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[info](#) :: [issue index](#) :: [contents](#) :: [subscribe](#)[print article](#) [cite article](#)

vol
01
issue
02
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Time Beside Space in *Brigadoon* (Minnelli, 1954)

Serge Cardinal

The relationships between music and moving images are not determined only by the rules of a genre, the aesthetics of a style, or the limits of a technique, but also by the idea or the dilemma that inhabits a specific film. An idea of sufficient depth can partially reconfigure those relationships specific to a genre, a style, or a technique. The musical *Brigadoon* directed by Vincente Minnelli (1954) contains just such an idea. Simply recalling the title song lyrics and the first scene is enough to uncover most of this idea's dimension. Two weary game hunters from New York City are lost in the mist of a Scottish forest. Though they may still be able to find their bearings on a map, their actual position appears to be in the middle of nowhere: "--Then where the devil are we?--What's in the middle?--Nothing.--There's where we are." This nothingness, this "ideal location" as one of the characters says, will prove to be the site of a shift: a shift from body weariness to spiritual weariness. Gene Kelly confesses not to be capable of loving, and doubts if anybody is anymore. His partner Van Johnson admits that he believes only in things he can touch, taste, hear, see, smell and swallow. But: "--Look at that!" Where there once was nothing, a little village appears suddenly: Brigadoon. A village unknown in Highland geography, a village "somewhere between the mist and the stars." A village indifferent to the heavens that cry above or to the world that grows cold around it. A village that comes alive again for only one day each hundred years. When Kelly and Van Johnson descend to this village, they go back two hundred years, to 1754. As they walk into Brigadoon, they penetrate deep into the heart of modern skepticism, to the heart of David Hume's philosophical Scotland. In this valley, there'll not only be dreams and doubts, "there'll be love." If we want to define the possible relationships between music and moving images, we need to measure them according to the dimensions of this film idea: the loss of space-time bearings, the ghostly presence of the invisible within the visible, the expression of the past through the present, the opposition between knowledge and belief. Although *Brigadoon* is not as technically perfect as other Minnelli movies may be (Brion), although its structure seems to be less modern than other contemporaries musicals, although it has never found a place in film history books and is not looked upon as one of the great musicals, it nevertheless contains a true cinematic idea: by building a particular bridge between music and image, we will probably escape skepticism and return to the world we live in.

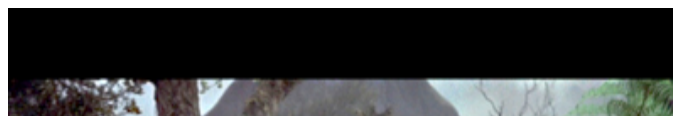




Figure 1. Hey. Look at that.

The penultimate scene of the film forcefully configures this particular relationship among music, actions, characters, and images. We are back with Gene Kelly in a high-society restaurant of New York City where he meets his fiancé busy with the preparations for their marriage. But Kelly is miles away—he cannot forget Cyd Charisse, the beauty of *Brigadoon* that he was forced to abandon for lack of belief in the reality of his love. And it only takes a tiny word in a conversation to open the doors of memory for him. Three times a tiny word triggers a song heard earlier in the film, a song that Kelly or Charisse sang or that they danced to. And three things will interest us here: the materiality of music, its autonomous productivity, and the space-time drama that it creates.



Figure 2. And right on top of a high beautiful hill.

The Materiality of Music

Snatches of three songs are heard successively: "The Heather on the Hill" and "Waitin' for My Dearie," sung by Cyd Charisse; and "I'll Go Home with Bonnie Jean," sung by a men's choir. To be more precise, these three song snatches are not heard but heard again. In one form or another, the spectator has already heard these three songs. They may have memorized or hummed them. Not only for the Gene Kelly character, but also for the spectator, these snatches of song are memories, clips from the past. But what can these particular repeats teach us about the relationships between music and moving images? All types of films, starting with musicals, frequently structured themselves by using musical repeats and the work of memory that comes with them, either by quoting a popular song or a piece of classical music, in part or in whole, in an allusive or an explicit manner, and in this way including the film in a large cultural history and structuring it by the memory of this or that musical piece, or by resorting to the *leitmotiv*, the internal system of repeats that flexibly associates a short theme to a character, a place, an object, a situation or a recurrent idea of the plot (Kassabian, 50–51). But the specificity of our scene is not due to these two formal types of repetition; it results from the perceptible material nature of these repetitions. Here we have to believe in little details that bode meaning. We have to believe in these little acoustic signs that make perceptible the songs material starts and stops. We have to believe in these "materializing acoustic signs" that can drive us back toward the musical concrete source (Chion, 190). But which concrete source? By shortening the beginning of a melodic line, by shortening a musical phrase before it reaches its pause, these repeats not only drive us back toward the orchestra or the score—they also drive us back toward another material fact: what we hear is a recording. The songs are not performed again; the songs are rebroadcast.

We have here a slight difference of relationship between music and what an image includes. The materializing acoustic signs do not echo the character's psychological memory state. Acoustic alterations and musical variations do not echo the character's subjective fancies. These signs echo a material working memory. The unpredictable triggers, the sudden interruptions, and the acoustic distortions explicitly echo the actions of a device and the resistance of a magnetic support. These triggers, interruptions, and distortions are not, as we usually see, completely absorbed by dramatic or psychological reasons. There are no general values to the music and moving-images relationship. The relationship becomes meaningful through a specific editing and a no less specific mixing of acoustic and visual elements. In this scene, we have to stay close to the specific sequence that links a word to a song to a memory. The words do not give rise to a recall that would in turn bring back to life this or that song. On the contrary, the words trigger a song that brings back the past for the character. The songs are not preserved in the character's memory, and it is not his imagination that performs them again. It is the film's musical memory, an independent and material memory that a few tiny words in a conversation trigger. The materiality of this memory we can hear through the operations it makes on concrete sound material. Its independence we can evaluate through the effects it has on the character. This musical memory is to a great degree independent of the story's logic or the character's psychology, their point of view. While it is true that Kelly has heard the third song in this exact form, it is not true of the first and the second ones. The first two songs are not personal memories—imprints of old auditions or old performances. Kelly does not keep this exact memory of the first song for the simple reason that he and not Cyd Charisse sang it. As far as the second song goes, Kelly cannot have the memory because he simply never heard it or sang it. Each word works here as Marcel Proust's little madeleine that gives rise to involuntary memory. As in Proust, this memory is an impersonal one: each song "rises up, not as it was experienced [...], but in a splendor, with a truth that never had an equivalent in reality" (Deleuze, 2000: 56). If, in this scene, music is engaged "in an existential and aesthetic struggle with narrative representation" (Gorbman, 13), it is because an audiovisual editing technique refers here to a metaphysics of the memory. The autonomy of the music, its independence from story logic and character psychology, forces us to confront the complete independence of time and memory. In *Brigadoon*, the past is not a former perception: when a song is preserved and comes back, it is not necessarily under the form we lived it. In *Brigadoon*, the past is not preserved within us nor by us; it is preserved in itself and by the film: when a song is preserved and comes back, it is not into our brain nor into the brain of the character (Deleuze, 1989: 80–82).¹ However, all is not about the past here. This material musical memory also builds a future. All song snatches not only recall their original totality, but also appeal to a song to come, a song that will gather them all, a song that could multiply

bridges between their differences of style, structure, tonality, rhythm—an overture. For all these reasons, this relationship between songs and images takes us away from skepticism a little: a world without us exists beside us, and this world has not already given all it might (Cavell, 1979).



Figure 3. There's a laddie waitin' and wanderin' free /
Who's waitin' for his dearie, me.

The Autonomous Productivity of Music

The relationship between music and moving images is first a relationship among music and narration levels, the articulation of action, and a character's various psychological states. Modern cinema and many recent audiovisual practices were able to explore new plastic and rhythmic relations after they managed to rid themselves of this triple bind. The classical Hollywood music practice is here the model to follow or to oppose. This classical practice gives to music many audiovisual functions: music creates points of view, it overlaps sequences, it establishes a site, it comments on story events, it polarizes actions, it maintains the space-time continuity of visual discourse, it gathers in the unity of its formal or programmatic language all the dissimilar elements of a film (Gorbman, chap. 4). This last function will interest us here. From musical to western, music always had the function of adding color, adding to a man or a landscape image deeper tones of subjectivity and more refined hues of psychology (Chion, 88). These tones and hues usually come from a musical catalog of culturally defined emotional states, which means that the classical relationship between music and moving images is usually a relationship between music and one element of an image: the character—and a special character, who has a subjective and a psychological identity that looks like a hidden reservoir of emotional states. The film music's task will be to reveal these states, to bring to light these inner truths, and to spread them out in space and time (234). What interests us here is the condition under which this musical practice can work. When music provides an audible definition of a secret emotion, when music pretends to explain the implicit (Kalinak, 86–88), it presupposes an accepted and very simple thing: emotion exists before music makes it perceptible. To be precise, hearing music makes perceptible an external form of a secret emotion that a character already possessed.

Brigadoon uses all these procedures of classical style, but then breaks free from their orbit in a way that sends it on a voyage straight to the heart of film music modernity. It does this specifically with regard to the function of emotional revelation. Via the relationship of music to images, *Brigadoon* teaches us that certain memories were not always within us. Via the same relationship, it also teaches us that emotions are external and objective entities. Once again we need to return to the way music encounters character attitudes and postures. At the beginning of the first song, everything is blurred: is it the word "hill" that gives rise to recollection and then to a song memory or does the word trigger the music? The sudden interruption of it is unequivocal: the song vanishes by itself, anticipating the fiancé's question to Kelly, still miles away and left there alone by the song. The second song start is also unequivocal: Kelly is literally surprised by it and turns in its direction, looking at the song before he closes his eyes. Kelly is equally surprised by the third song that seems to come from his back. In classical practice, music expresses character emotion; in this scene, it is the other way round. Kelly does not have a feeling first and then its musical representation; consciousness comes to him from music. It is Kelly's empiricist conversion: everything comes from the external world. "The music and its rhythm now initiate movement rather than vice versa" (Altman, 69). Music imposes itself as an autonomous and productive power that comes from space and time, that brings into the body a movement--a movement that can be turned into a subjective will or emotion by the body, but a movement that still leaves the body before it spreads and vanishes into the space and the time from whence it came.



Figure 4. There's lazy music on the rill.

This scene makes us see and hear three levels of the music's autonomous and productive power. The first level is the power of abstract time. "Musical time is abstract time; once begun, a piece's musical logic demands to work itself through the finish" and "can put music at odds with the dramatic human time, which is a less logically predictable time, more subject to the aleatory experiences of real life" (Gorbman, 24). With this nonhuman time, music can do more than show a given emotion: it can create it and force it on us as an objective movement like the third song ("Go Home") does--a march, an awkward "wedding" march that sounds like a military march, a march that carries Kelly away and still postpones the realization of his desire by stopping before its pause.

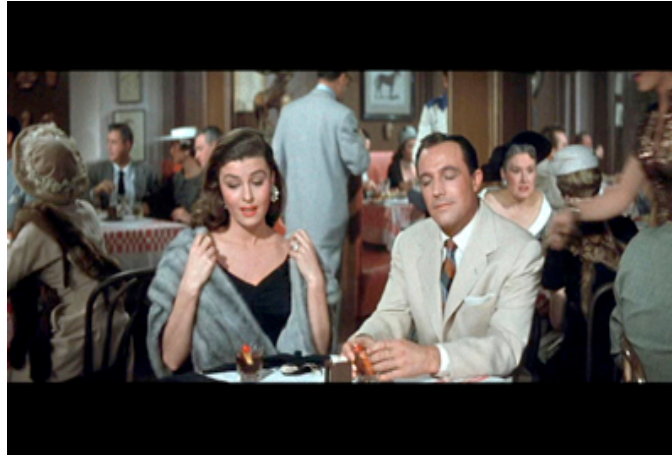


Figure 5. And happy am I / To hold my heart till he comes strollin' by.

The second level of power is the virtual time of music. Every snatch of music refers to a song that carries on by itself in a silent world, beneath its trigger and beyond its interruption. A before and an after that persist, like the remains or remnants in each of the song snatches. A before and an after: real but not actual, sensible but not audible like ghosts parallel to what we hear. A before and an after that we cannot directly perceive while at the same time they make us hear. The character hearing is haunted by this inaudible time that creates his feelings: nostalgia, resolution, and haste.

The third level of music's autonomous and productive power is the many intensities of its time. The emotional entities that music produces are not objective by a universal or primitive quality. Their objectivity does not come from an ability to suggest transcendence and destiny. It is true that music "elevates the individuality of the represented characters to universal significance, makes them bigger than life, suggests transcendence, destiny" (Gorbman, 81). But it can because music fulfills first another objective condition: it is a temporal contraction and expansion of acoustic material. Each contraction and each expansion is a distinct power to move, a distinct feeling. This power to move or this feeling is entirely defined by the musical speed or rhythm, not by the object it refers to or by the subject that feels it (Bergson, 270). As external objective entities, each song enforces such a distinct feeling. Precisely, every song seeps into the body and the soul as many distinct intensities or distinct powers to move: *andante*, *adagio*, *presto* are not only speeds; they are existential velocities. If Kelly can acknowledge the reality of Charisse's desire for him, it is not only because the song lyrics described the infinite patience of her love ("Waitin' for my dearie and happy I am / To hold my heart till he comes strollin' by"), but also because she finds a way to alter the rhythm and bring the song close to a romantic waltz, giving her desire a musical reality and liberty. And if Kelly finally makes the decision to return to Scotland, it is not only because the men's choir urges him to "go home, go home with Bonnie Jean," but also because their call has the rhythmic pressure of a march.

The independence of the past and the autonomy of the emotions both become perceptible through the same relationship of music with moving images. Does it mean that film music brings together a pure past and a pure emotion? Is the empiricist conversion of Gene Kelly more radical than we thought? Everything would not come from an external physical world; everything would now come from time. Here, perhaps, we might apply what Gilles Deleuze said

of Alain Resnais films and adapt it to Minnelli's particular style (Deleuze, 1989: 124). Each song is a "sheet of past" that replays, according to specific speed and density, all the love Charisse has for Kelly. This speed and this density are precisely the power and the material of a musical feeling. The pure intensity of this feeling gives music its power to move. The three songs from the past successively give Kelly's body and soul the power to acknowledge otherness, to greet this otherness tenderly, and return to it without running the risk of abolishing it by his doubts. These three new powers are themselves time attitudes--now bearable thanks to music's help. In *Brigadoon*, to acknowledge a woman, a man needs to make her a memory; to greet her, he needs to convert to the present; and to get her back, he needs to jump into the future. In short, music teaches him how to couple, to dance, in the deepest sense, with someone. For all these reasons, this relationship between songs and images places us at a greater remove from our skepticism: the musical independence of the past brought the world and us together; the song's emotional autonomy leads us now to the desired being, independent from our fantasies, an irreducible existence that can be acknowledged (Cavell, 1981).

A Space-Time Drama

How do these objective emotions and this pure past encounter the space-time of a visual representation? Let us begin again with a little detail: Gene Kelly sees the music we hear. He sees the music in front of him; the music seems there, just off-screen. Kelly does not look off-screen vaguely: sometimes, a song seems to face him; sometimes, a song seems to be on his left. Each song comes from a precise direction that attracts his gaze. These spatial descriptors always lead to time ones: they lead to a personal memory, or they lead to a past that Kelly never lived. In short, Kelly sees time just beside his space: the songs face him like figures of time, like time feelings. Close to an actual visual field stands a temporal off-screen filled with musical echo.²

We could try to chart this paradoxical space-time drama. The three songs seem to belong to the story space-time, which is always an inhabitant of the fictional space-time universe that performs it. But in which part of this universe will we find them? Where are the singers standing? Where is Cyd Charisse? Not in Kelly's head, we already know that; and we will not benefit from defining these songs as internal or subjective diegetic sounds (Bordwell and Thompson, 257). We will straightaway put the songs in front of him, in this invisible off-screen space. In so doing, though, we will be forced to change our definition of an off-screen space-time: the songs are not contiguous and simultaneous to Kelly hearing and seeing. If these songs come from the past, we will need to imagine that beyond the frame stands an invisible space-time radically different from what we see. We will then say that these songs are displaced *diegetic* sounds: sounds that "occur in a time either earlier or later than the time of the image" (259). Beyond the frame, there is a former present with all the bodies and minds that filled it. This is especially true of the third song, which is the only one that has really been performed in a former present: at this moment, Kelly probably sees the men he sang and danced with in the village. But how could we define the other two songs that never belong to the story time or the character time? Will we answer that, since they do not belong to the story past, they foresee its future? That will require a certain denegation: we will be forced not to hear that these songs are recordings, a simple fact that extracts them from the fictional universe and locates their sources "outside the story space" (254). This brings us back to square one: how can we explain the simple fact that Gene Kelly is able to perceive invisible songs, to hear and also to see things directly in front of him, the lyrics and melody of songs that do not belong to the fictional narrative he inhabits?

The map we've been trying to draw misses this geographical reality. Like the village of Brigadoon, the music appears not to have an actual location. Is it somewhere? It is definitely not nowhere. For Brigadoon and music cannot be measured with a Euclidian space ruler or with a John Harrison chronometer. These songs and these images create a complex topology and a foliated time. Like every musical, *Brigadoon* probably recharges the usual tension between a "world given as real and another world portrayed as ideal [...] bright, colorful, and fascinating, but ultimately chimerical, the product of a dream" (Altman, 60), building between the two worlds a musical bridge that enjoys "a freedom from the normal physical laws of time, space, and causality" (61). But it seems to us here that music is not used as a bridge or a road to "a realm beyond," "beyond language, beyond space, beyond time," a bridge to "a place of transcendence" (66). It seems to us that music comes from a realm beside our world. *Brigadoon* does not intend to overcome skepticism by dreaming of an ideal outer world, but by uncovering a belief in this world we live in. The swing has much to do with relationships between music and moving images.



Figure 6. Brigadoon, Brigadoon / Blooming under sable skies.

If these snatches of song belong to the film space, it is not as extensive parts of it. They are in the film space but never occupy a position or take physical form. This informal quality results in part from the perceptible nature of film music. Film music, without a frame of its own, and owing to its invisibility, can flow easily between all filmic spaces and times (Chion, 215). The three songs flow between a diegetic and a nondiegetic off-screen, fill the on-screen, surge into Kelly body and soul, and dry up in the projection room. Music flows around and between images, fills the images, and bathes its elements. We cannot situate these songs, neither on a space location or a time line, neither as a perception or a memory, neither as external or internal, neither in an actual world or in an ideal world. Still, though, the songs are in the film space-time like Brigadoon is in the landscape. Not somewhere but somehow. The most important thing is that film music circulates as pure emotion, a feeling without a face, a time-existential velocity without a date. The songs are there, not as actual beings but as forces: a power to persist, a potential to change, an intensity of will. The music is not off-screen; the off-screen is musical: not a predictable extension of a visible space anymore but a stock of events. "--Hey! Look at that!"--Time beside space.

This hypothesis grew from a tiny detail: Gene Kelly sees the music we hear. But what is the meaning of an expression like "he sees music"? Can it be classed with an idiom such as "I see what you mean"? What can he see? In view of the space-time drama we described, Kelly cannot simply see a remembered image of Cyd Charisse in her village or a remembered image of an orchestra in a recording studio. Does he see after all, only the restaurant where he stands? Maybe he sees that he hears. Maybe he sees that music cannot fundamentally display itself. Maybe Kelly sees that music cannot have an actual visible manifestation but can only be heard as an invisible force that haunts our body and soul--ephemeral, yet inexhaustible. It is only we who die. Between music and image, time is a ghost. And one cannot know a ghost, though Hamlet tried--one can only believe in them.³

Endnotes

¹ This relationship between music and moving images reminds us that a movie does not always bring back the past by the means of a flashback. A flashback is usually subjective, since the events we see or hear are triggered by a character's recalling the past (Bordwell and Thompson, 67). Consequently, a flashback shows events that not only occur earlier on the story's chronological line, but events that were also once lived by the character. Of course, a flashback can include elements (background, actions, material details, etc.) that the remembering character could have no way of knowing, but these elements logically belong to his or her memories. In this scene of *Brigadoon*, it is not the character who remembers the songs but the songs that come back from the past by themselves. Some of these songs were never lived by the character. And since these songs do not belong to the story's space-time, as we will see later, they cannot be unconscious parts of a former character's perception. In these ways, they are in no way acoustic flashbacks. In this movie, the temporal relations to the past are not reducible to the narrative and subjective relations of a flashback. This definition requires a different vocabulary (see Deleuze, 1989, chap. 5)--and if we still want to use the word "flashback," we need to put it between inverted commas, as Bordwell and Thompson do (see page 327).

² One could argue that we do not experience time in music and images in this scene since it deliberately refrains from bringing in past images, but such an argument presupposes three things. First, that a true memory is a visual memory--a sound or a song can only be a call up to visual memories, as we usually see in the classical narrative cinema. Second, that we experience time only through the progress of an action or the unfolding of a movement, time being only the measurement of an action or a movement. Third, that the past is only the reservoir of former presents (movements, actions, feelings, intentions). In other words, such an argument denies the aesthetic powers of music and the possibility for cinema to appropriate them. Music makes time perceptible not as a length but as an intensity, a power free of any particular spiritual or physical movement that embodies it. This intensity (*moderato cantabile*, per example) makes us feel that the past is not a reservoir of former presents but a configuration of pure movements: disappearance and persistence, distance and sudden appearance. When *Brigadoon* deliberately refrains from bringing past images of an action or a feeling, it gives us a chance to follow these pure movements of the past.

³ *Brigadoon* is an adaptation of a stage production. A comparative study could reconsider everything we said by defining the similarities and differences between the film and the stage production script. Three important differences would be immediately apparent. First, the spectator sees the one who sings appear behind the remembering character who "looks off dreamily" or "looks out front" (Lerner, 129-30). Second, not only do the singers appear, they appear either against a misty Scottish background or close to the remembering character. Third, the remembering character and the singer are able to talk to each other. One important similarity would also show immediately: each song is triggered by a word and is never voluntarily recalled by the character. The instant the fiancé says the first words, "Fiona's voice is heard upstage singing. Tommy turns from the bar and looks off dreamily. The lights come up behind the bar revealing Fiona against a misty Scottish background" (129). Finding these differences and this similarity could help us understand what the sequence we analyzed owes to cinema's specific forms: How the off-screen can accentuate the independence of a musical memory. How it can change the nature of the past.

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