




long-lived artist. In turn this tells us much about the USA and its process of self-examination through the six decades after the 'Glorious Thirty'.

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*Improvising the Score: Rethinking Modern Film Music through Jazz.* By Gretchen L. Carlson. Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 2022. 224 pp. ISBN: 978-1-496-84084-4

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The title hints at a paradox: scores consist of written notation, whereas improvisation is defined by its absence. This tension, in Carlson's own words, 'between the improvisational ideals of the jazz world and the conventionally highly structured and regulated expectations of the film music world' (p. 8) is central to the book. Ultimately, it remains unresolved, however.

According to the author, the 'book's intervention into jazz (and film) scholarship is threefold. First, it investigates jazz musicians' film work from a sociological perspective' (p. 10). By this, she is referring to accounts of musicians' behind-the-scenes labour and an analysis of the production process, as revealed primarily through interviews with key protagonists and observation of live film-scoring and recording sessions. The second line of enquiry involves an examination of jazz/film intersections as 'opportunities for jazz musicians' creativity in a radically different medium' (p. 10). This, then, focuses on the musicians' 'creative labour' and the tensions between creativity and artistic integrity on the one hand, and the requirements of providing music 'to order' in a subservient position on the other. Finally, the book 'posits larger implications for jazz within the fields of film and media studies, [arguing that] these unique jazz/film intersections challenge audiences to rethink film music's agency and meanings by providing models of integrative film projects built on mutual collaboration between composers and filmmakers, challenging conventional film soundtrack production methods in unique and innovative ways' (p. 11). While the first of these approaches yields rich dividends and the second is partly successful, the third proves more problematic.

The first chapter (after the introduction), 'When Strangers Meet: Structures, Tensions, and Negotiations in Jazz/Film Collaborations' (pp. 26-47) is particularly valuable, outlining the production processes and the roles and responsibilities of the personnel involved as well as the hierarchical relations between them. Although this may not include many new insights, it grounds the ensuing discussions about creative agency and notions of collaboration.

The bulk of the book consists of case studies, of Antonio Sánchez and Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Birdman*, Mark Isham and Alan Rudolph's *Afterglow* (Chapter 2), and the collaborations between Terence Blanchard and Spike Lee (Chapter 3) and Dick Hyman and Woody Allen (Chapter 4), respectively. Indeed, the advertising blurb focuses on Miles Davis's music for Louis Malle's *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud*. In

the book, a brief discussion of this notorious example of (seemingly) improvised film music sets up more extended analyses of Sánchez's drum performance in *Birdman* and Mark Isham's jazz score in *Afterglow*. The problem is that Carlson makes no apparent attempt to distinguish between myth and reality. No research on Davis's music for Malle's film is cited, but Tom Perchard (2015, pp. 112–43), for example, has critiqued the 'mythologization' of Davis's supposed improvisations, pointing out that this claim was hyped in the advertising campaign for the film. Although improvisation played an important role in the performance, the music was by no means entirely improvised as is often suggested. To be fair, this acts more as a springboard for Carlson, and her ensuing discussion of the work of Sánchez and Isham, as well as, in later chapters, Blanchard and Hyman, is well informed. There remains, however, a critical fuzziness surrounding the concept of improvisation. This term has recently undergone a critical reappraisal, but the book remains largely untouched by this, and the notion of improvisation employed is mostly uncritical. It is not even clear how important it is for the book. It is prominent in the title, although in a somewhat ambiguous context, and appears central to the first case study, on Sánchez and, to a lesser extent, Isham. About *Birdman*, for instance, Carlson comments: '[i]mprovisation is generally associated with spontaneity, experimentation and freedom', arguing that these aspects reflect '[the main protagonist] Riggan's own impulsive, reactive, and unpredictable approaches' (p. 60). Given the music consists of Sánchez's solo drumming, the emphasis on improvisation seems plausible here. The next case, on Isham's music for Rudolph's *Afterglow*, is already more complex, however. Isham's music is for a septet in mainstream jazz styles. Isham has described how he wrote the music on lead sheets, associating the different melody instruments with the main characters and writing tunes for each, so, while the music may not be fully notated, the extent of improvisation appears limited, although this isn't discussed in detail. In the following chapters on the Blanchard/Lee and Hyman/Allen collaborations, improvisation plays an even smaller role.

Thus, what connects the different examples is not so much improvisation but collaborations between jazz musicians and *auteur* directors. Carlson emphasises that, no matter their success in film, Sánchez, Isham, Blanchard and Hynam consider themselves jazz musicians first and foremost. On the other side of the divide, Iñárritu, Rudolph, Lee and Allen have in common that they work as filmmakers largely independently of the studio system, allowing them to explore novel production processes, which are likewise afforded by the flexibility and spontaneity of jazz. Yet, the innovative approaches to film scoring that Carlson attributes to the working practices of jazz are also characteristic of other music-inspired *auteur* directors. The overturning of standard practice whereby, instead of being added only in post-production, the music comes first and film scenes are paced and edited according to it, which Carlson attributes to Iñárritu and Rudolph, is known from the work of Hitchcock, Chantal Akerman, Ingmar Bergman and Kubrick, among others. What is possibly novel is that, in Iñárritu's case, the music has been created for the film, and is not pre-existing as in most of the others mentioned here, so this contribution is valuable, although a wider frame of reference might have enriched the discussion.

This apparent confusion about the appropriate contexts for the study and the traditions and lineages in which protagonists operate comes to the fore in the Conclusion, subtitled 'Miles Ahead: A New Way of Making Music' (pp. 144–59). Here, Carlson suggests that the works she has studied 'offer a general model of film soundtrack production that challenges conventional production methods,

experimenting with the possibilities of interactive collaboration between the visual and sonic aspects of cinema', citing the work of Jonny Greenwood, Trent Aznor and Atticus Ross, Geoff Barrow, Mica Levi and Colin Stetson as examples (p. 148f.), even establishing a link to an online concert by Travis Scott within the game *Fortnite* during the Covid 19 pandemic. Yet only the Sánchez/Iñárritu collaboration fits the bill. It is the only one that can remotely be described as 'experimental'. At the same time, it has least to do with 'jazz' in terms of its musical language. Although Sánchez identifies as a jazz musician, his drumming is not restricted to this stylistic language.

Thus, throughout the book, it becomes increasingly difficult to disentangle the different meanings of jazz: as an art world in the sense of Harold Becker; as a particular production process, relying on improvisation as a technique; or as a recognisable musical idiom. While Carlson on the one hand seeks to distinguish between these aspects, on the other, the book's argument appears to depend on their conflation, so that, for instance, Blanchard's scores, which in most respects function like conventional film music, complete with symphonic orchestration and leitmotifs, are included in the rhetoric of spontaneity and experimentation, by virtue of Blanchard's identity as a jazz musician and an idiomatic residue in the music.

Despite these problems, the book is a valuable contribution to the literature on jazz in film and the working methods of *auteur* filmmakers as well as their intersections. Whatever criticism I have levelled at the overall concept and argument, the individual case studies significantly enrich our understanding.

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## Reference

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***Reading Smile: History, Myth and American Identity in Brian Wilson and Van Dyke Parks' Long-Lost Album.* By Dale Carter. London: Routledge, 2021. 166 pp. ISBN: 978-0-367-62286-2  
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Fifteen years ago, Philip Lambert's *Inside the Music of Brian Wilson: The Songs, Sounds and Influences of the Beach Boys' Founding Genius* (2007) inaugurated an academically rigorous era in studies of the *auteur* behind *Pet Sounds* and 'Good Vibrations'. Dale Carter's *Reading Smile: History, Myth and American Identity in Brian Wilson and Van Dyke Parks' Long-Lost Album* epitomises the forensic analysis encouraged by Lambert, who died from a brain tumour in 2022. Yet whereas *Inside the Music* detailed Brian Wilson's compositional innovations, *Reading Smile* examines the lyrical content of the ill-fated 1966–1967 magnum opus intended to establish the