

*BUGS BUNNY RIDES AGAIN:*

CLASSICAL MUSIC IN CARL STALLING'S CARTOON SCORES

by

PAUL MILLER

(Under the Direction of Susan Thomas)

ABSTRACT

Carl Stalling's musical soundtracks for the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Warner Brothers cartoons included frequent quotations from classical composers, including Rossini, Beethoven and Wagner, acquiring a reputation as an informal kind of introductory musical education. Chapter 1 is a general introduction and brief review of some of the recent literature on film and cartoon music. Chapter 2 is a brief historical summary of the use of classical music for film from the days of live accompaniment to silent films through the first decades of recorded synchronous sound films. Chapter 3 examines the musical structure of the soundtrack to the 1948 cartoon *Bugs Bunny Rides Again* to see how Carl Stalling integrated classical music into his scores. Chapter 4 looks at the broad cultural context of the cartoons at the time of their production and their subsequent reputation as musical education in the decades that followed. Chapter 5 presents some conclusions.

INDEX WORDS: Carl Stalling, Cartoon Music

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

An enormous amount of my musical education came at the hands of Carl Stalling, only I wasn't aware of it at the time. It just kind of seeped into my brain.<sup>1</sup>

Film critic Leonard Maltin

For many Americans like Leonard Maltin, their first and sometimes only encounter with classical music, or Western art music, has been through the soundtracks of cartoons produced by major Hollywood studios from the 1930s to the early 1960s, particularly the Warner Brothers cartoons with music by Carl Stalling.<sup>2</sup> In my own experience, I have heard comments similar to Maltin's from people with a wide variety of backgrounds, like, "what little I know about classical music, I got from cartoons," or "I wouldn't know classical music existed if it wasn't for those cartoons." Although I don't mean to suggest that this phenomenon is universal, it is common enough that it provided a major impetus for this study.

As I began to listen more carefully to the music in the Warner Brothers cartoons, it became apparent that these soundtracks were quite unlike those for other films made during the same period. The background music in Carl Stalling's eclectic scores is often made up of brief excerpts from classical compositions right alongside quotations from

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<sup>1</sup> "Carl Stalling and Cartoon Music," in *Looney Tunes: Golden Collection* Vol. 1, Disc 3, DVD

<sup>2</sup> "Classical Music" will be used as a rough equivalent for "Western Art Music," and although both terms will occur throughout this text, in the world of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century cartoon music the repertoire does not usually include music of the Baroque or earlier, or much music after the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

popular and traditional tunes. The works of Beethoven and Mozart were not given any privileged status, and even a sacred piece like the “Inflammatus” from Rossini’s *Stabat Mater* could serve a fairly utilitarian role. In its function as part of the musical background, classical music was blended into the Warner Brothers cartoons in such a way as to make Maltin’s claim that he “was unaware of it at the time” convincing.

There were also a handful of the Warner Brothers cartoons and a few by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) that were parodies of concert hall and opera performances where classical music was very much in the foreground. In these productions, classical music’s role as serious high culture was emphasized and exaggerated as a comic foil for an assortment of sight gags and pratfalls. The cartoons that used classical music performance as their main plotline also reflected contemporary American stereotypes about high culture at a time when classical music and musicians were fairly prominent on national radio networks and in general-interest publications like *Time* and *Newsweek*.

This study focuses on these two uses of classical music in Hollywood cartoons, as an almost subliminal element in background music and as the subject for satire of high culture, and its resulting reception history. How and why did composers like Carl Stalling use compositions by Beethoven, Rossini and Wagner as a musical background for slapstick comedy? What were the subtexts about American culture contained in the representation of life in the concert hall? And why do Americans who watched hours of cartoons on television remember classical music as such a significant part of that experience, sometimes considering it to be a kind of musical education?

Musicologists have given cartoon music, and film music in general, a relatively low priority until fairly recently. K. J. Donnelly sums up what might be considered the

main reason for this neglect; “Music scholarship has persisted in the prejudice that film music is somehow below the standard of absolute music (‘pure,’ non-functional music, written specifically for the ‘respectable’ concert hall).”<sup>3</sup> Donnelly attributes part of that prejudice to the fact that “film music is usually fragmentary and relies on a logic that is not an organic part of the music but a negotiation between the logic of the film and the logic of the music.”<sup>4</sup>

As late as 1977, some fifty years after the first films with synchronized sound, Roy Prendergast wrote in the introduction to his book on film music, “Its relatively new appearance should not have precluded a body of intelligent and perceptive writing on the subject. The fact remains, however, that there is no such body of critical literature on film music.”<sup>5</sup> According to Prendergast, the lack of consideration given to film music was even more pronounced for cartoons.

If the neglect and misunderstandings about music to feature films has been unfortunate and unwarranted, the total inattention given music in cartoons verges on the criminal. With the exception of one substantial article on cartoon music by composer Ingolf Dahl, who early on was aware that something of significance was happening in this genre, there has been nothing of any real importance written about music in cartoons.<sup>6</sup>

In *Film Music: A Neglected Art*, Prendergast presents a thoughtful chapter on cartoon music that includes everything from a backward look at the history of synchronous sound for cartoons in the late 1920s to experimental attempts to produce music by

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<sup>3</sup> K. J. Donnelly, “Introduction: The Hidden Heritage of Film Music,” in *Film Music: Critical Approaches*, ed. K. J. Donnelly (The Continuum International Publishing Corp.: New York, 2001), 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Roy M. Prendergast, *Film Music, A Neglected Art* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), vii.

<sup>6</sup> Prendergast, 168.

photographing abstract shapes directly onto optical sound tracks. He also devotes much of his chapter to the more mainstream cartoon composer Scott Bradley and discusses fragments from Bradley's scores in considerable analytic detail. Although Bradley worked within the musically conservative studio system for MGM, Prendergast points out Bradley's innovative compositional approaches, including the use of augmented, whole-tone and twelve-tone melodic elements and unusual harmonies.

In 1985, Steven Westcott's *A Comprehensive Bibliography of Music for Film and Television* revealed a substantial body of work on film music, from early 20<sup>th</sup> century instruction manuals for silent film accompanists to more scholarly works that began to appear in the 1970s. Westcott's bibliography also lists Lawrence Morton's nineteen articles and reviews published between 1945 and 1951 for *Hollywood Quarterly*, including the first extended analysis of a film score in America.<sup>7</sup> Recent studies on wide-ranging topics, from Claudia Gorbman's examination of the compositional techniques of Max Steiner<sup>8</sup> to Roger Hillman's study of the use of the music of Beethoven and Wagner in films by Fassbinder, Herzog and Visconti<sup>9</sup> demonstrate that there is increased academic interest in the subject from both the film studies and musicological perspectives.

In 2001, Daniel Goldmark completed a comprehensive study of cartoon music in his Ph.D. dissertation at the University of California Los Angeles, *Happy Harmonies*:

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<sup>7</sup> Clifford McCarty, "Introduction: The Literature of Film Music" in *Film Music 1*, ed. Clifford McCarty (New York: Garland Publishing, 1989), ix.

<sup>8</sup> Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

<sup>9</sup> Roger Hillman, *Unsettling Scores* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

*Music and the Hollywood Animated Cartoon.*<sup>10</sup> He followed up with a short compendium of interviews and writings by and about the creators of the music for cartoons from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Hollywood studios to Japanese anime.<sup>11</sup> Goldmark then expanded his thesis into a book published in 2005, *Tunes for 'Toons: Music and the Hollywood Cartoon*, and in the introduction wrote,

Soon after beginning my research, I became frustrated by the lack of critical work on cartoon music, which convinced me that others found it insignificant. Until very recently, neither film studies nor musicology afforded film music any credence as an important topic; and film historians, as already noted, seldom gave more than a cursory glance toward animation, particularly Hollywood cartoons.<sup>12</sup>

Goldmark's body of work covers a wide area of topics about the Hollywood cartoons and his findings were extremely useful in preparing the present study. For example, in his dissertation Goldmark assembled a complete cross-indexed database of all the listed quotations from classical and popular music in the Warner Brothers cartoons from 1930 to 1969, taken from the cue sheets for the original recording sessions.<sup>13</sup> This index was extremely valuable, making it possible to make a general assessment of the extent of classical music's presence in the Warner Brothers cartoons.

The chapters that follow will explore the use of classical music in Hollywood cartoons, especially those produced by Warner Brothers under the musical direction of Carl Stalling. The second chapter is a summary of the history of cartoon and film music from the silent era to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, with an emphasis on the use of classical

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<sup>10</sup> Daniel Goldmark, *Happy Harmonies: Music and the Hollywood Animated Cartoon*, (Ph.D, diss., University of California, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Goldmark and Yuval Taylor, editors, *The Cartoon Music Book* (Chicago: A Capella Press, 2002).

<sup>12</sup> Daniel Goldmark, *Tunes for 'Toons: Music and the Hollywood Cartoon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 3.

<sup>13</sup> A cue sheet is a record of the musical selections used in producing a film or television soundtrack in order to assure proper compensation for composers.

compositions. Chapter 3 provides a musical analysis of one of the Warner Bros. cartoons scored by Carl Stalling, made possible by a transcription from the soundtrack. The original score, like many from its time, has apparently been lost, and this may be the first time the music from an entire cartoon from this period has been examined. Chapter 4 explores the Hollywood cartoons as a reflection of American attitudes toward classical music at the time of their production and speculation about their subsequent reception history that caused them to be associated so closely to classical music in the decades that followed their original theatrical releases. Chapter 5 presents some conclusions.



## Chapter 2

### **From Silents to Sound: The Changing Role of Classical Music in Film Accompaniment and Film Scoring**

Carl Stalling's use of classical music as background for the Warner Brothers cartoons grew out of his experience accompanying silent films. Since the music for the silent film era was provided by thousands of individual musicians including pianists, organists and orchestras, it is difficult to generalize, but early 20<sup>th</sup> century music collections and manuals for accompanists give some idea of what kind of repertoire was in use. When synchronous sound was introduced in the late 1920's, film music became centralized in the film studios themselves, resulting in an industrial model for its production and a new emphasis on original music for films. The individualized patchwork approach to film music developed during the silent film era was replaced by an emphasis on through-composed scores based on 19<sup>th</sup> century symphonic and operatic models. Carl Stalling's scores went against this trend by retaining the fragmented and improvisational elements used in silent film accompaniment, but his approach, including quotations from classical compositions, was highly successful for the Warner Brothers cartoons. The brief history that follows explores the reasons why classical music formed such an important element in that approach.

## Classical Music in Publications for Silent Films

By the 1920s, silent films with live musical accompaniment were well established as popular entertainment in America and all over the world. Many of the larger theatres

**SAM FOX  
MOVING PICTURE  
MUSIC**  
*By J. S. ZAMECNIK*

VOL. I PRICE 50 CENTS

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Festival March	2
Indian Music	3
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PIANO  
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**REMICK FOLIO  
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MUSIC**

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**Fig 1.1** Early Sheet Music for Silent Film Accompanists<sup>14</sup>

could hire orchestras, but the most common accompanist to the silent film was the solo pianist or organist, who was challenged to provide appropriate music for a wide variety of filmed genres including drama, comedy, educational short subjects, travel films and cartoons.

<sup>14</sup> “Perfessor” Bill’s Guide to Silent Movie Music, [www.perfessorbill.com/sourcesa.htm](http://www.perfessorbill.com/sourcesa.htm) accessed 1/27/06, 8:59 p.m.

Programs at movie theatres changed rapidly, usually once a week, creating a constant demand for new music that was met, in part, by published collections containing excerpts from existing compositions or original material designed for use by film accompanists. Collections like the *Sam Fox Moving Picture Music* series<sup>15</sup> and the *Remick Folio of Moving Picture Music*<sup>16</sup> included original character pieces by composers J.S. Zamecnik and J. Bodewalt Lampe, respectively, written for players of varying ability and experience. (See Fig. 1.1) Another early collection, first published in 1919, was Giuseppe Becce's *Kinobibliothek*.<sup>17</sup> It became known simply as the “Kino,” and contained about 90 short musical selections that could be used by the accompanist in whatever combination might be needed to illustrate film scenes as they unfolded on the screen. Becce studied flute and cello at the conservatory of the University of Padua before moving to Berlin in 1900 where he studied composition, wrote complete film scores and eventually conducted orchestras in several of that city’s large cinemas. The “Kino” contained themes composed by Becce himself, but it also included many excerpts from the operatic and symphonic repertoire, grouped by category. Under the heading “Katastrophe,” there are selections from operas by Massenet and the opening of Rachmaninov’s *Prelude in C# Minor*. (See Fig. 1.2)

Erno Rapée, a Hungarian conductor who became music director at several major American movie theatres produced several books for film accompanists that contained lists of titles rather than musical scores. The titles along with the names of the composers

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<sup>15</sup> J.S. Zamecnik, *Sam Fox Moving Picture Music* (Cleveland: Sam Fox Pub. Co.: 1913).

<sup>16</sup> J. Bodeswalt Lampe, *Remick Folio of Moving Picture Music* (New York, Jerome H. Remick: 1914).

<sup>17</sup> Giuseppe Becce, *Kinobibliothek* (Berlin, 1919).

Katastrophe.

1  
Becca 3, Kinothek III, 41 (11)  
Andante mosso.

Tragischer Einschlag Ge-  
witter. 


2  
Becca 3, Kinothek III, 35 (5)  
Andante largo.

Erscheinung des Todes. 

3  
Erdmann I, Fant. romant. Suite I E.  
Largo maestoso.  
Aut. Ziff. 3.

Katastrophe (anschwellend  
mit Abklang). 

4  
Leuschner 1, Ton und Bild Nr 10  
Vivo e feroce. Largamente ma  
non lento.  
Evid. Aut. Legnte. ma. s. Ha. - <Vivo e  
feroce S. 3>.

Katastrophe. Entsetzte  
Leidenschaft. 

5  
Leuschner 12, Werwolf S. 9  
Grandioso. Listesso tempo.

Elementarer Ausbruch. Tra-  
gische Zerrissenheit. 


6  
Massenet 31, Phädra Ouv. S. 1  
Andante molto sostenuto. Più vivo.  
And. sost.  
Buchst. A → D - Buchst. E → Z.

Tragischer Höhepunkt. 

7  
Massenet 40, Werther (Tavan) S. 1  
Andante. Maestoso. Più lent.  
Evid. - Aut. T. 8.20.  
dasselbe 41, Prélude, Nr. 1  
Moderé.  
Etwas verändert. - 1 1/2 Min.

Tragischer Höhepunkt. E. 

8  
Mevenses, Barque tragique S. 3  
Même mouvement. Poco più Anim.  
Più vivo. Leg. path. Leghito.  
S. 3. Z. 38 → Ziff. 8 oder Ziff. 11

Katastrophe. 

9  
Puccini 3, Mädchen aus dem gold.  
Weiden (Tavan) S. 21  
(Un poco meno). Andante mosso  
Andante.  
dasselbe 2, Gauwin S. 2  
Andante mosso.

Schweres Verhängnis. 

10  
Rachmaninoff 4, Prélude  
Lento  
Vgl. Nr. 786 - Bearbeitung Moros D. moll.

Nach der Katastrophe. Tra-  
gischer Höhepunkt. 

Hochdramatisches Agitato.

11  
Becca 3, Kinothek III, 37 (7)  
Agitato

Katastrophe. 

12  
Becca 3, Kinothek III, 38 (8)  
Allegro agitato

Katastrophe. 

Fig. 1.2 A Page from Antonio Becca's Kinobibliothek<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Roger Manvell and John Huntley, *The Technique of Film Music*, (New York: Hastings House, 1957), 55.

COMEDY PICTURES			COMEDY
Title	Composer		Publisher
.....CORNETSKI (Trumpet Tantrum) ..	Colby		ALFORD
.....PRELUDE TO PARLOR COMEDY ..	Baron		ARTISTIQUE
.....FARCICAL ALLEGRO .....	Aborn		BELWIN
.....MARCH OF THE SPOOKS .....	Baron		"
.....SHORTY FOX TROT .....	Winkler		"
.....COMEDY ALLEGRO .....	Berg		"
.....SCHERZETTO (No. 3 Symphonette)	Berge		"
.....PERPETUAL MOTION .....	Borch		"
.....RENDEZ-VOUS D'AMOUR .....	Edwards		"
.....LOVELETTE .....	Levy		"
.....TWO CHARACTERISTIC			
THEMES .....	Roberts		"
No. 1 Comedy Eccentric			
No. 2 Humorous Drinking			
.....MARCH BIZARRE .....	Simon		"
.....PHANTOM VISIONS .....	Stevenson		"
.....YOU'D BE SURPRISED .....	Berlin		BERLIN
.....BIM-BIMS .....	Adams		BOSTON MUS. CO.
.....MASQUERADE (Diabolo Dance) ..	Byford		BOSWORTH
.....FUNERAL MARCH OF A			
MASCOTTE .....	Huyts		"
.....COMEDY .....	Ketelbey		"
.....PACK UP YOUR TROUBLES IN			
YOUR OLD KIT BAG .....	Powell		CHAPPELL
.....CHANTICLEERS (Serenade) .....	Hartmann		CUNDY-BETONEY
.....DANCE OF THE GNOMES .....	Caroll		DITSON
.....IN GNOMELAND .....	Gruenwald		"
.....BUBBLES .....	"		"
.....COMIC HURRY .....	O'Hare		"
.....NYMPH AND SATIRE .....	Rollison		"
.....A MORNING IN NOAH'S ARK ..	"		"
.....PARADE OF THE MANIKINS ..	Wagner		"
.....BULL FROGS AND THE COON ..	Feist		FEIST
.....THE RACCOON AND THE BEE ..	Bayer		FISCHER, CARL
.....GROTESQUE ELEPHANTINE ...	Brockton		"
.....DANCE OF THE DWARF AND			
THE GIANT .....	Brooks		"
.....EVERYBODY WORKS BUT			
FATHER .....	Everett & Thornton		"
.....FUNERAL MARCH OF A			
MARIONET .....	Gounod		"
.....THE JERSEY PINERS .....	Hosmer		"
.....VILLANELLE (Shepherd Song) ..	Kriens		"
.....ESSENCE (Grotesque) .....	Lake		"
.....THE MOUSE TRAP .....	Lumbye		"
.....THE WHISTLER AND HIS DOG	Pryor		"
.....SCHERZETTO No. 5 (In Henry			
VIII) .....	Saint Saens		"

Fig.1.3 Rapée's Selections for Comedy from his *Encyclopedia*<sup>19</sup>

were grouped by genre, and the names of the publishers were included so that the accompanist or music director could obtain the music as needed.

Rapée 's *Motion Picture Moods for Pianists and Organists* was published in 1924,<sup>20</sup> and *Erno Rapée's Encyclopedia of Music for Motion Pictures*<sup>21</sup> that included an

<sup>19</sup>Erno Rapée, *Encyclopedia of Music for Pictures*, (New York, Belwin :1925, reprint ed. New York: Arno Press: 1970), 153.

introduction containing general advice, came out in 1925. Like Becce's *Kinobibliothek*, Rapée's listings contained numerous titles from the 19<sup>th</sup> century concert repertoire, but also included popular song selections. Rapée's *Encyclopedia* contains no explicit directions for accompanying cartoons, but it does have suggested musical selections for comedies that include selections by Wagner, Saent-Saens and Gounod (Fig. 1.3). For Rapée, the rule for accompanying comedy was simple: "The comedy has only one duty in a program and that is to make people laugh."<sup>22</sup> He suggests the use of old songs or medleys of popular hits of the day.

Many original scores were composed for specific films, but the more common practice was for distributors to send "suggestion sheets" drawing on musical materials that the local orchestra director or organist might have at hand. This was done instead of issuing expensive scores, and the musical selections were listed scene by scene. Arthur Dulay's sheet for the film *Sea Fury* shows selections by composers in the classical tradition, and although many of these have passed into obscurity, works by Schubert, Wagner and Tchaikowsky are part of the suggested program (Fig 1.4)

### **Classical and Popular Music in Guides for Silent Film Accompanists**

While orchestras were used in large theatres in major metropolitan areas, the individual pianist or organist remained the workhorse of musical accompaniment for most movie theatres throughout the country, and the 1920 manual, *Musical*

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<sup>20</sup> Erno Rapée, *Motion Picture Moods for Pianists and Organists* (New York: Schirmer: 1925; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1970).

<sup>21</sup> Erno Rapée, *Encyclopedia of Music for Motion Pictures* (New York: Belwin: 1925; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1970).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

*Accompaniment for Motion Pictures*, by Edith Lang and George West, gives a good idea of what was expected at the time.<sup>23</sup>

In the case of feature films, the suggestion sheet with its timings and moods is used as part of the preparation:

By means of this sheet, the player will select his material, timing the various numbers, the main theme, and the spaces for improvisation. Having selected the music for a picture, place it in proper order within a folder, marked with the name, so that when you arrive at the organ you will not be scrambling here and there and everywhere for scraps of paper.<sup>24</sup>

Suggestion sheets were not likely to accompany shorter films or cartoons, so *Musical Accompaniment for Motion Pictures* also includes sections on improvisation, modulation, transposition, organ registration, and repertoire suggestions for memorization.

The diligent student will search for himself in the vast operatic literature for passages that become universally adaptable and will form his most effective stock in trade. Then, there are a great many songs which by their words have become associated with certain thoughts and emotions, and which the player should be able to call upon without the notes, if necessary. There are a great many pleasing salon pieces of the lighter kind that will prove particularly useful for comedies and some of the shorter film plays. Music generally associated with such events as weddings, funerals, patriotic exercises, parades, special seasons of the year, boat songs, college songs, church hymns, and the like, should all be in the player's fingers, ready to answer instantaneous calls.<sup>25</sup>

In *Musical Accompaniment of Motion Pictures*, the animated cartoon is grouped with the slapstick comedy and, like *Rapée*, the authors suggest the use of popular material:

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<sup>23</sup> Edith Lang and George West, *Musical Accompaniment of Motion Pictures* (Boston: The Boston Music Company, 1920; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1970).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

This part of the show is admirably adapted to the introduction of all sorts of popular songs and dances. The player should keep in touch with the publications of popular music houses, since it will repay him to establish a reputation which will make the public say: "Let's go to the Star Theatre—you always hear the latest tune there."<sup>26</sup>

## MUSICAL SUGGESTIONS—By Arthur Dulay

### "SEA FURY"

Theme 1	L'Angoisse (from Fig. 1)	(Theme 1)	Porret	De Wolfe
Sub-title or Action.	Style.	Music Suggested.	Composer.	Publisher.
1. At Screening		L'Onle Tragique (Letter A)	Gabriel-Marie	Piema
2. After water thrown	Broad	Vision Tragique	Dyck	Liber
3. Sail ahead*	Agitato	Affollement	Ourdine	Piema
4. Captain sees black cat	Sinister	Theme 1		
5. It was the Captain's boast*	Quiet tense	"Rosamunde"	Schubert	Hawkes
6. See crew eating	Agitated melody	Atlantide	Keynaud	Piema
7. They bring food in Captain	Tense	A Vain Hope	Patou	Hawkes
8. Mate draws revolver	Dramatic	Madame Roland	Fourdrain	Piema
9. Deck scene	Agitated	Dialogue Dramatique	Brusselmanns	Liber
10. Mutiny!*	Dramatic agitato	Hate and Love	Samebtini	Piema
11. They make rescue	Tense agitated	Jerusalem Delivree	Hovelacque	Piema
12. Girl carried in	Sad dramatic	Bonheur Evannou	Dyck	Liber
13. Mills alone	Dramatic	La Mer Sombre	Fosse	Lafleur
14. Run!*	Hectic	On the Briny No. 4	Carr	Paxton
15. Boy brings food	Agitated	Invocation	Mezzacapo	Liber
16. Struggle on deck (note shot)	Jolly	Repeat No. 14		
17. They hit man	Dramatic tense	La Haute	Delmas	Liber
18. Captain enters	Tense	Agitato Misterioso	Popy	Liber
19. Captain sees cat		Theme 1		
20. Crew attack Captain	Dramatic	Destruction	Brusselmanns	Liber
21. Segue	Tense agitated	Ombre Conspicce	Marie	Piema
22. After men leave	Agitated melody	Heures d'Angoisse	Delmas	Liber
23. On deck	Dramatic	Ouverture Dramatique	Zercu	De Wolfe
24. To men used to kicks*		On the Briny No. 2	Carr	Paxton
25. Mills talks to helmsman	Tense Agitated	Incidental Symphonies	Schubert	Lafleur
26. See men again	Jolly	Repeat No. 24		
27. Bosun by wheel	Tense	L'Exploime	Delmas	Liber
28. The dog watch*	Tense	Svengali	Somerville	De Wolfe
29. Drops keg over	Dramatic	Le Lac Maudit	Staz	Liber
30. Eight bells*	Tense movement	Mystere	Delmas	Liber
31. Bosun talks	Tense	Misterioso Dramatique	Borch	Lafleur
32. Bosun goes down into hold	Tense	Treachery	Latour	Liber
33. The story's changed*	Dramatic	Tragedo, Con Moto	Drigo	Lafleur
34. Throws cat out of boat	Dramatic	Guilt	Ewing	Elkin
35. Negro and boy on board	Semi agitated	Romantique (Piu vivo)	Smetsky	De Wolfe
36. Men in boat seen	Tense agitated	Dramatic Hurry	O'Hare	Lafleur
37. The wind! the wind!*	Excited	Confession	Tchaikowsky	Liber
38. In the night*	Stormy	"The Flying Dutchman"	Wagner	Feldman
39. When day came*	Prayerful	Tout S'Apaise	Dyck	Liber
40. A ship! a ship!*	Agitated	L'Exultante Tendresse	Marie	Liber
41. Segue		Pleurs (Trio)	Messier	Liber

\*Denotes sub title. All other cues scene or action only.

NOTE.—If you have not the compositions suggested in the third column, you may easily substitute accurate music by following the DESCRIPTIVE ACTION OF EACH SCENE AND TEMPO.

Fig. 1.4 Dulay's suggestion sheet<sup>27</sup>

These excerpts from Lang and West's manual show that the film accompanist added substantially to the experience of silent films and was expected to possess substantial

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>27</sup> Manvell and Huntley, 54.



musical skills in addition to knowing how to play the piano or organ. In order to keep audiences from becoming bored by hearing the same material, a breadth of knowledge of all kinds of music was required, from the classical masters to contemporary songwriters.

In the late 1920s, a new development changed the movies forever. In 1927, *The Jazz Singer* was released, and in 1928, Walt Disney completed *Steamboat Willie*, the third cartoon featuring his new character, Mickey Mouse. The era of “the talkies” was underway.

### **Film and Cartoon Music in the Early Sound Era**

The transition to recorded synchronized sound was not an easy one for films or cartoons. For a number of years, all of the sound—music, dialogue, and sound effects—had to be performed in one take. A three-minute musical number could take days to record and any mistake meant that the entire process had to be repeated. For cartoons, the process was somewhat easier, since all the animation was usually completed prior to the sound recording session.

After all the decades where audiences had seen silent pictures accompanied by music from beginning to end, the advent of spoken dialogue on the screen created a perceived aesthetic dilemma; film producers felt that unless the actual source of the music could be seen, audiences would wonder where the musicians were, and become distracted from the story. As a result of this concern, many of the early sound films and cartoons were musicals, where a clearly visible orchestra and singers left no question as to where the music was coming from.

By the mid-30s, however, many of the technical limitations on the sound film had been overcome. The ability to record sound elements like music, dialogue and sound

effects separately and mix them together afterward allowed a greater freedom and creativity in creating sound tracks. A special film stock was created specifically for optical recording and overall sound fidelity was greatly enhanced.<sup>28</sup> The initial resistance to the idea of background music was overcome and scores for films became increasingly important. Hollywood studios formed music departments, retained entire orchestras for their productions, and hired composers to write for the movies.

### **The Advent of the Film Composer**

Composers like Max Steiner, Erich Korngold, Alfred Newman and many others wrote music for film nearly full time. In the late 1930s music producer Boris Morros tried unsuccessfully to engage Igor Stravinsky and Arnold Schoenberg;<sup>29</sup> Morros felt that film, being a modern medium, needed modern music.<sup>30</sup> However, most film composers adapted the musical language of the 19th century symphonic and operatic literature, just as orchestras and accompanists had done in the days of the silents. This musical language had the advantage of familiarity, and when literal excerpts of classical music were used, they were free of copyright restrictions, an advantage that was to have great impact on cartoon music. For feature films, however, there was an early preference for completely original scores, and literal excerpts from well-known existing classical pieces were avoided. As Claudia Gorbman has written, “since the filmgoer knows this musical

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<sup>28</sup> All film tracks were recorded by a photoelectric system until magnetic recording was introduced after WWII. The optical process was still used for the sound tracks on theatrical film print.

<sup>29</sup> Roy M. Prendergast, *Film Music: A Neglected Art*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), 46.

<sup>30</sup> Of course Prokofiev's score for Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky* was produced during this era, and after some initial resistance, many well-known composers would write for film, from Aaron Copland and William Walton to Philip Glass.

warhorse, his/her pleasure in recognizing it in a new context threatens to interfere with 'reading the story' of the film."<sup>31</sup>

The rapid changes in mood or location in films required a musical language that could keep up from picture to picture and even from scene to scene. Ralph Vaughn Williams remarked that "film composing is a splendid discipline, and I recommend a course of it to all composition teachers whose pupils are apt to be dawdling in their ideas, or whose every bar is sacred and must not be cut or altered."<sup>32</sup> If changes in mood were quick in full length movies, they were ten times faster in cartoons where the object was to fit as many gags as possible into seven minutes, often in the context of complicated chase sequences. The 19th century romantic tradition had also developed many musical devices that worked well for the frenzied action in cartoons, devices that carried cultural codes that could be read swiftly by audiences. Gorbman writes, "Musical 'meaning' was codified and institutionalized well before the coming of sound. In turn, these meanings were inherited from a long European tradition whose recent forbears included theatrical, operatic, and popular music of the latter nineteenth century."<sup>33</sup>

### **Cartoon Composers**

Many composers like Winston Sharples, Joe deNat, Eddie Kilfeather, Art Turkisher and Clarence Wheeler wrote specifically for cartoons,<sup>34</sup> but two of the best-known are Carl Stalling who wrote the music for most of the cartoons at Warner Brothers from the late 1930s through most of the 1950s, and Scott Bradley who scored the Tom &

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<sup>31</sup> Gorbman, 18.

<sup>32</sup> Prendergast, 39.

<sup>33</sup> Gorbman, 85.

<sup>34</sup> Goldmark and Taylor, *The Cartoon Music Book*, xv.

Jerry cartoons at MGM. Stalling used many more direct quotations from popular music than Bradley, partly because Warner Brothers insisted that the cartoons they produced contain references to songs that appeared in their feature length films. Of course, the studio also owned the copyrights to those songs and was able to make additional profits by selling sheet music for home use. In contrast to Gorbman's observation that the recognition of familiar music by the audience might interfere with the reading of the film's story, Stalling seemed to encourage that recognition by linking the song lyrics to the onscreen action, creating an additional humorous layer to the cartoon. Stalling had worked for Disney before joining Warner Brothers in 1936 and far from seeing his new employers' insistence on using their songs as a limitation, Stalling felt a sense of liberation:

At Warner's, I could use popular music. That opened up a new field so far as the kind of music we could use. At Disney's, we had to go back to the nineteenth century, to classical music, to "My Old Kentucky Home."<sup>35</sup>

Although he may have found being limited *only* to music free of copyright fees during his days at Disney, Stalling continued to use excerpts from tunes in the public domain and classical music, but as part of a much larger available repertoire that included the entire Warner Brothers catalog of popular music. The classical pieces he used, with the exception of those used in cartoons set in a concert hall or opera house, were so familiar (or obscure) that audiences may have primarily heard them for their affect rather than in their original role as concert pieces, much as they heard them as accompaniment to silent film. However, a lot of the music in Stalling's scores *was* original material out of necessity given the eccentric action of cartoons. According to Stalling, "eighty to

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 49.

ninety per cent was original. It had to be, because you had to match the music to the action, unless it was singing or something like that.”

At MGM, Scott Bradley developed a more modernist approach, although he also occasionally used familiar melodies from popular and classical sources. Unlike Stalling, Bradley wanted to create original, through-composed pieces of music to accompany the MGM cartoons. Most of his original material was heavily jazz and swing-inflected, but Bradley was perhaps proudest of his inventive transformations of familiar cartoon music formulas:

Take the common diminished seventh arpeggio of D-natural above middle C—it sounds rather ordinary, I am sure, but now, add the diminished seventh arpeggio of A-natural, and play them in parallel fourths—rather fast. To me, it is exciting, and sounds quite modern. Take the simple chromatic scale—an octave apart—and play it up scale. Sounds like practice hour, doesn't it? But now, take G-C in the right hand, and add B-natural, D# in the left, proceed chromatically up the keyboard—but don't blame me if the neighbors throw a shoe through your window!<sup>36</sup>

Bradley's commitment to modern musical techniques extended to at least one use of the twelve-tone system:

I would like to tell you about a problem which I ran into recently in one of our “Tom & Jerry” cartoons. A little mouse was running around with the mask of a dog over his head...I was stuck for a new way of describing the action musically, and for a whole day I worried about a two-measure phrase. Everything I tried seemed weak and common. Finally, I tried the twelve-tone scale, and *there it was!* This scene was repeated five times within the next fifty seconds and I had only to use my scale—played by the piccolo, oboe and bassoon in unison. I hope Dr. Schoenberg will forgive me for using *his system* to produce funny music, but even the boys in the orchestra laughed when we were recording it.<sup>37</sup>

In cartoons from the 1960s, 70s and beyond, economic considerations led to the use of prerecorded music cues and synthesizers, but cartoons from the previous two

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 117-18.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 118.

decades or so usually had full orchestral backgrounds, a by-product of the studio system that used symphony orchestras for feature film soundtracks. This enabled composers to use a great variety of styles in their scores, from grand opera to jazz. Stalling's sendup of Rossini in *The Rabbit of Seville* and Bradley's Gershwin-esque music for *Mouse in Manhattan* are two outstanding examples. For seven-minute animated films whose only responsibility was to be funny, these composers and others were able to produce, in the words of cartoon music scholar Daniel Goldmark, “ridiculously complicated” music.<sup>38</sup>

The very brief synopsis of the history of film music in this chapter shows how excerpts from classical compositions were an important element of silent film accompaniment but were rare in feature length films after the development of synchronous sound. However, composer Carl Stalling continued to use classical music much as he had used it during the silent film era, as just one element in a kind of improvisational patchwork that existed only to accompany the action onscreen. He remained as the music director for the Warner Brothers cartoons from 1936 until the late 1950s, never changing his technique. The next chapter will explore some of the methods Carl Stalling used to create one of his cartoon scores.

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<sup>38</sup> Goldmark, *Happy Harmonies*, 269.

### Chapter 3

#### ***Bugs Bunny Rides Again: A Closer Look at Carl Stalling's "Score"***

Cartoon music has always struck me as unusual in that it paid no attention to the “rules” for film scores. In my undergraduate film courses, I was taught that the best music for any kind of film was an original score and using pre-existing material was merely a way of meeting a tight budget. Music, like picture editing, was best when unnoticed, a seamless matching of rhythm and affect with the visual film content, and, of course, subservient to dialogue. By these standards, the patchwork scores of Carl Stalling, with their recognizable quotations from popular and classical music, could be interpreted as overly intrusive.

If all the above were true, however, why was Stalling so successful in a career that spanned decades, and why were the Warner Brothers cartoons so popular? I suggest that Stalling's technique is a kind of double dialogue, the first between Stalling and the content of the cartoon, and the second between the musical selections he uses and the audience. The audience's recognition of familiar music adds to their experience of the cartoon, and Stalling's choices, usually involving very obvious connections of song lyrics to the visuals onscreen, actually help the audience to read the story.

Previous examinations of cartoons like “Bugs Bunny Rides Again” have explored local associations of musical selections with onscreen action, but there have been no published analyses of the entire musical structure of a cartoon in regard to key areas, modulations or transitions. One reason for this is that few scores for these cartoons exist;

at the time of their original use, the score and orchestral parts were considered as disposable as the individual celluloid sheets that were used to create the cartoons' visuals. Of course, once the soundtrack was recorded, the entire purpose of the music was achieved: the optical film soundtrack *is* the score. I made a rough transcription from the soundtrack of "Bugs Bunny Rides Again" in order to get a view of the musical workings of an *entire* Carl Stalling score and to gain insight into the methods Stalling used while breaking all the rules of "proper" film music.

*Bugs Bunny Rides Again* (1948) is a parody of the Hollywood Western, with Bugs Bunny and the hot-tempered Yosemite Sam as the main characters. The combination of musical elements used in the soundtrack is a hallmark of Carl Stalling's style, including instrumental versions of popular tunes, classical music excerpts and original material, and the music for this cartoon is particularly rich in its variety of musical sources.

The story of this cartoon is that of a typical Western, beginning with Yosemite Sam entering a saloon looking for a gunfight and Bugs Bunny accepting his challenge. This sets off a series of confrontations between Bugs and Yosemite Sam including a gunfight that Bugs changes into a tap dance contest, a chase on horseback and a climactic card game. Bugs wins the card game and hustles Yosemite Sam off to the train station and tries to push him on to the next train out of town. The train, however, is filled with young women in swimsuits bound for a beauty contest in Miami. The two characters then fight to get *on* the train, and Bugs wins again. As the train chugs away, Bugs waves goodbye, saying, "So long Sammy! See you in Miami!" The storyline provides opportunities for cartoon gags that parody conventions of the Western film genre accompanied by a nearly continuous musical background.



The soundtrack contains musical quotations from popular and classical sources that Daniel Goldmark has listed in an index based on the cue sheets from the original recording sessions. The numbering system excludes original material by Stalling himself. Goldmark's list includes selections in styles commonly used in Western movie soundtracks, like the ragtime tunes "Cheyenne" and "Navajo," and it also contains a number of classical pieces, from the familiar Overture to *William Tell* to the more obscure "Inflamatus" from Rossini's *Stabat Mater*. (Table 3.1) Two of the popular songs in the list are examples of Stalling's musical "puns": "Oh, You Beautiful Doll" is played as Bugs and Yosemite Sam discover the beauty contestants on the train, and "Aloha Oe" accompanies Bugs' wave goodbye.

The list of titles in Goldmark's index gives a good deal of information about the mix of styles that make up the soundtrack to this cartoon, but I made my transcription to examine the soundtrack from a different point of view—to see what basic musical elements were present in such an eclectic score. My transcription was not complete by any means, but even without the complete orchestration, it is possible to identify individual musical sections with their key areas and to investigate the methods that Stalling used to create a background score that was compatible with the quick changes of action onscreen. I compiled information about the action onscreen, including isolated lines of dialogue, the key areas of individual musical sections, and the titles of the music used taken from Goldmark's index into a table that follows the cartoon from start to finish. (See Table 3.2)

**Table 3.1: From Daniel Goldmark's Index<sup>39</sup>**

Ref. #	Title	Composers	Length
1.	Merrily We Roll Along	C. Tobias, M. Mencher, E. Carter	0:12
2.	William Tell Overture	G. Rossini	0:15
3.	Cheyenne	E. Van Alstyne, H. Williams	0:14
4.	Navajo	E. Van Alstyne, H. Williams	0:11
5.	The Erl King	F. Schubert	0:20
7.	Inflammatus	G. Rossini	0:27
8.	Sonata Pathetique	L. van Beethoven	0:44
11.	Die Gotterdammerung	R. Wagner	0:12
15.	My Little Buckaroo	M. K. Jerome, J. Schott	0:30
17.	Oh You Beautiful Doll	N. D. Ayer, A. S. Brown	0:05
19.	Aloha Oe	Queen Liliuokalani	0:08

The contents of Table 3.2 are, for the most part, self-explanatory, but a few words about the contents might be helpful. The first column to the left is simply a numerical reference to the parts of the cartoon that will be used in the discussion that follows. The words “Title” and “Description” for the middle columns are flexible in order to accommodate a variety of information. Song titles and the names of classical works are in italics, while original material is identified by type (chase music, vaudeville music) or by function (dialogue underscore, transition).

While much of the music for this cartoon hovers around the keys of C and G in

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 389.

**Table 3.2: Key Areas in *Bugs Bunny Rides Again***

<b>Ref#</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Key</b>
1	<i>Merrily We Roll Along</i>	Opening Credits	C major
2	Transition	Title	N/A-snare and cymbals
3	<i>Overture to William Tell</i>	Title	E flat
4	Transition		B flat to G via Secondary Dominant
5	<i>Cheyenne</i>	Background Instrumental	G major
6	<i>Navajo</i>	Piano in saloon	A flat
7	Transition	Footsteps and spurs	N/A
8	<i>The Erl King</i>	Background Instrumental	G minor
9	Transition	Crowd screams and rapid string chromatic figures	Concludes on G
10	Original Action Underscore	Skunk footsteps	G minor to V of C minor
11	Original Action Underscore	Shoots at Skunk/cowboy tries to sneak out	C minor to B flat minor
12	Original Action Underscore and transition	Cowboy as shooting gallery/SFX and rapid scales	Ends in B flat minor, but music obscured by SFX
13	Original B flat minor motivic figure	Dialogue Underscore	B flat minor
14	<i>Inflammatus</i>	Slow pan to Bugs	B flat minor
15	Transition/Interruption	Bugs: "I aims ta!"	N/A
16	<i>Inflammatus</i>	Bugs and YS walk towards each other	B flat minor
17	Underscore with gaps for dialogue	"What's up, Doc?" "Doc!!"	G minor
18	Transition/Dialogue Underscore	"This town ain't big enough for the two of us!"	Cadential figure to C minor
19	<i>Pathetique Sonata</i>	Action Underscore	C minor-ending in B flat minor
20	Original action underscore	Staccato scale figures for Bugs' footsteps running away	B flat minor followed by descending chromatic thirds with no fixed key

<b>Ref#</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Key</b>
21	Transition	Dialogue YS: “Dance!”	N/A
22	Original based on vaudeville tap dance music	Bugs and YS do tap dance numbers	C major
23	Transition	Falling SFX as YS falls into well	N/A
24	Original maudlin dialogue underscore	Bugs: “Poor little maroon! So trusting, so naive!”	C major
25	Original action underscore	Rising chromatic figures as Sam comes out of well	Possibly C minor
26	Original action underscore	Rocks and YS fall out of bucket	Dominant of C minor
27	Transition	Confrontation and dialogue	Modulation to G flat minor
28	<i>Die Götterdämmerung</i>	Action Underscore	G flat minor
29	Original action underscore	“Cross that line” “That one” etc,	Harmonic sequence ending on dominant of G minor
30	Original action underscore	Series of rapid descending chromatic string figures as YS falls from cliff	Ends in F minor
31	Original action underscore	YS and Bugs footsteps, angular atonal figure and then marcato descending chromatic scales	Ending in suggestion of C minor
32	Transition	Horse galloping SFX	N/A
33	<i>Overture to William Tell</i>	Chase music	E flat
34	Transition	“Wa-wa” brass figures for YS falls after crashing into brick wall and chromatic scales as chase continues	No specific key
35	<i>William Tell</i>	Chase changes directions again and again	Sequences of two measures in D flat, E, G, and series of diminished seventh chords

<b>Ref#</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Key</b>
36	Transition	Rising chromatic duplets as chase gets faster and faster	Figure ends on G
37	Original dialogue underscore	Slow solo clarinet line begins, then to full orchestra	Modulation sequence ending in G minor
38	Silent transition	Fade to black and fadeup on card game	N/A
39	<i>My Little Buckaroo</i>	“Western” music under card game action	E flat major
40	Dialogue transition	Bugs: “Gin! You lose!”	N/A
41	<i>Cheyenne</i> reprise	Bugs rushes YS onto stage to train station	G major, modulating to A flat
42	Transition	YS and Bugs see beauty contestants on train to Miami	Chromatic scale modulating to C major
43	<i>Oh, You Beautiful Doll</i>	Beauty Contest girls and YS and Bugs “Wolf Whistle”	C major, modulating at end to dominant of A minor
44	Original “Silent Movie” chase music	YS and Bugs compete to get on train	A minor modulating to dominant of C major
45	<i>Aloha Oe</i>	Bugs waves from train: “So long, Sammy! See you in Miami!”	C major
46	<i>Merrily We Roll Along</i>	Closing Title	C major

both major and minor modes, there is a surprising variety of key areas, including the brief G flat minor section from *Die Götterdämmerung*. In the silent movie days, an accompanist might simply have played one selection after another with little regard for key relationships, but from the sections on improvisation and modulation included in Lang and West’s guide mentioned in Chapter 2, a truly skilled accompanist would have been expected to use those techniques to create a more coherent musical flow between individual pieces. At the time this cartoon was produced, Stalling had the advantage of

being able to write out these modulations and transitions, matching them exactly to the timing in the cartoon, aided by a “detail sheet” provided by the animators that contained specific frame counts (at the rate of 24 frames per second) that could be translated into metronome tempi, timings for sound effects, and placement of dialogue.<sup>40</sup>

Some of Stalling’s transitions for *Bugs Bunny Rides Again* are meant to be interruptive with abrupt changes of key. The opening theme, *Merrily We Roll Along*, cadences in C major, followed by the trumpet call of the Overture to *William Tell* in E flat major. The snare drum and cymbal flourish preceding the trumpet call provides a moment with no key reference, allowing the freedom continue in any key, but the rhetorical use of the trumpet call as a sign of sudden change, just as it functioned in Rossini’s original overture, is probably what Stalling had in mind. One direct modulation early in the action, from G major to A flat major (Ref. # 5-6) emphasizes the saloon piano as “source music,” music that is produced by a source that is part of the visible environment separate from the orchestral background. The audience can accept the honky-tonk piano’s presence in the saloon even though the instrument and the person playing it remain unseen, and when the music stops abruptly as Yosemite Sam enters the saloon, the implied reaction of the piano player cues the panic and flight of the saloon patrons. In many cases, Stalling carefully prepares for the next key area, as he does to transition from the opening *William Tell* Overture in E flat to *Cheyenne* in G major by using simple half-step voice leading to change the B flat major triad at the end of the fragment from the overture to D major, the dominant of the following key. (Ref# 3-5)

Modulation by brief original composed material is reminiscent of the type of

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<sup>40</sup> Prendergast, 176.

improvisation required of a silent film accompanist, sometimes leading to the dominant of the new key, as in the transition (Ref. #27) to G flat minor of the brief quotation from the opening of Wagner's *Die Götterdämmerung*. Stalling also created brief gaps in his score for sound effects and dialogue, using rhythm much in the same way it is used for operatic recitative. Some original material suggests no tonal center, such as the footsteps of Ref. #31, another technique that could have been used for silent films. The close rhythmic mimicking of physical action in the cartoon, such as the music used for footsteps blurs the line between music and sound effects, referred to elegantly by Ingolf Dahl as “‘recitative accompaniment’ to an action in a pantomime,”<sup>41</sup> or more commonly as “mickey-mousing.”

At the conclusion of *Bugs Bunny Rides Again* Stalling is firmly in C major for “Aloha Oe,” transitioning seamlessly into the final end title music in the same key. It is difficult to tell whether the arrival at C major at the end of the cartoon was meant to fit with the end title; the opening and closing music was most probably prerecorded and edited into the finished soundtrack.

### **Classical Music in *Bugs Bunny Rides Again***

The *William Tell* Overture would have been familiar to contemporary audiences as the theme music from *The Lone Ranger*, and by 1948 would probably have become its primary association as opposed to an overture to an Italian opera. In *Bugs Bunny Rides Again*, Rossini's music sets the Western theme of the cartoon during the opening titles, and much later in the story Stalling uses the overture's galloping section, again a familiar

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<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Prendergast, 172.

feature from *The Lone Ranger*, for the chase on horseback. As the characters abruptly change direction, Stalling creates a sequence out of the familiar two-measure motive, rising in pitch to create increasing tension, and the sequence ends with three measures that use only the last three notes of the motive. (Musical Example 3.1 - A) Most of the classical music quotations in *Bugs Bunny Rides Again*, however, have no direct connection to the Western genre and are used as raw material for a dramatic background. Stalling scores an excerpt from Beethoven's Piano Sonata, Op. 13, the "Pathétique," for full orchestra, and adds an extra measure to fill the time required for Bugs to magically build a large cityscape as a response to Yosemite Sam's challenge, "This town ain't big enough for the two of us!" (Musical Example 3.1 – B,C) The entire section from Yosemite Sam's entrance up to the tension-breaking tap dance duel (Table 3.2, Ref#8-20) is made up of classical music selections in minor keys: Schubert's *The Erl King*, Rossini's "Inflammatu" and Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 13. This enables Stalling to create a lengthy dramatic episode out of existing material connected by brief passages of original music in a way that recalls the techniques used in silent film accompaniment. Stalling may have relied on this technique as a practical matter; after all, he often was responsible for providing music for cartoons at the rate of one per week.

Despite its fragmentary, *pastiche*-like approach, there are some unifying elements in the soundtrack to *Bugs Bunny Rides Again*. The fanfare from *William Tell* in the opening titles creates an expectation of the familiar galloping chase theme that occurs much later in the story, and the tune *Cheyenne* that precedes Yosemite Sam's first entrance is reprised as Bugs rushes him out of the saloon. However, in the context of the swift reverses of the Western conventions that make up the gags of this cartoon, unity



### Musical Example 3.1 Stalling's "Recompositions"

A. Stalling's sequencing of a motive from Rossini's *Overture to William Tell*

Musical notation for Stalling's sequencing of a motive from Rossini's *Overture to William Tell*. The notation is written on a single staff in 2/4 time. It begins with a treble clef, a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and a common time signature. The first measure contains a quarter note G4, followed by eighth notes A4, B4, and C5. The second measure contains quarter notes D5, E5, and F5. The third measure contains quarter notes G5, A5, and B5. The fourth measure contains quarter notes C6, B5, and A5. The fifth measure contains quarter notes G5, F5, and E5. The sixth measure contains quarter notes D5, C5, and B4. The seventh measure contains quarter notes A4, G4, and F4. The eighth measure contains quarter notes E4, D4, and C4. The ninth measure contains quarter notes B3, A3, and G3. The tenth measure contains quarter notes F3, E3, and D3. The eleventh measure contains quarter notes C3, B2, and A2. The twelfth measure contains quarter notes G2, F2, and E2. The thirteenth measure contains quarter notes D2, C2, and B1. The fourteenth measure contains quarter notes A1, G1, and F1. The fifteenth measure contains quarter notes E1, D1, and C1. The sixteenth measure contains quarter notes B0, A0, and G0. The notation ends with a double bar line.

B. Excerpt from Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 13, *Pathétique*

Musical notation for an excerpt from Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 13, *Pathétique*. The notation is written on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) in 3/4 time. The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The first measure contains a half note G2, a half note A2, and a half note B2. The second measure contains a half note C3, a half note D3, and a half note E3. The third measure contains a half note F3, a half note G3, and a half note A3. The fourth measure contains a half note B3, a half note C4, and a half note D4. The fifth measure contains a half note E4, a half note F4, and a half note G4. The sixth measure contains a half note A4, a half note B4, and a half note C5. The seventh measure contains a half note D5, a half note E5, and a half note F5. The eighth measure contains a half note G5, a half note A5, and a half note B5. The ninth measure contains a half note C6, a half note D6, and a half note E6. The tenth measure contains a half note F6, a half note G6, and a half note A6. The eleventh measure contains a half note B6, a half note C7, and a half note D7. The twelfth measure contains a half note E7, a half note F7, and a half note G7. The thirteenth measure contains a half note A7, a half note B7, and a half note C8. The fourteenth measure contains a half note D8, a half note E8, and a half note F8. The fifteenth measure contains a half note G8, a half note A8, and a half note B8. The sixteenth measure contains a half note C9, a half note D9, and a half note E9. The notation ends with a double bar line.

C. Stalling's extension

Musical notation for Stalling's extension of the excerpt from Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 13, *Pathétique*. The notation is written on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) in 3/4 time. The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The first measure contains a half note G2, a half note A2, and a half note B2. The second measure contains a half note C3, a half note D3, and a half note E3. The third measure contains a half note F3, a half note G3, and a half note A3. The fourth measure contains a half note B3, a half note C4, and a half note D4. The fifth measure contains a half note E4, a half note F4, and a half note G4. The sixth measure contains a half note A4, a half note B4, and a half note C5. The seventh measure contains a half note D5, a half note E5, and a half note F5. The eighth measure contains a half note G5, a half note A5, and a half note B5. The ninth measure contains a half note C6, a half note D6, and a half note E6. The tenth measure contains a half note F6, a half note G6, and a half note A6. The eleventh measure contains a half note B6, a half note C7, and a half note D7. The twelfth measure contains a half note E7, a half note F7, and a half note G7. The thirteenth measure contains a half note A7, a half note B7, and a half note C8. The fourteenth measure contains a half note D8, a half note E8, and a half note F8. The fifteenth measure contains a half note G8, a half note A8, and a half note B8. The sixteenth measure contains a half note C9, a half note D9, and a half note E9. The notation ends with a double bar line.

seems beside the point; the gunfight that changes into a tap dance competition, the card game that turns out to be gin rummy instead of poker, and the discovery of the girls on the train are twists that are enhanced by the cross-cutting of musical styles in Stalling's score. The juxtaposition of disparate classical music excerpts in the initial confrontation of the main characters mirrors the alternation of mock drama and outright farce that characterizes the entire episode.

It is possible to read too much into the summary of key areas for *Bugs Bunny Rides Again* and indeed into the transcription itself. The fact that the score begins and ends in C major makes it tempting to look for some overall harmonic scheme, but Stalling himself has furnished the best explanation of his technique; "I just imagined myself playing for a cartoon in the theater, improvising."<sup>42</sup> Stalling's repeated use of the same popular and classical melodies suggests that he had an inventory of favored pieces that he could call upon, like the experienced silent film accompanist he was.

Stalling's use of existing material in his scores has caused criticism for a lack of originality. In an interview, Chuck Jones said of Stalling, "He was a brilliant musician. But the quickest way for him to write a musical score—and he did one six-minute score a week—was to simply look up some music that had the proper name. If there was a lady dressed in red, he'd always play 'The Lady in Red.'"<sup>43</sup> This description suggests that Stalling simply assembled bits and pieces of existing music, but looking at Table 3.2 above and just listening to the music for *Bugs Bunny Rides Again*, the fact is that with the exception of the intentional abruptness of the honky-tonk piano to emphasize its role as

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<sup>42</sup> Michael Barrier, *Hollywood Cartoons: American Animation in its Golden Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 339.

<sup>43</sup> Goldmark, *Happy Harmonies*, 88.

source music (Ref#5-6), *there is not a single unmediated transition between individual pieces of music in different keys*. By using all the techniques discussed above (gaps for dialogue and sound effects, short original musical transitions, alterations of music to fit the time needed, etc.), Stalling was able to create a soundtrack that sounds continuous, despite radical changes in styles of music and key areas.

Stalling's use of obvious song lyrics and many recognizable pieces of classical music also served another purpose mentioned at the beginning of this chapter; it created a kind of musical dialogue between the audience and the music. The very obviousness of the connection of the song lyrics to the action assured that this dialogue would not interfere with the reading of the cartoon's story. The classical "war horses" that occur again and again in Stalling's scores could be viewed the same way. For those in the audience who recognize a piece of music by Beethoven or Mozart accompanying a slapstick comedy routine could also feel an additional layer of humor just by the incongruity of the association. In fact, the incongruity of musical elements in these soundtracks and the short bursts of recognizable material sometimes only seconds in length create a kind of absurdist sound montage that is funny in itself, even when heard in isolation from the picture.

In many of his scores, Stalling used classical music as a kind of utilitarian program music, and Dean Duncan writes that program helps the novice listener comprehend instrumental music, making it "unspecialized, unprivileged, and accessible."<sup>44</sup> However, Stalling and the animators at Warner Brothers also used classical music in an entirely different way that emphasized it as an elite art form, using it

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<sup>44</sup> Dean Duncan, *Charms that Soothe: Classical Music and the Narrative Film* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), 119.

as a comic foil in cartoons set in concert halls and opera houses. There are not many cartoons of this type, but they have proved to be some of the most memorable, probably because of the very obvious juxtaposition of the high art form of classical music with cartoon characters and situations. These cartoons and their relationship to the culture in which they were produced and their subsequent reception history in the decades that followed as they were shown repeatedly on television are the main subjects of the next chapter.

## Chapter 4

### Classical Music, American Popular Culture and the Cartoon “Musical Education”

Previous studies have explored the relationship of the content of cartoons to the society in which they were produced, especially in regards to issues of race and gender. For example, Michael Barrier has written about the representation of African Americans in Disney’s *Song of the South*,<sup>45</sup> and Daniel Goldmark devoted a chapter in his book *Tunes for ‘Toons to race and jazz*.<sup>46</sup> In his book on Tex Avery, Joe Adamson explored the gender stereotypes in Avery’s recurring “chorus girl” cartoon character.<sup>47</sup> Several recent articles about American “middlebrow” culture by columnist David Brooks and music critic Alex Ross led me in a different direction: to explore the representation of classical music in cartoons in relation to the cultural environment that Brooks and Ross were writing about.

What follows is a brief summary of some of the changes in American attitudes towards classical music from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present, drawing largely on the work of Lawrence Levine and Michael Kammen. At the time of their production during the middle decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Hollywood cartoons reflected some contemporary stereotypes about classical music and musicians. As substantial changes took place in American society and culture during the 1960s and 70s, an unusual reception history

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<sup>45</sup> Michael Barrier, *Hollywood Cartoons*, 391-392.

<sup>46</sup> Goldmark, “Jungle Jive: Animation, Jazz Music, and Swing Culture” in *Tunes for ‘Toons*, 77-106.

<sup>47</sup> Joe Adamson, *Tex Avery, King of Cartoons* (New York: Da Capo Paperback, 1985).

developed for the cartoons that had been produced in the relatively placid period after WWII through the 1950s: in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Hollywood cartoons with their eclectic musical scores that included excerpts from the Western canon became known as an informal introduction to classical music, indeed as a kind of musical education for many Americans. The concluding part of this chapter involves speculation about this phenomenon that persists to the present day.

### **Changing American Attitudes Toward High and Low Culture in the 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

In America during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the hierarchical boundaries between elite and popular forms of entertainment were flexible, and audiences for opera cut across class divisions. According to Lawrence Levine, “opera was an art form that was simultaneously popular and elite. That is, it was attended both by large numbers of people who derived great pleasure from it and experienced it in the context of their normal everyday culture, and by smaller socially and economically elite groups who derived both pleasure and social confirmation from it.”<sup>48</sup> Early 19<sup>th</sup> century opera performers included popular tunes as encores with little regard for relevance to story or character; in the 1830s, the leading soprano of the New Orleans Opera Company injected popular songs like “The Light Guitar” into performances of Mozart’s *Marriage of Figaro*.<sup>49</sup> Band concerts, a staple of public entertainment throughout the United States in the 19<sup>th</sup> century also featured a wide variety of musical genres. When John Philip Sousa took over the U.S. Marine Band in 1880, he added classical works without fear: “I have

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<sup>48</sup> Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge:Harvard University Press paperback, 1990), 86.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

no hesitation in combining in my programme tinkling comedy with symphonic tragedy or rhythmic march with classic tone-picture.”<sup>50</sup> In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, a trend to separate popular and high culture emerged in America.

In 1889, conductor Theodore Thomas wrote, “Circumstances force me to prostitute my art and my talents.”<sup>51</sup> Thomas, who went on to found the Chicago Symphony in 1891, was expressing an increasingly common sentiment, particularly in the large metropolitan centers like New York, Boston and Chicago: the masterpieces of Western music required a refined and educated audience to understand them. Thomas's wife wrote, “A little experience taught him that neither children nor what are called 'wage-workers' were sufficiently advanced intellectually to be able to appreciate the class of music that was his specialty.”<sup>52</sup> America's egalitarian ideal was beginning to erode, and in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Harvard professor Barrett Wendell was still able to yearn for an earlier age when “the warring ideals of democracy and of excellence were once reconciled.”<sup>53</sup>

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the trend to reserve classical music, and “high” culture in general, for an educated American elite was countered by an opposite trend to make such things more available to the general public. Lawrence Levine writes, “it is important to recognize the degree of tension in this relationship, which led the arbiters of culture on the one hand to insulate themselves from the masses in order to promote and preserve pure culture, and on the other to reach out to the masses and sow

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>53</sup> Michael Kammen, *American Culture, American Tastes: Social Change and the 20th Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 37.

the seeds of culture among them in order to ensure civilized order.”<sup>54</sup> Levine argues that the exposure to culture also taught proper forms of behavior and attitude; “What was invented was the illusion that the aesthetic products of high culture were originally created to be appreciated in precisely the manner late nineteenth-century Americans were taught to observe; with reverent, informed, disciplined seriousness.”<sup>55</sup> The reverent atmosphere expected in American concert halls had its roots in Europe beginning as early as the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, according to Carl Dahlhaus in a chapter of *The Idea of Absolute Music* entitled “Esthetic Contemplation as Devotion.”<sup>56</sup>

### **The Emergence of American “Middlebrow” Culture**

The attempts to make high culture more accessible to the broad American public resulted in what has been called “middlebrow” culture, beginning in the decades between the World Wars and continued into the 1960s. As Donald C Meyer summarized,

Especially after World War I, there was a growing movement toward cultural egalitarianism, manifesting itself not only in a sharp increase in high school and college enrollments, but also in the Book-of-the-Month Club, founded in 1926, advocating such culture-disseminating tomes as H.G. Wells’ *Outline of History* and Will Durant’s *Story of Philosophy*. This also was the birth of the music appreciation movement which had a father figure in Walter Damrosch, director of NBC’s *Music Appreciation Hour*.<sup>57</sup>

The movement toward cultural egalitarianism, however, relied on the judgment of cultural authorities like Damrosch, who told the public not only what music to listen to, but *how* to listen to it. In like manner, the Book-of-the-Month Club’s selection

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<sup>54</sup> Levine, 206.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>56</sup> Carl Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music*, trans. Roger Lustig (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 78-87.

<sup>57</sup> Donald C. Meyer, “Toscanini and the NBC Symphony Orchestra,” in *Perspectives on American Music 1900-1950* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), 308.



committee told its members what to read. In addition, cultural critics like Dwight Macdonald, found that middlebrow culture “pretends to respect the standards of High Culture while in fact it waters them down and vulgarizes them.”<sup>58</sup>

In a few recent articles, the American middlebrow era has been the subject of renewed interest. As David Brooks wrote in a column for the *New York Times* of June 19, 2005,

Back in the late 1950’s and early 1960’s, middlebrow culture, which is really high-toned popular culture, was thriving in America. There was still a sense that culture is good for your character, and that a respectable person should spend time absorbing the best that has been thought and said. The middlebrow impulse in America dates at least to Ralph Waldo Emerson and the belief that how one spends one’s leisure time is intensely important. Time spent with consequential art uplifts character, and time spent with dross debases it.<sup>59</sup>

Brooks also commented on articles in the popular general-interest magazines *Time* and *Newsweek*; “They devoted as much space to opera as to movies because an educated person was expected to know something about opera, even if that person had no prospect of actually seeing one.”<sup>60</sup> In a recent article for *The New Yorker*, Alex Ross wrote of the 1930s and 40s, “In those years, in what now seems like a surreal dream world, millions listened as Toscanini conducted the NBC Symphony on national radio.”<sup>61</sup>

Another American trend during those decades was an increased interest and investment in education, including the passage of the G.I. Bill. Joan Shelly Rubin has written,

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 315.

<sup>59</sup> David Brooks, “Joe Strauss to Joe Six-Pack,” *New York Times*, 19 June 2005, accessed on-line 6/19/2005, 11:43 a.m. at [www.nytimes.com/2005/06/16/opinion/16brooks.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/06/16/opinion/16brooks.html), 1.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>61</sup> Alex Ross, “Listen to This”, *The New Yorker*, Feb 16 & 23, 2004, 148.

In the three decades following the First World War, Americans created an unprecedented range of activities aimed at making literature and other forms of “high” culture available to a wide reading public . . . Colleges and universities, accommodating an expanding student body, augmented their curricula with extension programs in the humanities and other disciplines, some offered on the new medium of radio.<sup>62</sup>

The trend continued into the 1960s; as Michael Kammen has observed,

Middlebrow culture, moreover, expanded its base and its audience dramatically as educational levels rose and leisure time increased. . . . Cultural centers of various kinds were opening all over the United States, in communities large and small. Editorials appeared in mass and popular magazines praising “the new role for culture” in the United States. Recordings of classical music sold surprisingly well, as did serious books in soft-cover editions.<sup>63</sup>

Hollywood occasionally reflected the “middlebrow impulse” in feature films about music: *A Song To Remember*, released in 1945 by Columbia Pictures, was based loosely on the life of Frederic Chopin; and in 1947, MGM released *A Song of Love* about Robert and Clara Schumann. Juxtaposed with these earnest (and usually historically flawed) depictions of the culture of classical music, films were produced that found that culture ripe for satire; the well-known *A Night At The Opera* (1934) starring the Marx Brothers had a storyline about struggling young musicians and got much of its humor from an exaggerated view of the high culture snobbery of opera and its audiences.

While efforts were being made to “level up” the tastes of the American public during the middlebrow era, a counter trend emerged to defend the products of popular culture, exemplified in part by a number of films and cartoons with storylines that depicted a conflict between popular and classical music. Disney’s *The Band Concert* of 1935 pitted Mickey Mouse conducting a concert band arrangement of Rossini’s Overture

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<sup>62</sup> Joan Shelly Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), xi.

<sup>63</sup> Kammen, 92-93.

to *William Tell* against Donald Duck playing *Turkey in the Straw*, a tune so catchy that the band can't resist playing it. Warner Brothers' *I Love to Singa* opens on a music academy located inside a hollow tree with an owl as the music professor. The music on the soundtrack at the beginning of the cartoon is made up of academic scale exercises, and a sign outside the door says "No Jazz." This opposition showed up in feature films as well, with the Marx Brothers in *A Night At The Opera* tricking the orchestra into playing "Take Me Out To The Ball Game" during the overture to *Il Trovatore* and in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1949), Bing Crosby teaches a group of Renaissance musicians to play swing jazz, delighting the lords and ladies of the court.<sup>64</sup>

#### ***Fantasia* and A Corny Concerto — "Middlebrow" vs. "Lowbrow"**

Walt Disney's feature-length *Fantasia* of 1940 featured a selection of musical compositions by a wide variety of composers from Bach to Stravinsky, and was a sincere effort by Disney and conductor Leopold Stokowski to bring music of the Western canon to mass audiences. Stokowski was already well known to the American public. John Culhane, in his book on *Fantasia*, wrote, "Through his concerts, his recordings, and his films — and his widely publicized romance with Greta Garbo — Stokowski had become, by 1938, perhaps the best-known symphonic conductor of all time."<sup>65</sup>

Disney's animators created visuals for each musical selection that ranged from a literal depiction of a Witches' Sabbath for Mussorgsky's "Night on Bald Mountain," to an abstract rendering of the optical film soundtrack for the music of Bach. The presence

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<sup>64</sup> The anachronism of lute and harpsichord in Arthurian Britain, supposedly in the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D., was a Hollywood gloss.

<sup>65</sup> John Culhane, *Fantasia* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1983), 12.

of composer and music critic Deems Taylor in the film as a ‘narrator’ who introduces the individual musical selections provides additional evidence of the seriousness of the film’s creators. The immediate reception, however, was a combination of commercial failure and mixed responses from critics ranging from high praise to scathing attacks, most in the latter category.<sup>66</sup> A review in *The Musical Times* by “McN.” from September, 1941, praises a few of the sections in *Fantasia* but takes a dim view of the second part of the film.

After an interval the second part begins with Beethoven’s ‘Pastoral’ Symphony. This is Disney’s outstanding failure. Beethoven’s music is too strong in its own character and local habitation to be taken to Olympus and peopled with centaurs, centaurettes (however dainty) and cupids; moreover, this episode exhibits some of the worst drawing ever seen in a Disney picture. Next we are given Ponchielli’s ‘Dance of the Hours’ as a ballet of ostriches and hippos. Had this been the first item of its kind ever witnessed it would have caused a sensation; but to people experienced in Silly Symphonies it will appear second-rate. Moussorgsky’s ‘A Night on the Bare Mountain’ becomes a typically overdrawn essay in the macabre. Attached to it as epilogue is an intolerable orchestral and choral version of Schubert’s ‘Ave Maria,’ during which one onlooker, long an ardent Disneyan, sought the door.<sup>67</sup>

Another sort of response to *Fantasia* came in the form of a later animated cartoon, *A Corny Concerto*, released by Warner Brothers Studios in 1943. Elmer Fudd stands in for both Stokowski and Deems Taylor in a low-comedy takeoff of their roles in *Fantasia*. The conductor appears first as an immense shadow, only to be revealed as the diminutive Elmer Fudd. Elmer, whose formal attire has a life of its own, having to be continually adjusted and fidgeted with, comes off as a kind of burlesque clown, and he delivers the Deems Taylor-like commentary in his character’s comic speaking voice, with *r*’s and *l*’s pronounced like *w*’s (“wisten to the wippling woodwinds”).

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<sup>66</sup> Goldmark, *Happy Harmonies*, 197

<sup>67</sup> Review of *Disney’s Fantasia* by McN., *The Musical Times*, September 1941, 349.

Since *A Corny Concerto* is only seven minutes long compared to the two hour running time of *Fantasia*, there are only two musical episodes, both set to excerpts from Strauss waltzes. In the first episode, Porky Pig is a hunter stalking Bugs Bunny, and the Strauss waltz “Tales of the Vienna Woods,” is a high-toned background for an assortment of sight gags, including one of the many cross-dressing episodes that were common in the Bugs Bunny cartoons. The second episode is a retelling of “The Ugly Duckling” set to Strauss’s “On The Beautiful Blue Danube,” with a miniature version of Daffy Duck in the title role. There are brief visual allusions to the style of *Fantasia*: a flowering shrub comes to life and tree blossoms drop onto the rippling surface of a lake. There are also short references to the War in Europe: the ugly duckling is rejected by the draft board as 4-F, and is transformed into a fighter plane as he attacks a predatory buzzard.

The mocking tone and crude humor of *A Corny Concerto* created comedy from a clash of high and low cultures. This cartoon may have been an expression of movie studio competition as the animators at Warner Brothers made easy sport of what could be seen as Disney’s highbrow pretensions, but it also contains subtexts that question cultural authority that can be found in many other Hollywood cartoons. These concerns reflected a contemporary ambivalence about high culture in America, and as Norman Klein has written about cartoons in general: “Cartoons are timeless because they look — and feel — like the year they were made. They are an upside-down version of entertainment and consumer rituals popular in that season. As historical documents, they are priceless journeys into the signified.”<sup>68</sup> The following examination of some of the Hollywood

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<sup>68</sup> Norman M. Klein, *7 Minutes* (New York:Verso), 107.

cartoons from Warner Brothers and MGM that portrayed life in the concert hall will explore some of these subtexts.

### **Concert Hall Cartoons — Reflections and Reactions to “Middlebrow” Culture**

In the 1946 cartoon, *Rhapsody Rabbit*, Bugs Bunny enforces the rule of reverent silence in the concert hall by actually shooting an audience member who has an uncontrollable cough. *Rhapsody Rabbit* is a chase cartoon set in the context of a piano recital, with Bugs attempting to perform Liszt’s Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 while dealing with interference from a mouse that emerges from inside the piano. During his performance, Bugs joins the mouse in playing a short jazz riff that clearly embarrasses him and must be suppressed. However, his smiling and enthusiastic demeanor during this episode implies that jazz is a more “natural” expression of Bugs’ personality, but is an impulse that must be conquered in order for him to play classical music. Another cartoon, *The Cat Concerto*, was made about the same time by MGM, featuring Tom & Jerry. The story line is nearly identical, including the jazz outburst in the middle of the performance.

The Tom & Jerry cartoon *Johann Maus* released in 1952 by MGM, satirized elementary music education, and the entire story is told as a kind of fairy tale in voiceover by the actor Hans Conreid. Conreid reads the story with a slight German accent since the action takes place in Vienna, where Tom & Jerry have taken up residence in the home of Johann Strauss. Strauss plays the piano so beautifully that Jerry emerges from his mouse hole and starts dancing, almost trance-like, giving Tom an

opportunity to chase him. When Strauss leaves on a business trip, Tom decides to teach himself to play the piano since it makes Jerry more vulnerable.

Strauss's servants happen upon the spectacle of a cat playing piano while a mouse dances and Tom & Jerry declare a truce to accept their applause. They are summoned to play for the Emperor, but at the end of the performance, they revert to their old selves and Tom chases Jerry into a hole in the wall, crashing into it. The voiceover says, "But when the music stopped, it was the same old thing." Through high culture, Tom & Jerry rise above their station in life, but cannot resist old habits. This cartoon seems to have a message that acquiring knowledge of high culture can't overcome class origins, possibly satirizing the middlebrow assumption of cultural literacy leading to social mobility. As Alex Ross has written, "the rise of 'classical music' mirrored the rise of the commercial middle class, which employed Beethoven as an escalator to the social heights."<sup>69</sup>

The 1949 cartoon, *Long-Haired Hare*, pits Bugs Bunny, a kind of everyman musician who sings popular ditties, against a tenor soloist rehearsing the "Largo al factotum" from Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*. The tenor, named "Giovanni Jones", is singing in his home with the windows open while Bugs sings and plays a banjo on a nearby hillside. Bugs' singing distracts Giovanni who marches up the hillside, breaks the banjo in two and smashes it over Bugs' head. The same scenario is repeated several times with Bugs singing different popular songs and playing different instruments, including a tuba. The scene changes to the Hollywood Bowl where the tenor is about to begin his concert. Bugs, determined to get revenge, disguises himself as the conductor Leopold Stokowski and takes over the performance. The orchestra, the audience and the

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<sup>69</sup> Ross, 151.

tenor are, somewhat improbably, fully convinced by his disguise. During the performance, Bugs forces Giovanni to hold a high note for an impossibly long time; the tenor, not wanting to disappoint the great Stokowski, is on the brink of asphyxiation, but holds onto the note, creating a vibration that eventually causes the Hollywood Bowl band shell to come crashing down. Bugs receives a tremendous ovation.

At the time of its release in 1949, Stokowski was still familiar enough to American audiences that the animators had Bugs break the baton into bits before conducting with only his hands, sure that their audience would connect the gesture with the famous conductor. *Long-Haired Hare* had its almost exact equivalent at MGM with *Magical Maestro*, with a lowly mutt-like dog playing a magician trying to get on the bill with “The Great Poochini,” a bulldog who also sings Rossini’s “Largo al factotum.” The plot also has the lowly magician disguising himself as Stokowski to dominate the elite artist.

In 1957, *What’s Opera, Doc?* featured Bugs Bunny and Elmer Fudd performing a seven-minute sampling of Wagner’s operas. The musical direction for this cartoon was by Carl Stalling’s arranger, orchestrator, and eventual successor Milt Franklyn. Goldmark’s index shows that the cartoon included excerpts from *The Flying Dutchman*, *Siegfried*, *The Valkyries*, *Rienzi*, and *Tannhauser*. There is no proscenium arch, and the action takes place in a fantastic landscape that suggests a filmed version of the opera without visible audience, orchestra or conductor. Goldmark writes that that Chuck Jones, the director, wanted to treat Wagner’s music seriously while still putting “a bunch of clowns in front of it.”<sup>70</sup> Like *A Corny Concerto*’s treatment of Strauss waltzes almost

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<sup>70</sup> Goldmark, *Happy Harmonies*, 232.



15 years earlier, *What's Opera, Doc?* uses Wagner's music as a backdrop for cartoon gags and Bugs plays much of the cartoon in drag as a Wagnerian heroine, mixing low comedy with high art.

The concert-hall cartoons discussed above bolstered contemporary stereotypes about classical music and musicians. The conductor and concert pianist were usually portrayed as aloof and distant figures, as shown by Bugs' mock-serious facial expressions in both roles. The formal and reverent behavior expected of the audience in a concert setting receives a brief moment of satire in *Rhapsody Rabbit's* shooting scene, but usually functions by implication as a foil to cartoon mischief in a normally staid setting. At the time of their production, these cartoons portrayed classical music as a symbol of a powerful cultural elite that furnished a target for satire. In the decades following their original production, however, changes in American popular culture changed how these cartoons were seen as they continued to be shown on television.

### **Cartoon Music as “Music Education”**

Looking at the final third of the twentieth century, in fact, we can watch the waning of clearly defined and widely accepted sources of cultural authority, replaced in part by the rising influence of populist sources of authority, such as opinion polls, television ratings, published statistics on movie attendance, and political preference polls.<sup>71</sup>

Michael Kammen

The erosion of cultural authority has had a significant effect on the status of classical music in the United States. In the 1960s, conductor/composer Leonard Bernstein was a national celebrity and Pablo Casals' 1961 performance at the White

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<sup>71</sup> Kammen, 259.

House was broadcast nationally by NBC and ABC radio. By the end of the century, such widespread attention to classical music and its practitioners had become increasingly rare. One possible reason might have been the rapid rise of television as the primary medium of mass culture. Symphony concerts that had been successful on radio simply did not translate well to television. There was also a decline in music education programs in the primary and secondary schools; as Sheldon Morgenstern has written, “most North Americans born after 1960 have had little or no classroom instruction, much less participation, in the classical performing arts.”<sup>72</sup>

Although the evidence for the claim that cartoons have been a form of music education has not been the subject of scientific study, it has almost achieved the status of common knowledge. Drew McManus, a classical musician and teacher who writes for an Internet site called *The Partial Observer*, recollected in 2004,

I used to believe that while growing up I had no exposure to classical music or other forms of culture. My schools never had artists or musicians visit, my family never listened to classical music, opera was only something to be laughed at, and the first live orchestra I heard was one that I played in. But luckily for me I grew up 25 years ago as a slightly obsessive compulsive child who watched an awful lot of television, especially cartoons; and my favorite cartoons were those made by Warner Brothers. Although I was completely unaware of it at the time, by watching those cartoons I was being exposed to wider variety of classical music than could have been obtained by attending a full subscription series to the New York Philharmonic.<sup>73</sup>

The last sentence of McManus’s statement is probably a rhetorical exaggeration, but it does beg the question: just how extensive is the variety of classical music in the Warner Brothers cartoons?

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<sup>72</sup> Sheldon Morgenstern, *No Vivaldi in the Garage: A Requiem for Classical Music in North America* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2001), 166.

<sup>73</sup> Drew McManus, “Carl Stalling Was A Genius”, *The Partial Observer*, 8 November 2004, accessed on-line 3/16/06, 6:56 p.m. at <http://www.partialobserver.com/article.cfm?id=1298>

Daniel Goldmark, whose index of titles and composers for the entire output of Warner Brothers cartoons from 1930 to 1969, comes to the conclusion that the selection is quite limited, referring to it as the “cartoon canon.”<sup>74</sup> Most of the pieces could be considered as “light classical” and more substantial works are sometimes only represented by brief motives, like the opening four notes of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony. Rossini’s Overture to *William Tell* is used repeatedly, with 88 uses documented in Goldmark’s index, but this is in the context of some thousand cartoons. It also is used at greater length than most of the other classical quotations, but its association with the popular Western *The Lone Ranger* places it more in the realm of popular, or at least “light classical” music. Other brief melodies and motives, like Brahms’ *Cradle Song*, and the so-called “Funeral March” motif from Chopin’s Piano Sonata, Op. 35, were so familiar that they might be considered as traditional music. The limited repertoire and brief nature of the classical music in cartoons, however, works in its favor, especially with young audiences, comparable, perhaps with the methods of Walter Damrosch in an earlier time recalled by Alex Ross, when he “explained the classics to schoolchildren, singing ditties to help them remember the themes.”<sup>75</sup>

I can only speculate as to the reasons why these cartoons are so frequently invoked as an introduction to classical music or as a kind of subliminal course in music appreciation. Negative stereotypes about classical music have long been a part of popular culture. Lawrence Levine cites an early example:

*Gold Diggers of 1933* was typical. Its hero, the son of a Boston Brahmin family, defends his decision to compose and perform in Broadway musicals by telling his proper banker brother: “Music is my career, you know that! I mean the kind of

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<sup>74</sup> Goldmark, *Happy Harmonies*, 185.

<sup>75</sup> Ross, 148.

songs sung in shows and over the radio and on record. I don't mean the kind of music played by the Boston Symphony Orchestra. You have to be half dead to compose that!"<sup>76</sup>

More recently, in his *New Yorker* article, Alex Ross refers to himself and a few college schoolmates as "classical nerds,"<sup>77</sup> which sums up recent prevailing attitudes concisely. Citing cartoons as a source of familiarity with classical music, however, crosses the boundary between popular and high culture, creating a distance from such pejorative connotations. In addition, the ambivalence towards classical music expressed in the subtexts of so many of the cartoons situated in the concert hall can provide a kind of ironic camouflage.

There are, no doubt, many Americans who developed a genuine interest in classical music from hearing it first in the context of some very funny cartoons, even as the portrayal of a powerful cultural elite lost some of its satirical punch in the latter decades of the last century. Still others, having familiarity with classical music already, can appreciate these parodies of concert hall performances from an entirely different point of view.

Finally, the concert hall cartoons also contain positive messages about classical music: In *Rhapsody Rabbit*, Bugs Bunny's performance of the *Hungarian Rhapsody* also communicates, albeit in exaggerated form, the physical joy of playing the piano; in *Baton Bunny*, Bugs' conducting shows a kind of kinesthetic pleasure inspired by Von Suppé's *Morning, Noon and Night in Vienna*; and the cartoons' use of melodic fragments and

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<sup>76</sup> Levine, 238.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

excerpts from pieces that had great popular appeal in the 19<sup>th</sup> century still remain accessible to audiences today.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

I seem to have heard that observation before, Ernest. It has all the vitality of error and all the tediousness of an old friend.

Oscar Wilde, *The Critic as Artist*

As I worked on this paper, I mentioned its subject — classical music and cartoons — to friends, acquaintances, and complete strangers. I was surprised at the high percentage of people who remembered getting their first exposure to classical music through cartoons. Yet as I inquired further, almost none of them had any current interest at all in the music that they heard in the context of the adventures of the Warner Brothers characters. Perhaps it's a bit of a hangover from the American middlebrow era; an educated person is expected to know something about classical music even if he or she never listens to it.

It is unlikely that Carl Stalling considered his use of classical music in the scores he created for the Warner Brothers cartoons as a kind of music education. His compositional method was linked to the improvisational techniques he had used during the silent film era, when the works of Wagner and Beethoven were heard in movie theatres as well as concert halls and opera houses. In the 1930s and 40s, radio broadcasts of symphonic programs shared the airwaves with more popular fare. As Alex Ross

reminisced, “In my house it was the Boston Symphony followed by the Redskins game. I was unaware of a yawning gap between the two.”<sup>78</sup>

Carl Stalling juxtaposed classical and popular music in much the same way in his cartoon scores for Warner Brothers, and his quotations from classical composers functioned primarily as a kind of utilitarian program music. The cartoons themselves often featured abrupt changes in moods and situations so, in *Bugs Bunny Rides Again*, part of a Beethoven piano sonata could be followed shortly by a vaudeville dance tune. This matter-of-fact way of integrating classical music into cartoon scores instilled a kind of subliminal familiarity in audiences who saw them on television for decades after their original production.

Cartoons that featured concert hall performances, while few in number, provided a more obvious link between classical music and cartoons, emphasizing stereotypical aspects of high culture. They were less likely to be seen as dated, since the rituals and dress of classical music performance changed little over subsequent decades. Many of the people who I talked with about their introduction to classical music through cartoons cited examples from those set in the concert hall.

Responses of audiences in the latter decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the classical music in the Warner Brothers cartoons have never been quantified to my knowledge, so whether these cartoons produced any lasting interest in classical music remains an open question. It seems that keeping a significant American engagement with classical music and other demanding art forms will require the hard work of outreach programs, public

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<sup>78</sup> Ross, 148.

advocacy, and a push for a revival of art and music education in elementary and secondary schools, as Sheldon Morgenstern concluded.<sup>79</sup>

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the idea that a significant connection existed between cartoons and classical music is that it existed at all; the reputation of the Warner Brothers cartoons for their extensive use of classical music is actually the result of a combination of coincidences. Stalling's adherence to an outmoded method of composing film scores might have been due to any number of reasons, but his technique proved effective for the eccentric structure of the Warner Brothers cartoons, and his consistency led to the presence of brief excerpts of classical music in the soundtracks for hundreds of cartoons. In the early days of television, programmers looking for content for children's programs recycled whatever cartoons were available as an inexpensive resource, and as the presence of classical music in American popular culture receded along with the decline of music education in the latter decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the snatches of classical compositions in Carl Stalling's soundtracks continued to be heard. As Americans cite the Warner Brothers cartoons as their only contact with classical music, it is not so much a comment on the presence of classical music in the Hollywood cartoons, as it is on its absence elsewhere in American popular culture.

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<sup>79</sup> Morgenstern, 160-167.



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