

Music 712 – Issues in Performance: Western Popular Musics
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TERM PAPER:

ONE FROGGY EVENING
Retrieving Tin Pan Alley in a mid-century 'Toon

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In the classic 1950 Warner Brothers cartoon, *What's up Doc*, Bugs Bunny reveals that he and Elmer Fudd got their start on the vaudeville stage, and that when Bugs stumbled across the line "What's up Doc?" to the uproarious applause of the audience, they were catapulted to stardom. This idea of the comic hero having grown out of vaudeville, as well as the cartoon itself, sprang from the creative combination of writer Michael Maltese and director Charles M. ("Chuck") Jones, who also produced a short featuring a frog singing the songs of Tin Pan Alley, which Stephen Spielberg once called "The *Citizen Kane* of animated film," *One Froggy Evening*.¹

Animation historian Charles Solomon joined Spielberg and many other fans and critics in showering praise upon *One Froggy Evening* (to which I will refer as *OFE* often in this paper), and expresses both the conceptual and technical mastery it displays, and alludes to its cultural significance:

Personally I think *One Froggy Evening* is one of the most perfect cartoons ever made. It's a wonderful parable of greed, it's beautifully animated, it's wonderfully timed, it's very funny, and its story is perfect for the length and yet it suggests that it is part of an ongoing cycle of something larger and greater.²

For a seven-minute cartoon featuring no dialogue and a completely unknown character which was never again to be featured in a major-studio cartoon, *OFE's* popular impact is impressive. The frog character's popularity compelled Jones to give it the name "Michigan J. Frog" in the 1970s; while the frog never made another Warner Brothers cartoon appearance it has made a number of cameos

¹ In A PBS biography of Chuck Jones, *Extremes & Inbetweens: A Life In Animation*.

² Solomon, Charles. "It Hopped One Night: A Look at 'One Froggy Evening'" on *Looney Tunes Golden Collection, Vol. II*. Warner Bros. Cartoons Inc., 2004.

(including two 1990 *Tiny Toons Adventures* and one episode of *The Simpsons*); in 1995 Jones' own production company revived the frog in a prequel, *Another Froggy Evening*,³ Warner Brothers used it as corporate mascot for ten years from 1995 to 2005; and in 2003 the United States Library of Congress deemed the film "culturally significant" and selected it for preservation in the National Film Registry.

The short recounts a contemporary (1955) construction worker engaged in the demolition of a building who finds in its cornerstone a strongbox containing papers sealed there in 1892 – and with them a rather glum-looking frog, presumably from the same time. The frog fishes a top hat and cane out from the box and launches into a song and kick-step dance number to “Hello, ma Baby! Hello, ma Honey!”, and then just as quickly reverts to the glum, croaking frog it had been before. The worker, dreaming of fame and fortune through promoting the frog as a novelty act, takes it to the Acme Theatrical Agency – and is thrown out when the frog fails to perform. The worker then spends his life savings on the rental of a theatre to produce the frog act himself – but once again when the audience takes its seats the frog disappoints, and his poor discoverer is ruined and later committed to an asylum as a lunatic. When he is released he sees an opportunity to rid himself of the frog once and for all by re-interring it in the cornerstone of a new building: this he does, and the cartoon closes with a 101-year flash-forward to 2056, when this new building is being demolished, and a new greedy victim discovers the frog and begins the cycle again.

Throughout the seven minutes of the cartoon the frog regales its discoverer with its beautiful baritone voice and impressive dance steps, while consistently thwarting his efforts to profit from it by refusing to perform whenever anyone else is looking or listening, constructing as Solomon suggests a

³ *Another Froggy Evening*, confirms what OFE implies: that the frog carries its interactive morality play to unsuspecting greedy exploiters across the ages. In this nine minute short, the frog appears in medieval England, renaissance Italy, Napoleonic France and civil war-era America, each time frustrating its greedy discoverers as in OFE. Interestingly, the frog's songs throughout these incarnations are from Tin Pan Alley (!).

parable of greed, and also a profound and according to Chuck Jones, “touching” expression of an individual’s search to be understood or believed by a world which can only seem to reject him.⁴

With the exception of Figaro’s first aria “Largo al factotum” from Rossini’s *Barber of Seville*, the songs of the frog are drawn from, or written in the styles of, Tin Pan Alley,⁵ an era in American popular song usually thought to stretch from the late 1880s at least until the end of World War II. This paper will explore the visual and sonic incarnation of Tin Pan Alley proposed by Jones and Maltese’s use of it in *One Froggy Evening* with reference to theories of filmic sound, and then hypothesise the use and striking power of this nostalgic device.

Music Seen, Music Heard

First it should be noted that film scholarship, which as Scott Curtis has noted is very “feature-centric,” has had a profound impact on the development of film theory. While the feature film has obvious connections to the animated short, and while its theory will serve adequately the theoretical component of the present study, its imperfection of application (to which I shall allude later) must be borne in mind. In a 1992 essay addressing sound in early Warner Bros. cartoons, Curtis writes:

Our vocabulary for describing sound in film becomes increasingly inappropriate when confronted with certain aspects of these cartoons... Three common schemata – the image/sound hierarchy, the separation of sound into dialogue/music/effects, and the “diegetic/non-diegetic” distinction – are particularly unwieldy when dealing with animation, suggesting that we should reconceptualise our descriptions of film sound to include other types of film texts besides live-action features.⁶

⁴ Jones, Charles M. “It Hopped One Night: A Look at ‘One Froggy Evening’” on *Looney Tunes Golden Collection, Vol. II*. Warner Bros. Cartoons Inc., 2004.

⁵ A Manhattan stretch of 28th Street was nicknamed “Tin Pan Alley” by composer Monroe Rosenfeld for the cacophony made by its dozens and dozens of pianos churning out song after song after song, which reminded him of clanking tin pans.

⁶ Curtis, Scott. “The Sound of the Early Warner Bros. Cartoons” in *Sound Theory/Sound Practice*, ed. Rick Altman. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Second, having committed to the use of conventional film sound theory, a further disclaimer is necessary: it will suffer the limitation of which Rick Altman accuses most writing about film sound, consideration of only one of the three elements mentioned above (*italic emphases are mine*):

By far the majority of writing on film sound has concentrated on a single soundtrack component at a time. Numerous books treat the history, theory and aesthetics of film *music*. Increasingly, studies have been devoted to filmic uses of *language*... Even *sound effects* have received separate attention.... To these separate studies we owe our current understanding of film sound.⁷

While I might be forgiven the application of feature film theory to an animated short (there being as yet no distinct theoretical alternative), and hopefully also of the charge of ignoring dialogue (since *OFE* has none) and sound effects (which on the whole function in a very traditional, non-integrated capacity with the music), I must plead “guilty before charged” to another sin of omission: ignoring the large non-diegetic component of the musical score, concentrating solely on the eight songs of the frog, and locating the character devised by Jones and Maltese to sing them.

Diegetic music (such as the frog’s singing), flows explicitly from a film’s narrative, accompanying and in some sense ‘matching up to’ images depicting or suggesting music making. Another useful definition of diegetic music is simply “music that the film characters can hear.” Non-diegetic music (like the pizzicato strings accompanying the worker’s tip-toeing from the construction site) has no such explicit role the narrative, but rather supports it from the imagined orchestra pit, and exists, as Claudia Gorbman immortalised in the title of one of the germinal scholarly works about film music,⁸ on an *unheard* plane. But, as Curtis has also alluded, the black/white, diegetic/non-diegetic distinction is misleadingly simple. In the fantastical world of animated cartoons, and indeed to some degree in other

⁷ Altman, Rick et. al. “Inventing the Cinematic Soundtrack: Hollywood’s Multiplane Sound System” in *Music and Cinema*, ed. J. Buhler et. al. Wesleyan University Press, 2000. p. 339

⁸ Gorbman, Claudia. *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.

film, diegetic music is often constructed to correspond to images of music being made, without committing to the exact depiction of the constructed onscreen 'reality.' For example, whether we see the frog sing on a construction site, street corner, park bench, or vaudeville theatre stage, we see no sign of the lush Hollywood orchestra we hear accompanying its songs. Is the worker 'hearing' the orchestra or just the frog's voice? Is only part of what we hear in that music diegetic?

Michel Chion, addressing this combination of the sonic real and imaginary commonly located in the theatrical "suspension of disbelief" makes a distinction between *rendering* and *reproduction*:

In considering the realist and narrative function of diegetic sounds (voices, music, noise), we must distinguish between the notions of *rendering* and *reproduction*. The film spectator recognises sounds to be truthful, effective, and fitting not so much if they *reproduce* what would be heard in the same situation in reality, but if they *render* (convey, express) the feelings associated with the situation. This occurs at a barely conscious level, for filmviewers (in which we must include most critics and theoreticians) have little more than a fairly crude and immediate understanding of the cinema's figurative nature.⁹

The act of *reproduction*, had it been applied here, might create the (admittedly species-problematic) sound of a rich, human, English-speaking baritone voice accompanied only by the sounds of the depicted locale, or else to depict onscreen whatever musical accompaniment is heard. The act of *rendering* as we see it here, creates a still more fantastic world than that in which frogs sing and dance... specifically one in which they do so to the accompaniment of an unseen Hollywood film orchestra, which manifests magically as a natural accompaniment to the archetype of a top-hat-and-cane-sporting performer well-known on the silver screen to mid-century filmmakers and filmviewers.

That image refers at least in some part to a Hollywood archetype personified best and most famously by Fred Astaire in his fourth film with Ginger Rogers, *Top Hat* (1935), with score composed by Irving Berlin. Critic Alan Vanneman argues that through only the fourth of ten films they made, *Top Hat*

⁹ Chion, Michel. *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, tr. Claudia Gorbman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

marks the pinnacle of Astaire's and Rogers' work together.¹⁰ Critical to Vanneman's view of this film's importance are two of the five song and dance numbers, *Top Hat*, *White Tie, and Tails*, which he calls the song most closely associated with Astaire throughout his career, and *Cheek to Cheek* which became a symbol of the Astaire/Rogers relationship (their *onscreen* relationship, as he qualifies).¹¹

The critical viewer of *OFE* would be justified in judging the visible/audible package of a top-hat-and-cane-sporting frog singing to a classic Hollywood film orchestra to be a rather poor conveyance of the Tin Pan Alley/vaudeville era of the songs. But it must be remembered that if a Chionian rendering of "the feelings associated with the situation" is to be made, ultimately the story and its humour hinge upon the evocation of a contemporary (1955) paradigm of glamour, wealth, and success in the entertainment business – the dream of the construction worker who would make his million on the shaky premise of promoting a singing frog. As we will see later, the dying or dead Tin Pan Alley could offer much appeal of a nostalgic nature, but could hardly have represented this paradigm of success.

A Sound Film in a Silent-era Paradigm

Of particular interest to this study is a property "One Froggy Evening" shares with another Chuck Jones creation, the "Coyote and Roadrunner" series: it employs no spoken dialogue – the only voice ever heard, and indeed the only sound of any kind heard other than Milt Franklyn's musical score and Tregoweth Brown's sound effects, is the singing voice of the frog. Jones himself referred to this device

¹⁰ Vanneman, Alan. "Fred and Ginger hit their Highest Peak in *Top Hat*" in *Bright Lights Film Journal* Issue 31 (2001) [online document accessed 28 March 2006] <<http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/31/tophat1.html>>.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

simply as a discipline, and suggested that applying certain “disciplines” on comedy and drama, and understanding them, is vital to their success:

This is the vital factor in all comedy or all drama: what are your disciplines? The discipline here was that nobody was supposed to hear the voice of the Frog except the guy who found it; and the only voice that you hear would be the voice of the frog. And yet it had to seem like it was natural. That to me is the most difficult of all.¹²

In his *Looney Tunes Golden Edition* commentary to *One Froggy Evening*, Michael Barrier takes the interpretation of the use of this device one step further, suggesting that the viewer's experience of hearing the frog only and no other voices is an elegant conveyance of, and drawing-in of the listener to, the construction worker's constructed subject position:

The storyline hinges on the fact that nobody else in the cartoon hears the frog's voice, except for this construction worker – but when we're watching the cartoon the only voice that *we* hear is the Frog's: so what this means is the whole cartoon is a sort of mirror image of the worker's frustration in trying to make the world believe that he isn't crazy, that this frog really can sing.¹³

Another interpretation of this device could lie in conveying the internal obsession with wealth and fame the construction worker develops from his received sight and sound of the frog. He, like us, hears a great singing voice and a compliant Hollywood orchestra issuing from this unlikely source. Yet, that he is prepared to risk his life savings on the rental of a theatre to promote a singing frog which so far only he has succeeded in hearing, suggests that he, like we his viewers, is in some sense listening only to the voice of the frog, rather than the voice of disbelief and doubt that must surely accompany so unlikely a discovery, or the voice of dismissal and discouragement emanating from the talent agent, or indeed whatever more broadly-conceived voice of reason that might suggest he just give up.

¹² “It Hopped One Night: A Look at ‘One Froggy Evening’” on *Looney Tunes Golden Collection, Vol. II*. Warner Bros. Cartoons Inc., 2004.

¹³ Barrier, Michael. Commentary to “One Froggy Evening” on *Looney Tunes Golden Collection, Vol. II*. Warner Bros. Cartoons Inc., 2004

Of further interest to this device is that not only are the worker and all other characters silenced in the experience of the viewer – indeed they are almost never depicted (through the movements of their mouths) to be talking, the only exception to this being when we are shown characters behind the glass windows of the talent agency (when we wouldn't expect to be able to hear them anyway).

The singular instance of another character hearing the frog's singing occurs after the fiasco of the theatre rental, when the worker, destitute, bitter and seemingly with only the frog to his name, sits in a park while the frog delivers a rendition of "Largo al Factotum" from Rossini's *Barber of Seville*. A patrolling police officer hears (but does not see) the singing, and when he approaches sees only the worker, and threatens to arrest him for disturbing the peace. Interestingly, the embittered worker's response is not to speak in his defence, but merely to point at the frog (which has of course returned to its now-familiar froggy mundanity), indicating that it, rather than he, was the singer. The worker has thus been muted (we have of course never heard him... but he is now mute in the cartoon world, even while accused). The first other human to hear the frog's singing *still* cannot believe that the frog sings, and the frog's voice brings not fame and fortune, but rather arrest and committal: the final joke on our hero.

Cartoon music historian Daniel Goldmark, who has made something of a specialty of what he calls the "Cartoon Canon" (that is, the place of classical music in the scores of animated cartoons) accords a special status to this aria, as the operatic selection most frequently evoked in cartoon music.

While Liszt's [second Hungarian] Rhapsody may hold the record for most onscreen performances in a cartoon, Figaro's first aria from Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, "Largo al Factotum" certainly wins as the opera selection featured most often, either in its entirety or in pieces.¹⁴ ... a mixture of the piece's stature as a popular favourite among singers and audiences alike, its easily recognisable melody that can be divided into numerous sections, and its overall quick and playful nature give it an edge over almost all other contenders.¹⁵

¹⁴ In the citation below, Goldmark mentions eight cartoon appearances other than *OFE*.

¹⁵ Goldmark, Daniel. "Classical Music and Hollywood Cartoons: A Primer on the Cartoon Canon" in *The Cartoon Music Book*, ed. Goldmark, Daniel and Taylor, Yuval. Chicago: A Capella, 2002. p.106

The use of the score's only "classical" selection in this situation is interesting for two reasons: the first, comic, casting classical music in the realm of a public nuisance and disturber of the peace; and the second poetic: its conspicuous break with both the Tin Pan Alley/vaudeville and classic Hollywood genre paradigms signals the end of the worker's dream of "making it big."

Despite the homage *OFE* owes in its soundscape and the frog's constructed character to classic Hollywood sound film, there is another filmic association which is in my view critical to the creators' choice of Tin Pan Alley as genre signifier, and absence of spoken dialogue: the silent film. The filmic paradigm of the vaudeville era was predominantly without spoken dialogue, and the combination of the music of Tin Pan Alley with a narrative idealising the live performer (despite the frog's resemblance to Astaire its potential to the construction worker lies unmistakably within that of the *live performer* rather than the film star) evokes a range of associations with silent film. Meanwhile, to a 1955 American society firmly in love with sound film, the voice of the frog stands in contrast to the more primitive, mute world of the worker (who, one notes, bears more than noticeable resemblance to Charlie Chaplin).

Other than in the absence of spoken dialogue, any reference *OFE* makes to silent film is associative rather than imitative: its score and soundscape are conceived on a model closer to classic Hollywood than any other. Yet its comedy, so entrenched in the narrative and in physicalisms such as exaggerated movements and facial expressions, are consistent with the silent era. While describing the legacy Hollywood music inherited from silent film, Kathryn Kalinak eschews any parent/child construction:

Film music in the silent cinema proves not so much a forerunner of the classical Hollywood film score as an alternative practice, a set of conventions developed in response to particular needs. The classical score appropriated from the silent model its insistence on narrative integrity through an amalgamation of music and image and its translation of musical experience into collective associations which could be harnessed in service to that narrative.¹⁶

¹⁶ Kalinak, Kathryn Marie. "The Silent Film" in *Settling the Score: Music and the Classic Hollywood Film*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992. p.65

In *OFE* we see, then, a form of hybrid between silent and sound film, whose collective associations point backwards to an age quickly dimming in the collective consciousness of the 1950s, and the “silentisms” of both its sights and sounds serve as ample referent to that age.

The Songs of “One Froggy Evening”

Goldmark’s (and my) location of the eight songs of *OFE* in the Tin Pan Alley era¹⁷ is, of course, a simplification. A number of disclaimers are necessary, first concerning Rossini’s *Largo al Factotum* (1816) discussed above, whose presence speaks more to its place in the “Cartoon Canon” than to any time period, and second, *The Michigan Rag* (1955), written by Jones and Maltese specifically for *OFE* in a ragtime style reminiscent of Tin Pan Alley. While the six remaining songs, like much of the music of the era, come loaded with an array of important binaries as baggage including white/black, American/Irish, male/female, classical/popular, in the frog’s renditions this baggage is absent.

Two Irish songs evocative of early vaudeville predate the Alley, “Claribel’s” *Come Back to Erin* (1868) and John Kelly’s *Throw Him Down, McCloskey* (1890, technically dating from just after the “birth” of TPA, but written by a non-Alley composer, and really belonging to an earlier genre). In the 1880s and 90s Irish character acts outnumbered even blackface and “Dutch” (meaning German) characters on the New York vaudeville stage,¹⁸ and it seems no coincidence that in *OFE*, *Throw Him Down, McClosky* is sung from a grand vaudeville stage (and indeed, in a spectacular umbrella-and-highwire routine, the popular culture referent of which I’ve so far been unable to discover).

¹⁷ Goldmark, Daniel. Interview in “It Hopped One Night: A Look at ‘One Froggy Evening’” on *Looney Tunes Golden Collection, Vol. II*. Warner Bros. Cartoons Inc., 2004.

¹⁸ Snyder, Robert W. *The Voice of the City: Vaudeville and Popular Culture in New York*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000

In the category of black racialised song, *OFE* incorporates Emerson and Howard's *Hello, ma Baby!* (1899, a textbook 'coon' song), Jones and Maltese's *The Michigan Rag* (written in 1955 in a ragtime style with similar negro associations), and Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle's cakewalk hit *I'm just Wild about Harry* from the 1921 all-black Broadway show, *Shuffle Along*. As in the case of the Irish songs, the frog's singing makes no reference in accent or dialect to the originary racial content of these songs. *Hello, ma Baby!*, for example, was originally set in dialect, and although the majority of references occur in the verses (which are not sung in *OFE*) one notes that the single clear one in the chorus, "...telephone, and tell me *I'se* your own" is changed to "...telephone, and tell me *I'm* your own."

In addition to its lost original African-American encoding, *I'm Just Wild about Harry* is in fact gendered feminine in its original setting in *Shuffle Along*, sung as it is by Mandy about Harry (Harry does, however have a brief line of reply – "I'm just wild about Mandy, etc..."). The robust maleness of the frog's voice makes his 'wildness about Harry' read more comical than homosexual in implication... indeed for the 1950s audience it will certainly have held stronger associations in its rewritten form, a campaign song for Harry Truman in the presidential campaign of 1945.¹⁹

Also in the category that adds transgender to the trans-species paradigm is Williams and Van Alstyne's *Won't you come over to my house?* (1906), a sentimental song written in the voice of a woman who having suffered the loss of her own daughter sees a little girl crying and offers her hospitality and comfort. In a similar manner to the way the excerpting of the chorus to *Hello, ma Baby* neutralises its "coon" heritage, the short clip of *Won't you come over to my house?* works just fine as a man talking to a younger woman in a familiar diminutive address known throughout popular song of the era (in, for example, *Oh, You Beautiful Doll!*, *Ain't She Sweet*, and *Baby Face*).

¹⁹ Eubie Blake, the song's composer, is said to have been very supportive of Truman in recognition of the latter's integration of the previously-segregated armed forces.

Won't you come over to my house is cheekily offered as our hero is beckoning the public to come into his rented theatre to see the frog sing. The frog sings Claribel's sentimental *Come Back to Erin* as a comfort to the worker upon their rejection by the Acme Theatrical Agency, and *Throw Him Down, McCloskey* as his warm-up to his debut on a grand vaudevillian stage. Sidney Clare and Sam Stept's *Please don't talk about me when I'm gone* (1930), a classic break-up song in which the singer urges a former lover to forget about their relationship (and more particularly, to keep quiet about it) is offered first in the construction worker's asylum cell, and then reprised from the echoey confines of the box which is once again to serve as time capsule as the construction worker re-enters the frog.

Please don't talk about me when I'm gone neatly balances *Hello, ma Baby!*, the frog's debut song. It signals the end of the relationship between the frog and the worker, and leaves as a parting shot an ironic suggestion: that after his life has been ruined by trying to convince the world that a frog could sing our hero needs to be reminded, even urged, to keep quiet!²⁰

Such direct comment on the story illustrates what Jeff Smith, addressing the compiled (as opposed to the composed) filmic score, proposes as a characteristic of scores involving popular music:

Because of its formal autonomy, the compilation score is much less likely to be used as an element of structural and rhythmic continuity. Instead, filmmakers frequently use songs as a way of establishing mood and setting, and as a commentary on the film's characters and action.²¹

Even with originary racial, gender and other content stripped away, the songs stand as examples of Smith's specified function of popular music to provide "commentary on the film's characters and action," here perhaps another evocation of silent film with its tradition of extempore musical specificity, and yet another pointer back to the era of Tin Pan Alley.

²⁰ This nuance of *OFE*'s plot was lent extra piquancy in 1995, the 40th anniversary of *OFE*, when Chuck Jones' production company released *Another Froggy Evening* (see note 3 above).

²¹ Smith, Jeff. *The Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular Film Music*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1998. p.155

Conclusions: Nostalgia for Tin Pan Alley

It is the position of this paper that the setting and mood in *One Froggy Evening* are provided by a utopian retrieval of an *über-genreal*,²² “Tin Pan Alley”, albeit one transformed both musically and situationally by the mid 1950s world of the cartoon’s creators and consumers. The problematic construction of Tin Pan Alley (which, at least by Tawa’s taxonomy,²³ consists of over a dozen formal and textual genres) as a ‘musical genre’ can be viewed as harbinger of a significant 20th century musical trend to privilege stylistic and historical commonalities as determinants of musical genre over more classical factors such as form and instrumentation... but in the present subject it is useful in understanding the common associations this diverse body of music brings to *OFE*, located firmly in the realm of nostalgia.

Caryl Flinn’s *Strains of Utopia* is, in the main, the proposal and examination of a utopian ideology underlying the music of classic Hollywood film, but it makes the point that only rarely has the constructed utopia been a futuristic or fantastical one: overwhelmingly utopia in film is nostalgic.

It is extremely difficult to find an anticipatory strain in Hollywood’s classical film scores... Indeed the tendency cuts across a variety of films and genres... The nostalgic utopia that influences so much of the theoretical discourse on film music has, in other words, enjoyed an equally strong hold within the films themselves.²⁴

Nostalgia, derived from the Greek *nostos*, to return home, and *algia*, a mournful or painful condition, was coined by a Swiss doctor in the 17th century, although it did not come into prominence for a hundred years or so.

²² Dawes, Christopher. *Imploding Musical Genre*. Masters thesis. McMaster University, 2006. I have coined this term to refer to groupings (by any criteria, but usually outside the traditional realms of form, instrumentation, etc.) of already identifiable musical genres which become treated themselves as genres. What is popularly called “classical music” is one case; in this work I have proposed “church music” as *über-genreal*; “popular music” and “world music” provide other examples. In the case of Tin Pan Alley, it recognises an *über-genreal* category defined simply by a stretch of 28th street in New York, and by a period in history when that street shaped American popular music and culture.

²³ See “Text and Music in the New Songs” in Tawa, N.E. *The Way to Tin Pan Alley: American Popular Song, 1866-1910*. New York: Schirmer, 1990.

²⁴ Flinn, Caryl. *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia and Hollywood Film Music*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. p.108

Originally referring to a psychological disorder its use has only been demedicalised within the last 50 years. Flinn locates this shift in nostalgia's meaning in the context of socio-economic changes which culminate in the 1950s.

Significantly, the word's entry into our vocabulary corresponds with certain developments in the expansion of market and industrial capitalism, a system that, it should be stressed, also necessitates the idea of "homesickness" through its long history of colonisation – the word *nostalgia* in fact was initially used to describe the melancholia of soldiers fighting on foreign soil – and through capitalism's slow but inexorable disengagement of private from public spheres... The trend, of course, continues, perhaps culminating with the self-contained nuclear family of the 1950s. Interestingly, and as sociologist Fred Davis notes, it was soon after this that the word *nostalgia* came to be used as a matter of everyday speech.²⁵

Having established a framework for nostalgia that positions it in relation to market expansion, industrial capitalism and other mid-century American paradigms, Flinn carries on the thought to a Marxist utopian dimension in which music, whether known or unknown, feels like home and soothes the soul ravaged by the alienating forces of modernity.

As far as popular music scores are concerned, according to certain Marxist perspectives, music functions not only as a "home" or sanctuary from capitalism (or Hollywood, or its films) but as a reprieve from its fragmenting and alienating effects (think of Lowe, Ballantine, Shepherd, and especially Adorno).²⁶

A relevant Adorno reference absent from Flinn's bibliography is found in *Music in the Background* (1934), where while grieving the lost place for music in society he holds up the tremendous power it still exerts even when retreated from foreground listening. Although Adorno refers throughout this essay to the context of background music in cafés, the analogy to film music is clear.

One would think that music in the background, unnoticed music, should not present itself other than as accompaniment... Far from true. Since in the café, after all, the melodies wander around as ghosts, one need not fear disturbance from them, no matter how present they are. For they

²⁵ Flinn, Caryl. *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia and Hollywood Film Music*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. p.93. Flinn suggests Davis, Fred. *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York: The Free Press, 1979) for a fuller discussion of the etymology and development of the word.

²⁶ Ibid. p.95

are quoted from the unconscious memory of the listeners, not introduced to them. The greater the ecstasies the more perfect the emotional calm of the hearers over whose heads they drift.²⁷

Adorno is not alleging that everyone knows all café music and is thus soothed by the familiarity and standardisation he so vigorously attacks elsewhere... rather, he accords its background status with a softening effect, allowing even unknown music to enter and work its magic in the mind of the listener without the jarring and irritation it might engender if received in the foreground, such as in a concert. Nor does the fact that *OFE*'s songs are very much foregrounded disrupt this effect – for they are in a Chionian sense backgrounded to the images they supplement, the story they help to tell – setting the stage for that utopian 'escape' which characterises the culture of animation, and indeed, all film.

The tragic hero of *One Froggy Evening*, a Caucasian, single, lower class and slightly overweight construction worker, is portrayed in 1955 as middle-aged, probably suggesting he was born around the same time as *OFE* director Chuck Jones (1912) and writer Mike Maltese (1908). He will presumably have grown up, as did his creators, with the songs of Tin Pan Alley, and the utopia he imagines in the frog's music stands in allegory to that proposed by Flinn, and perhaps experienced by Jones and Maltese.

A note on dates: 1892, the year of our amphibian friend's supposed interment, is significantly also the year of the publication of America's first popular song to sell a million copies, Charles K. Harris' *After the Ball*, and while this milestone is not usually considered the actual birth of Tin Pan Alley, it represents its successful arrival as the economic and cultural force it would come to be in the history of American popular music. The music historian viewing *OFE* must add an extra level of suspended disbelief to that maintained by those of us who simply believe that frogs can't sing: four of the seven pre-existing songs (including the signature tune *Hello, ma Baby!*) actually date from after the frog's interment

²⁷ Adorno, Theodor W. "Music in the Background" (1934), translated by Susan H. Gillespie in *Essays on Music*. Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002. p.509.

in 1892, making the already suspect premise that the frog could have heard and remembered its songs still less plausible. Nonetheless the creation of a rich musical landscape of that now-legendary stretch of 28th street in New York, is convincing.

If we mark the significance of the frog's interment on April 16, 1892, as corresponding with the birth of Tin Pan Alley we must note the significance of another date, dubbed by David Jasen as the symbolic "death of Tin Pan Alley": April 12th 1954, the recording date by Bill Haley and the Comets of Max Freedman and Jimmy De Knight's *Rock Around the Clock*. The song that was later to sell twenty-five million copies worldwide (five times the ultimate sales of *After the Ball*), and define the Rock 'n Roll era, according to Jasen wouldn't create a sensation until a year after Haley's recording²⁸ – that year being 1955. While Thomas Hischak cautions against Jasen's over-simplification of Rock 'n Roll as the killer of Tin Pan Alley, he points to an important sea-change in the entertainment industry associated with, although certainly not invented by, Rock 'n Roll:

Rock 'n Roll is often blamed for the death of Tin Pan Alley but there is more to the story than that. The Alley had survived the invasion of ragtime, blues, jazz, swing, country-western and other upsetting musical movements: Why should rock be any different? By the late 1930s for example, the emphasis started to shift from the song to the performer. Tin Pan Alley had always been about the song... When the star *became* the product, the music publishers suffered. Soon the record companies were the most likely to benefit from a hit song, and the music business found itself in a new business.²⁹

Maltese and Jones knew and liked the songs of Tin Pan Alley sufficiently to have co-composed *The Michigan Rag* for *OFE* when they couldn't find an authentic song they liked. Viewing *One Froggy Evening* as their nostalgic requiem for Tin Pan Alley at the dawn of the Rock 'n Roll Age is tempting, if far from provable... yet if it had occurred to them to portray Tin Pan Alley's focus on the song in

²⁸ Jasen, David. *Tin Pan Alley: The Composers, the Songs, the Performers and Their Times*. New York: Donald I. Fine, 1988. p.286

²⁹ Hischak, Thomas S. Preface to *The Tin Pan Alley Song Encyclopaedia*. London: Greenwood Press, 2002, p. x

opposition to Rock 'n Roll's focus on the performer, what more powerful statement could they have made than to show how great these songs could sound sung by... a frog... and indeed one for whom those songs represent the ability to lift it from its froggy mundanity to performing brilliance?

In yet another classic Warner Bros. creation, *Show Biz Bugs* (1957), Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck (dressed, incidentally, in top hats and carrying canes) are shown on the vaudeville stage playing out a classic cartoon conflict. In everything Bugs does (including a perfect unison tap dance with Daffy) he is vigorously applauded by an audience which spurns a frustrated Daffy. Obsessed with his denied "stardom", Daffy lives in his partner's shadow and seeks repeatedly to expose Bugs as a charlatan and take his rightful place as the star of their show. Two years after *One Froggy Evening*, the memory of vaudeville (including then-nostalgic songs like *Tea for Two* (1925), *Jeepers Creepers* (1938), *Those endearing young charms* (1945), etc.) is truly a "stage" in its own right upon which the creators chose to play out an archetypal story of comic conflict which could have been set in almost any other context. Whether the memories and associations that may have pointed to the use of vaudeville and the Tin Pan Alley tradition in these and many other classic mid-century cartoons are to be found in the creators, its target market, or both – nostalgia, and the search for pre-World War utopia may well have been at work.

While Chuck Jones, who died in 2002, never as far as I have discovered commented on the place of Tin Pan Alley in *One Froggy Evening*, he did reveal in an interview late in life, that his own, and Warner Bros.' interest in parody was based on a great love of the subjects.

I learned to love to do parodies; I never did vicious parodies, and I discovered that if you're going to do one you have to love what you do; you cannot look at it in the negative. You cannot treat it roughly: you have to care about it.³⁰

³⁰ Jones, Chuck. "Looney Tunes goes Hollywood" on *Looney Tunes Golden Collection, Vol. II*. Warner Bros. Cartoons Inc., 2004.

There can be no doubt that, even tempered by mid-century paradigms, *One Froggy Evening's* constructed musical utopia of vaudeville and Tin Pan Alley is an affectionate one, and whether its audience is a 1955 one with the tunes and cultural baggage of the dying Tin Pan Alley still ringing in its memory, or a kid like me 20 years later for whom it defined a strange and then-unnamed genre of music and culture: film theory, and the evidence of history points to its considerable power to engender again the creators' affection for a lost performance and a lost age in the hearts of us, the viewers.

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