Film Music Bibliography

The following bibliography contains general studies only, not studies of individual films. This bibliography originated with items found in Steven D. Wescott, *A Comprehensive Bibliography of Music for Film and Television* (Detroit: Detroit Studies in Music Bibliography, No. 54, 1985) which is some 300 pp. I have added new titles of prominent books published since 1985 and have also added annotations of my own.

M.P.

Overview of Important Writings on Film Music


Stilwell divides the literature into nine categories: 1) the silent film era; 2) general reference sources; 3) surveys; 4) biographies and interviews; 5) Film Music Society Newsletters, magazines, and the internet; 6) historical aspects; 7) theory, aesthetics, and analysis; 8) pedagogy; and 9) sociology and cultural studies.

Textbooks Devoted to Film Music (most prominent)


Historical Surveys of Film Music (incl. compositional technique) and some other useful books


Includes bibliographic references, musical examples, and interview with composers John Barry, R. R. Bennett, Bernstein, Paul Glass, Goldsmith, Herrmann, Kubik, Johnny Mandel, North, Raksin, Rosenman, Laurence Rosenthal, Schifrin, Bernardo Segall, and John Williams.


While this book covers a wide range of films, it cannot be considered a survey and is arranged topically, rather than chronologically. Much praised for its insight, Brown’s book is especially good on the Herrmann scores for Hitchcock’s films.


A study of the film music of four Hollywood composers: Hugo Friedhofer, David Raksin, Leonard Rosenman, Alex North. Especially good on the years of the jazz score in Hollywood during the 1950s and 1960s. An excellent feature of Burt’s book are the many musical transcriptions of complete sequences from these films. All have been typeset for
easy reading. Passages in the text directed specifically to musicians have been bracketed and italicized.

Cocks, Gerald. *Incidental Music in the Sound Film*. (Pamphlet.) London: British Film Institute, 1946.

Mostly British industry.


Detailed study of compositional techniques. Includes composer lists and bibliography, pp. 359-65.


Not a critical study, but still one of the most useful books on film music. Its title is reflected in the survey-like structure of the work and there are many detailed studies along the way (with musical transcriptions - mostly melodic). A very important study on Hollywood’s major composers. This book is an ideal place to start before moving on to more critical studies of the aesthetics of film music (such as Gorbman’s). Includes filmographies on each of the major composers.


A useful, readable survey of film music history and technique with and introduction by Miklos Rozsa. This author finds a way to discuss varieties of characterizations and musical styles in film scores without resorting to overly technical language.


An aesthetic study of the period of the classical Hollywood. Flinn’s study is infused by Barthes, gender studies, and other critical theory, but her focus is too diffuse to be useful in drawing any important conclusions.


Considered by scholars of film music to be one of the most penetrating studies of film music, especially in the area of aesthetic issues. Gorbman focuses on American and French films of the 1930s and 1940s and includes an insightful chapter on the Eisler/Adorno critique of the Hollywood model.

Concerning the development of music in the German socialist feature film, with references to the film of Eisenstein and Balázs, and film music theories of Eisler and Zofia Lissa.


A thorough study of film music in Great Britain, with an introduction by Muir Mathieson. Includes discography and a selected bibliography, pp. 244-46.


An overview of Hollywood practices from the silent film period to John Williams’ s 1980 score for The Empire Strikes Back. While her choice of works is idiosyncratic, her chapter on Steiner’s music for The Informer contains many valuable insights.


This book is the lay person's guide to the world of film music, from the silent era to the present day. Film composer Karlin uses the direct language of an insider to describe how music is written and recorded for the movies; who the composers are and how they work with filmmakers; and offers a good bit of detail about the music itself--what to listen for in a film score, and what makes one score better than another. Includes chronological film lists for each composer and a useful table for finding the composers that is organized by title of film.


A valuable survey of European and American composers, with brief biographical information and filmographies, pp. 143-410. Includes a selected discography, pp. 437-56.


Part I is an anthology of historical and theoretical material, including two articles by Limbacher: “How It All Began,” pp. 13-14, and “Classical Composers on the Screen,” p. 158. Contributions by 34 authors, including Buchanan, M.E. Bute, P. Cook, Eisenstein, J. Embler, G. Forrell, O.L. Guernsay, W. Hamilton, and composers Applebaum, E. Bernstein, Bliss, Dahl, Duning, J. Green, Matheison, Raksin, Rosenman, Rozsa, Stevens, Tiomkin, Walton,
and others, pp. 13-191. Part II is a listing of films and composers, including discography, pp. 193-835.


Includes an introduction by Constant Lambert, and a section “Silent Films and Musical Synchronization,” pp. 66-70.


An important history of film music. Includes detailed analysis of scores by Walton, Thomson, Rozsa, and Alwyn, a section which deals with experiments in “animated sound” written by Norman McLaren, discography, pp. 225-280, and bibliography, pp. 285-91. The enlarged edition of 1965 includes a section “Four Films since 1955,” pp. 245-64, a discussion of The Devils (Peter Maxwell Davies), Kubrik’s 2001 (recycled “classical” music), Second Best (Arnell), and Zabriskie Point (Pink Floyd, The Rolling Stones et al.).


This anecdotal book tries to be comprehensive of the industry and even includes musical films and chatty information about songwriters and composers. Not much useful here other than insider dirt for the fans.


A useful book arranged by composer.


A summary of film music function and technique, and a survey of its history in America (Palmer), Europe, and the Far East (Gillet).


Includes a useful listing of European and American composers with biographical information, listing of film and concert scores (and borrowings), and collaborations, pp. 207-328. Also a bibliography, pp. 329-31, and discography, pp. 333-35.

This is a very insightful book by a very opinionated insider. Prendergast provides much detail about how the process of creating and adding music to the soundtrack occurs. He doesn’t examine any particular film in detail but does include musical examples from many different types of films.


Perhaps the earliest overview and guidebook for film music composition.

Smith, Jeff...


A valuable work, with extensive bibliographic references.


Includes chronological lists for each composer. Has some useful career studies of some of the lesser knowns. Ends with John Williams and doesn’t go much past the mid ’80s. There isn’t a section dedicated to “craft,” but there is a lot interesting and useful information about craft incorporated within individual composer studies. See the entry on Max Steiner for instance for a complete reel-by-reel cue-sheet for *Gone with the Wind*.


Biographies and comments by 20 major film music composers. Includes a discography and a selective bibliography.


Twenty four articles which originally appeared in *Soundtrack (SCN)*.


A state-by-state, library-by-library index of where surviving written music for past films is kept.  These scores (and sometimes orchestral parts) are almost always in manuscript.