone to film music occurred. Sergio Leone, the godfather of the Spaghetti-Western genre, asked him to score music for *A Fistful of Dollars*. Since that movie onwards, Morricone went to be *the* film-composer, in Italy first, and very soon abroad too.

The knowledge accumulated in the first 5–6 years of work in the pop music business, was probably decisive for the development of Morricone's personal aesthetics, and it is very well known how his film music is in fact profoundly affected by elements and ideas that are more typical of pop than of serious music. In a sense, Morricone is one of the finest examples of how a compromise between two seemingly different musical languages can be performed efficiently, and with taste.

Provided that this shall not be the focus of this article, a short example of the influence of popular music in Morricone's film music can be made. It concerns the spaghetti-western genre (in which he arguably delivered his best known themes), and it constitutes the only (to my knowledge) big musical robbery of his career: a robbery that happened to be made at the expenses of popular music. It is a real *topos*, nowadays: you watch a western, or even a parody of it, and invariably, sooner or later, you hear the clean and bright sound of a Fender Stratocaster electric guitar

performing a phrase based on the bass notes. That's *so* Morricone, one may think (and that kind of thing that Quentin Tarantino quotes so easily). Well, before being *so* Morricone, that sound (and generally that musical idea) was *so* Shadows. Not so many remember them, but a year or so before the Beatles broke into the scene, they were the most popular band in England. They collected a few hits with instrumental songs (not a rare occurrence in those days), whose leading part was taken by guitarist Hank Marvin, who indeed played a Fender Stratocaster. One song in particular, *Apache*, was clearly meant as a western song, and it had *that* kind of clean and bright sound, with *that* kind of phrases and *that* kind of atmosphere. Except that it was three years before *A Fistful of Dollars*. It is hard to believe that Morricone was not aware of it, as he later declared during an interview, because the song was such a success that listening to any radio station for less than half an hour would have been enough to be exposed to it.

But we can easily forgive Morricone for this. If it is true that minor artists copy, while major ones steal, then this is just another confirmation of how major a figure he is.²

1.3. The song *Se Telefonando*

Leaving this short example, aside, my main task, in discussing here Morricone, shall be that of illustrating how his specific work “within” popular music, was affected by a then-achieved “cinematic” vision of music. In other words, not only Morricone was keen on bringing popular music in cinema, but — perhaps more interestingly — was very eager to do the exact opposite as well. One song in particular has an interesting story behind. In 1966, while still an emergent film-composer, he was asked to write a tune for the Italian popstar Mina, by then (and by far) the best-known (and possibly the best) Italian female pop singer. He is given a ready set of lyrics to work on: nothing really special, a typical “silly love song”, as there are many.

The title is *Se telefonando*... (“If, talking on the phone...”), and the words describe (if “describe” is the expression here) a couple who had an affair one night by the sea. Somehow they are both taken by surprise by the suddenness of this

² To his credit, however, it must be said that in general Morricone does not cheat, when he talks about his music. Musicologists cannot stand anymore those composers and authors who pretend they do not know what is behind their music, who call into question magic inspirations and transcendental states of mind (or soul, or spirit, just name your favourite), and who, because of that, refuse even banal analyses of their own work (perhaps with the proud addition that they do not believe in analysis, and that art is art, and the like). Morricone (bless him) is the opposite. He tells you everything about how a theme is created, developed and what are the ideas behind it. Is his music less magical because of that? I do not think so: he just makes a point on the fact that *he* is the magician.

passion (“The wonder of the night, leaning towards the sea, caught us as unknown to each other. Then, all of the sudden, your hands on mine...”). Except that he falls in love with her, while she does not (“This love of ours has grown too fast ...”). So, there she goes: ‘If, talking on the phone, I was able to tell you goodbye, then I would call you... If, meeting you again, I was sure you wouldn’t suffer, then I would see you... If, looking at your eyes, I was able to tell you that it’s over, then I would look at you... But in fact I can’t explain why our new-born love is already over...’. And that is it. This part about her not being able to talk to the partner is repeated once more, and then the song fades out. Altogether, less than 3 minutes, as it was perfectly common in those pre-Sgt. Pepper sixties.

On the other hand, we have a quite uncommon structure for a pop song, and a very peculiar one for those days of either Strophe-Refrain or Chorus-Bridge repertoires: in *Se Telefonando* we have something like a A-B-B structure, the A (shorter) being the sudden passion part, and the B (rather longer) being the sense of guilt, sung twice, of the narrating character.

Now, how did Morricone approach the song, in terms of compositional problem-solving? At that time, he had been in film music for five years already, so it is not to be excluded that his mind was in that kind of set already, because his musical solution was remarkably cinematographic. A strophic type of melody, with very much an attitude of “preparation”, characterizes the A part: the melodic arc is rather restricted (the whole part plays around four contiguous notes) and, on purpose, not awfully catchy. The harmonic progression is simple and stable, yet perfectly meant for each unit of the section: a mixed cadence performed twice, on the descriptive part (“The wonder of the night, leaning towards the sea, caught us as unknown to each other”. The second verse, however, does not resolve on the tonic, but on the minor chord of the III degree, practically creating a dominant minor that is nothing else but expectation for something not-openly-positive to happen). Things then turn slightly dramatic “all of a sudden” (“Then, all of the sudden, your hands on mine...”), so: focus on the VI minor (the obvious sad alternative to the tonic, but again: “slightly” sad, as turning to the I minor would be much more dramatic), and a change in melody (a bit more *pathos* appears). Then, finally, the verse ‘This love of ours has grown too fast’ is performed with the same identical melody as the opening, but with a crucially different progression: not the full-circle regularity of the I-IV-V-I, but the extremely waiting-for-something-to-happen I-IV-II-V.

The ending of the verse is on the dominant, thus the doors are open: the motif A comes to an end and qualifies itself as a clear prologue. A is the past, B will be the present. A tells us why the woman is feeling so desperately guilty in B, and it does that — we shall see — with a total different rhythm and atmosphere than B. In other words, and to mention just one example out of many, this is what Alfred Hitchcock loved to do in so many of his movies: it is Janet Leigh stealing the money that “opens” to her anxious escape and tragical stop in the motel, where Anthony Perkins will kill her in the shower.

So, B starts, and it is a totally different matter. The melody is wider, more contiguous, more in legato, and extremely catchy, but at the same time it is set on a syncopated rhythm: it is a cry installed on uncertainty. She knows how she feels, but she does not know how to say it. The lyrics are repetitive, and really not particularly brilliant, as they revolve around the same concept through three different (but in principle similar) actions: whatever she says, the point is, "If I was able to call it over, I would, but in fact I cannot see you suffering." Thus, Morricone has a second problem here: giving a bit of freshness to a boring set of lyrics. To a good half of the Italian popular song tradition, that would have meant one single procedure: change of key. And changes of key, in Italian popular song tradition, are done in two ways: either half a tone up, or — in the bravest cases — an entire tone.

Too easy for Morricone: he has three verses to work on, three "if's", talking on the phone with the guy, meeting him, and looking at his face (plus the final explanation that she will *not* perform these actions, as she does not have the courage to face her lover's desperation). The first "if" starts with the same key of the A part (G flat major), and melodically-wise, begins with and relies on the tonic. The second "if" insists on the G flat but now begins with and relies on the 2nd grade (A flat), not anymore on the tonic. Harmonically, we get an idea of repetition, but we have lifted the melody a bit higher, as if the character is increasingly doubtful about her abilities to call the affair over. Third "if", and the protagonist crashes in tears: the long-awaited modulation happens, but not in the typical Italian way: Morricone takes the song "two" tones higher, in B flat, and the melody begins with and relies on B flat, in a similar fashion than the first "if". The sense of the modulation is here totally different from the traditional one: not a simple refreshment of the same musical ambience, but simply a "new" ambience. Not painting the same room with a new colour, but straight away moving to another room. This is what happens when you modulate two tones up. So, Morricone works here on two levels: melody and harmony (we leave aside arrangement here, which is as relevant, but perhaps it would turn our discussion too long and boring), letting the former suggest repetition and doubtfulness, and the former taking care of increasing desperation.

2. The role of popular music in David Lynch's filmography

If, with Morricone's case, the intention was to focus on one specific event of his musical venture, offering a microscopic analysis, for David Lynch I shall opt for the opposite strategy: a general (macroscopic) view of his many ways to approach popular music. And the question might be even a bit more intriguing, when we consider that Lynch is primarily a director, and not a film composer.

The relationship that the director from Missoula has established with music since the very beginning of his career is an intense, symbiotic and eclectic one, experienced from any possible angle. Lynch is a listener, a performer, a composer, a user and even a fan of the music featured in his movies. He manipulates music and lets music manipulate him.

The history of cinema is full of directors who gave, or give, music function and relevance that exceed those which tradition established as customary. Some compose their music together with professional composers (Morricone himself experienced a famous collaboration with Gillo Pontecorvo in the *Battle of Algeri*), or by themselves only (like Alejandro Amenabar or Clint Eastwood, both achieving admittedly good results). Some others provide music (diegetic music, particularly) with a role in the narration and definition of soundscape that goes far beyond the notion of “colour” (an obvious mention being here Aki Kaurismäki, who is in fact almost allergic to non-diegetic music). We also know of directors who are so in love with the synchronisation between sound and image that they end up constructing some sequences, in a videoclip-fashion, which arise from the music. Several of Quentin Tarantino’s movies would not work the way they do, if he did not follow this reversed order of action.

We also know of directors who work side by side with composers, letting them participate in the decision making process. Some even establish a long-lasting and reciprocally affectionate relationship. How much does Hermann owe to Hitchcock? And how much does Hitchcock to Hermann?

We are even aware of directors who are so perfused with musical imagery, particularly within the pop environment, that they actually want rock stars or other musicians to play relevant acting roles. The chat between Iggy Pop and Tom Waits in Jarmusch’s *Coffee and cigarettes* remains for me the best-crafted example of this special category.

In sum, we have knowledge of many forms of symbiosis between directors and music that not only help us to better decode the poetic gesture, and the aesthetic intentions of a movie (or an entire filmography, e.g. Tarantino), but that testify to a whole territory of semiotic relations describing conception, articulation, and *mise-en-scene* of a cinematographic work. These relations tell us about how a sequence was born, how it is written, and how it develops.

David Lynch possesses and exercises *all* these relations, sometimes separately, but more often all together. As he himself states: “Sometimes, if I listen to music, the ideas really flow. It’s like the music changes into something else, and I see scenes unfolding”.³

To start with, Lynch is himself a musician. His first movie, *Eraserhead* (1977), contains music “designed and produced” by himself and Alan Splet (as reported

³ Stephen Pizzello, “Highway to Hell: Sex, sax and surrealism lend noir to *Lost Highway*”. *American Cinematographer* 78 (1997), no 3, 36.

in the credit notes of the soundtrack). Why is it, that the music is not credited as “composed” by Lynch and Splet? It is 1977, and sampling sounds or entire song passages,⁴ as it occurs in this movie, has not yet achieved the institutional acknowledgement of being deemed “artwork” in all respects that it is today. Lynch loves deconstructing and reconstructing sounds, giving them a new identity, decontextualising them. It is a similar process that he actually applies to his movie characters. In *Eraserhead* there is an original song, *In Heaven*, which Lynch co-wrote with Peter Ivers. This is not an isolated case. In *Fire walks with me*, 1992, the prequel of the super-famous *Twin Peaks* TV series, two songs, *The Pink Room* and *Best Friends*, are written by Lynch, who is also the lyricist for all songs on the soundtrack (the latter role being performed several times throughout his cinematographic career, and also in other projects).⁵

Even more emblematic of the Lynch-musician, in my opinion, is an album released in 1998, entitled *Lux Vivens*, together with singer Jocelyn Montgomery. *Lux Vivens* is an interesting “alternative” project, which re-elaborates some chants written by the 12th century mystic composer Hildegard of Bingen. Lynch reactivates his passion for sound sampling and handles with remarkable competence sounds and noises of a varied nature, resulting in a moderately (that is, catchy⁶) experimental album.

Albeit not an extraordinarily refined musician, Lynch impresses for his way of shaping the musical matter in discourse, structure. And such a procedure appears even more clearly if one works with somebody else’s material, as indeed is the case of *Lux Vivens*.

2.1. The partnership with Angelo Badalamenti

Of course, given such conditions, and as he also happens to be a director, Lynch simply cannot “passively” experience his relationship with film music. The dialogue with the latter is intense and continuous, founded upon a reciprocal exchange of suggestions and inspirations. And, more importantly, based upon real-time interaction. To many directors, a soundtrack is something to think of *after* the

⁴ In the specific, *Digha’s Stomp*, *Lenox Avenue Blues* and *Messin’ Around With The Blues* by Fats Waller, and *Stompin’ The Bug* by Phil Worde and Mercedes Gilbert.

⁵ See Julee Cruise’s albums *Floating Into The Night* and *The Voice Of Love*, where the singer, the director and faithful collaborator to Lynch, Angelo Badalamenti, re-form a trio that is often featured in many of Lynch’s movies. Cruise is among other things the vocalist of the hit *Falling*, from the *Twin Peaks* series.

⁶ Obviously, with such a title and such an exotically ancient composer, one finds it easy to guess that the album resulted appealing to the New Age market (climbing up to number 25 in the special Billboard chart). However, despite the aesthetic banalisation that such an affiliation implies, I am inclined to believe that this interest did not exactly disappoint the American director, who has always been a passionate supporter of transcendental meditation.

movie is shot. Scenes are edited, packaged and provided with a cinematographic pace that is already a “rhythm”, with which the composer (often one of the last workers to be hired in a movie production) must primarily agree.

Now, not only does Lynch often turn the order of this convention upside down (this aspect already suggesting a rather unusual definition of the creative process), but also — even more significantly — he chooses to work with music “during” the shooting of a movie. And, come to think of it, “during” is in this case more extreme a word than “before”. One can fit the music into the images, or the images into the music. The former case is the rule, the latter an increasingly common exception. But, to creatively operate “at the same time” with both music and images is something more than a simple *modus operandi*: it is a specific aesthetic project, regardless of how rare or frequent that may be.

In this venture, Lynch found in Angelo Badalamenti a collaborator who, besides being a very good, was tuned into the same frequency from the start.⁷ The pair met in rather amusing circumstances. Lynch was working on *Blue Velvet*, the movie that trapped him into the occasionally uncomfortable status of cult-director. Isabella Rossellini, the female protagonist, was due to shoot the sequence where she sings in a nightclub. Lynch wanted a realistic scene, and that would also require that the actress actually perform the singing for real, without being dubbed by a professional singer. There is a problem: Rossellini is as tone-deaf as Yoko Ono. If the sequence is not meant as a parody, and it is definitely not, a music teacher is urgently needed. The production staff went off in search of one, and — in one of those coincidences that someone might call cosmic — they bump into a composer who makes ends meet by writing music for commercials and Off Broadway shows. They assume that Badalamenti and Rossellini, both being of Italian heritage, will find some common understanding in working together.

And it works, not just for the actress (who tackles the performance with acceptable results, especially considering the situation), but mostly for the careers of both Lynch and Badalamenti. A partnership was born, with an exceptional chemistry. Lynch asks Badalamenti to write the whole score of the movie, assigning him the hardly boring task (inaugurating a leit-motif in their collaboration) of writing ‘something that reminds of Shostakovitch!’ The Italo-American composer obliges and charges the movie with a cool jazzy atmosphere, which will in turn become a little *topos* in Lynch’s movies, whose main example remains the fortunate (for both) *Twin Peaks* series.

Blue Velvet wound up being the only instance where the Lynch-Badalamenti partnership proceeded in the traditional manner: one makes the movie and the other — “eventually” — scores the music. From then on, the pair began working

⁷ The exceptions are only Lynch’s first three movies: we spoke already of *Eraserhead*; in *Elephant Man* (1980) the soundtrack is composed by John Morris, following the traditional rules (movie first, then score); in the fiasco *Dune* (1984), the music is written by the rock-band Toto, with a (nice) theme composed by Brian Eno, Daniel Lanois and Roger Eno.

side by side “during” the production, thinking of sounds and images as entities in constant and real-time dialogue. Scenes, sometimes before being shot and sometimes right after, are discussed in front of an electronic keyboard: Lynch launches an idea, an image, with one or more key words. Then, Badalamenti translates it all into a musical theme. It is then the musical theme’s turn, to suggest a possible visual and dynamic development of the action. Then, it is again the images’ turn to suggest the music, and so forth.

Music and images, simply, *talk* to each other. Moreover, the type of descriptions that Lynch may offer to Badalamenti reveal all about the pair’s chemistry with each other:

With Mulholland Drive, I’d see a few scenes, but certainly not the whole film, and get an improvising thing going with him. I’d sit at a keyboard and say, ‘Okay, David, talk to me about a mood.’ And he’d say, ‘I need a theme for Betty — she’s like a little girl who comes to Hollywood and she’s got stars in her eyes...’ And as he’s talking we record it, you know, put it right to DAT [tape]. And, bang, that’s it!⁸

The prototype of this partnership will always remain *Twin Peaks* (oddly enough, as it is not a “movie”, but a TV series). *Twin Peaks* is not only Lynch’s first (and so far last) “mainstream” success, but it also leaves for posterity a soundtrack (particularly a main theme) of tremendous success. It is an album capable of placing in the highest regions of the general music charts, a most unusual occurrence for a soundtrack featuring almost exclusively instrumental tracks. The *Twin Peaks* soundtrack rose to number 22 on the Billboard charts, ever since then there has not been a single ‘free association’ that will keep Badalamenti (and perhaps Lynch himself) separated from the opening theme of the series. A theme which is not only successful in a generally artistic sense (it is well written, well arranged, and well performed), but which also ends up constructing another, very important, *topos* of the pair’s collaboration. We could call such a *topos* the ‘quiet “during” the storm’. More or less what Kafka was able to render in his literary production: a sub-layer of pacific, even relaxing normality, upon which a dark and disturbing context operates. The *Twin Peaks* theme is a great piece of ambient music in which nothing, from harmony to arrangement, gives hint to the thrilling TV series’ plot. Yet, the efficacy of the match is even superior to what Badalamenti would have achieved if he did not resist the temptation to write a cliché noir/thriller theme. It is a form of alienation that works, also because it is based upon a very explicit visual context, which does not need any redundant reinforcement.

The chemistry between Badalamenti and Lynch, when it comes to this contrast, can be detected not only by the many themes that the Italo-American composer wrote for his friend’s movies, all generally clean and ethereal, but also from the cinematographic imagery itself. Let us take, for example, the garden sequence at

⁸ Dan Jolin, ‘Angelo Badalamenti’, *Total Film* 61 (2002), 113.

the beginning of *Blue Velvet*: every element, from photography to camera movements (and music, of course: in this case Bobby Venton's version of the standard *Blue Velvet*), suggests an idea of charming serenity. It is in that context, that Lynch inserts, in fact shoves, the death of one character and the disgusting shot of the worms that we get the next minute. A similar strategy we witness in certain surrealistic art, from artists like De Chirico or Ernst.

2.2. Popular music and Chinese boxes

Badalamenti's centrality in Lynch's cinematography,⁹ though, should not prevent us from noticing the generous (and carefully designed) use of diegetic music within each movie. Songs of all sorts (mainstream or alternative) appear in several key-sequences: Lynch plans their use long before starting the production of the movie. In more than one case, it is while listening to those songs that he gets inspired to shoot a certain sequence. Once he has decided what song to play, Lynch takes the record along to the set, and literally blasts it from the speakers, asking the actors — as much as they can — to move and act 'in accordance' with the song (for instance, following its tempo).

However, most of all, what Lynch manages to create with certain songs is a sheer microcosmos of references and meta-references: to the movie, to its characters, to the actors who interpret them, and to himself. *Lost Highway*, one of his best movies (perhaps the best), is an excellent catalogue of this microcosmos and its mentioned dynamics. The first song is *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, by Barry Adamson (some might remember him for having played bass with Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds). It is a track containing a number of samples (once again), and even a meta-sample: Massive Attack's *Blue Lines*, in turn sampled from Tom Scott's *Sneaking in the Back*. Lynch loves Chinese boxes, apparently.

Still Adamson's work, the next song in the movie is *Hollywood Sunset*. Here, probably, Lynch must have had another chat with Badalamenti, asking him to write music (the track called *Dub Driving*) that, in terms of BPM, would be an ideal "partner" to Adamson's track. Diegetic and non-diegetic music are now merged in a coherent soundscape.

Song to the Siren, by This Mortal Coil, is therefore a track Lynch must particularly love, if it is true that he already intended to use it in *Blue Velvet* (an intention eventually replaced with an original Lynch-Badalamenti composition called *Mysteries of Love*). Still within a meta-linguistic framework, it should be

⁹ The collaboration between Lynch and Badalamenti is extended also to more experimental projects, some of which were already mentioned in a previous footnote. *Industrial Symphony No. 1: The Dream of the Broken Hearted* is deserving of a chapter of its own. Staged at Brooklyn Academy of Music in New York, during the 1989 edition of the New Wave Music Festival, *Industrial Symphony* is a performance featuring 10 songs, sung by Julee Cruise.

remembered that *Song to the Siren* was originally written and performed by Tim Buckley. Lynch adores covers because they are like him: they de-contextualize and re-contextualize, referring, also through a negation, to more than one aesthetic and textual dimension. However, in this case, there is one more reason for choosing a cover: it is because Fred, the saxophone playing lead character in *Lost Highway* has a double identity. Fred is first, Fred, and then, as his wife dies, “becomes” Pete. In other words, there is an original Fred, and then there is a cover.

And indeed, the next song is yet another remake: Marilyn Manson offers his version of Screaming Jay Hawkins’ famous song *I Put a Spell on You*. Another Chinese box, brought to a new climax when Lynch asks Manson himself to make a cameo appearance in the movie. In fact, it goes deeper than that: Manson (and his band guitarist Twiggy Ramirez) appears in a movie within the movie! That is, the cameo occurs in the porn-horror clip that the characters are watching at some point during the film. Basically, a matryoshka doll!¹⁰

Manson’s cameo, suggests a last topic for this very short article. I had mentioned Lynch’s inclination (shared, in fairness, with a few other directors) to invite musicians and rock stars (who are not professional actors) to appear in brief sequences within his movies. Generally, when a director does this, it is mostly for marketing purposes: one spreads the rumour that Keith Richards will act in *Pirates of the Caribbean*, and of course quite a few otherwise unconcerned Rolling Stones fans will go see it. However, there can also be strictly artistic reasons for such a choice: a cameo offers a portion of reality, which helps with the framing of the space-time dimension constructed within a movie. It is certainly in this manner that one should interpret, for instance, the famous appearance of the then very hip British band Yardbirds in Antonioni’s *Blow-up*.

Once more, however, Lynch brings this choice to a more sophisticated level, bringing it closer to his personal surrealistic and meta-referential aesthetic. We spoke already of Marilyn Manson, well what about the character Pete? The character Pete is played by the actor Balthazar Getty. Getty used the alias “B-Zar”, when he produced the hip-hop band Mannish’s album *Audio Sedative*, just a year before starring in *Lost Highway*. Indeed, an alias. And who else is Pete, if not an alias for Fred?

Still in *Lost Highway*, one can also spot Henry Rollins, former member of Black Flag, and I am sure there are many other examples that have certainly escaped my attention (I will not even count David Bowie’s part in *Fire Walks With Me*, as “the Duke” has been acting in several different movies, with remarkable results).

Finally, to conclude in the most appropriate manner, we should mention those brief parts that Lynch made for his faithful partner Badalamenti. A most obvious one is the appearance in *Blue Velvet*, in the predictable role of a pianist (a clear

¹⁰ The list of covers featured in *Lost Highway* continues with *That magic moment*, originally by Doc Pomus, and re-interpreted by Lou Reed in the movie.

identification with the composer himself, who — I shall remind you — was hired on that occasion as a music teacher for Isabella Rossellini). More interesting, and very significantly, is the part of mafia boss Luigi Castigliane, in *Mulholland Drive*, whom Lynch creates as part of an inside joke, and is also a tribute to Badalamenti, as the director's *alter ego*. Castigliane is a coffee-maniac, as he drinks one espresso after another. Who else could Lynch be referring to if not himself, an enthusiast who founded his personal coffee brand, and — as Special Agent Dale Cooper would put it — likes his coffee 'black as midnight on a moonless night'?

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