

Music's Role in Hollywood's Social Erasure of the Disabled Body: Two Case Studies (*Kings Row* and *The Beast with Five Fingers*)

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[*a work in progress*: any responses welcome to above email]

Disability scholars have begun discussing the ways that the disabled body is socially erased in many discourses, including Hollywood cinema. In particular, Martin F. Norden devotes an entire monograph to tracing representations of disabilities in film.¹ As one of the most overlooked elements of cinema rhetoric, music can play a special role in masking or altering the disabled body in its filmic representations. Examples can be found in U.S. films running the gamut of Hollywood history and its genres, including: *The Big Parade* (1925), *Of Human Bondage* (1932), *The Informer* (1935), *Kings Row* (1942), *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1945), *The Beast with Five Fingers*, (1946), *The Men* (1950), *A Patch of Blue* (1965), and *Forest Gump* (1994).² This paper will briefly introduce two ways that close attention to music and music-making, at both the diegetic and non-diegetic level, can further inform our understanding of disability discourses: first, as a powerful strategy of support for the overcoming narratives commonly found with disability narratives (*Kings Row*); and second, in the ways that stories about physically impaired musicians also follow, at the diegetic level, systematic efforts to erase a body with a difference (*The Beast with Five Fingers*).

¹*The Cinema of Isolation: A History of Physical Disability in the Movies* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

²This list is in no way meant to represent an exhaustive catalogue of all such films where music plays an important role in representing disability.

Korngold's Score for *Kings Row*: Musical Markers for the Overcoming Narrative

Within Hollywood cinema practices, music has long been valued for its abilities to reinforce visual information and, sometimes, to insert other information about character and plot not visible in other parts of a film's elements. Claudia Gorbman introduced the important paradox of film music's frequent inaudibility, the ways that Hollywood practices employed music covertly but powerfully.³ Film has been theorized almost exclusively in terms of the visual, in terms of the gaze: who is doing the looking, and what is being seen. Laura Mulvey's central work on this topic has drawn attention to the strong tendency of film to privilege the male gaze.⁴ Film theory remains largely untheorized in terms of the audible, where the cultural prejudices of the English language make it difficult even to find a comparable term for "gaze": we do not have a single word that refers to the focused act of listening as do for the focused act of looking. What I want to begin to do here is to propose a theory of Hollywood film music and the representation of disability, focusing on Erich Wolfgang Korngold's score for the 1942 film, *Kings Row*. That theory: in early (i.e., 1930s/40s) Hollywood sound film narratives involving bodies with disabilities, music almost invariably supports familiar visual and dialogue messages about perceived abnormalities, unambiguously signaling moments of abjection, pity, triumph, or simply acceptance. In the early days of the synchronized Hollywood sound film, when composers were more likely to highlight on-screen actions with musical

³*Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

⁴"Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16/3 (Autumn, 1975), 6-18.

gestures—the technique known as “mickey mousing”—composers like Max Steiner wrote some character motives that reflected their physical movement.⁵ As a case study of these early sound film scores, I want to propose a new reading of *Kings Row* and its score by Erich Wolfgang Korngold that utilizes archival discoveries to contextualize this film against the backdrop of World War II and the returning home of the first wave of disabled veterans.⁶

Kings Row may be most famous for the breakout performance of Ronald Reagan, who utters the line that became the title of his autobiography: “where’s the rest of me?!?” Henry Bellamann’s 1940 novel, *Kings Row*, was considered unfilmable under the Motion Picture Production Code as enforced under Joseph Breen, and most of the existing scholarship about the film focuses on the numerous changes and cuts that the writers and producers at Warner Brothers enacted. The novel, and subsequent film, offered an exaggerated critique of small-town life, something of a rarity until after World War II, after which point such critiques became more common. The fictional town of Kings Row, Missouri,

⁵Steiner wrote rhythmically lurching melodies for limping characters in *Of Human Bondage* and *The Informer*.

⁶A general introduction to Korngold may be found in Brendan G. Carroll, *The Last Prodigy: A Biography of Erich Wolfgang Korngold* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1997). Korngold’s musical score for *Kings Row* has been studied in detail by Scott Murphy in his doctoral dissertation: “Korngold and *Kings Row*: A Semiotic Interpretation of Film Music” (University of Kansas, 1997). Bryan Gilliam discusses Korngold’s liminal status, caught between writing for opera and Hollywood, in “A Viennese Opera Composer in Hollywood: Korngold’s Double Exile in America,” in *Driven into Paradise: The Musical Migration from Nazi Germany to the United States*, eds. Reinhold Brinkmann and Christoph Wolff (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 223-242. I am grateful to Korngold’s granddaughter, Kathrin Korngold Hubbard, for granting me permission to study and copy papers at the Library of Congress; I am also grateful to Warner Brothers Legal Clearance for allowing me to study and duplicate papers relating to *Kings Row* at the Warner Brothers Archive at the University of Southern California.

was thought by many to have been based on Bellamann's hometown of Fulton, Missouri; both are situated between Kansas City and St. Louis, and both derive some of their fame from a mental health institution and a small college (Aberdeen College in Kings Row, Westminster College in Fulton). The film itself has brought a certain amount of notoriety to Fulton, and the Callaway (County) Chamber of Commerce has one of Ronald Reagan's suits from the film on display. Among the novel's plot points that were considered unfilmable were representations of incest, pre-marital sex, euthanasia, embezzlement, inter-racial romance, sadistic surgeons, amputation, and homosexuality (although here may be some explanation for the novel's popularity). The novel focuses on a young man, Parris Mitchell, and his social circle, which includes a female love interest, Cassandra Tower, and an intense male friend, Drake McHugh (Reagan's character). The diegetic/filmic world of *Kings Row*, set at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries, emphasizes social hierarchies. There are wealthy uptown characters (Drake McHugh enjoys a healthy trust fund), suburban middle class



types (including Parris and Cassandra), and even some characters from the other side of the train tracks, most importantly the Irish tomboy, Randy Monaghan. Physical and social mobility defines characters in this world. The

women, for instance, rarely leave their original spaces, but the men can and do

travel between the stratified zones. Drake, in particular, is characterized by his mobility: he revels in riding around town in his buggy, being seen with many different women. That mobility, however, gets progressively reduced as he first is robbed of his financial fortune, then is forced to sell his buggy, and finally loses his legs in as close to a literal castration as Hollywood could have offered under the production code.

While the novel suggests a possible homoerotic bond between Parris and Drake, Breen and the Hollywood production code would not tolerate such a possibility. One way their close bond manifests itself on the screen, however, raises that possibility: Korngold's epic, late-romantic styled musical score accompanies several of Drake and Parris's interactions with a specific melody. Indeed, nearly all of the characters



in the film receive their own melodies, in the tradition of the operatic leitmotif; and one other relationship, the courtship and marriage of Drake and Randy, gets its own musical motive. Mid-way through the film, Drake faces a considerable challenge to his conception of identity and body as Dr. Gordon, a sadistic surgeon who performed surgeries without anesthesia on those he considered unjust, amputates both of Drake's legs after an accident at the train yards. Drake had been dating Dr. Gordon's daughter, but Dr. Gordon considered the rakish and sexually omnivorous Drake an unsuitable son-in-law, refused them his consent



for them to marry. The audience learns that Dr. Gordon's surgery was unnecessary, and that fact is kept from Drake, who is profoundly depressed by his change of state and demands that Randy, his wife, promise never to take him out of his

room until he dies. At the start of his autobiography, Reagan discussed the challenges of portraying Drake's realization that his legs had been removed, explaining that:

A whole actor [sic] would find such a scene difficult; giving it the necessary dramatic impact as half an actor was murderous. I felt I had neither the experience⁷ nor the talent to fake it. I simply had to find out how it really felt, short of actual amputation. ...I consulted physicians and psychologists; I even talked to people who were so disabled, trying to brew in myself the caldron of emotions a man must feel who wakes up one sunny morning to find half of himself gone.⁸

⁷ Norden notes that Reagan had his own disability: his right ear was severely damaged in the 1930s when someone fired a pistol close to his ear during a film shooting (*The Cinema of Isolation*, 153).

⁸Ronald Reagan and Richard C. Hubler, *Where's the Rest of Me?* (New York: Dell, 1965), 8-9.

In the scene where we see Drake right after his discovery of the amputation, director Sam Wood emphasizes the sense of a world suddenly out of balance by employing a canted camera, framing the



shot off level. Drake moves his head into the shadow, perhaps symbolically hinting at his desire not to exist right at that moment. In addition to the cinematography, the music also insists upon a tragic understanding of Drake's amputation: Drake's musical motif first appears in the film as a playful, quick tempoed major melody, but after his accident, Korngold slow it down and shifts it from major to minor mode. The music sets up an overcoming narrative.

At the time of Drake's accident, Parris had been in Vienna studying psychiatry (as the year was 1900, the spectre of Freud looms large). Upon returning to Kings Row, Parris struggles with how to treat his friend. He writes Randy and tells her that "the helpless invalid complex must be avoided at all costs." In the novel, Drake's condition worsens and Parris eventually aids in euthanizing Drake;

Drake's disability is not overcome. Parris could no more euthanize his friend in a 1942 Hollywood film than he could kiss him—although his dramatic return from Vienna shows Parris running up to



Drake's bed, staring longingly into his eyes, and then...pressing cheeks. This clip



offers one of the two moments of great euphoria in the film, both of which are signaled through the heroic, melodramatic musical score.

As Parris learns that Drake's amputation may have

been unnecessary, he asks another character about it, and is told, "sadistic surgeons are not unknown in medical history. You wouldn't be shocked if you heard of it happening in some remote town in Europe." An initial interpretation of that comment might involve a reminder of the cinematic doctors of Universal's horror films—doctors with last names like Frankenstein or Jekyll. The film acknowledged its relationship to the genre of horror, and that genre has always been about the repression of bodies considered abnormal. The Universal horror films of the 1930s have been linked to the proliferation of maimed, mutilated bodies that resulted from the violence of the First World War. Besides providing a link to the horror genre, the comment also provides a possible reminder of the *Second World War*, which the U.S. had recently entered in early 1942, right at the moment when *Kings Row* was released. Letters written by U.S. soldiers and their families who saw the film in 1942 speak to the film's powerful resonances within the context of those who lost limbs in the war. For example, the Warner Brothers archives has a letter from a Sergeant Joe A. Lewis, writing for himself and five other soldiers, expressing deep gratitude for the film and explaining that

Kings Row had been a boost to their morale, much more than a “battle picture.” One letter, dated December 31, 1941, and eventually condensed and sent directly to Jack Warner (on January 19, 1942) singled out *Kings Rows*’s amputation against the backdrop of the imminent U.S. casualties. “We are now at war and must face it practically. Unfortunately we shall have, or now already have, some casualties. Some boys may lose their limbs if not their lives. Some of their relatives, friends or loved ones may see the picture and to remind them of the gruesome fact will not be conducive to our responsibility of keeping up the morale of the nation.” That author goes on to suggest a refilming, whereby Drake’s legs are crushed, not removed, by Gordon, and then Parris returns to repair them.

Obviously that suggestion was ignored, yet one wonders if the film had been released even a few months later if there would have been greater pressure to remove the plot point of an unnecessary amputation, a point that would have been of keen interest to the many affected by lost limbs because of the violence of the war. The film itself thematizes repression, diegetically bringing up psychoanalysis, and thus the loss of a limb in a fictional 1890s mid-west town may appear to serve as a barely veiled reference to the impending bodily destructions of 1942. War was about to bring renewed interest in “overcoming narratives” to the United States and Hollywood. Korngold’s music mediates these images, operating melodramatically, excessively, and never against the grain; a composer like Korngold (or his stylistic descendent, John Williams) knows how to press the right musical buttons, knows how to steer an audience’s reception of various characters and situations, and in this case, the film announces to us

Drake's ultimate acceptance of his altered body, an acceptance triggered by Parris's risky revelation to Drake that his amputation was unnecessary. In the closing scene from *Kings Row*, Korngold's triumphant music works to assure us of Drake's newly optimistic attitude about his disability. Even if inaudible, this score places the film viewer/film listener into the subject position of an overcoming narrative.

Erasing the Impaired Body: Music-making and Patterns of "Normalcy" in *The Beast with Five Fingers*

In *Piano Music for One Hand*, Theodore Edel suggests four causes for the writing of one-handed piano pieces:

1. technical development, with the goal being to improve the left hand to make for better two-handed playing;
2. injury of one hand, such as the much-discussed injuries of Robert Schumann's right 4th finger or Scriabin's entire right hand;
3. compositional challenge; and
4. as a display of virtuosity.⁹

Edel notes that the vast majority of one-handed pieces are usually for the left-hand, speculating that the larger cultural insistence of right-handedness through the nineteenth century caused most left hands to be weaker, and therefore more in need of extra pedagogic attention. It may be significant to recall that through the nineteenth century, left-handedness was heavily discouraged; there are many examples throughout Western (and some non-Western) culture where the left hand, the *manus sinistra*, symbolizes evil, compared to the right hand of good. One-handed keyboard performances became increasingly popular through the

⁹*Piano Music for One Hand*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.

nineteenth century, and famous one-handed performers tended to flourish after wars, as in the well-known case of Paul Wittgenstein, the pianist who lost his right arm in World War I and then commissioned many works for the left hand, including concertos by Korngold and Ravel. There was a brief outpouring of one-handed piano works published in the U.S. in the 1870s and 1880s, after so many Civil War soldiers left limbs on the battlefield. And during the early 1940s, when production began at Warner Brothers on a film version of William Fryer Harvey's 1919 short story, "The Beast With Five Fingers," it would not require the gift of prophecy to foresee yet another wave of amputees, and Hollywood responded with both non-war related maimings, as with Ronald Reagan's character in *Kings Row*, and also with soldiers who lose limbs in the war, as with the character of Homer in 1946's *The Best Years of Our Lives*. *The Beast with Five Fingers*, which tells the story of a disembodied hand that seems to strangle people as well as play Brahms's one-handed arrangement of Bach's Chaconne in D minor for solo violin, BWV 1004.

From short story to feature film

Harvey's short story does feature an evil, disembodied hand, but it was a manus *dextera*, not a left hand.¹⁰ Furthermore, Harvey's short story includes nothing about a stroke-paralyzed pianist, as the film version does. The short story opens with a narrator reflecting on his first meeting with a character named

¹⁰"The Beast with Five Fingers," in *The New Decameron*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1919).

Adrian Borlsover; in both the literary and the cinematic versions, the perspective of who is telling the story maintains significance. Adrian Borlsover, we find out, was an eccentric naturalist, an expert on the fertilization of orchids—this detail and its relation to procreation is not insignificant—and at the age of fifty, Adrian suddenly went blind. A bachelor, his only relative was a nephew, Eustace. Eustace discovers something about his uncle Adrian: Adrian’s right hand is capable of “automatic writing.” When Adrian is sleeping, his right hand scribbles out long lines of seemingly nonsense prose, although it begins to write threatening messages to Eustace. Eustace was also a bachelor, and we are told early on that he “lived alone...with Saunders, his secretary, a man who bore a somewhat dubious reputation in the district.” (20). Within the confines of early twentieth-century Anglo culture, both Adrian and Eustace seem to be coded as homosexual, and one reading of the short story might be to see it as a reactionary, homophobic vengeance tale, where the homosexuals are haunted by supernatural forces for their implied non-heterosexual behavior. After Adrian’s death, Eustace and Saunders find themselves tormented by a disembodied right hand. The two men leave the hand-infested mansion, but return as the servants begin to quit, complaining about odd occurrences. They flee to another town, but the hand follows them, stowing away in Eustace’s gloves. They barricade themselves in a room but then realize the hand could sneak in through the chimney. To avert the hand, they light a fire, but in the process they accidentally set the room ablaze. Saunders escapes, and as he considers going back to save Eustace, he sees a black and charred thing crawling out of the flames. Eustace dies in the flames, and the

story ends with the unidentified narrator explaining that he knew Saunders as his math teach at his “second-rate suburban school.” (46)

William Fryer Harvey died in 1937, and left the rights to his literary works to his wife, Margaret. In the summer of 1942, executives from Warner Brothers began exploring the possibilities of making a film version of “The Beast With Five Fingers.” A Warner Bros memo from July 16 described (Col.) Jack L. Warner’s interest in purchasing the story rights for not more than \$500 (it would, in the end, cost closer to \$750), and shortly after, on July 21 and 22, attorneys Ligon Johnson and Fulton Brylawski sent separate reports to Warner Brothers, informing them that while the story was in the public domain in the U.S., it had copyright protection in Great Britain and Europe. After determining that William Harvey was deceased, Warner Brothers executives began negotiations with Margaret Harvey, and on December 8, 1942, Warner Brothers purchased the screen rights to the short story for the sum of £200. As was typical within the Hollywood studio system, a number of screenwriters were brought in to adapt the story to the screen, although only one writer (Curt Siodmak) received a screen credit (Siodmak did work the longest on the story, and there is no reason to think that most of the most interesting parts of the screenplay did not originate from him). Siodmak specialized in horror films, writing numerous scripts including *The Wolf Man* (1941) and *I Walked With a Zombie* (1943); his novel, *Donovan’s Brain*, has been made into several films.

One of the most valuable folders in the studio archives might be the research record folder. Warner Brothers had an entire research department, and various people involved with the film could send them questions. Most films have a

record of the person asking the question, the question, the date of the question, and the date of the answer, which was also included in this record. In the case of *The Beast With Five Fingers*, this research record can give us clues as to when, how, and even who was behind the story's change in the important character of Adrian Borlsover, the blind naturalist, to Francis Ingram, a half-paralyzed concert pianist. One of the earlier writers for *The Beast With Five Fingers*, James Griffin Jay, submitted the first question on the log (March 12, 1945), which was a question about "automatic writing." (The earliest records show that another writer, Graham Baker, had been working on the script in January and February of 1945.) The other six questions from Jay all center on England in the 1840s, reflecting Jay's sense of setting, which would differ from the final location of the Italian town of San Stefano in the early 1890s (to have some idea of what kind of answers, consider this question: "data on undertaking in England in 1940," and the answer: "Good description in Oliver Twist"). Curt Siodmak's first question, dated May 31, 1945, was for the "name of piece of music written for the left hand by M. Ravel. When written and performed?" to which he got the response, "For the Left Hand, Concerto for Piano, completed in 1931, first performed in Vienna, Nov. 27, 31, by Wittgenstein and conducted by Ravel. Info: LAPL." On August 14, 1945, Siodmak returned with another question, this time a request for an Italian translation of "Concerto for the Left Hand." Finally, on September 7, 1945, Siodmak sent a memo to producer William Jacobs suggesting that "In case the title, THE BEAST WITH FIVE FINGERS, should be changed, I would like to suggest the title, 'CONCERTO FOR THE LEFT HAND.'" All of this evidence points to Curt Siodmak as the likely culprit responsible for injecting not just

music but specifically, music for a one-handed pianist, into the film version.¹¹

There were no copies of contracts with the composer, Max Steiner, and presumably he did not become involved with the film until relatively late in the process, as was typical with Hollywood films, then and now.

The shift from the Ravel concerto to the Bach-Brahms Chaconne may also be explainable from the materials in the Warner Brothers archive. Executives from the music legal division of Warner Brothers exchanged urgent memos on November 2, 1945 (the first memo adds the time, “9:30am,” which was uncommon on the memos). The first one, from Gene Werner to Herman Starr, asked:

Is it possible to clear “Concerto for the Left Hand” by Ravel, unlimited uses, visual and background instrumental? Please advise cost and rush answer. Would like to use this for picture ‘The Beast With Five Fingers’ if not too expensive.

The response went from Starr to Leo Forbstein, musical director on the film, declaring that:

“Concerto for Left Hand” can only be done if you agree that you can only use this song either in its entirety without interruption or complete

¹¹In his liner notes for the Marco Polo CD of the *Beast* score, Tony Thomas writes that it was Siodmak “who suggested to Steiner that he utilize the left-hand version of Bach’s D minor Chaconne played by the severed hand.” Thomas, though, provides no documentation for his assertion.

movements as a unit. You will not be able to use snatches at any time. If this agreeable must also know how many uses you will make before they will quote. Personally advise against this as believe their restrictions will be such to make it impractical for you to use song, and price will be high. Advise.

Forbstein responded to Starr three days later, on Nov. 5, saying he should “Forget about ‘Concerto for Left Hand’. Will try and replace it with something else.” None of the other records I examined indicated who suggested the Bach Chaconne, but press releases for the film did contain these curious tidbits.

Victor Aller, member of the Warners’ music department, composed a Bach Choconne [sic] for Victor Francen; this is a piece written for the left hand. Francen practised [sic] for some 200 hours in order to acquire the proper technique.

Victor Aller was related to Eleanor Aller, a cellist who recorded with the Hollywood studios and who, with her husband Felix Slatkin, and Paul Shure and Paul Robyn, formed the Hollywood String Quartet. Victor Aller was employed by Warner Brothers in the 1940s as the orchestra manager, earning \$19.95 an hour, according to music department budget breakdowns from 1949. He also gave piano lessons in Hollywood, sometimes to actors who needed to play piano on-screen, as in the case of Dirk Bogarde in the 1960 Liszt biopic, *Song Without End*. No evidence surfaced declaring who may have recorded the one-handed Bach

recorded on the *Beast* soundtrack, but Victor Aller may be more likely than Victor Francen, despite his 200 hours of practicing. Among the musical parts preserved from the recording session is a three-page solo piano part entitled “Chaconne (Study No. 5). The unnamed reporter who attributed the arrangement of the Bach Chaconne to Aller was probably mistaken, perhaps because he or she was told something about Aller and that piece (maybe that Aller performed it, or that he was Victor Francen’s teacher for it?), but apart from a few minor differences, such as the slurring in measure five, the arrangements are identical, perhaps most tellingly in their dynamic markings.

The film version of *The Beast With Five Fingers* was an important project for Warner Brothers, commanding the fairly hefty budget of \$724,000 (the total from the Nov. 6, 1945 budget). It was directed by Robert Florey, a French émigré who had been involved with Grand Guignol plays as a teenager, and who wrote the original script for Universal’s film version of *Frankenstein*. In fact, Florey contributed the rather important story detail that the creature’s behavior was malevolent because he had been made with a criminal’s brain; it was a later writer who developed that idea further, positing that the criminal brain was only stolen after the intended “normal” one was dropped. Universal somewhat unceremoniously yanked the project from Florey, even though he had shot test scenes with Karloff, but the film was given to James Whale. Strongly influenced by German Expressionist cinema (like Wiene’s *Das Kabinett des Doktor Caligari* or Murnau’s *Nosferatu*, 1922), Florey specialized in horror films, and his output included *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1932), *The Florentine Dagger* (1935), and *The Face Behind the Mask* (1941, also with Peter Lorre). Peter Lorre was not the

producer's first choice to play the role of Hilary Cummins, the odd secretary to the pianist—William Jacobs had Sydney Greenstreet and Claude Rains higher on his 9/11/45 wish list—but Lorre had a strong history of appearing in similar roles, including the psychotic child murderer in the 1931 Fritz Lang film, *M*, as well as in his first Hollywood film, Karl Freund's *Mad Love* (1935), where Lorre played a doctor who replaces the damaged hands of a famous concert pianist with those of a criminal, leading to all kinds of mischief.

A quick synopsis: a rich and eccentric pianist, Francis Ingram, has suffered a stroke that paralyzed the right side of his body. He lives on a lavish villa, assisted

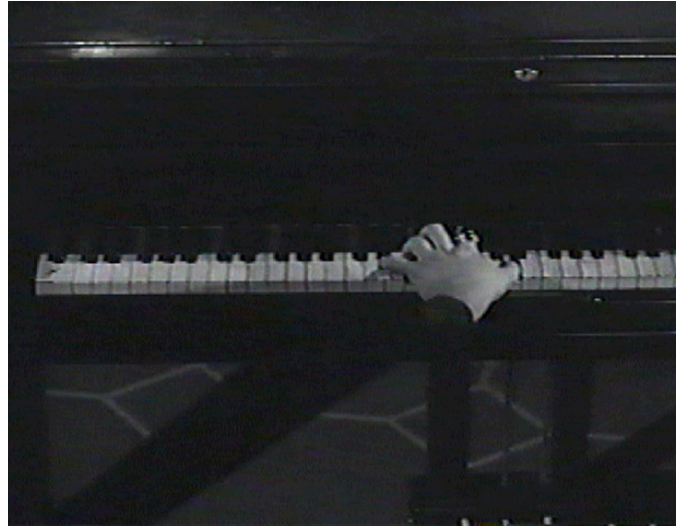


by a nurse, Julie (played by Andrea King). He has continued concertizing because of an arrangement of the Bach Chaconne prepared for him by the composer and con man, Bruce Conrad, played by Robert

Alda (Alda had recently portrayed George Gershwin in the 1945 film, *Rhapsody in Blue*). Ingram's secretary, Hilary (Peter Lorre), seems to have nothing to do with Ingram, insisting on spending all of his time with the massive library of ancient books housed at the villa. Ingram mysteriously dies, and the will leaves everything to Julie and not Hilary or Ingram's relatives, including his nephew,



Donald. Forced to leave the books, Hilary begins to act strangely, and the local police commissario is shocked to find that Ingram's corpse has had its left hand removed. Soon a number of stranglings plague the villa, and Hilary claims to see Ingram's disembodied hand crawling around and even playing the Bach Chaconne. Eventually the hand strangles him to death, or so it seems—apparently Hilary has a heart attack from the fear of being attacked by this hallucination.



At times, the tone of the film takes on a comic flavor, sometimes intentionally, sometimes unintentionally. When the stranglings begin to occur, Siodmak employs conventions of a mystery film, with each of the characters having motives and alibis. Coupled with the creepiness of the expressionist shadows and camera angles, as well as Steiner's often dissonant score, the goofier bits of the film might seem more like a Scooby Doo episode than an anxiety-provoking thriller. When the true murderer, Hilary, is revealed at the end—and the revelation is overplayed to ridiculous proportions—the film lapses into sheer bathos as the Commissario gets scared by his own hand, threatening to strangle him. Siodmak did not approve of the comic relief, as he made clear in a September 21 memo to producer Jacobs:

About comedy relief in “Beast with Five Fingers.” Not one of Edgar Allan Poe’s stories, nor “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde”, nor “The Horla” by Maupassant – even “Hamlet” – has any comedy relief.

I think the classics are right.

Audiences responded to the film with laughter, as several reviews report. A February 6, 1947 review in the Cleveland Plain Dealer said that “the opening audience yesterday quite literally hooted it down,” while the February 13 Chicago Sun reviewer, Henry T. Murdock, wrote that “as it progresses and Peter Lorre begins to chew big hunks out of the scenery the audience laughs instead of shivers.” And Mae Tinée was repulsed that audiences would laugh at the supposedly gruesome scenes, as she wrote in the February 15 Chicago Tribune: “For some reason the audience at the Rialto found such scenes as that in which [Hilary] [the idiot] hammers the hand down with a nail and tosses it into a fire, only to have it crawl out, vastly amusing—a sentiment I could not share.”

Close readings of specific scenes

A brief word about sources. The Warner Brothers archive at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles contain the corporate records for Warner Brothers from the 30s until 1968. Besides examining over fifteen files of production papers, I also studied the musical materials preserved there, which include copies of Max Steiner’s short score (the original is housed at the Max

Steiner archive at Brigham Young University¹²), the full score in the hand of his orchestrator, and all of the orchestral parts. There are conductor's scores for all seven of the film's reels, but there are no full scores or parts for reels four and five, although there is music in those reels. One mystery that I discovered when perusing the scores: while Hugo Friedhofer receives screen credit for orchestrating this film, every full score cue in the archive contained the name and handwriting of Murray Cutter. Friedhofer was Steiner's main orchestrator from the late 1930s until 1946, at which point Cutter became his principle orchestrator. I could locate no contracts or other records specifying musical personnel, although music department budgets from 1949 (the only ones I was able to see) list Murray Cutter as a staff orchestrator who earned a premium rate of \$10/page. For instance, in the week of June 17, 1949, he arranged 82 pages for the film *Lady Takes A Sailor*. Within the hierarchies of the studio system, it was standard practice for the established and bigger names to receive credit for work that may have in fact been carried out by several individuals. Such seems to have been the case with Friedhofer and Cutter on this score; at most, Friedhofer may have done two of the seven reels.¹³

It has become something of a commonplace in music history to note that characteristics of musical aesthetic modernism have been absorbed within

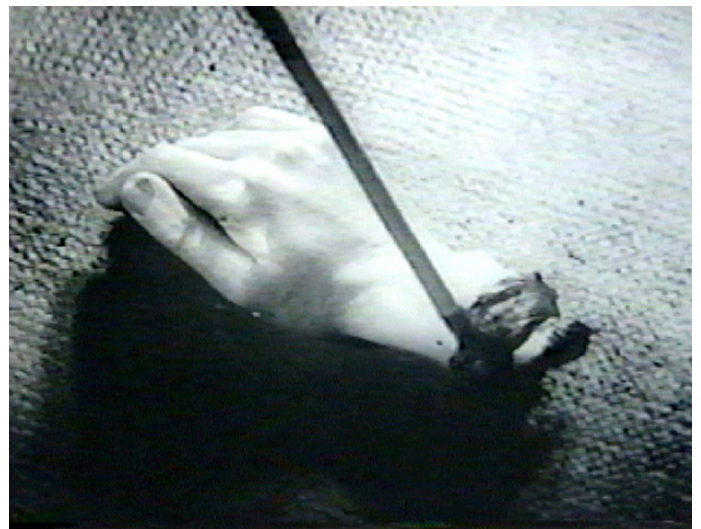
¹²See James V. D'Arc and John N. Gillespie, *The Max Steiner Collection: MSS 1547* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1996).

¹³The main title sequence opens with the Warner Brothers fanfare before moving into a fully orchestrated version of the Chaconne theme. The orchestra included 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 3 clarinets (one doubling on bass), 2 bassoons (sometimes on contrabassoon), 4 trumpets, 4 horns, 4 trombones, 1 tuba, and 6 violins, 6 violas, 6 celli, and 4 basses. Further, there were six percussionists, 2 harps, 1 Hammond organ, and, most ironically given the restrictions to the on-screen pianist, 2 piano parts.

Hollywood film music, but rarely are such assertions followed with specific examples. Genre plays an important role in determining what kinds of musical languages Hollywood adopts, and the genres of the horror film and science fiction—two genres that are sometimes overlapping and indistinguishable—have been particularly fruitful places for Hollywood composers to incorporate more avant-garde compositional techniques such as extended dissonances, atonality, aleatoricism and timbral experimentation. Steiner's score for *King Kong* remains an exemplary early example of a Hollywood score that employs extended dissonances, but in general Steiner is regarded as representing a more reactionary musical language. Together with Alfred Newman, Erich Korngold, and Franz Waxman, Steiner was responsible for championing a musical vocabulary in Hollywood that relied heavily upon the gestures of European post-romanticism, particularly the language of Wagner and Strauss. Steiner rarely wrote for horror films—mostly because his principle studio, Warner Brothers, did not make many of them—so the rare opportunity of *The Beast With Five Fingers* presumably allowed Steiner more creative freedoms. The most dissonant and non-traditional musical moments occur during the cue called “The Storm,” which underscores the scenes of Ingram's death as he falls down a flight of stairs. The presence of dissonance here is not surprising—these dissonant, unstable sounds present a direct analogue with the expressionist cinematic techniques. The canted camera, the unsettled camera movement, and the wavy shots of the double-exposed piano work together with the music to create an effect of confusion, fear, and suffering. As Ingram tries to focus on the piano, Steiner returns to the Chaconne theme introduced in the Main Title, played by both piano parts—only

he writes them in close but different keys (e minor, f minor), creating a moment of bitonality that runs parallel to the double-exposure photography. Here we have techniques of aesthetic modernism put to the service of amplifying the horrific, the terrible—and in connection with the piano, the body with disability, for the piano serves metonymically as a reminder of Ingram’s non-normative body. Bitonality here serves as a reminder of Ingram’s bifurcated body, split into active and passive by a stroke.

It turns out that the mobile disembodied hand has been a recurring motif within horror films, although as best as I can tell, *The Beast With Five Fingers* may be the Urquellen for this trope in Hollywood. Disembodied hands that don’t move go back further, including the presence of one in *Un chien andalou* (1928), by surrealist filmmakers Salvador Dali and Luis Buñuel. Buñuel returned to the image of the disembodied hand in his 1962 film, *The Exterminating Angel* (*El*



Ángel exterminador), and he is sometimes, and incorrectly, attributed with having been involved with the production of *The Beast With Five Fingers*, no doubt because Buñuel claims to have written some of the scenes in his autobiography. (Brian Taves studied the archival records at Warner Brothers and has determined that Buñuel was not involved with *The Beast With Five*

Fingers.¹⁴) Other cult classics involving disembodied hands include *The Crawling Hand* (1963), *Dr. Terror's House of Horror* (1965), *And Now the Screaming Starts* (1973), and Oliver Stone's 1981 *The Hand*. The trope of the disembodied hand was strong enough for it to be parodied in the 1964 television series, *The Addams Family*, where the hand named "Thing" joins other stock horror characters like a Frankenstein monster and a vampire. Even an episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, from season six, features an independently mobile disembodied hand, a mummy's hand roaming in the Magic Shop. *The Beast with Five Fingers* builds up tension for the disembodied hand, and the audience doesn't see it until relatively late into the picture. While all of the circumstantial evidence causes it to appear that a single hand has been crawling around and strangling people in the Ingram villa, Hilary is the only character who ends up seeing the hand.

In one of the most radical departures from the short story, the film reveals its tricks and illusions by driving home, in a rather ridiculous manner, the information that Hilary, and no other character, sees the disembodied hand. After an increase in the level of the sound effects (the score calls for "wind machine" here but it sounds as though it may have been altered in some way), the solo piano version of the Chaconne returns, with some impressive special effects photography showing the hand at the keyboard. As the camera pans between Hilary and Julie, both looking at the piano, the level of the music rises and falls, so that as we see Hilary, we hear the Chaconne, but then with a pan to Julie, the

¹⁴"Whose Hand? Correcting a Buñuel Myth." *Sight & Sound* LVI/3 (Summer 1987): 210-211

music disappears. (A document entitled “Notes for The Beast With Five Fingers,” without a name, contained the suggestion that for this scene, the camera should pan between the two characters, and the music should only be heard while we see Hilary.) This back and forth panning occurs three times, creating a comic effect and perhaps some of the cause for the laughter reported by the reviewers.

Some conclusions

The genre of the horror film has provided an especially rich space for the contemplation of bodily disabilities. While generic definitions are notoriously, and justifiably, slippery, Robin Wood’s understanding of the horror genre, as put forth in his famous and influential essay, “An Introduction to the American Horror Film,” offers a succinct definition: “normality is threatened by the Monster or the Monstrous.”¹⁵ That definition itself begs another question, namely, what is monstrous?¹⁶ As Wood points out, this formula causes potential overlap with other genres (i.e., replace “monster” with “Indian” and suddenly we’re into Western territory). Hollywood monsters during the period of the 1930s and 1940s were usually fairly well demarcated through acting, makeup, costume, lighting, and of course music—whether the monster was, as Wood lists, “a vampire, a giant gorilla, an extraterrestrial invader, an amorphous gooey mass, or

¹⁵“An Introduction to the American Horror Film.” In *American Nightmare: Essays on the Horror Film*. Eds. Andrew Britton, Richard Lippe, Tony Williams, and Robin Wood. Toronto: Festival of Festivals, 1979.

¹⁶Tay Fizdale, who first introduced me to film studies at Transylvania University, once defined a monster as anything higher than you are on the food chain.

a child possessed by the Devil,” the monsters usually *look* different (and some of the monsters implied within that list don’t hit Hollywood until later decades). Monsters look different, and they look threatening. Furthermore, as Wood so importantly points out, they threaten that other famous abstraction, “normality.” Wood observes that sexuality often powers the monstrous element in these films, that libido threatens the bourgeois patriarchal system, and from this Marxist and Freudian positioning, he reads films with a sharp eye towards the role of sexuality, in particular, how sexuality is repressed within the narrative structures of these films. While the Monster, or Monstrosity, may have a sexual component to it, it may also be tied up with representations of bodies with disabilities, or fragmented bodies, and it is at this juncture, the juncture between monstrosity and the non-normative body, where disability studies has theories that can inform our readings of film and music.

The relatively new field of disability studies has drawn much attention to how we define “normal” and to what we consider as “the normative.” Music (and musicology) certainly have their share of blind spots in this respect. Across our culture, it is common practice to find that which is defined as “not normative” made invisible, even though the idea of “a normal body...is a theoretical premise from which all bodies must, by definition, fall short,” as David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder write in *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*.¹⁷ Mitchell and Snyder also discuss the recurring paradox in the representation of disability, that even though we encounter “a perpetual

¹⁷David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

circulation of their images,” bodies with disabilities are constantly encountering what they call “a social erasure” as the temporarily-able bodied resist, repress, and renounce the difference of the disabled body. The reality of the body with disabilities is continually pushed away from our temporarily-able bodied perspective, permissible only when it comforts those without disabilities, as in the pervasive trope of the “overcoming narrative.” (If a character has a disability, the story may focus on how that character fights through it and conquers their difference, instead of allowing them just to accept it.) Lennard Davis has drawn particular attention to the pervasive need within Western culture to hide the mutilated or fragmented body.¹⁸ *The Beast With Five Fingers* follows such habits with shocking efficiency, eliminating the one-handed pianist within the first twenty minutes of the film, and then reducing the haunting power of that body to an hallucination. Indeed, in adapting the short story, Hollywood added some interesting and important alterations to the original story, including an emphasis on the European cultivated musical tradition and on the left hand instead of the right. Hollywood did not simply make up this erasure of the one-handed pianist for a 1946 genre film; instead, Hollywood could turn to larger cultural institutions, including the traditions of European and U.S. music-making and musicology, for centuries of the invisible disabled body. Our received traditions are so powerful in this respect, it is difficult to detach ourselves from them; but let me close by asking this question: would any of us, in our positions as music teachers, encourage a person with only one arm to pursue a career as a pianist?

¹⁸ Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body*. (London and New York: Verso, 1995).

