

## Music in Contemporary French Cinema

‘Phil Powrie’s book would already be quite valuable for its first half—a revealing analysis of music’s role in the construction of gender, space, and time in French cinema since the 1980s, as well as of the dominance of English-language songs in recent French films. But then, his forcefully original work on the ‘crystal-song’ is required reading for anyone wishing to understand the *frisson* of meaning and affect we experience with particular songs, songs that change the direction and apprehension of stories on screen.’

— Claudia Gorbman, Professor Emeritus of Film Studies at the University of Washington, Tacoma, USA. She is the author of *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (1987)

‘Powrie’s study of song in French cinema since the 1980s is full of compelling insights into the relationships between song and narrative, sounds and images, and genre and gender. Moving across the boundaries between “high” and “low” film art, between composed scores and pre-existing music, and between French and English songs, Powrie generates new historical knowledge and creates a stimulating new theoretical concept, the “crystal-song”.’

— Kelley Conway, Professor of Film at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA. She is the author of *Chanteuse in the City: The Realist Singer in French Film* (2004)

‘This book takes on an exciting project, approaching the history of French cinema from the vantage point of its engagement with popular music. Popular song has been essential to French cinema throughout its history, as Phil Powrie argues; but it has drawn relatively little scholarly attention. Cinema—and maybe French cinema especially—is thought of as a visual art, first and foremost. Powrie’s examination of French cinema from the standpoint of its links to popular music rests on an original, counterintuitive move that yields fresh insights.’

— Charles O’Brien, Associate Professor of Film Studies at Carleton University, Canada. He is the author of *Cinema’s Conversion to Sound: Technology and Film Style in France and the United States* (2005)

Phil Powrie

# Music in Contemporary French Cinema

The Crystal-Song

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Phil Powrie  
University of Surrey  
Guildford, Surrey, United Kingdom

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*à Nanou, la Vénus de Bashung, et nos cœurs en chœur*

## PREFACE

Many colleagues have over the years helped me shape the ideas that went into this book: Séverine Abhervé, Jeremy Barham, Martin Barnier, Tim Bergfelder, N.T. Binh, Kelley Conway, Gérard Dastugue, Hugh Dauncey, Rémi Fontanel, Laurent Guido, Sue Harris, Raluca Iacob, Anahid Kassabian, Renaud Lagabrielle, David Martin-Jones, Miguel Mera, Richard Middleton, Raphaëlle Moine, Dominique Nasta, Lydia Papadimitriou, Jérôme Rossi, Robynn J. Stilwell, James S. Williams and Emma Wilson. Lina Aboujeb, my Editor at Palgrave, gave me sound advice, which has improved the book immensely, and Palgrave's Editorial Assistant Karina Jákupsdóttir kept me on the right track. I am extremely grateful to them all; they are not in any way responsible for errors, whether theoretical, methodological or practical, that the reader may come across. I am also grateful to the University of Surrey for the research leave granted in 2016 that allowed me to write this book.

Some of the material in this book has appeared before. I am grateful to the publishers concerned for allowing me to rework the material, which in all cases has been updated with more recent examples:

- “Outing the Synch: Music and Space in the French Heritage Film.” In *European Film Music*, edited by Miguel Mera and David Burnand, 86–99. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006.
- “The Haptic Moment: Sparring with Paolo Conte in Ozon’s *5x2*.” *Paragraph* 31(3) 2008: 206–222.
- “Le *gender* et la musique dans les fictions patrimoniales depuis les années 1980.” In *Les Fictions patrimoniales sur grand et petit écran*:

*contours et enjeux d'un genre intermédiatique*, edited by Pierre Beylot and Raphaëlle Moine, 123–137. Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2009.

- “Soundscapes of Loss: Songs in Contemporary French Cinema.” In *A Companion to Contemporary French Film*, edited by Raphaëlle Moine, Hilary Radner and Alistair Fox, with Michel Marie, 527–546. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014.
- “La Chanson-cristal.” In *La Chanson dans le film français et francophone depuis la Nouvelle Vague*, edited by Renaud Lagabrielle and Timo Obergöker, 65–84. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2016.

I am also grateful to the following:

- Emily Ezust at [leider.net](http://leider.net) for allowing me to use her translations of Richard Dehmel’s “Venus Mater” and Karl von Ense’s lyrics put to music by Franz Schubert.
- The University of Nebraska Press for allowing me to use Walter Frisch’s translation of “Im Dorfe” from Wilhelm Müller’s *Winterreise* in *Schubert: Critical and Analytical Studies*. © 1986 by the University of Nebraska Press.
- Karen Willemsen of Elzevir Films who facilitated copyright permission for the cover picture of Émilie Dequenne in *Par accident*.

## REFERENCING

Given the large number of films mentioned in the book, I have only given the French title followed by the year of release at first mention in the main text. The filmography gives the translated title, director and countries of production.

I cite many texts in French. The translation can be found in the notes; if they do not have a bibliographic reference, they are my translations.

I reference music separately from other publications. The items are listed by musical title. The details for the many songs I reference are based on material in the end credits of the films, although these are often rudimentary and have been supplemented by additional research. The titles of songs are followed by the date of publication, the performer(s) (pf.), the composer(s) (comp.), and the copyright holders. In the case of “classical” music, arias

from operas give the composer (comp.) and the librettist (libr.). The details for composed film scores are listed by the title of the film.

As I refer to many musical moments in many films, I have chosen to indicate a timing for them where appropriate. That timing is given in minutes, and indicates the approximate moment when the music starts; so 0.15 means fifteen minutes into the film and 1.15 means one hour and fifteen minutes into the film. I say “approximate” because timings can vary depending on the medium used (DVD, video streaming); nonetheless, even approximate timings are better than none, as I hope that what I write will prompt readers to explore the musical moments I discuss in more detail, if only to challenge my interpretation.

Chanter, cela ressemble à se délivrer. Ce qu'on ne peut dire et ce qu'on ne peut taire, la musique l'exprime.\*

(Victor Hugo. 1864. *William Shakespeare*. Paris: Librairie internationale, p.120)

\*"To sing seems a deliverance from bondage. Music expresses that which cannot be said, and which cannot be suppressed" (Victor Hugo. 1905. *William Shakespeare*. Translated by Melville B. Anderson. London: Routledge, p.71).

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