



Introduction to "Bits and pieces: Music for theater"

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Introduction

Lowell Lindgren

Bit by bit,
 Putting it together...
 Piece by piece—
 Only way to make a work of art.
 Every moment makes a contribution,
 Every little detail plays a part.
 Having just the vision's no solution,
 Everything depends on execution:
 Putting it together—
 That's what counts.*

Thus goes the artist's philosophizing in Stephen Sondheim's *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984). It nicely parallels the reasonings of the seven essayists represented within, who discuss how bits and pieces of music have played an affective role in five theatrical genres: plays, operas, ballets, melodramas and films.

The presence of such bits and pieces within theatrical contexts has become "second nature to us now." Indeed, we've grown so accustomed to their placement that we've become quite heedless of the precise function of music within dramatic contexts. We should thus welcome the discourse found herein. Its focal point will not surprise those of us who have been fortunate enough to have studied with John Ward, for he has always manifested an unfailing concern for the function of any bit or piece that he has discussed. While teaching at Harvard University, he even devised courses in which his approach was reflected in titles like "Music and Ritual," "Music and Narrative" and "Music in Oral Tradition." In such classes, we learned that the intended context for a piece is often exceedingly difficult to determine, yet knowing its context often provides the main clues that lead to an understanding of its musical features.

This is most certainly true for theatrical music, and the point is demonstrated both explicitly and implicitly in the seven papers printed herein, which were written for the splendid conference which Jeanne Newlin organized at the Harvard Theatre Collection on 30 November 1990. In the first of the day's presentations, John Ward provides "points of departure" for the conference. He illustrates them by calling attention to the significance of music in Shakespeare's plays—ranging from bits such as trumpet calls in *3 Henry VI* to pieces called songs in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *Cymbeline*.

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Two distinguished scholars who are among his former students then take the stage to discuss eighteenth-century genres. Curtis Price sets the scene for opera in the eighteenth century, when pieces called arias took on a life of their own, because they were carried from city to city by Italian singers, who utilized them repeatedly in the ubiquitous *pasticcis*. The end result was sometimes a legal battle over the rights of arrangers, suppliers and singers, as Price demonstrates by discussing pieces in three London *pasticcis*: *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (1787), *Il re Teodoro in Venezia* (1787) and *Idalide* (1791). Roland John Wiley then focuses on the path-breaking pantomimes in the *ballets d'action* devised by Jean-Georges Noverre: he analyzes the bits that Mr. Millard put together for a mimed scene in *Iphigenia* (1793) before he exemplifies traditional pieces with his descriptions of a minuet and a march from the same work.

In the afternoon session, two noted scholars who were likewise once advisees of John Ward discussed genres of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, while a scholarly sage provided supplementary remarks for each. Anne Dhu Shapiro described the bits that underpin miming and speaking in two melodramas, one composed by Thomas Busby in 1802 and one composed anonymously in the 1880s. In his response, Laurence Senelick reflected upon the "mystical marriage of music and emotion" in melodramatic works ranging from the mother of them all to Warner Brothers cartoons. In the final segment, Martin Marks analyzed the mixture of melodramatic bits and borrowed pieces in scores written by Walter Cleveland Simon for two silent films of 1912, *Captured by Bedouins* and *The Confederate Ironclad*. In his response, Wayne Shirley pondered two issues: why such specially prepared scores for pianists were discontinued early in 1913 and what such borrowed pieces might mean within their filmic contexts.

The audience learned much from these disquisitions, from the questions asked by the enthusiasts who filled the reading room of the Theatre Collection, and from the lively discussions at lunch in the Harvard Faculty Club and at the early evening reception in the Theatre Collection. What follows is therefore not the whole show, but it does provide refined versions of seven choice pieces.

The art of making art
Is putting it together
Bit by bit...
That is the state of the art,
And art isn't easy...*

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