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The Rózsa Touch: Challenging Classical Hollywood Norms Through Music

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B.A. Appalachian State University, 2009

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An abstract of
A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
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Abstract

The Rózsa Touch: Challenging Classical Hollywood Norms through Music
By Stephen Fogleman

If *film noir* is a body of work that is partially characterized by its difference from other Classical Hollywood films, many of the scores for these films work to reinforce that difference. Miklós Rózsa's music exemplifies this claim more than that of his contemporary composers; while he was not the only innovative film composer at the time, Rózsa exerted a greater influence. Like the *films noir* themselves, they criticize Classical Hollywood style. According to David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, various narrative and visual techniques of *films noir* challenge this style's "neutrality and 'invisibility'"; Rózsa's scores, with all of their modernist traits, deviate from the romanticism and post-romanticism of the music that typically accompanies these films.

I will examine Rózsa's music for *The Lost Weekend* (Paramount, 1945), *The Killers* (Universal, 1946), *Brute Force* (Universal, 1947) and *The Naked City* (Universal, 1948). I choose these scores because no other film music scholar has examined them at length, but I also hope to fill in a broader gap. As Robert Miklitsch writes, *film noir* has almost exclusively been defined in terms of its visuals and its narratives. The music for these films, on the other hand, has been largely neglected. My thesis works, in part, to address this oversight.

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Introduction

The many stylistically conservative scores for Classical Hollywood films have led some film music scholars to overlook a corpus of strikingly innovative work, particularly in the realm of 1940s *film noir*. In *A History of Film Music*, for instance, Mervyn Cooke writes, "[t]he orchestral music for narrative features written by Hollywood film composers in the 1930s and 1940s was steeped in a late nineteenth-century romanticism that was several decades out of date in the concert hall" (78). The chief influences on these scores were composers such as Richard Wagner, Giacomo Puccini, Richard Strauss and Giuseppe Verdi. Upon examining the music of Max Steiner or Erich Wolfgang Korngold, it is easy to see the validity of Cooke's claim. Steiner, who is often called the "father of film music" and who is "central to the study of Hollywood's film music norms," typically wrote highly expressive melodies and almost exclusively applied tonal harmony (Gorbman 73). Korngold, whose mere nineteen film scores made an indelible impression on his contemporaries, composed in a similar stylistic vein (Cooke 93-4). Musicologist and film music historian Christopher Palmer also notes the conservatism of these composers' work: "Musically speaking Hollywood has always seemed to be something of an autonomous community, its composers generally cut off from the mainstreams [sic] of musical activity in other spheres" (*The Composer in Hollywood* 23). He continues:

> the 'real' world would have decried the music of Korngold…and Steiner as anachronistic and refused it a place, whereas the 'fantasy-world' of Hollywood not only wanted it but encouraged its procreation in vast quantities. 'Romantic' music, music of romance, of fantasy, dream, illusion: what [is] more logical than that it should find a final refuge in the real world's dream-factory? (*The Composer in Hollywood* 23)

Miklós Rózsa's scores for *films noir* of the 1940s, however, demonstrate that such generalizations are not entirely correct. I will show that Rózsa's music for *The Lost Weekend* (Paramount, 1945), *The Killers* (Universal, 1946), *Brute Force* (Universal, 1947) and *The Naked City* (Universal, 1948) deviates from the romanticism of Steiner and Korngold and exhibits a more modernist quality. These scores replace expressive and developed melodies with fragmented motifs, tonal harmony with dissonance, and conventional beats with aggressive, "angular" (i.e. heavily accented) rhythms. Their contemporary flavor would have been completely at home in concert halls alongside works by Igor Stravinsky and Béla Bartók. Like the *films noir* themselves, Rózsa's music did not belong to the "'fantasy-world'" of which Palmer speaks. Rather, it attempted to portray doomed love instead of romance and harsh, gritty realism instead of fantasies, dreams and illusions. In the course of this thesis, it will become clear that Rózsa's *noir* scores are just as unconventional as the films' visual and narrative techniques.

Rózsa's harsh and aggressive style of this time are strikingly distinct from the scores he wrote before (for a series of action and adventure films) and after (namely for a string of MGM epics). For the most part, his other film music is harmonically and rhythmically less innovative. As we shall find, Rózsa's work for *films noir* closely resembles his own modernist music for the concert hall. Rózsa himself recognized this and felt that this was the only period in which his concert and film music, or his two "lives" as he called them, overlapped. This suggests that the composer was most comfortable while writing for *films noir*. These films, then, proved to be a perfect match for him: *Noir* did just as much for Rózsa as Rózsa did for *noir*.

Rózsa was not the only composer at the time to write in this modernist vein. Roy Webb and David Raksin also wrote some inventive scores for *films noir*. Webb, for instance, provided music with a "sophisticated harmonic language" (Cooke 115) for *Murder, My Sweet* (RKO Pictures, 1944), and Raksin composed a spare and acerbic score for *Force of Evil* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1948). However, it is Rózsa who "initiate[d] a modest modernist trend in film music that only came fully to the fore in the more adventurous work of composers such as Bernard Hermann and Leonard Rosenman in the following decade" (Cooke 110). The contemporary scores of Webb and Raksin, on the other hand, are not as influential. Prendergast writes of Raksin's work for *Force of Evil*, "[t]o say that the atonal quality of this score influenced similar scores of later years (such as Leonard Rosenman's serial score to *The Cobweb* [Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1955], for instance) is probably to overstate" (84). If all three composers wrote groundbreaking, modernist music, why is Rózsa's work seen to be influential when Webb's and Raksin's was not? One explanation is that Rózsa's scores, while initially creating tension among production personnel at the studios, eventually received a great deal of critical appreciation. As we will find, some of his *noir* projects earned him Oscar nominations.

In light of all of their innovations and influence, it is surprising that the majority of Rózsa's scores have not received proper critical attention. *Double Indemnity* (Paramount, 1944) is the exception. Royal S. Brown, in his *Overtones and Undertones: Reading Film Music*, devotes a portion of a chapter to this score. (This writing, which I will discuss below, greatly influenced my own approach to examining some of Rózsa's most important music for *film noir*.) Rózsa's other work of the period is only mentioned in passing, if at all, in other texts. Cooke allots just a paragraph for *The Lost Weekend*.

Palmer does precisely the same in a monograph on the composer's life and work. The two writers describe the general aesthetic of the score and highlight a couple of its themes, mainly focusing on the one that features the theremin. Palmer also has a paragraph on the music for *The Naked City*, in which he briefly mentions Rózsa's two themes. This passage, along with the one on *The Lost Weekend*, would later be recycled in Palmer's *The Composer in Hollywood*. Cooke, Palmer and Brown only devote a sentence or two to *The Killers*, *Brute Force* and a few of his other *noir* scores. Palmer is also the only writer to include excerpts of these film scores. (I have included these in this thesis. I notated all other excerpts.)

It should come as no surprise that the films themselves have received a significant amount of critical attention: As Robert Miklitsch writes in *Siren City: Sound and Source Music in Classic American Noir*, "[f]ilm noir…has been interpreted in terms of literary antecedents such as the detective novel…as well as through a glass darkly—which is to say, in terms of its expressionist graphics" (xiii). He continues, "the sound track of classic noir...has frequently been disregarded even by cineastes" (xiii). The scores for these films, then, particularly Rózsa's with their many innovative traits, demand further explication.

In order to appreciate the ground-breaking aspects of this body of work, it is necessary to examine the style and functions of the typical Classical Hollywood film score in greater detail. In her *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music*, Claudia Gorbman outlines the key principles of the "composition, mixing, and editing" of classical film music. She uses Steiner's work as a model due to the vast quantity of his scores and his influence:

I. *Invisibility*: the technical apparatus of nondiegetic music must not be visible.
II. "*Inaudibility*": Music is not meant to be heard consciously. As such it should subordinate itself to dialogue, to visuals—i.e., to the primary vehicles of the narrative.
III. *Signifier of emotion*: Soundtrack music may set specific moods and emphasize particular emotions suggested in the narrative (cf. #IV), but first and foremost, it is a signifier of emotion itself.
IV: *Narrative cueing*:
—*referential/narrative*: music gives referential and narrative cues, e.g., indicating point of view, supplying formal demarcations, and establishing setting or characters.
—*connotative*: music "interprets" and "illustrates" narrative events.
V. *Continuity*: music provides formal and rhythmic continuity—between shots, in transitions between scenes, by filling "gaps."
VI. *Unity*: via repetition and variation of musical material and instrumentation, music aids in the construction of formal and narrative unity.
VII. A given film score may violate any of the principles above, providing the violation is at the service of the other principles (Gorbman 73).

It is fitting that "invisibility" and "inaudibility" are two of the chief tendencies of the Classical Hollywood film score. These principles mirror the invisibility of that cinema's overall approach to style and narration (Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson 25; Gorbman 73-4). In addition, editing tends to be "seamless" and "camerawork 'subordinated to the fluid thought of the dramatic action'" (Bordwell et al. 24, quoting Krows 168-9). This parallels the "inaudibility" of these scores; the music, too, must be "subordinated to the dramatic and emotional dictates of the film narrative" (Gorbman 76). In other words, just as we are not meant to made conscious of the processes of filmmaking (such as the editing, shot compositions, etc.), we are not meant to consciously hear the film music.

Composers make music inaudible in a number of ways: the duration of a musical cue corresponds to that of a scene, sequence, etc.; music typically "enters and exits on actions"; the mood of the score must match that of the scene; and the volume of the

music should not interfere with the dialogue (Gorbman 76-8). (When there is no dialogue, however, music is allowed to become more prominent. Similarly, the camerawork and/or editing typically becomes more "overt" in such moments; Bordwell et al. 34.) Steiner firmly believed that film composers should strive to make their music as inaudible as possible: "[T]he most important thing about screen composing is the judgment involved in knowing when and where to place music—the location of music and when to start and stop." In his score for *The Big Sleep* (Warner Bros., 1946), for instance, Steiner inserts several such swells or sforzandos (sudden, loud attacks on a note or chord) after gunshots, screams, and other sudden, shocking events. Steiner also warned against embellishments or any kind of "decorative" orchestration that might draw attention to the score. He concludes his advice by stating, "[a] lot of composers make the mistake of thinking that the film is a platform for showing how clever they are. This is not the place for it" (as qtd. in *Film Score* 81).

Regarding Gorbman's third principle that film music is as a "signifier of emotion," we should recall that they key purpose of a classical score is, in Gorbman's words, "quick and efficient signification to a mass audience" (Gorbman 4). This helps to explain why Romantic composers such as Wagner and Strauss exerted such an influence on Classical Hollywood film music. Their music is full of memorable melodies and is emotionally expressive and tonal. Another possible explanation for their influence is that, while musical language had developed and had become dissonant and even atonal, Romantic and Neoromantic composers remained popular with concert audiences. Roy M. Prendergast offers a more compelling reason as to why Steiner, Korngold and other film composers of the time looked to Wagner, Strauss, Puccini and Verdi. He posits,

"[w]hen confronted with the kind of dramatic problems films presented to them, [they] merely looked (whether consciously or unconsciously is unimportant) to those composers who had, for the most part, solved almost identical problems in their operas" (39).

In their operas and other programmatic works, these late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century composers explored music's narrational possibilities, and they did this by drawing upon a number of techniques. Harmony and rhythm were used to emulate and complement the dramatic action on stage: If there was a great deal of movement, for instance, the tempo would quicken. Wagner also developed the idea of *unendliche melody* ("unending" or continuous melody, i.e. an uninterrupted flow of melodic material) and implemented leitmotifs, or "leading"/"guiding" musical phrases; other composers would follow his example and would utilize these techniques in their operas. Individual characters, characters' thoughts, and places, situations, and so forth were represented by these leitmotifs. Furthermore, music frequently underscored dialogue (Cooke 80).

All of these techniques guided Classical Hollywood film composers. In the typical score, they looked to the approach of *unendliche melodie* and their music was used to "flow continuously along with the action" (Bordwell et al. 33). This meant that composers would provide a substantial amount of music and that it featured several themes. Steiner, for instance, provided 192 minutes of music for *Gone with the Wind* (MGM, 1939); only thirty minutes of the film, then, are left unscored (Bazelon, qtd. in Brown 97). Brown also cites Michael Curtiz's *The Sea Hawk* (Warner Brothers, 1940) and reveals that Korngold was asked to score nearly 100 of the film's 128 minutes. This is an extreme example, but it is closer to the typical approach of using a nearly

continuous stream of music (Brown 97-8). A great deal of this music, as Gorbman highlights in her list of principles, aided in a film's continuity. It was used to smooth "discontinuities of editing within scenes or sequences," and it would also connect the gaps between scenes and sequences (Gorbman 89; Bordwell et al. 33).

In addition to being used for continuity purposes, much of the music was dedicated to narrative cueing. In particular, it was employed to designate point of view. Once again *The Sea Hawk* exemplifies this approach, and Brown finds that its score contains numerous leitmotifs. Through the course of the narrative, he explains, each motif becomes associated with a place, a situation, a thing, etc. (Brown 98). More often than not, though, they become associated with characters. There is a theme for Captain Thorpe (Errol Flynn), two for Doña Maria (Brenda Marshall), and one for Queen Elizabeth (Flora Robinson). That all of these leitmotifs are associated with characters should come as no surprise. As Caryl Flinn writes in her *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia, and Hollywood Film Music*, "[a]lthough Hollywood uses leitmotivs to designate significant places, situations, or dramatic themes, most are associated with specific characters" (26). Korngold's score is so rich with leitmotifs, in fact, that the majority of the musical material is constructed from them. The same can be said for many of the other scores of the time. As Steiner once remarked, "every character should have a theme…. Music aids audiences in keeping characters straight in their minds" ("Music in the Cinema" 4).

Gorbman is careful to emphasize that any principle she enumerates can be violated. She states, "certain conditions (the specificity of the text itself, the composer's personal style, the studio's practices of orchestrating, mixing, and editing, historical

factors) may require one principle to take precedence over another" (91). Even Steiner and Korngold would insert an occasional dissonance; in Steiner's score for *King Kong* (RKO Radio Pictures, 1933), one that "almost single-handedly marked the coming-of age-of nondiegetic film music," several dissonances appear, but these were seen to correspond to the "mood" of the film and were thus accepted (Cooke 88). But a violation could inspire controversy when a composer's "personal style," for instance, was deemed inappropriate by a studio.

Such is the case with Rózsa. Six years after composing his first film score (for *Knight Without Armour*; United Artists, 1937), his music generated a considerable amount of conflict within Paramount's music department. This was an especially unfortunate circumstance for Rózsa, as his new score at the time—for Billy Wilder's *Five Graves to Cairo* (Paramount, 1943)—was his first "real Hollywood engagement in a major studio" *(Double Life* 131). The executive musical director, Louis R. Lipstone, disliked the fact that his score contained numerous dissonances. Wilder, who took an immediate liking to the composer and his music, thankfully supported Rózsa and allowed his score to be used (*Double Life* 131). (We will see in the second and third chapters how Rózsa was able to form another fortunate friendship with the producer Mark Hellinger, who, like Wilder, defended Rózsa's music to the studio.)

Double Indemnity, Rózsa's next project for Wilder, however, created even more discord within the studio. Rózsa recalls the incident in his autobiography, *Double Life* (1982):

> Enter now the figure of the Musical Director, who, when the time of the recording came, made no secret of the fact that he disliked the music intensely…. Later I was summoned to his office where, in the presence of his assistant, he reprimanded me for writing "Carnegie Hall" music which had no place in film.

> This I took as a compliment, but he assured me that it wasn't intended as such…. He was convinced that when the artistic director of the studio, Buddy de Sylva, heard the score it would be thrown out and all of us would suffer. (Rózsa 142)

"'Carnegie Hall' music" is a loaded phrase. Lipstone was undoubtedly referring to the dissonances in the score and its general modernist quality, which would make it resemble some of the classical music that was being played in concert halls at the time. In his analysis, Brown finds that there is only one fully-developed tonal theme in the entire score (127). The fact that there is only one theme makes Rózsa's work novel in light of the many found in the scores of Steiner, Korngold, etc. The rest of the music for *Double Indemnity* is dissonant and fragmented; Rózsa inserts motifs instead of themes, i.e. short musical ideas as opposed to melodies. Throughout, Rózsa eschews traditional approaches to rhythm as well by writing aggressive, accented lines. The majority of his material, then, draws attention to itself, therefore violating the principle of inaudibility. In addition, there is a general lack of music; Brown notes that, of the film's 107 minutes, only around fifty-four are scored (120). He argues that this scarcity augments the "coldness" of the film and highlights the first love scene with Walter Neff (Fred MacMurray) and Phyllis Dietrichson (Barbara Stanwyck), which Rózsa leaves untouched (128). Another unconventional aspect of the score is that it "largely avoids the use of leitmotifs per se" (Brown 121). Phyllis is the only character who is associated with a particular theme (Brown 127). Recall *The Sea Hawk*'s plentiful themes in general and leitmotifs in particular, and Rózsa's distinctive approach to composing is immediately apparent.

It is fitting that Rózsa's music for *Double Indemnity* should incite controversy, as it mirrors the production background of the film itself. This was a story about scams,

after all, and one that is about "the lengths human beings will go to in trying to get what we want" (Sikov 193). How would something like this easily pass through the censors? The Hays Office prevented earlier adaptations of the source novel, written by James M. Cain in 1935, from being filmed (Sikov 194). (Such parallel struggles—those to make/realize films, and those to create their scores, to evade censorship—will reoccur in the making Rózsa's later *noir* projects.)

It is also appropriate that Rózsa's score should be atypical and unconventional, as this is how *Double Indemnity*, along with a number of other films, were soon to be viewed by a group of French critics. These other titles include *The Maltese Falcon* (Warner Bros., 1941), *Laura* (20th Century Fox, 1944), *Murder, My Sweet*, *The Woman in the Window* (RKO Radio Pictures, 1944) and *The Lost Weekend*. One critic, Jean-Pierre Chartier, published an article in 1946 entitled "Les américains aussi font des films 'noirs'" ("Americans Also Make Films 'Noirs'"), in which he compared these American films to the "brooding *Le Quai des brumes* (*Port of Shadows*, Osso Films, 1938) and *Pépé le moko* (Paris Film, 1937), works which the French called *films noirs*" (Bordwell et al. 75). These so-called *films noir* that emerged from America in the early and mid-1940s depicted worlds of crime and menace in a frank way—a way that made many other Hollywood films that dealt with similar content look tame.

Film noir should not be classified as a genre; these films were not made by filmmakers who were consciously working within the confines of a category. Due to this and to the fact that it "now has a generic status it originally did not possess in the past," *film noir* is a hotly debated term (Neale 3). James Naremore, in his influential *More than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts*, goes so far as to claim that "film noir has no essential

characteristics" (5) and that "there has never been a single noir style—only a complicated series of unrelated motifs and practices (7). Despite such views, it is most frequently characterized in terms of its visuals and its narrative tendencies (Naremore 7). As Janey Place and Lowell Peterson state in their seminal article of 1974 entitled "Some Visual Motifs of *Film Noir*," "[n]early every attempt to define *film noir* has agreed that visual style is the consistent thread that unites the very diverse films that together compromise this phenomenon" (65). They argue that *noir* cinematography is defined overall by "the constant opposition of areas of light and dark" (67). When it comes to *mise-en-scène*, Place and Peterson write, the "compositional balance within the frame is often disruptive and unnerving" (68). The visual style of *film noir* serves to convey moods of "claustrophobia, paranoia, despair, and nihilism" (Place and Peterson 65).

Film noir has also been considered to be a term that points to the atypical characteristics of these works. As John Belton writes, "[w]hat struck French critics about film noir was its essential *difference* from earlier American films" (190; also qtd. in Neale 156). What were some of these differences? Bordwell et al. highlight four ways in which these films contrast with and challenge the typical Classical Hollywood product: (1) an "assault on psychological causality," featuring a protagonist who "often suffers internal conflict, 'with an existential awareness of his or her situation'" (quoting Silver and Ward 323); (2) a "challenge to the prominence of heterosexual romance," namely with the alluring but deceitful *femmes fatale*; (3) an "attack on the motivated happy ending," by the inclusion of a bleak resolution or a tacked-on, contrived happy ending; and (4) "a criticism of classical technique," which is accomplished by night-lighting, location shooting, and differing forms of narration such as subjective point-of-view,

voice-over, and flashbacks—and all of these devices "challenge the neutrality and 'invisibility' of classical style" (76). In the course of this paper, it will become clear that Rózsa's music fits perfectly into the fourth characteristic of *film noir*.

Each of the four films I examine challenges the Classical Hollywood cinema in the various ways Bordwell et al. discussed above. *The Lost Weekend*, *The Killers* and *Brute Force* each have protagonists that suffer internal conflict and have an "existential awareness of his…situation." Both *The Killers* and *Brute Force* feature *femmes fatale*: There is Kitty Collins (Ava Gardner) in the former and Flossie (Anita Colby) in the latter. *The Killers* and particularly *Brute Force* have bleak endings, and while the resolution in *The Lost Weekend* may be happy, it is sudden and could thus be interpreted as "tacked-on." The "critique of classical film" occurs in all of the films in several different ways. *The Lost Weekend* and *The Naked City* contain several sequences that were shot on location; according to James Sanders, the latter film, for instance, was shot on 107 different locations in New York City. *The Naked City* also has self-conscious voice-over narration that is directed at the audience. And all of the films contain flashbacks and emphasize subjective points of view. (It should be noted that each of them, like all *films noir*, is also transgeneric. *The Lost Weekend*, for instance, is also thought of as a "social problem" film, while *The Naked City* is also considered to be a documentary police thriller or a police procedural; Borde and Chaumeton, qtd. in Neale 259-261). Most significantly for our purposes, all of them feature scores that challenge the "neutrality and 'invisibility' of the classical style."

Richard R. Ness, in his article "A Lotta Night Music: The Sound of *Film Noir*," argues, "[j]ust has 1940s *noir* films represented a challenge to the security of home and

family, their musical scores defied the emphasis on tonality common in classical Hollywood scoring practices" (52). (Ness focuses on the scores for *Laura* and *Murder, My Sweet*.) If *film noir* is a body of work that was and is characterized by its difference from other Hollywood films of the time, many of its scores—and in this case, Rózsa's in particular—work to reinforce that difference. Rózsa's music, again, can be seen as a criticism of classical technique. Indeed, Cooke states that his projects after *Double Indemnity*—referring to *The Lost Weekend*, *The Killers*, *Brute Force* and *The Naked City*—"allowed Rózsa to develop his personal and refined brand of musical brutality" (112). Yet Cooke does not explain the "how." Nor has any other scholar of film music. My thesis works, in part, to address that oversight.

"The Official 'Voice' of Dipsomania": The Music for *The Lost Weekend*

Born in Budapest, Hungary in 1907, Rózsa grew up loving his country's folk music. He also developed a keen interest in Bartók and Kodály, two modernist Hungarian composers who incorporated Eastern European folk music into their compositions. However much he admired their music, he felt that their "ways and methods were not for him" (*Miklós Rózsa* 2). He then moved to Leipzig to study under Hermann Grabner, a former student of Max Reger—a composer who was greatly indebted to Beethoven and Brahms. Rózsa's early compositions accordingly reflected these influences. However, it was not until 1934, after hearing Arthur Honegger's music for *Les Misérables* (Pathé-Natan, 1934), that Rózsa considered film scoring. He realized then that "serious music [i.e. concert music] would never sustain him" (Darby and Du Bois 309). In the hopes of establishing himself as a film composer, he moved to London where he started working for Alexander and Zoltan Korda, who incidentally were also Hungarian (Darby and Du Bois 309).

For the six years after *Knight Without Armour*, Rózsa scored several adventure and fantasy films, including *The Four Feathers* (United Artists, 1939), *The Thief of Bagdad* (United Artists, 1940) and *Jungle Book* (Alexander Korda Films/United Artists, 1942). He moved to Hollywood while work was being completed on *The Thief of Bagdad*, and he immediately began to intently listen to the music of his "new colleagues." He was "not impressed" with these Hollywood scores, as each one "sounded much the same" (*Double Life* 111). In a late interview with Brown (published in *Overtones and Undertones*), Rózsa states that he particularly did not care for Steiner's "melodic" and "popular-music sense" (273). In addition, he said that he "intensely

disliked" Steiner's tendency to write passages of mickey-mousing and added, "[o]ne of the reasons I did not want to come to Hollywood was that I thought that was what you had to do [there]" (Brown 273).

Fortunately for Rózsa, he met Billy Wilder, who supported his atypical style. Both *Five Graves to Cairo* and *Double Indemnity*, Rózsa's first projects for the director, were commercially successful (Sikov 192, 213). As part of *Double Indemnity*'s instant success, Rózsa's score was nominated for an Oscar (Sikov 213). In addition, Rózsa went on to write the music for the critically and commercially successful *A Song to Remember* (Columbia Pictures, 1945), a film about the life of Frédéric Chopin. Despite all of this, however, his score for Wilder's next film, *The Lost Weekend*, fared no better with Paramount's Louis Lipstone: "Once again the Musical Director kept calling my music too dissonant, too aggressive, too noticeable beneath the dialogue…" (*Double Life* 148). In other words, for Lipstone, this was another batch of "Carnegie Hall" music. Hearing this music today, it is difficult to imagine why Lipstone had such a reaction; there are, as we shall find, a few moments of striking lyricism in the score. But we must not be too quick to dismiss Lipstone's words, as he is not completely off the mark: Although I will show that it is rarely "noticeable beneath the dialogue," Rózsa's music for *The Lost Weekend* also contains numerous instances of both dissonance and rhythmically aggressive writing. Once again, Rózsa was exploring new sounds for a Hollywood film score.

Although Lipstone could not have known it at the time, *The Lost Weekend* was in fact, as Tony Thomas says, "a film saved by its score" ("Rózsa Noir" 17). Soon after the shooting wrapped, the film was shown to a preview audience. The filmmakers used

temporary soundtrack, and Rózsa describes it as "some jazzy xylophonic Gershwinesque music" (*Double Life* 148). Imagine hearing, á la *Manhattan* (United Artists, 1979), *Rhapsody in Blue* during the opening shots of *The Lost Weekend*, when the New York skyline is shown. Such music would lead one to think that the film would maintain this light tone, and this is exactly what the test audience thought. When this music continued to play as Don Birnam (Ray Milland), a writer and alcoholic, reached for his whiskey bottle that he has hanging from his apartment window, the audience burst out with laughter. However, as the film became more serious, the laughter stopped and soon people were walking out (*Double Life* 148). At the end, there was no applause, and, according to Ed Sikov, many people wrote on their cards that they were repulsed by what they saw. The day after the screening, there was talk of shelving the film. Wilder and his co-screenwriter Charles Brackett could not see (or hear) the source of the problem. They knew that the music was temporary, whereas the audience did not. They also knew that "the audience laughed when they weren't supposed to, then they got bored and confused…" (Sikov 231).

Rózsa, who attended the screening, had the advantage of having a detached perspective in the matter, and he immediately recognized that the temporary soundtrack was the cause of the trouble. As Rózsa states in his autobiography, he tried to explain this to Brackett, but the latter was not completely convinced. Nevertheless, he told Rózsa to "go ahead and do what [he] felt was right" (*Double Life* 148). Wilder, too, permitted him to have a great deal of freedom with the score, and he was quick to realize that the film needed "strong support" from the composer (Behlmer 37). It is only fitting that his film, the first to openly and directly dramatize the subject of alcoholism, would have a

score that did not sugarcoat the material. If Wilder was going to depict Don's state as realistically as possible, Rózsa could not generate conventional music.

Rózsa took great advantage of the freedom he was offered, and he composed a highly dramatic score—one, again, that was full of new and sometimes harsh sounds. The most obviously novel sounds came from the theremin. The instrument, which was patented by Leon Theremin in 1928, was still relatively unknown in the United States at the time Rózsa was scoring *The Lost Weekend*. It had first been used in Hollywood in 1944, when Robert Dolan incorporated it in his score for *Lady in the Dark* (Paramount Pictures; incidentally, the film also stars Ray Milland). But it was not until Rózsa wrote the score for *Spellbound* (Selznick International/United Artists, 1945) that the theremin was prominently featured. He had a difficult time convincing both its director, Alfred Hitchcock, and David O. Selznick, the film's producer, that this instrument would be fitting to represent the mental instability and paranoia of John Ballantine/Dr. Anthony Edwardes (Gregory Peck). They had never heard of the instrument, and they "weren't quite sure whether you ate it or took it for headaches" (*Double Life* 146).

While *Spellbound* was filmed first, it was released after *The Lost Weekend*; the former had its wide release in December, whereas the latter was released in November. This made for two problematic situations: The first was that Selznick was angered when he learned that Rózsa had used the instrument in *The Lost Weekend*, as he apparently thought he had a "monopoly" on it because of its usage in *Spellbound*; the second was that, at the time Rózsa was scoring *The Lost Weekend*, most people had not heard or even heard of the theremin (*Double Life* 148). When the score was played for Lipstone, he said that he did not want it to have such effects (Behlmer 38). His "Carnegie Hall"

criticism comes to mind once more, for while the instrument was practically new to film music, it had been used in concert works by such avant-garde composers as Edgard Varese and Charles Ives, whose styles were a far cry from the music of Steiner, Korngold, and other prominent composers working in Hollywood. Rózsa's usage of the theremin must be considered in this light, as it exposes just how daring and imaginative he was in incorporating novel approaches.

Wilder thankfully came to Rózsa's aid, as he had done with his previous two films, and he convinced Lipstone that the instrument should be retained in the score. Rózsa, too, was firm, and he knew early on why he wanted to use it. Comparing it to how he had used it in *Spellbound*, he said that he wanted to employ it again "because it's the same kind of supernatural force. This is alcoholism, which [the character] cannot resist" (Behlmer 38). The theremin is cued whenever Don has an urge to drink and is overpowered by his craving. As Rózsa puts it, the theremin became "the official 'voice' of dipsomania" (*Double Life* 148). It is initially heard at the beginning of the film, when we first see Don. He does not say a word, but he does not have to: We can discern from his facial expression that he is fixated on the bottle that is dangling from the window of his apartment. As he looks down at it, the "Alcohol Theme" is cued, and the theremin has the melody.

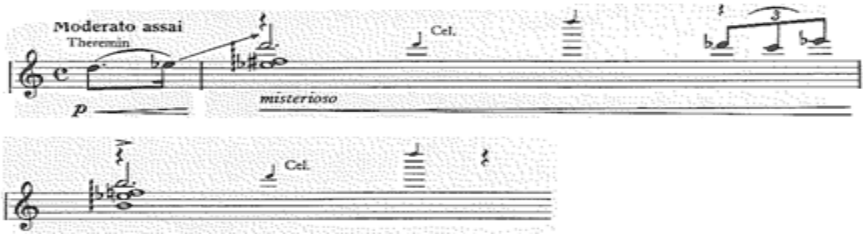

Fig. 1. The "Alcohol Theme." Christopher Palmer. *Miklós Rózsa* (London: Breiktkopf & Härtel, 1975) 58.

The music fades as he and his brother, Wick (Phillip Terry), begin to talk. It is heard again as soon as Wick and Don's girlfriend, Helen (Jane Wyman), leave the apartment after having discovered the bottle outside his window and taking it away. As Don is left alone for the first time in the film, he is free to look for any hidden alcohol in the apartment. During this sequence, there is an added desperation to Don's search, and the music portrays it fittingly: Under the theremin, there is now a rolling *ostinato* (a phrase that is repeated in the same voice), which is played by the woodwinds.

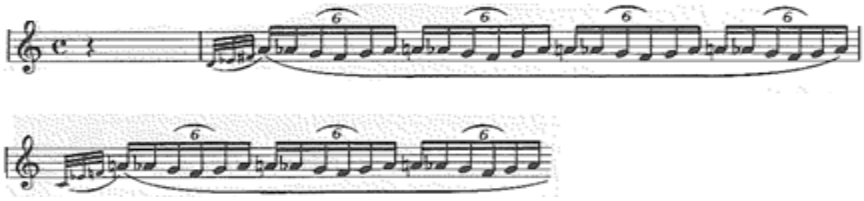

Fig. 2. Woodwind *Ostinato*. Christopher Palmer. *Miklós Rózsa* (London: Breiktkopf & Härtel, 1975) 58.

A few sequences later, Don is in the bar, and he asks the bartender, Nat (Howard Da Silva), for a drink. As the full shot glass looms before him, he hesitates; Don knows that once he takes that first taste, there will be no end to his drinking. The "Alcohol Theme" appears once more, but it stops as soon as he downs the shot in one gulp. A descending melody is played by a solo violin to represent his fall. As Cooke points out, it is significant that the theremin falls silent at this point, as Don's craving has been satisfied, if only temporarily (113).

Don becomes increasingly desperate as the film goes on, and at each stage the "Alcohol Theme" played by the theremin and orchestra reflects this. In Palmer's words, "the theremin twists and turns it chromatically so as to suggest a loss of equilibrium, and variations and elaborations on this insidious motif grow to control the score, just as Birnam's passion for liquor controls him" (*The Composer in Hollywood* 199). The scene

in which this theme is heard in its most frantic and loudest guise is when Don is attempting to pawn his typewriter in one of the shops on Third Avenue. By the time he has realized that all of the pawn shops are closed, he has walked a great distance. This sequence was filmed on location, and John Seitz's camera portrays all of the grittiness of the city and shows how sickly Don has become. Rózsa's music, too, captures Don's ill appearance at this point, but whereas Seitz's camera reveals the external, Rózsa's music depicts the internal. Palmer states, "the music intensifies both what is clearly visible on the screen and what is not: it is at one and the same time illustrative and interpretive" (*Miklós Rózsa* 32). Once more, there is no dialogue in this sequence; nor is there any voice-over narration. Voice-over actually never appears in the entire film as there is little question at any point as to what is going on in Don's mind. This exemplifies the claim of Gorbman and Bordwell et. al that music serves to reinforce subjectivity. Representing Don's psychological states is Rózsa's greatest accomplishments with this score, and it is good instance of one of Rózsa's ideas in practice: In his 1946 piece "The Cinderella of the Cinema," he wrote, "[t]he most important function of music in films, then, is not to illustrate the picture but to complete its psychological effect" (17). It is little wonder that, when Brackett heard the first draft of the score for the Third Avenue sequence, he wanted Rózsa to write a stronger version (*Double Life* 148).

Rózsa's usage of the theremin in relation to the orchestra is yet another example of his pioneering approach to film scoring. The theremin never has any solos; rather, it is treated as an extension of the standard Hollywood orchestra, which "seldom exceeded fifty players; thirty-five was about the average" (Prendergast 95). There was a simple reason why Rózsa had the theremin doubling the part of other instruments.

> I always put a [musician] next to [Hoffman, the theremin player] who played the same thing. I usually put an oboe, and he followed that. Otherwise, his intonation might have been completely off. But once he had a lead, he could follow the pitch, the steady pitch of an oboe. It was very close to the nasal sound of the theremin. (Behlmer 41)

The sound that is created by this style of orchestration also mirrors that of more modern compositions. In his *Turangalîla-Symphonie* (1949), Olivier Messiaen used the ondes Martenot, an electronic instrument with a timbre not unlike that of the theremin, in a comparable way (Ashby 370). This similarity to a work of modernist music written only a few years later confirms the fact that Rózsa was breaking new ground in this score.

There are numerous sequences in *The Lost Weekend* in which Don is alone, and in these he is left to wrestle with his cravings. The emphasis in these scenes is on his psychological state, and the music is, again, one of the primary means through which his thoughts are portrayed. Due to these factors, there is a substantial amount of music in this film. Around an hour of *The Lost Weekend*'s 101 minutes contain music. While the score is not nearly as sparse as some of Rózsa's others, including *Double Indemnity* and especially *The Killers*, it does not approach the length of *The Sea Hawk*'s, or Franz Waxman's music for *Rebecca* (United Artists, 1940); of the latter films' 130 minutes, all but ten were scored (Ness 54). For *The Lost Weekend*, there are twenty-two cues, including three diegetic tracks. The longest cues by far are for the scenes in which Don is alone: The Third Avenue sequence, the hospital sequence with Don's escape, and the "bat and mouse" hallucination are each over six minutes long. The longest periods without music, on the other hand, come when there is dialogue; the scene at the beginning of the film, when Don is talking to Wick and Helen, lasts for six minutes and not a second of it is scored. The fact that Rózsa left many of the dialogue sequences

without music makes one question what Lipstone meant when he said that the score was "too noticeable beneath the dialogue."

Like the one for *Double Indemnity*, the score for *The Lost Weekend* departs from the standard because it has very few themes. In addition to the "Alcohol Theme," there are four others, but only two of these are heard with great regularity. The first of these recurrent melodies is the opening theme that is heard during the credits. It is stark and in a minor key, not unlike the opening theme from *Double Indemnity*. Palmer writes that it embraces the tragedy of the drama and that there is "no synthetic Rachmaninov or Delius here but a cynical hardness of outline (note the preponderance of the interval of the fourth) and harsh chromium-plated scoring to match" (*Miklós Rózsa* 31-2).

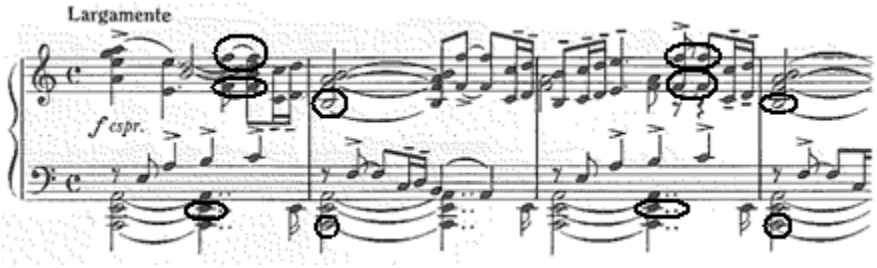

Fig. 3. Dissonances. Christopher Palmer. *Miklós Rózsa* (London: Breiktkopf & Härtel, 1975) 58.

Lipstone's complaint about the dissonances of the score is worth mentioning in the context of this theme. The Fs and the Es in the first and third measures above create somewhat of a clash due to the fact that they are only a half-step apart, but it is in the second and fourth measures that the more noticeable dissonances are heard: The B and C generate another dissonance, and this chord is sustained for three and-a-half beats. There is therefore ample time for this discord to draw attention to itself and to make this music audible. The fact that the opening theme is as austere as it is was certainly enough to

irritate Lipstone, but the added dissonances ensured that Rózsa would be hearing from him.

Like the "Alcohol Theme," it is heard several times throughout the film. One of the opening theme's most significant cues comes during the Third Avenue sequence, when it is heard alternating with the "Alcohol Theme." Again, music is played continuously during this scene, and both themes crescendo as it progresses. The opening theme is heard when Don is first shown walking the street, typewriter in hand, and in this context it sounds akin to a *marche funèbre* : The pacing of the music matches that of his steps. (Compare this to the music during the opening credit sequence of *Double Indemnity*, during which we see the silhouette of a man—is it Walter? is it Mr. Dietrichson?—who trudges along to a dirge-like theme.) The strings play the melody, while the brasses have the countermelody. As the music crescendos, the orchestration becomes denser; low strings and brass are added as the scene goes on. It is noteworthy that the "Alcohol Theme" alternates with this theme during this sequence, and one gets the sense that these two melodies in some way reinforce each other: The opening theme, with its funereal overtones, is inarguably tragic, and it swells after the "Alcohol Theme" appears. Conversely, the "Alcohol Theme" expands after it is heard in alongside the opening theme. The theremin itself will never be heard at a louder dynamic, and it is doubtful that it could get any louder at all. It is fascinating that Rózsa would develop these two themes so extensively when they are juxtaposed. Interpreted in this light, the music may be heard as a commentary on the downward spiral that Don faces: The more he drinks, the bleaker his condition gets; the bleaker his condition gets, the more he drinks.

The last regularly-cued theme of the film is a love theme, and this is the only recurrent theme that is in the major. It is first played when Wick and Helen are outside of the apartment. He has decided to give up on Don, and he tells her, "I'll give you a lift as far as Grand Central." "No thanks. I'm going to wait here," she says. At this, a soft but fully-developed version of the love theme is heard on the midrange strings.

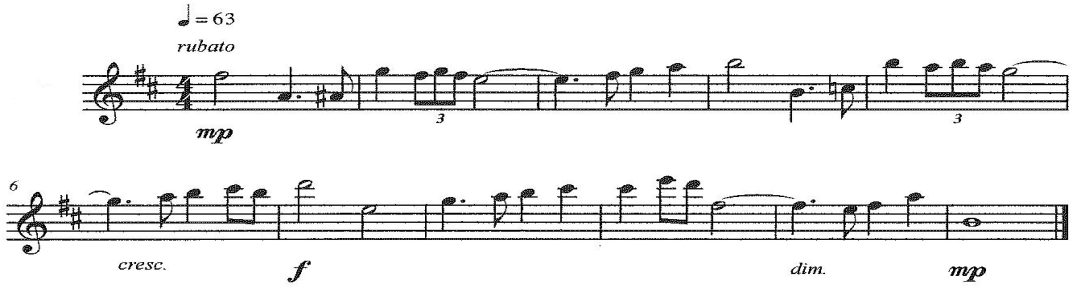

Fig. 4. The love theme.

The theme is a leitmotif for Don's and Helen's love for each other; heard here, it also signifies her hope that he will improve. The next time it is cued is in a flashback, in which Don recounts to Nat, the bartender, how he and Helen first met. Nat continues to listen to yet another story; this time, Don is recounting how he was going to meet Helen's parents. The love theme is cued at the beginning of this flashback as well. The fact that the theme is tied to flashbacks in this manner brings to mind what Flinn said of how music can function in *film noir*: "music signals [a] sense of lost pleasure and stability" (117). It is not until the end of the film, after Don drops his cigarette into the glass of whiskey thereby signifying his recovery, that this theme is heard prominently in the present of the story. This is when it is played at its fullest in terms of dynamics and the general level of expression.

A theme that is given only two cues (at least in its original guise) is the one that is heard at the beginning and end of the film as we see the New York skyline. Like the love

theme, it is in the major, and the strings have the melody while the French horns have the countermelody. Palmer writes that this is poignantly lyrical music and that it has a "feeling of spaciousness" (*Miklós Rózsa* 32). The combination of horns and strings is highly reminiscent of the Neoromanticism of Richard Strauss; this kind of orchestration can be found in many of his numerous orchestral works and operas (Darby and Du Bois 339). Such scoring stands out when it is juxtaposed with the darker, more abrasive opening theme, but it is a reminder that Rózsa, while writing his "Carnegie Hall" music, does not completely turn his back on tradition. But this Straussian moment does not last for long. When the camera zooms in on his apartment, the loss of spaciousness is reflected in the music: The music shifts to the minor in order to set the stage for the theremin in the "Alcohol Theme."

The final theme to mention is cued in only three sequences, and its appearance is brief within each of those. It is first heard when Don wakes up the morning after he get kicked out of Harry and Joe's bar. As the camera tracks away from his eye, which had been shown in an extreme close-up, the trombones and horns have the melody while the double basses play sluggishly punctuated dotted rhythms. (Note its striking similarity to John Williams's "Rebel Fanfare" from *Star Wars*, which is namely featured in *A New Hope*; 20th Century Fox, 1977.)

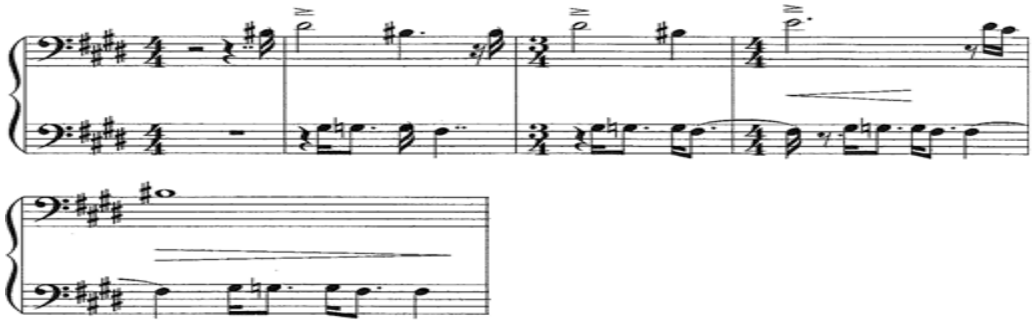

Fig. 5. Dotted Rhythms.

It is worth asking why Rózsa introduced a new theme an hour into the film, which is in itself a highly unusual act; due to its late entrance, it stands out in a score that already contains so few themes. It is significant that it is heard on this particular morning in the story, which is immediately before Don takes his anguished walk down Third Avenue. By introducing such a theme here, it is almost as if Rózsa were highlighting the fact that, at this point in time, Don's desperation has reached a new level.

This, along with the opening theme, shows just how much Rózsa was influenced by modernist composers. In particular, these themes show an affinity with the music of Bartók. Cooke highlights the fact that his influence can be sensed in Rózsa's use of "pulsating ostinati, dissonant chords derived from octatonic scores, snappy dotted and Lombard rhythms inspired by Hungarian folk music…and saturated chromaticism" (112). The "pulsating" ostinati and dotted rhythms are evident in the *Star-Wars*-like subject, whereas the opening theme is full of dissonant chords and saturated chromaticism. The "Alcohol Theme" is also highly chromatic (meaning that it uses notes of which the standard seven-note diatonic scales do not consist, thus expanding the limits of tonality). Robert Nelson noted this in his 1946 article "Film Music: Color or Line?" as he was commenting on the theme's modern sound: "…the amorphous chromaticism of the melody fits in completely with the tonal indefiniteness of the harmony, and thus reinforces rather than reduces the ambiguity of key" (60). Lipstone, then, was not the only critic at the time to notice Rózsa's pioneering approach to film scoring.

Rózsa himself was fully aware of the fact that his film scores of the mid-1940s were atypical when compared to other those for many other Hollywood films. In his 1975 monograph, Palmer quotes Rózsa:

> The general idiom was conservative and meretricious in the extreme-diluted Rachmaninov and Broadway. In *Double Indemnity* I introduced certain asperities of rhythm and harmony which wouldn't have caused anyone familiar with the serious musical scene to bat an eyelid, but which did cause consternation in certain musical quarters in Hollywood. (*Miklós Rózsa* 5)

The same, of course, applies to his score for *The Lost Weekend*. While his use of dissonance, chromaticism, grinding ostinati, etc. was not modernist when compared to works for the concert hall of the period, it was when compared to the scores of, say, Korngold or Steiner. So when it is said that Rózsa's scores for *The Lost Weekend* and other *films noir* are modernist, it should be kept in mind that this description needs to be qualified and placed in the context of their time.

Rózsa also noted the more modern qualities of these scores. Thomas writes, "[Rózsa] always claimed that…if any aspect of his movie scoring might be allied to his concert and chamber works, it might be the scores he wrote for films noir" ("Rózsa Noir" 17). Rózsa felt that, throughout his career, he was leading a "double life" (the title of his autobiography, from 1947 George Cukor film he scored): One side of his musical personality could be found in his concert works, while his other personality was manifested in his film scores. (Many film composers did not—and do not—face such a split. As Thomas states, Rózsa is one of the few composers who has "been able to accomplish…a distinguished and highly profitable career writing film scores while also writing music for the concert hall and having it frequently performed and recorded; *Music for the Movies* 91.) It is significant, then, that he felt that the one time these two "lives" overlapped was in his scores for films like *Double Indemnity*, *The Lost Weekend*, etc. He felt that his work on films such as these challenged and engaged him more due to their darkly dramatic nature ("Rózsa Noir" 17). The work that these two *films noir*

resemble is the *Concerto for Strings* of 1943. Not only was this piece written immediately before these two film scores, but it contains the same kind of uncompromising tones that can be found in, say, the opening themes in both *Double Indemnity* and *The Lost Weekend*. Take the theme from the *Concerto*'s first movement:

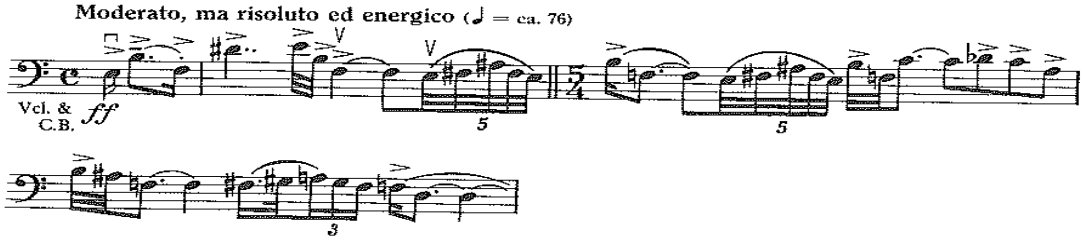

Fig. 6. From *Concerto for Strings*. Christopher Palmer. *Miklós Rózsa* (London: Breiktkopf & Härtel, 1975) 50.

Palmer describes this passage as "fierce, red-raw, angry music, stricken at times with an almost uncontrollable anguish" and he draws particular attention to the theme's "sharp-etched rhythms and jagged phrase-structure" (*Miklós Rózsa* 18). Palmer says that there is an autobiographical element to this, and he argues that Rózsa was perhaps angry and frustrated due to fact that, at this time, he was living in a state of comparative comfort while he knew that his homeland was being torn "asunder by warfare" (*Miklós Rózsa* 18). Whatever the source of his newly-adopted musical style was, it carried over into these two scores.

There is a cue in *The Lost Weekend* when the middle and low strings and brass have a figure that is strikingly similar to the Concerto's first movement theme. It appears the morning after Don has escaped from the hospital. He is wandering around in a stolen coat, and he comes up to a liquor store. The owner has just arrived to open it, and Don aggressively says that he wants a bottle of whiskey. During this entire scene, the strings and muted brass play dissonant chords and sharp, aggressive rhythms. The fact that this

music continues to play under the dialogue could be something that Lipstone had in mind when he said that it was "too noticeable beneath the dialogue." But this is one of the only such examples in the film when music of this nature plays under the dialogue, and it is a brief scene at that.

While there are several instances of modernist harmonies and rhythms—whether subordinate to the dialogue or not—some critics, such as William Darby and Jack Du Bois, have argued that Rózsa's film scores are not as revolutionary as it is often thought. Although they acknowledge his use of "sharp, jagged" rhythms, they write, "Rózsa's orchestration is almost uniformly big and full-blown. He does not exhibit any penchant for unusual or small combinations or for the continuous highlighting of solo instruments" (339). Ness, for instance, points to the fact that one innovative aspect of many scores for *films noir* was that there was a "move toward smaller ensembles and selective instrumentation rather than a full symphonic orchestra" (54). Darby and Du Bois also argue that Rózsa's writing for film is conventional in that it evidences "[t]he late romantic sound of Richard Strauss, with a love of French horns and sweeping strings" (339). Rózsa's "love of French horns and sweeping strings," again, can be heard in such themes as the one that is played during the opening and closing skyline shots. Broad and rich string lines are also used for the love theme. But their assertion that such instances are "much in evidence" needs to be clarified. What they say about Rózsa's orchestration—that he "does not exhibit any penchant for unusual or small combinations"—also needs to be called into question.

While several cues in the score are written for full orchestra, there are noteworthy solos and examples of unusual writing for smaller sections of the orchestra. The scene

that comes to mind is the one in which Don sits down at the typewriter in an attempt to write his autobiographical novel. At first, the music is in the major as he types "To Helen with All My Love" and is still hopeful about getting to his work. As soon as he has typed this, though, he has hit the first stumbling block: how to begin. He lights up a cigarette, wipes the sweat from his brow, and begins to pace around the room. A flute playing in the lower range has a chromatic melody, and low, muted brass accompany this scene. It is unusual to hear a flute play in this register, and the fact that the low brass has a "naggingly insistent" rhythm makes this music all the more striking (*Miklós Rózsa* 32). Then, as Don remembers that he has a hidden bottle somewhere in the apartment, the "Alcohol Theme" is cued, and this version has a "drunkenly distorted trumpet variant" (*Miklós Rózsa* 32). While they are passing moments in the score, these sections are nonetheless significant exceptions to Darby's and Du Bois's claim. In these cues, Rózsa proved that, in addition to his harmonic and rhythmic sense, his orchestration could be inventive as well. Of course, by claiming that he did not "exhibit any penchant for unusual" instrumental combinations, Darby and Du Bois overlooked Rózsa's usage of the theremin. Strauss, after all, never wrote for such an instrument.

Perhaps Palmer best characterized the coexistence of the traditional and the novel in Rózsa's *noir* scores: "in Hollywood films of the 1940s the expressive norm was still the standard symphony orchestra; though Rózsa, remaining within the confines of a glossy, basically 19th-century medium, produces from it a very 20th-century sound" (*The Composer in Hollywood* 202). While Rózsa's score for *The Lost Weekend* is conventional in some ways, it contains remarkable instances of a more modernist style of writing. There are moments of dissonance and writing that contains angular rhythms.

While a great deal of this is done with a "standard symphony orchestra," there is the frequent addition of the theremin. There are rich and sweeping melodies—ones that are unquestionably written in a late-Romantic idiom. What strikes one about this score, and the film it accompanies, though, is that they have it both ways: There are moments of tenderness, such as when Don is shown to actually respond to Helen's affection, but these cannot be isolated from the gritty reality that surrounds them. In Rózsa's scores for *The Killers* and *Brute Force*, projects on which he would work during the following two years, there are also a few lyrical passages in each, but we will find that, overall, his musical language became more spare and austere.

Enter Mark Hellinger: *The Killers* and *Brute Force*

Rózsa fared well in the 1945 Academy Awards: He received three Oscar nominations—one for *The Lost Weekend* and the other for *A Song to Remember*—and won for *Spellbound*. Despite all of his mounting success, however, Rózsa's music for *The Killers* generated the same amount of conflict that his previous *noir* scores had. Universal's Musical Director, Milton Schwarzwald, informed him that it "ran into a certain amount of heavy critical weather at the studio" (*Double Life* 152). It was accepted, though, because the film's producer, Mark Hellinger, had the final say in the matter. What was it about Rózsa's music for *The Killers* that caused opposition? Why, even after a couple of years of modernist, ground-breaking scores in the genre, would he still be met with this kind of response? We shall see that he pushed the envelope even further with his work for this film. The success of the two Wilder films was undoubtedly what allowed him to carry his "personal and refined brand of musical brutality" to new limits (Cooke 112). The amount of dissonances, aggressive rhythms, and the lack of music and themes in the score make his work in *Double Indemnity* and *The Lost Weekend* pale in comparison.

Due to the close working relationship and shared artistic values between Rózsa and Hellinger, which would develop over the course of *The Killers*, *Brute Force*, and *The Naked City*, it is worth briefly focusing on the producer and his involvement in these films. While *The Killers* is directed by German-born Robert Siodmak, Hellinger's authorial presence is just as significant—if not more so. Indeed, much of the film's publicity emphasized Hellinger's participation: In its pressbook, one reads, "'[w]hat do Mark Hellinger and Ernest Hemingway, producer and author of *The Killers*, have in

common? Answer: Both achieved fame as writers'" (Bishop 316). As a powerful independent producer, Hellinger was involved from the very beginning. He secured the rights for the Ernest Hemingway story on which the film is based, recruited some of the cast members and filmmakers, and worked out the budget (Bishop 312-3). In the hopes of lending the film a more realistic quality, Hellinger wanted "unknowns, or has-beens, or almost-wases" wherever possible, and he was not interested in even having a "pretty man" for the leading role (Bishop 313)

Siodmak and Hellinger's film is, like Rózsa's music, atypical when compared to many other Classical Hollywood films. Its structure, which is described by Jonathan Lethem as "a fractured puzzle of multiple narrations," has given the film the reputation as the *Citizen Kane* (RKO Pictures, 1941) of *noir*. (Much of its narrative consists of flashbacks, and in these we get several characters' backstories; the same, as we shall see, applies to *Brute Force*). Rózsa's music for this innovative work begins as soon as the Universal International logo appears. The first notes we hear would later become (without permission) the famous *Dragnet* (Mark VII Productions/Mark VII Limited, 1951-1959) theme. It is a four-note motif, an ostinato that is aggressively played by the low brass.

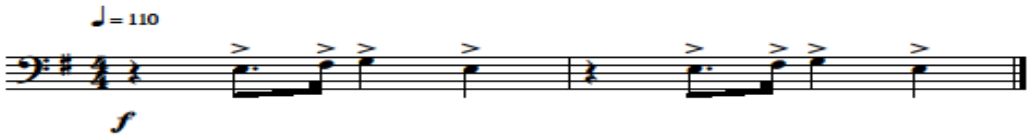

Fig. 7. Four-Note Motif.

The film then wastes no time in immersing us in a dark, shadowy world. The first images show two silhouetted figures driving along a rural road at night; their car lights are just barely bright enough to illuminate the city limits sign for the town that they are approaching. Accompanying all of this, Rózsa supplies a sustained chord, played by the

low brass, that gradually crescendos into the opening credits. The tone is certainly ominous and even funereal in its pacing (the bass drum keeps a slow, steady tempo). From this, too, we know that the score will continue Rózsa's modernist streak, as it is dissonant from the very first bar. This long-lasting chord gives way to a loud syncopated motif that is predominately scored for trumpets and percussion.

Fig. 8. Syncopated Motif.

The music is jarring after the sustained chord, and it cannot help but draw attention to itself. It is arguable that, due to the fact that this is during a credit sequence, this kind of writing would be permissible. As Bordwell et al. argue, these sequences are "highly self-conscious," standing somewhat apart from the film proper (26). But because this music reappears throughout the narrative, it shows that, once again, Rózsa is clearly violating the principle of inaudibility. Fitting for a film with this title, this is music that does not in the least subordinate itself to the visuals.

Such moments of brutality and dissonance are, again, the reason that his score was not well received by the studio. As we have seen, Rózsa was used to this kind of reaction and, to a certain extent, he would have known why he was eliciting these kinds of responses. He was well aware of the typical approach to scoring, particularly as it was practiced by Steiner (see Brown 273; *Miklós Rózsa* 5). In addition, there was a manual for film composers by Leonid Sabaneev that captured the contemporary philosophies of the discipline. (Gorbman draws on this to support the principle of "'inaudibility.'") It was called *Music for Film: A Handbook for Composers and Conductors*, and it was translated into English in 1935. In a key passage, its author states:

> In general, music should understand that in the cinema it should nearly always remain in the background: it is, so to speak, a tonal figuration, the "left hand" of the melody on the screen, and it is a bad business when this left hand begins to creep out into the foreground and obscure the melody. (22; also qtd. in Gorbman 76)

As Gorbman puts it, film-goers should be given what they have come for, which is a "story, not a concert" (76). Rózsa, with his dissonances and his angular writing, knowingly gave viewers a concert, and a modernist one at that.

But what a short concert it is. *The Killers* is around 103 minutes long, and only twenty-seven of those minutes are scored. It is remarkable that compared to his spare score for *Double Indemnity*, there is far less music. Rózsa had reached a new level of sparseness. There are only nineteen non-diegetic cues, and there is a substantial amount of time between many of them. Toward the beginning of the film, for instance, over ten minutes are left without music: After Swede (Burt Lancaster) is killed, Rózsa's score does not resume until the film's first flashback, when Swede's beneficiary and former landlord (Queenie Smith) recounts one of her memories of him. In between these two cues, there is a great deal of dialogue. Here is one way in which Rózsa did not deviate from the classical model, for, as Kalinak points out, "musical accompaniment to dialogue…was avoided" (93). Nearly all of the dialogue sequences in the film, in fact, are left unscored. No matter how innovative he was in certain ways, Rózsa did not break every rule or established approach.

There are, however, some strikingly dramatic sequences that are left without music. This is significant, due to the fact that "[c]omposers of the Hollywood film score were drawn almost compulsively to moments of heightened emotional expression" (Kalinak 87). The reason for this, Kalinak explains, is that such moments "afforded them

what they perceived to be the most direct access to the spectator" (87). While Rózsa does score a few such moments, a few stand out as exceptions. Kitty Collins, the *femme fatale*, has just been caught by Lt. Sam Lubinsky (Sam Levene) for stealing a piece of jewelry. Swede approaches them just as Sam is getting ready to take her into the station. In an attempt to cover for her, he says that he stole it and punches Sam in the face. At this, no non-diegetic music is cued; if this absence were not marked enough, the diegetic piano music stops. It is striking that such a pivotal moment—and indeed a surprising one at that, given that Sam and Swede had been close friends since their childhood—was given no music. If this were in a film scored by composers who followed the classical model, like Steiner or Korngold, one can almost be certain that it would have been accompanied by an orchestral swell.

Swede's funeral is the sequence that stands out the most for its glaring lack of music. Heightening the mood of the scene, Siodmak and his cinematographer, Elwood Bredell, shoot it in high-contrast black-and-white and have expressionistic clouds in the background. (It is shot day for night.) If all of this attention is devoted to the visual, one would guess that the aural, too, would be in the same stylistic vein, or that music would at least be heard quietly alongside the dialogue. Not so with Rózsa. He chooses to have his score—or lack thereof— match the innovative approach to the visuals in this scene. The silence here seems to sustain a certain emotional coldness that runs underneath this film (recalling Gorbman's comment that music is a "signifier of emotion"; 79.) This quality in the film in general, and in the music in particular, is apparent in other sequences, too, such as when Swede is shot. As the killers fire their guns, there is no music; this silence is accentuated by the fact that a dissonant chord, which had been seemingly held for an

eternity as Swede was awaiting his death, was abruptly cut off when the weapons sounded. But the silence is most keenly felt after the shots have been fired. A close-up captures Swede's last moments of life: We see his hand as it struggles to hold on to the bedrail before it soon goes limp. All the while, there is no music. We are left to confront the situation in all of its bare horror.

The cold nature of the film is augmented by the fact that almost none of the characters are designated by leitmotifs: If they had been given their own themes, the viewer might have felt closer to them. The lack of leitmotifs, again, makes this score contrast with many others written in the Classical Hollywood mode. These traditional scores used music in general and leitmotifs in particular to encourage identification (Gorbman 108). Gorbman also states that leitmotifs are employed to "create or emphasize a particular character's subjectivity" (83). Seen in this light, it is unsettling that the most obvious leitmotif in the score is one that is written for the killers themselves; they are associated with that famous four-note phrase. Played over the credit sequences, the theme is not heard again until toward the end of the film after investigator Jim Reardon (Edmond O'Brien) meets Kitty in front of the theater. As soon as the two killers appear, the phrase is cued.

There is only one other leitmotif in the score, and this one requires some elucidation as well. It is first heard toward the beginning of the film when Nick Adams (Phil Brown) alerts Swede about the killers' presence. He tries to save Swede by getting him to leave his boardinghouse room, but Swede refuses and says, "I'm through with all of that runnin' around." At this, a fragmented theme is cued for solo violin. This theme is not heard in its fullest form, however, until after Swede's funeral. After this scene, Jim

meets Charleston (Vince Barnett), who was once Swede's cellmate. Charleston reminisces about his time in prison with him, and this initiates a flashback. We see Swede lying in bed while Charleston, gazing out into the night sky, tells him some of what he knows of astronomy. Swede listens intently but then sits up holding a handkerchief. Just as this object comes into view, the solo violin theme is cued once more; its lyricism both captures and accentuates Swede's nostalgia.

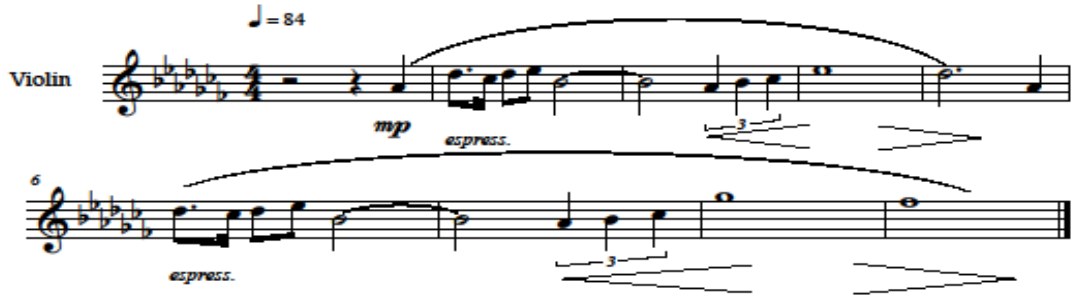

Fig. 9. Theme for Solo Violin.

Just what, or who, is this nostalgia all about? It was Kitty, his one and only *femme fatale*, who gave him that handkerchief, and it is she who he is dreaming about. As he remembers and longs for her, this is the music we hear. The fact that it is heard just before Swede is killed further points to his awareness that it was she who led him into the world of crime. The music, then, is tied to the past, to memory. This again recalls Flinn remark that music in *noir* can signal this "sense of lost pleasure and stability"—and in the case of its earlier usage, it heightens the sense of tragedy and resignation. She adds, "music is tied to the anterior moments in both [*film noir* and melodrama]. Previously known characters, places, and relationships have their individual leitmotivs" (117).

It is significant that Rózsa uses this melody: When Swede sees Kitty for the first time, this is the music that she is singing. Rózsa then took the sung phrase "The more I know of love, the less I know…" and transposed it for the violin. (The lyrics, written by

Jack Brooks, are derived from "The More I know of Love," the song that Rózsa wrote for the film.) This kind of phenomenon is occasionally found in music for *films noir*. Ness states, "[t]he music for *noir* films not only undermined the security of more conventional film scores through the incorporation of dissonance and atonality, but also through such destabilizing devices as the breakdown of traditional diegetic/nondiegetic distinctions…" (53). These distinctions are almost always clearly established in traditional film scores, but this is not the case with Rózsa's music for *The Killers*. There is yet another instance of blurred diegetic/non-diegetic boundaries, however, and it is even more pronounced.

Toward the end of the film, when Jim and Kitty are in the bar, a manic, jazzy piano figure is heard; this music, which is diegetic, continues to play throughout their conversation. Soon Kitty goes to the bathroom, and the camera pans away from her to the front door. We see the two killers enter, and it is at this point that the non-diegetic "killers" leitmotif is cued. All the while, the piano music can still be heard, and it is nearly as prominent as Rózsa's music. What is more, it is harmonized by the orchestral underlay. The effect of this harmonizing is fitting, in that it adds to the sense of apprehension and alarm. This particular overlapping of diegetic and non-diegetic music is arrestingly innovative. It caught the attention of Cooke, who writes that it is a "striking cue" (112). When the guns are fired, the piano music stops, and Rózsa's non-diegetic score takes over. The music that follows is, like much that has preceded it, thickly orchestrated and rife with jagged, syncopated rhythms.

After the police arrive, Jim realizes that Kitty has escaped. He and the police go to the home of Big Jim Colfax (Albert Dekker), the mastermind behind the robbery, knowing that Kitty will be there. When they enter, they find that Colfax has been fatally

wounded; Dum Dum Clarke (Jack Lambert), who was also involved in the robbery and who is now lying dead on the stairs, shot him. Kitty soon comes in and talks to Colfax. She tries to get him to tell the police that she did not have a part in the crime. "Kitty is innocent. Say it, Jim! It'll save me if you do." But it is too late: He is dead. She continues to shout, and loud, dissonant chords played by the brass are sounded. Music this piercing has hitherto not been heard in this soundtrack. Rózsa's score soon ends appropriately: The music, like the film itself with its fractured narrative, is groundbreaking until the close.

The Killers would go on to achieve both critical and financial success, thus catapulting Hellinger into the spotlight. As Pete Martin writes, "*The Killers* boosted Mark to a place in the Hollywood producer hierarchy" (16). In his biography of Hellinger, Jim Bishop, his friend and assistant at the *Daily Mirror*, adds, "[after the success of *The Killers*] Mark was now a bigger man than ever in Hollywood" and states that producers and executives discussed "'the Hellinger touch'" in a way that was reminiscent of how they mentioned the "'Lubitsch touch'" (318). Just what did this so-called "Hellinger touch" entail? Overall, it points to the realism of his films; the reason he was initially asked to be a producer, after all, was that Warner Bros. and then Universal wanted their crime films to have a greater sense of authenticity (Silver and Ursini). For *Brute Force*, Hellinger's next film, he wanted every element to be realistic.

While not credited, Hellinger, for instance, is the one who actually wrote the original story of *Brute Force*, and he based it on articles that he had read by prisoners. (It is for this reason that one must include Hellinger's name in almost any aesthetic description of the film, as he was thoroughly involved in the production from the very

beginning. He was, as Silver and Ursini state, a "hands-on producer," and he should be noted alongside Dassin as the film's "author.") He soon hired Richard Brooks to flesh the story out and then sent him to a penitentiary in Atlanta for two weeks. Hellinger did this so that Brooks could come to a better understanding about life in prison and could thus write more authentic dialogue (Silver and Ursini). The director, Jules Dassin, and his cinematographer, William Daniels (both of whom were also personally recruited by Hellinger), did their part to contribute to the film's realism as well. They did this in the Bazinian sense, as opposed to giving the film a documentary-like feel: While there are hardly any on-location shots, there are nevertheless several striking long takes that allow for a sense of ambiguity that the French critic admired.

The "Hellinger touch" might also refer to the raw violence in his films. The producer wanted to use the freedom he had gained from *The Killers* to make the film more shocking in terms of its brutality and its allegorical view of postwar American society. The desire for increased grittiness came with a price, however: He had to fight to retain his vision for the film. Joseph Breen, the head of the Production Code Administration (PCA), demanded that several changes be made to the script. For instance, he asked Hellinger to "take the greatest possible care" in depicting women, to tone down the language (this included omitting "For God's sake," which was to be spoken twice; "Mark Hellinger and Joseph Breen" 27-8), and above all to ensure that "every effort will be made to avoid any undue emphasis on brutality" ("Mark Hellinger and Joseph Breen" 28). While Hellinger did follow some of Breen's orders, much of the brutal violence remained. The "showing of policemen, guards, etc., dying at the hands of

criminals" is still in the film, and the work of Dassin and Daniels ensured that all of this is depicted in as frank a way as possible ("Mark Hellinger and Joseph Breen" 28).

A fascinating parallel arises when one compares Hellinger's experience as a producer and Rózsa's as a composer: Both had to defend their work in the light of some form of censorship. Despite the commercial success of the films that Rózsa scored, the musical directors, whether at Paramount or Universal, never warmed up to Rózsa's approach and continued to criticize what they perceived to be the unpleasant cues. Even after his experience with Rózsa on *The Killers*, Schwarzwald disliked the music for *Brute Force* and its "tough, stark" sound (*Double Life* 152). Hellinger thankfully "loved" it, and it was his opinion that mattered (*Double Life* 152). He knew that "tough, stark" music was a perfect match for the equally violent images and narrative content. No matter how much of a parallel exists, then, the difference between their experiences cannot be ignored: In the end, Rózsa's product was not altered, while Hellinger, having to argue with Breen on his own, was forced to make some concessions.

It will become clear that Rózsa's music greatly added to *Brute Force*'s realism and brutality. The film is sparsely scored, lending it a documentary-like feel, but the music used is frequently dissonant and á la "Carnegie Hall." All of this is in line with his work for the previous films. It is clear that, by this point, Rózsa was becoming comfortable with writing scores that were spare and harsh in equal measure. As the case is with *Double Indemnity* and *The Killers*, there are several dramatically charged moments that Rózsa does not score. However, Rózsa did not neglect all of the dramatic scenes; he punctuates many shocking events with rhythmically and harmonically austere cues. From this the question arises: Why score some of these moments while leaving

others untouched? And if the music here is remarkably similar to his other work for *films noir*, is there anything that makes his work for this film distinctive? Furthermore, how does the treatment of diegetic music compare to that of the previous films?

The first image of *Brute Force* is arresting: It is a low-angle shot of one of the Westgate Penitentiary guard towers; the sky above it is dark, and there is a heavy rain. (Rain, which captures the passage of time and which, as Silver and Ursini remind us, is iconic in *film noir*, continues to pour throughout the first several minutes of the film.) We then cut to a long shot of the prison, and cut again to a medium shot of the main gate—the gate that represents both freedom and the forces that keep the prisoners inside. The music, which is firmly rooted in a minor key, is appropriately grim.

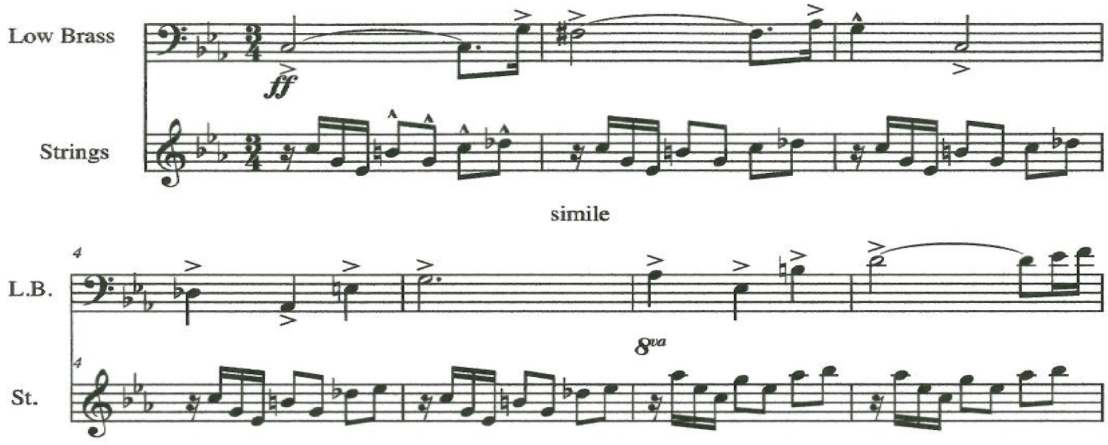

Fig. 10. Opening Theme.

Palmer writes that the opening cue is "very typical" for Rózsa: "jagged asymmetrical rhythms, sharp accents, pulsating ostinati, bitonal harmony, flurried snatches of chromatic or modal theme[s], dense-packed iron-clad textures, an obsessive use of quick, nervous repetitive figures and of sequence" (*Miklós Rózsa* 33). Indeed, all of these characteristics align it with the preludes to *The Killers* and *A Double Life* (Universal International Pictures, 1947); those have equally biting and aggressive rhythms. The

"dense-packed iron-clad textures" further call to mind the opening cues for *Double Indemnity* and *The Lost Weekend*. (However, the pulse of these latter films' cues are, again, more funereal and thus less "jagged.") Similarly, Brown notes that the prelude to *Brute Force* features "fragmented, obsessively repeated melodic shards that replace anything resembling developed themes" (119-20). Once again, we see that Rózsa was committed to bypassing the romanticism and neo-romanticism of Steiner and Korngold in favor of a more modernist musical language. This aggressive music continues to play throughout the lengthy credit sequence.

The cue that begins immediately after the opening credits deserves attention. However brief it may be (it is forty-seven seconds long), a great deal can be gleaned from it. It is a variant of the main theme from *Double Indemnity*. The repeated sixteenth-note figure is there, along with the funereal sound, which is now provided by the timpani and low brass.

Fig. 11. Variant of Main Theme from *Double Indemnity*.

Whenever this theme appeared in Wilder's film, it represented a sense of fatalism and determinism: This *marche funèbre*-like music is heard at the beginning, but it reappears at the end of the film after Walter, who was shot by Phyllis, slumps to the ground. The fact that it is reprised at this point makes the score more than cyclical: it gives the impression that Walter's fate was sealed from the very start—that there was no escape. Keeping all of this in mind, it is fitting that Rózsa decides to adapt this theme for the opening of *Brute Force*. A sense of fatalism permeates *Brute Force* from the beginning:

The establishing shots with all of the heavy rain speak to this, as does the prominence of the main gate, draw bridge and high walls. But as the film progresses, and as we learn more of Munsey's character, the sense of pessimism grows. Rózsa's choice to include this particular music, then, is extremely appropriate.

After this brief cue, there are over twenty-seven minutes without any non-diegetic music. While there is a great deal of dialogue during this time—we are introduced to all of the central characters within the first thirty minutes, after all—there are also many instances of silence: Prisoners walk silently into their cells; the staff go about their duties without saying a word; and Rózsa lets it all simply play out. These moments of silence, along with several marked transitions including fade-outs that also occur without musical accompaniment, slow the passage of time and work to "reinforce the monotony" of prison life (Silver and Ursini). Furthermore, these twenty-seven minutes of non-diegetic silence immerse us in Hellinger's and Dassin's realistic, documentary-like aesthetic. The scene in which Wilson (James O'Rear) is killed perfectly and shockingly demonstrates this approach.

The protagonist Joe Collins (Burt Lancaster), a tough and determined prisoner, has planned to have his fellow inmate Wilson killed. Joe knows that his recent long stretch in solitary confinement occurred because Wilson planted a knife on him. What he does not know, however, is that Captain Munsey (Hume Cronyn), the manipulative and ill-intentioned chief of security, pressured Wilson to plant it. Joe's plan is well organized: While he is in the doctor's office, a group of prisoners carry out the act in the machine shop; because the doctor (Art Smith) is his witness, Joe can in no way be blamed for Wilson's death. (The murder is set to take place at 10:30. Joe asks the doctor

for the time to ensure that the doctor knows he was in his office at precisely that moment.) The prisoners will not face any consequences, either, due to the fact that they first distract the guards by violently hammering their metal all at once and then surround them in a brawl. Once this is done, they corner Wilson and force him to jump into the steel press by pointing blow torches at him. The clanging of metal builds, and Wilson realizes his fate. "He made me do it! He made me do it! No, don't! Captain Munsey made me do it!" he screams. "You guys would've done the same thing!" Right as the press is about to slam down, the prisoners hold the torches right up to his face. He jumps in and is crushed off-screen. The clanking has ceased, a whistle blows, and then there is a rush of silence as the camera pans up to the clock. It is just past 10:30.

Aside from its utter brutality, this scene is notable for one other feature. No non-diegetic music accompanies it. As he did in *The Killers*, Rózsa refrains from scoring a pivotal, dramatic moment. So much for composers of the Classical Hollywood score being "drawn almost compulsively to moments of heightened emotional expression." Instead, the absence of non-diegetic music allows the diegetic sounds—the pounding of the worker's hammers on the metal in a collective, rhythmic fashion—to come to the fore. This absence, too, makes the scene all the more disquieting: Without a non-diegetic track to reinforce the fact that this is only a representation of violence, the scene becomes more realistic.

There are several long takes in the first thirty minutes of the film, and it is striking that Rózsa does not score any of these. Take for instance the sequence in the mess hall, during which Munsey walks around and taunts the prisoners. Here, Dassin chose to use a tracking shot that is fifty-five seconds long. This allows us to sense how large the room

is and see how every prisoner reacts as Munsey walks by them; they each dread that he will address them, and their eyes reveal their anxieties. The absence of music accentuates the sense of realism and dread in the scene. This lack is especially surprising given that there are several moments without dialogue: Munsey is just walking around, speaking to no one. The silence on the non-diegetic soundtrack can be most acutely sensed at the beginning and end of the sequence. When Munsey is shown entering the hall, the prisoners do not initially notice his presence; they eat and talk as they normally do. But when he is seen, all of the prisoners stop what they are doing and turn to face him. The sudden quiet of the room is allowed to be fully felt, and it is this that makes their dread all the more palpable. Toward the end of the sequence, Tom Lister (Whit Bissell), one of Joe's cellmates, accidently bumps in to Munsey. The guard with Munsey strikes him, but Munsey, in a markedly hypocritical moment, grabs the stick and says to the guard, "What's the matter with you? It wasn't his fault!" Even with this sudden bout of action, there is no music. When we consider Rózsa's sparing approach to scoring, we see that his music is far removed from the giant example of Steiner.

There are numerous instances in which the use of silence throughout the film accentuates its sense of realism, but one more should be examined. Immediately before the attempted escape, Mr. McCollum (Richard Gaines), the prison commissioner, meets with the warden (Roman Bohnen) in order to tell him that he is to resign and give his position over to Munsey. Shocked and horrified, the warden is unable to announce this news to the prisoners. McCollum forcibly takes the microphone from him and speaks to a large crowd of inmates who are gathered in the main yard. When he says, "this institution is now in charge of Captain Munsey," the prisoners shout in disbelief. The

prisoners become silent again when they hear, "I repeat: Captain Munsey is now your warden." Gallagher (Charles Bickford), who is a key member of the group who wants to escape, shouts, "Yah! Yah!" in protest. All of the other prisoners join him. The sequence has a startling impact: The hundreds of inmates shouting in unison produce a gush of sound, and the crowd's size is exposed as it creeps its way toward the central guard tower where Munsey looks down on them from atop. The prisoners' shouts grow louder as they move closer, adding to the tension of the scene. If Rózsa had provided an orchestral underlay for all of this, the scene's immediacy would have been diminished; instead, we can grasp how genuine, spontaneous and overwhelming the group's protest actually is. It turns out that the diegetic sounds are more than enough to elicit an emotional response from the viewer. The scene speaks for itself, and it is allowed to do so.

It is unusual that this unscored sequence occurs toward the end of the film, as all of the pivotal scenes before and after it are accompanied by non-diegetic music. When Joe and the other prisoners are preparing to approach their escape through the drainpipe, for instance, Rózsa inserts a rhythmically restless, accented cue. This music perfectly captures the prisoners' desperate attempt to succeed in their plan. After the period of non-diegetic music, gunshots are heard. The guards open fire on the prisoners who are attempting to ram the gate from the inside; these shots prompt agitated and dissonant music—music that will continue for nearly the rest of the film. Once again, the music proves to match the dramatic action.

While dissonant and completely devoid of any hint of melody, then, Rózsa is in this passage nonetheless following conventional scoring practice in some notable ways:

He begins the cue on an action (Gorbman 78), thus not disrupting the narrative flow; what is more, he proves that he does not always resist those "moments of heightened emotional expression" about which Kalinak writes. Why, though, would Rózsa score all of these dramatic moments, leaving several, especially at the beginning of the film, without music? It is not merely a matter of wanting to "underscore" dialogue, as there are several dramatic scenes with dialogue—many of them occurring toward the end—that are accompanied by music. Instead, Rózsa, along with Dassin and Hellinger, arguably had a broader idea in mind: By having the first section of the film pass without non-diegetic music, they allow the climaxes of the film to be all the more climactic. If Rózsa had scored all of the dramatic action toward the beginning—writing music for every shock or bout of violence—there would have been nowhere to build up to and the drama would have been robbed of all of its brutality. Rózsa and his fellow filmmakers therefore seem to be highly conscious of the power of contrasts.

Another way in which Rózsa resists the typical Classical Hollywood approach is that, in addition to the lack of music in general (of the film's ninety-eight minutes, only thirty-four are scored), there is a distinct lack of themes. There are only three main themes, and two of these have already been discussed: the opening theme and the variation of the *Double Indemnity* cue. The third is a lyrical melody that is cued every time there is a flashback. There are fewer themes here, then, than in any of his previous *noir* scores. But Rózsa's unconventionality does not end with the lack of themes. For the first time in one of his *noir* scores, there are no leitmotifs—at least in the traditional sense. No individual character, situation, place, or relationship is associated with a

particular melody or motif. The lyrical melody that accompanies every flashback, however, presents an unusual case, and it requires some explication.

While this theme is not a leitmotif for an individual character, etc., it does come to represent Joe and his cellmates' longing for the women they love or have known, as it is cued each time one of them recounts memories of a relationship. Throughout the film, we see four flashbacks from four characters' perspectives. There are two strands that tie these separate flashbacks together: the lyric melody and the calendar girl on the wall of their cell. Our attention is first drawn to the drawing of the woman when Kid Coy (Jack Overman), a new member of the cell, asks his cellmates why they are so taken with "this dame." "It's enough to give somebody the creeps," he says. They explain that, after looking at her long enough, she will come to remind him of someone that he loves or has loved; this is, after all, what has happened with each of them. Or rather, as Spencer (John Hoyt) elaborates, "Our calendar girl is just an inspiration… She starts you thinking about the one you really want to see." (It is worth noting that this drawing can be seen as the film's chief *femme fatale*: this calendar girl has long, dark hair, and all of the men are obsessed with her; Silver and Ursini) Spencer then recounts a memory of Flossie, one of his sweethearts—and yet another *fatale*. As he begins to talk about her, we hear a faint, expressive melody on the clarinet, which, as the flashback begins, leads into a light, playful theme for strings. The melody only lasts for around ten seconds; it passes by so quickly that it could easily go unnoticed. But this is not the last time that we will hear it.

As all of his cellmates, along with most of the prisoners, are watching a film, Tom sits alone in his cell writing a letter to his wife, Cora (Ella Raines). A melody for oboe, with string accompaniment, begins; it is the lyrical melody for clarinet and strings heard

in full. In the flashback, as Tom kisses her on the neck, it is heard again, this time played *rubato* (i.e. with rhythmic and expressive freedom) by a solo violin. It sounds rather Hungarian in this instance:

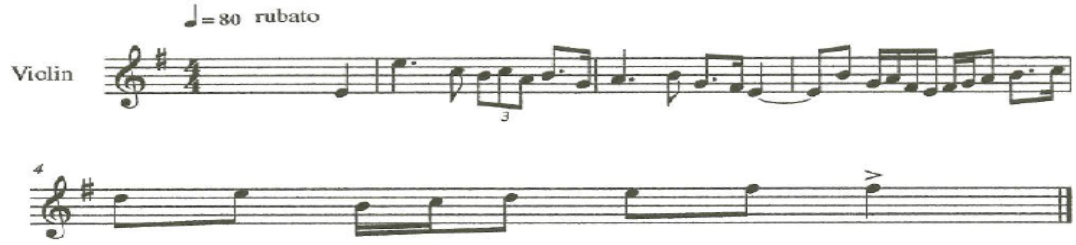

Fig. 12. Theme for Solo Violin.

It continues as Tom tells his wife to "make a wish" and leads to a mink coat that he has gotten for her. When we learn that he had to steal the money in order to purchase the coat—a coat that she has wanted "all her life"—the melody modulates into the minor and is now played by the full string section. In this sequence, then, we hear this theme, which was fragmented in the first flashback, develop and transform to take on more characteristics. We are also introduced to yet another *femme fatale*-like woman (her obsession with the fur coat associates her with other such *femmes*). What is more, though, Tom is made more relatable, more human, in this flashback. We see that he is in prison not because he committed some merciless crime but because he loved his wife, wanted to please her, but in the end could not because of his financial state. Similarly, in the previous flashback, we see that Spencer did not commit such a horrible crime, either. He was merely gambling in an illegal casino (with money he had gotten from selling some curious stocks); when the place is raided by the police, Flossie finds a way out for them but soon, at gunpoint, steals all of his money and drives off in his car. In the end, it is he, and not Flossie, who is imprisoned.

We later learn the backstories of Robert, or "Soldier" (Howard Duff), and Joe through flashbacks, and it turns out that they are in prison because of their women as well: Soldier takes the blame for a crime that his wife committed, and Joe steals money in order to support his wife, who is handicapped. Even Joe, the prisoner who comes across as the most stoic and removed, is humanized. Throughout these characters' flashbacks, the lyric melody reappears, either in full or as a variation. No matter what, though, it is there to augment and expose the sympathetic traits of these men. It unites their histories and shows what they have in common. In a way, then, it is a shared leitmotif—a theme not for any individual but one for the collective. It represents their romantic yearning as well as their longing for life "on the outside." In this film, Rózsa's innovative approach to scoring is perhaps best exemplified by this: He took a staple of the film score, the leitmotif, and transformed it into something new. Opposing Steiner's conception of this musical form aiding "audiences in keeping characters straight in their minds," Rózsa's usage blurs the characters' feelings.

It is significant that the only light, lyrical music, and indeed the only light and lyrical moments in *Brute Force* in general, take place in the past. The present in the film, as it is in so many *films noir*, is depicted as endlessly bleak. Every scene reflects "the country's sour postwar mood" (Hirsch 21). In addition to the aforementioned rain that relentlessly pours in the beginning, Silver and Ursini note how characters are often seen in a defeated posture; their hopelessness is thus rendered visible. Furthermore, Dassin and Daniels frequently emphasize the isolation that several characters feel by singling them out in the frame. (Joe, for instance, is often seen in isolated singles, as is the warden when he feels helpless and dejected after the first meeting with McCollum.) And

then there are characters like Captain Munsey. His wicked schemes are responsible for making the prison an even more unbearable place than it already is. If all of these elements were not enough, Rózsa's score contributes to the sense of darkness through its persistently funereal and dissonant quality. When the major-keyed, lyrical theme is heard, then, it is all the more effective. Once again, Rózsa is working by way of contrast. Such moments in the score help to convey just how important the past—and life on the outside—was for these prisoners. As Gorbman writes, "[m]usic enters to satisfy a need to compensate for, fill in, the emotional depth not verbally representable" (67). The prisoners' intense longing for their loved ones and their lives on the outside, no matter how imperfect, are best captured by the music.

Of course, music does not always work to signify and deepen the expression of positive emotions. In one of *Brute Force*'s darkest moments, Munsey, who suspects that some of the prisoners are organizing an escape, tortures Louie (Sam Levene) in an attempt to extract a confession about the plan. The scene begins when Louie goes down to get a pass that would allow him to enter the drainpipe. A guard abruptly and ominously comes up to him and escorts him toward the guard headquarters. As they enter this room, music is heard while Munsey holds a rifle: The low brass play a chorale. At this point, it is unclear as to whether this music is diegetic or non-diegetic. *Brute Force*, then, carries on the pattern of the previously discussed films: The line between the two sources is blurred, even if one recognizes that it is Wagner's overture to *Tannhäuser*. (The music is uncannily fitting—the somber, march-like melody plays as Louie anxiously goes into the headquarters—and this makes it even more difficult to trace.) When Louie is told that he is to be taken into Munsey's office, and that Munsey is

"in and waiting," the melody shifts to the strings and is played more urgently and loudly. The guard first enters the office as Louie waits outside and we see that Munsey is indeed in and that he is wearing a sleeveless T-shirt as he is polishing his rifle. (It is hard to ignore the homoeroticism of this image, as Silver and Ursini point out.) Putting his rifle away, he tells the guard to bring Louie inside. Right before he enters, there is a medium shot of a record player. Finally, it is revealed that the music is diegetic. Now that we know the source, though, another question arises: Why would such music be playing in a scene like this?

Munsey at first appears to be making casual conversation with Louie, but by now we know that no conversation is as it seems with this man. "I understand that you're interested in the drainpipe," he says. Wagner continues to play ever more prominently as Louie is handcuffed to a chair. Munsey comes over, sits next to him, and asks, "What business did you have in the drainpipe?" "To write a story," Louie responds. At this, Munsey slaps his face. Meanwhile, the Wagner takes on a lighter, more playful character: The strings begin to play a sixteenth-note figure. Munsey then lowers the blinds, grabs a rubber rod (again, the phallic imagery is far from subtle), tells the guard to leave the room, and during all of this the music begins to ecstatically swell; it could not be more firmly rooted in the major. When he slaps Louie harder, a bright chord is sustained. While the music itself is highly tonal, its relationship to the action on screen creates discord. Ambivalence pervades the scene. How are we to respond to these violent acts when such music is heard? Given that music "encourages identification" (Gorbman 108) and that it "belongs primarily to the sphere of subjective inwardness," the effect of this application of Wagner becomes all the more chilling (Eisler and Adorno

71). Since the music is overwhelmingly major-keyed and rapturous, it is not encouraging the viewer to identify with Louie. If this were the case, grim, minor-keyed music would be heard. Rather, the music represents and exposes Munsey's inward state in all of its ecstasy. Despite our natural inclination, alignment with him is encouraged as he inflicts wound after wound on the helpless victim.

What can initially be said about this application of pre-existing music is that it defies convention. Ambivalence, after all, is not one of the chief aims of Classical Hollywood cinema. Upon further reflection, though, this usage of music proves to yield further significance. The film as a whole, as Michael Atkinson writes, "draws explicit parallels to the Nazi encampment experience." He also highlights *Brute Force*'s "cold equations": "convicts = soldiers and/or civilian freight = the oppressed masses, and guards = Nazis = capitalist strongmen." (The Nazi commentary would have had particular resonance with the cast and filmmakers, due to the fact that some of them fought on the European front in the Second World War; Silver and Ursini.) It is therefore little coincidence that Wagner was selected for this scene, as he was famously—or rather, infamously—appropriated by the Nazis. For those who viewers who would have been familiar with the overture to *Tannhäuser* and its composer's connection to fascism, the music makes Munsey's Nazi-like characterization less ambiguous and generally brings the film's fascist undertones to the surface. Even if one is acquainted with this music, though, its ecstatic swells still make this scene far from a straightforward viewing experience.

The choice of pre-existing music is revealing for another reason. Rózsa was to a degree influenced by Wagner, particularly in terms of orchestration; both, for instance,

were capable of writing for large ensembles and of evoking a wide range of instrumental colors. Unlike Steiner, Korngold, and several of their contemporaries, Rózsa was not under Wagner's spell when it came to harmony and rhythm. As we have seen, modernist composers such as Bartók, Kodály and, to a certain extent, Stravinsky had much more of an impact on his music in these ways. Wagner's writing was comparatively far more tonal and less percussive. Hearing Wagner's music in the film, then, serves as a reminder of how progressive Rózsa's musical language was: Wagner's chorales and aching string melodies make Rózsa's dissonances and accents all the more potent. This revealing juxtaposition foreshadows the composer's next project for Hellinger: *The Naked City*. Frank Skinner, who was the co-composer for the film and wrote in a conservative, conventional vein, exposes to an even greater extent just how innovative Rózsa's music was becoming.

What Brown said of the music for *Brute Force* applies to that for *The Killers* as well: "Wildly dissonant chords punctuate and interrupt the musical flow, often in driving, syncopated rhythms, while sound layering, where several different musical events occur simultaneously, creates textural complexity rare in earlier scores" (119). Of course, "wildly dissonant chords" are not the only things that disrupt the "musical flow" in both scores. These two films contain numerous instances in which non-diegetic music does not appear, and many of these instances are dramatically intense. The chief innovation in *The Killers*'s score is its sparseness—again, a new level of brevity for Rózsa. When it comes to the music for *Brute Force*, a particularly inventive element is his reworking of the leitmotif. Just when Rózsa appears to be looking to Steiner's model, he upsets expectations. He didn't particularly like the latter's music, after all.

An Amalgam of Styles: *The Naked City*

In a video interview on the film, Dana Polan argues that *The Naked City* does not securely fit into one generic mold: He states that it is both a *film noir* and a police procedural; it is a story about crime as well as one about crime fighting. *The Naked City* begins with a crime—the murder of a woman—and is followed by a larger narrative, which is the detailed police investigation. A fascinating tension arises from this hybidity, and an affective reading of the film is complicated. Polan contends, "If a genre like film noir is often unsettling…the police procedural in contrast is often very reassuring." *Films noir* can be seen as unsettling for a number of reasons, not least of which for their "bolder content" that has crime as its focus, and their "grittier edge and seedier visual style" (Biesen 5). All of these developments reflected wartime fears, as well as later anxieties about the cold war and nuclear war (Biesen 3).

The police procedural, on the other hand, with its emphasis on the day-to-day efforts of policemen and its comparatively plodding narrative, reassures because it holds that "there is an order to the universe" (Polan). Crime is always stamped out. Polan furthers the distinction between the two genres: "First of all, unlike film noir, it's saying there is something valuable and even potentially attractive about blandness, about ordinariness." This worldview is perhaps best conveyed through the home life of Jimmy Halloran (Don Taylor), the young detective who is one of the many men shown working on the murder case. His job is depicted as repetitive often dull. But things are different when he is off the clock. He is shown to be the head of the household and is happy with his wife, Jane (Anne Sargent, who is shown in short shorts and a midriff-baring top) and son. The film, Polan argues, suggests that the ordinary life is far from undesirable.

The Naked City opens with a birds-eye view of New York. We hear the droning of an airplane engine, and soon the voice-over narration begins. The speaker identifies himself: It is Mark Hellinger, the film's producer. He states, "I may as well tell you that [*The Naked City* is] a bit different from most films you've ever seen." The film, we are told, was not filmed in a studio but rather on location. All of the actors "played out their roles on the streets in apartment houses, in the skyscrapers of New York itself." He continues, "Along with them, a great many thousand New Yorkers played out their roles also. This is the city as it is." Polan finds that this narration, which is interspersed throughout the film, only reveals one side of the film's production background. Another tension within this film, then, is that it is a product of Hollywood, but it is self-consciously attempting to adapt an Italian neorealist approach. It is trying to take on the air of the "new seriousness" and be more than mere entertainment, Polan continues, "yet clearly this film also is part of the Hollywood machine." *The Naked City* is largely filmed on location—even more so than *The Lost Weekend*—but studio sets are also used, especially for some of the interior scenes. He points to the fact that rear-projection is also utilized at certain moments. In terms of genre and aesthetics, the film resists singular categorizations.

These tensions are mirrored in the soundtrack. The final credits read, "Music by Miklós Rózsa and Frank Skinner." It is striking that two composers of such differing styles worked on the same film. Just how did this happen? In his autobiography, Rózsa recounts that, after Hellinger recruited him for the project, Dassin, the film's director, wanted to "use instead a composer friend who had also lost his job at MGM" (153). (Dassin had been asked to leave the same studio because he was suspected of left-wing

sympathies. This unnamed composer had left "for a different reason"; *Double Life* 153.) Rózsa understood and went on to score *Desert Fury* (Paramount Pictures, 1947), a color *noir* that had Burt Lancaster as its star. As the score was being written for *The Naked City*, Hellinger suffered a heart attack. When he recovered and heard the music at a recording session, he was displeased. Rózsa writes, "Dassin's friend…was really only an arranger, and when Hellinger heard this man's score…he almost had another heart attack" (*Double Life* 153). Hellinger was determined that this music would not appear in the final print. Bishop says as much: "Hellinger couldn't rap out chopsticks at the piano, but he wanted the musical score changed and he would keep harping on the subject until it was changed to something he liked" (350). In particular, sounding rather like Lipstone, he disliked it because "[i]n spots, he felt that it was so loud that it walked across the lines of the actors," but in other moments he felt that the music "wasn't in mood with the scene" (Bishop 357-8).

Hellinger died while working on *The Naked City*, and the film received its premiere around three months later in March. It is noteworthy that his last phones calls, which he made the day before his death, concerned the film's score. He called Rózsa, asked if he had finished working on *Desert Fury*, and said, "'Would you [write a new score for *The Naked City*]?'" Rózsa was overjoyed and agreed to take over (*Double Life* 153). Schwarzwald, ever the messenger of good news, informed him that the premiere date was fixed, which left two weeks to write the score. Rózsa recognized that it would be impossible to complete the music with such a deadline, so Schwarzwald suggested that Skinner "score the less important dialogue sequences" while Rózsa would cover all of the "'foreground' areas" (*Double Life* 154). When all the work was done, Rózsa only

contributed two significant themes, both of which appear within the last twenty minutes of the film (*Miklós Rózsa* 34). (Due to the climactic nature of this final section, nearly all of these twenty minutes are scored. In the end, Rózsa contributed around seventeen of the total thirty-six minutes of music for the film.) Heard after all of Skinner's music, Rózsa's sounds all the more austere. There is a distinctive fissure in the soundtrack, and it happens at a telling moment. It is thus necessary to examine both composers' work in order to expose how the score reflects those tensions of which Polan spoke as well as just how innovative and unconventional Rózsa's writing was.

It is fitting that Skinner's book on film music is called *Underscore* and that it was published only two years after *The Naked City* was released. As he puts it, "music is background and should not detract [from the film it is accompanying]" (32). This principle is detectable from the very beginning of his portion of the score. Soon after the opening voice-over narration begins, there is a long shot of the city at night. We are told that it is "one o'clock in the morning on a hot summer night, and this is the face of New York when it's asleep." The camera moves in from over the river to show the empty streets. Skinner writes a passage for muted solo trumpet, working with the notes of a traditional blues scale over quiet strings, to accompany these images.

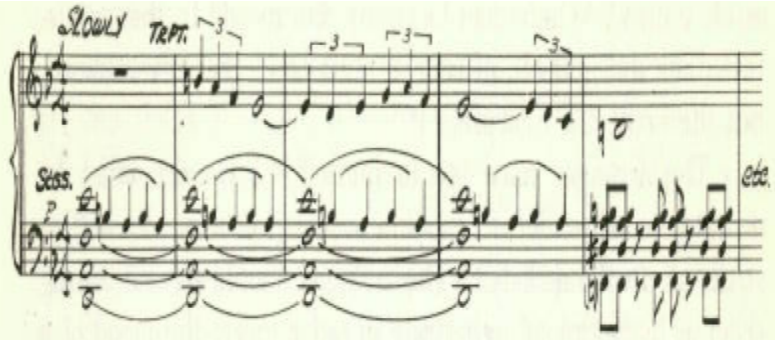

Fig. 13. Solo Trumpet Theme. Frank Skinner. *Underscore* (Los Angeles: Skinner Music Company, Inc., 1950) 245.

He states that he chose the trumpet for its more "'New Yorkish'" associations, and intended the strings to be "sentimental and warm" (Skinner 245). None of the trademark dissonance of a Rózsa introduction can be heard. This music is eminently tonal and jazzy. It represents so-called "underscoring" at its best; as it does not interfere with the voice-over narration, this "left hand"—to recall Sabaneev—does not obscure the film in the least. At this point, the approach to narration is far more inventive than the music: The voice-over shifts from Hellinger to minor on-screen characters' thoughts and back again, thus blurring the diegetic/non-diegetic distinction.

When houseworker Martha Swenson (Virginia Mullen) enters an apartment, Hellinger tells us, "[f]or this woman, the day will not be ordinary." Hushed and *tremolo* (trembling) strings are nearly inaudible as she goes inside, but when she finds the corpse of her employer, Jean Dexter, she screams. At this, Skinner inserts a sforzando. If Rózsa had scored this scene, it is unlikely that he would have done it in this way; any sudden or shocking events that occur earlier on in *The Killers* or *Brute Force*, after all, were left unscored. What makes this sforzando distinctive from one of Rózsa's is that the chord is not dissonant. It is loud, but it is decidedly tonal. Even in such a moment, then, Skinner resists writing "Carnegie Hall" music.

One cue in particular shows just how conventional Skinner's music is. Toward the beginning of the film, just after news of the murder has made the headlines, Halloran is shown returning home. As he walks toward his yard, a light, major-keyed melody for woodwinds and strings is heard.

Fig. 14. Melody for Woodwinds and Strings.

It continues playing as his skimpily-clothed wife comes to greet him and asks him about the weather. She then tells him that dinner is ready and, when she asks him for a kiss, a solo violin enters and begins to play a lyrical, expressive tune. Regarding this kind of music, Gorbman writes, "you are likely to find that a certain kind of music will cue you in correctly to the presence of a Woman [as romantic Good Object] on screen. It is as if the emotional excess of this presence must find its outlet in the euphony of a string orchestra" (80). When they finish embracing, lyrical music for the entire string section, accompanied by a harp, ensues. The scene—given that it takes place in the present, as opposed to the past—does not belong in a *film noir*; this is as far away from gritty as one can get. Instead, following the police procedural format of emphasizing the routine, the mise-en-scène, dialogue, and the music work to reassure rather than destabilize. (This scene also shows us what is denied so many characters in *films noir*; it is a contented present as opposed to a happy past.) As Polan states, the police procedural demonstrates that there is value to the ordinary life. But this scene, especially with its overwhelmingly playful music, seems to foreshadow something from a sitcom.

It should be noted that, during the first hour of the film, there are some long sequences that have no non-diegetic music. There are two periods, each around eleven minutes, within the first hour when Skinner or Rózsa do not provide any cues. The first of these, however, does not necessitate any music, due to the fact that there is dialogue

throughout and it all takes place within the confines of one office: The two main detectives on the case, Detective Lt. Dan Muldoon (Barry Fitzgerald) and Halloran, interrogate small-time crook and pathological liar Frank Niles (Howard Duff) for the first time; following this, the detectives review the evidence that has been gathered; finally a senile old woman, having read the newspaper headlines about the case, arrives at the office with information she has concocted. There is not a moment without dialogue, in fact, and there are no significant transitions of any kind. Thus there is no time or space for any music to be inserted. Hellinger's wish has been taken into consideration: the dialogue comes first.

The next lengthy sequence without any non-diegetic music is more remarkable. There is a great deal of dialogue as Muldoon and Halloran question Ruth Morrison (Dorothy Hart), Niles's fiancé, about her engagement ring. She is surprised to have it returned to her, as it had been stolen. At first she is grateful, but when she finds out that Jean was wearing the ring when she was found dead, she begins to realize that Niles may be implicated in the murder. The two detectives then take her to Niles's apartment. When they arrive, they find that they have interrupted someone who is trying to murder him. Niles's would-be killer fires at the detectives, and Halloran proceeds to chase him down the escape ladder and into the street. After a shootout, Halloran runs after him in the dark city streets. This is the most intense sequence thus far in the film, and it is left unscored. The absence of music complements the other realistic elements of the scene: In addition to being filmed on location, there are individual shots in which no artificial lighting is used—the street lamps and business lights instead illuminate the space. But the absence of music does more than augment the scene's realism. It makes the scene

more unsettling, which is appropriate given that the police are put in danger; the sense of order has thus been highly disturbed. Such a lack of non-diegetic music is reminiscent of similarly unscored dramatic sequences in Rózsa's previous *noir* projects including *The Killers* and *Brute Force*. The composer's involvement in this film is here noted through his absence.

In the first hour-and-fifteen minutes of the film, though, we have several other opportunities to sense Skinner's presence: The jazzy trumpet cue is heard a few more times, as are other unobtrusive, tonal figures. But there is one other scene that exposes just how conventional his approach to scoring is. Immediately after the shootout and chase, Halloran returns to Niles's apartment and he and Muldoon proceed to question Niles about the man who was trying to murder him. It turns out that he did not get a glimpse of him before the man struck him in the back of the head. "Must have been a burglar," Niles speculates. "A burglar?" Muldoon wonders. "Maybe he stole something." The thought of this alarms Niles, and as his eyes widen a sforzando is cued; this chord then leads into a figure for basses. All of this is meant to capture Niles's unease—he fears that his most valuable possession may have been stolen—but, unlike how Rózsa would have scored it, there is no dissonance, and the music is not accented or rhythmically aggressive. The only element of this cue that hints at its relationship with the narrative content is that it is written in the minor.

When Niles realizes that he still has this item, a lighter, Muldoon takes it from him and gives it to Halloran. It is revealed that Niles himself stole this lighter from someone else, and it is at this moment that his fiancé recognizes that he is not the honest man she thought he was. "Sweetheart," she says, "this is a terrible thing to ask you right

now, but my engagement ring—where did you buy it?" Niles stumbles and tries to hide in more lies, but she and Muldoon push him to tell the truth. He eventually claims that Jean gave him the ring as well as the lighter as presents, which reveals that he had a relationship her. Ruth does not want to believe this, and she asks him to say that he is lying. He refuses and yells, "Your ring was a present from Jean!" At this, she hits him. She screams "You're lying!" several times and hits him once for almost every interjection. Skinner inserts a sforzando for every single hit—five separate chords in all. Once again, the music is not dissonant but only loud. But its conventionality does not end there: This is a prime example of the outmoded technique of "mickey-mousing," for the musical effects are in perfectly synchronized with the physical action in the narrative. In a film that strives to be realistic and documentary-like, this scene and its heightened action serve to remind us that this is, after all, only a film. To draw on Polan's distinction, instead of Italian neorealism here we have a firm example of a Hollywood product. Skinner's music does nothing but reinforce its mainstream origins.

A few minutes after this scene, however, the music becomes noticeably more aggressive and moves away from tonality. Muldoon wants to confirm whether Dr. Stoneman (House Jameson) was Jean's mystery boyfriend, and so he brings Niles to Stoneman's office in order to trap him and get him to confess. When Stoneman sees Niles, an austere, accented figure for strings begins.

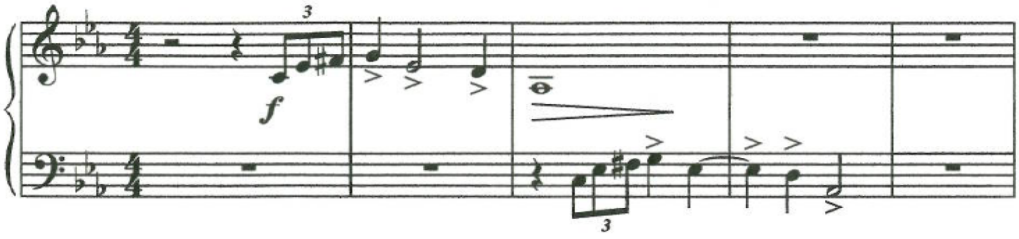

Fig. 15. Accented Figure for Strings.

The writing here once again recalls the *Concerto for Strings*, as well as the music of Bartók. It continues to play as we find out that, due to the fact that Stoneman had indeed fallen for Jean, she and Niles were using him in order to rob his wealthy friends. Stoneman found out about their scheme after they had been stealing for a few months, but by that point he did not report the matter to the police because he was afraid of a scandal; he is a married man, and if news got out his wife would have not only found his relationship with Jean but that he was enabling their crimes. This confession prompts Niles to reveal that a man named Willie Garzah (Ted de Corsia) was the one who actually murdered Jean. The writing for the strings intensifies; dynamics increase and more accents are added. When Stoneman is told that he will be arrested due to his involvement in Jean's and Niles's crime, he attempts to commit suicide by jumping out of his office window. At this, the music builds—the strings hastily climb the chromatic scale—and trumpets enter; tonality abates through the application of bitonal harmony (the simultaneous use of two keys).

It is striking that, only twenty minutes before the end of the film, Rózsa's modernist approach is first heard in this scene. After all of the Skinner cues, this music sounds all the more innovative. What is also intriguing about this cue is that it in no way attempts to hide itself under the dialogue. This loud, aggressive playing is all the more evident because the characters are exchanging information that is vital to the plot. For the first time in the film, the creeping "left hand" of which Sabaneev spoke has emerged. It is curious that Rózsa would insert such a cue, given that one of Hellinger's criticisms of the film's initial score was, after all, that it overwhelmed the dialogue. But while the music is as audible as can be, it does satisfy the producer's other wish, in that it fits the

dramatic mood of the scene. One can imagine that Skinner's conventional approach would have underwhelmed in such a moment.

The scene that follows has Halloran finding Garzah's apartment. He enters and is soon knocked out by him. As Garzah flees the apartment, the film cuts to Muldoon, who is now back at the precinct office, as he orders that every available squad car be sent to find Halloran and Garzah. This leads into a brief sequence which shows all of the efforts required in order to deliver Muldoon's message to all of the police in the area: A policemen delivers a written form of the order to a dispatch operator, who then makes the announcement over the radio; policemen scattered around the city then listen to the message and head to Garzah's neighborhood. Densely contrapuntal and accented music for strings accompanies all of this, and it is highly audible alongside the dialogue. It is fascinating to briefly contrast this with Skinner's music during a similar sequence from earlier in the film; in this, we see the many steps required to relay the housekeeper's report about finding Dexter's body. Woodwinds and percussion play a rapid and repetitive figure that mimics the sounds of Morse code (which makes it reminiscent of the music often used in newsreels of the time.) This music, with its tonality and light accents, is far more conservative than that which Rózsa wrote for the later sequence.

Rózsa's contrapuntal music continues into the next scene as we watch Halloran chase Garzah through the Lower East Side. Palmer describes this cue as a "tense, hard-hitting fugato" and states that it is "Hungarian in verve" (*Miklós Rózsa* 34).

Fig. 16. "A Tense, Hard-Hitting Fugato." Christopher Palmer. *Miklós Rózsa* (London: Breiktkopf & Härtel, 1975) 58.

It is appropriate that this music evokes some sense of cultural otherness, for, as Polan argues, this section of town, because of the differing socio-economic milieu, is "presented as the exotic Other." Due to the fact that so much of the story, in addition to taking place in other parts of the city, has been set in confined interiors—in offices, apartments, etc., the Lower East Side "suddenly [erupts] onto the scene" and it opens up the film. We have several on-location shots of Garzah and Halloran winding through a cemetery, running through streets, and going through a market (the music momentarily abates so that we are allowed to hear foreign languages being spoken). This sense of eruption and of opening up is reflected in the soundtrack, as this is the first time that we hear Rózsa's music without dialogue. After all of Skinner's conventionally romantic and jazz-based cues, Rózsa's modernist writing seems as new and arresting as these images of the Lower East Side.

It is fitting for yet another reason that Rózsa's music emerges so late in the film. Apart from the earlier and short-lived shootout, a policeman is not shown to be in grave danger until Halloran is attacked by Garzah. Garzah continues to have the upper hand during the chase sequence, as they are running through his neighborhood; he knows his way around, whereas Halloran is at a loss. This scene reverses the relationship that cops and criminals have had throughout most of the film: In line with other procedurals, the police are almost always shown to be the controlling figures (Polan). Thus the chase is rendered all the more unnerving. Rózsa's strident sounds, then, are highly appropriate. As the police chase Garzah over the Williamsburg Bridge, and as Garzah climbs one of its pillars, Rózsa's music grows more urgent. This cue reminds one of why Hellinger insisted that he write the score for the film.

The only other theme that Rózsa contributes begins with the final voice-over. After Garzah falls to his death (an event that is accompanied by a devastatingly dissonant chord), the scene ends and the epilogue suddenly begins. As we see long shots of the city at night, Hellinger states in the narration that, while "tomorrow a new case will hit the headlines," Jean Dexter will not be forgotten. He ends the film on a phrase that has now become well-known: "There are eight million stories in the naked city. This has been one of them." All the while, flowing music can be heard.

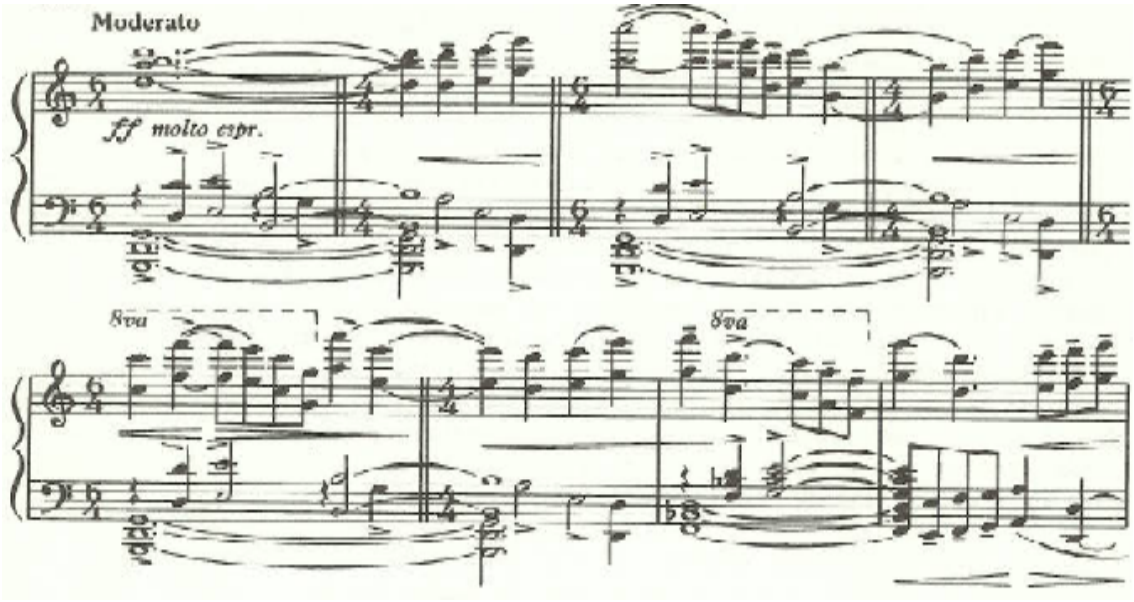

Fig. 17. "The Song of a Great City." Christopher Palmer. *Miklós Rózsa* (London: Breiktkopf & Härtel, 1975) 48.

Palmer writes, "[t]he melody has a calm spaciousness that is almost Coplandesque, and as it develops in long, fine-drawn expressive lines its great girder-like shafts of lyrical melody, the ambience of the big city in summer by night is superbly conveyed" (*Miklós Rózsa* 34). Such unabashed lyricism is rare for a Rózsa *noir* score, and it is noteworthy that it is not inspired by romantic love or longing; rather, as Palmer notes, it is Rózsa's "personal tribute" to Hellinger. Palmer further states, '"Rózsa subtitles this epilogue

'The Song of a Great City' and perhaps nowhere else is the singing quality of his melodic style so graphically illustrated" (*Miklós Rózsa* 34).

The Naked City ends on a hopeful note. (The ending of *Brute Force* could not be any more dissimilar, but this should come as no surprise. As Polan states, "the police procedural is the flipside of the prison film.") Order has been restored; the police are once again in control. While there will always be crime, we are reminded that it emerges only temporarily. It is fitting, then, that Rózsa's unsettling music should appear only momentarily. It is framed by sounds that, for all of their rhythmic and harmonic conventionality, could not be more reassuring. While heard only in passing, however, those modernist notes, like the drama that they accompany, make a lasting impression. Like the film itself, it is ultimately difficult to define this soundtrack with one word. "Nonconformist" and other such adjectives come close, however, as both the aggressive, dissonant music and the film itself, through various techniques—such as the self-conscious voice-over narration, the location shooting—critique and challenge the typical Classical Hollywood product.

Conclusion

Following *The Naked City*, Rózsa provided only a few more scores for *films noir*. These included *Kiss the Blood off My Hands* (Universal International Pictures, 1948), *Criss Cross* (Universal International Pictures, 1949) *The Bribe* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1949) and *The Asphalt Jungle* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1950). *Criss Cross*, Rózsa's last project for Universal, was also supposed to be Hellinger's fourth film for the studio. While Hellinger did begin some work for the film, he died before it went into full production. Still, Rózsa's austere music—not to mention Siodmak's direction and the presence of Lancaster as the protagonist—lends it a trace the "Hellinger touch." The score for John Huston's *The Asphalt Jungle*, which remarkably has only two cues that amount to a total of about six minutes, was to be his final for a *noir* before a long string of epics (Ness 54).

Rózsa is now chiefly remembered for his work for those big-budgeted MGM films, such as *Quo Vadis* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1951) and *Ben Hur* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1959). While there is the occasional dissonance and modernist influence (see Cooke 187-9; *Miklós Rózsa* 44), these scores are full of leitmotifs and "triumphal [and thereby tonal] marches" (*Miklós Rózsa* 43). In some ways, then, his film music of this period follows more closely principles of the typical Classical Hollywood score. However in other ways, Rózsa continued to defy tradition. As Cooke writes:

> [p]erhaps the most significant aspect of music for historical epics in the 1950s was not its scale, which was in essence no different from that of earlier extravaganzas such as *Gone With the Wind*, but a new 'authenticity' that required nondiegetic music to reflect to some degree the musical characteristics of the historical period in which the film was set. (187)

He feels that Rózsa's scores of this period exemplify this approach and adds that his "musicological research was a deliberate stand against the ineptitude of musical anachronisms in historical movies prior to his own first project in the new manner, *Quo Vadis?*" (Cooke 187). For many of these scores, he insisted that ancient instruments were replicated and then employed (*Miklós Rózsa* 38), and he used "archaic" forms of harmony that "replaced the romantic chromaticism of standard Hollywood scoring" (Cooke 188). In these projects, Rózsa's may not have been writing as frequently in the "Carnegie Hall" vein, but his music was still innovative.

The one side of his so-called "double life" would be overtaken with these MGM epics throughout the 1950s and early 1960s. When he stopped scoring those films, he devoted his energies once more to music for the concert hall and produced, among other things, several concerti. After his music for *films noir*, then, his musical life remained divided until Wilder's 1971 film *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (United Artists, 1970), as he would incorporate large sections of his Violin Concerto from 1953-54 into the score (Brown 119). He would only go on to provide music for a few more films. Two are worth noting here. The first is that for *The Last Embrace* (United Artists, 1979). The film itself is a thriller with hints of *film noir*, and Rózsa contributed a score that is highly reminiscent of his work during the 1940s. Cooke writes that his "brand of moodiness" is out of place "when divorced from the production characteristics that had defined the original genre back in the 1940s: the bland daylight cinematography of modern New York makes his music seem inappropriately nostalgic where once it had been genuinely threatening" (119).

Although he would live until 1995, his last score was written in 1982. It was for Carl Reiner's *Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid* (Universal Pictures), and it was an appropriate, if not unfortunate, way for his film career to end. The film was a spoof of—as well as an homage to—*films noir*. It included clips from several of these films, including some that Rózsa had scored such as *The Killers* and *The Bribe*. Due to the fact that comedies were never his forte, he was asked to "overlay or camouflage" his original music when the clips were featured (*Double Life* 219-20). While Rózsa states that "everything worked out well and everybody was very admiring and appreciative of [his] music" (*Double Life* 220), Cooke feels that this was an "undignified final project of his distinguished career" (119).

These late scores serve to remind us just how innovative Rózsa's earlier work was and is. Within these classic *film noir*, it is evident that his music progressively shed more conventions of the typical Classical Hollywood film score. His work for *The Lost Weekend* featured relatively novel instrumentation with the theremin, and that for *The Killers* was his sparsest yet. The music for *Brute Force* had introduced a fresh application of the leitmotif; played during nearly every flashback, this theme comes to represent not an individual character's longing but rather that of several, which is a clear violation of Steiner's model. Finally this score, along with that for *The Naked City*, had "sharp accents and terse rhythms and tension chords [that was] unlike either what he had written for the screen previously or what he would write later" (*Music for the Movies* 96). This entire body of film music also served to make these atypical films themselves all the more uncharacteristic. In these films, everything "classical" about Classical Hollywood style was critiqued and challenged: Depending on the film, there were existentially

aware individuals and *femmes fatale*, location shooting, self-conscious voice-over narration, and grim endings. And for all four, there was music to match these narrative and formal innovations.

If there is a pitfall to examining these scores in this way—highlighting their innovative and modernist traits, as Brown did with the music for *Double Indemnity*—it is that Rózsa may come across as a sole trailblazer. This is simply not the case. As I have stated, other composers at the time, namely Raksin and Webb who also contributed scores to *films noir*, wrote inventive, atypical music as well. In the end, it was Rózsa, again, who exerted the greater influence. But what Brown claims remains valid: "During the 1940s the composer who most visibly brought the classical film score into the modern era was no doubt…Miklós Rózsa" (119). It is also important to remember Cooke's assertion that Rózsa's work during this period "helped initiate a modest modernist trend in film music that only came fully to the fore in the more adventurous work" of Herrmann and Rosenman. These latter composers would write in their own distinctive styles, but their musical language recalls several characteristics of Rózsa's: Their music also contains dissonances, "thematic angularity and textural fragmentation" (Cooke 194). But while Rózsa's music was still firmly tonal, Herrmann's and Rosenman's occasionally drifted into atonality (music lacking a tonal center). The latter's score for *The Cobweb*, for instance, is almost entirely atonal, whereas Herrmann's for *Psycho* (Paramount Pictures, 1960) is well known for the piercing writing for strings that is heard during the shower scene. In both of these films, romantic/neoromantic themes are almost entirely absent. Rózsa was certainly not the chief influence on these composers—Arnold Schoenberg and Stravinsky, among others, were their models—but his innovations paved

the way for their own. Rózsa showed that one could write modernist music and still go home with an Oscar, thus opening a door in Hollywood that had hitherto been closed.

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