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The Features of Audiovisual Structure in Films with Jazz and Pre-jazz Music*

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to consider the way of interaction between jazz and pre-jazzy music and screen for birth of new features and meanings, as well as to analyze the audiovisual structure in terms of jazzy expressive means. As time arts, music and cinema are closely related due to the fact that musical composition and film exist for a clearly period of time. Therefore, similar processes may arise on the basis of compositional patterns and artistic means, which generate an active exchange for achieving a new quality and the birth of unique phenomenon. Since modern art shows that different types of art today are aimed at mutual interaction and the creation of new combined forms, and cinema itself is one such a hybrid art, this interaction does not go unnoticed for those types of art that are involved in multi-artistic forms. No wonder different directions of music, styles and spheres of musical art affect the expressive structure of various movie genres. Among them films with jazz music occupy a special place having their own system of interaction between the two arts. This interchange is focused in such aspects as timbre heterogeneity as a reason for vividness of the plot lines and narrative variability, the ratio of improvisation and composition as two opposite beginnings in jazz and films involving jazz, compositional and structural principles of jazz as a method of dramatic narrative in films with jazz, the language and expressive means of jazz and their interaction with dramatic narrative in films and the influence of jazz on genre formation in cinema.

Keywords: Jazz, Film, Narrative, Improvisation, Diegesis, Cinema, Jazz cinema, Jazzy music, Composition.

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Introduction

Jazz is a special kind of musical art and a type of culture, one of the characteristics of which is openness to interact with other creative phenomena. Certainly, jazz and films have always been in a close connection throughout the history since the early forms. So, ragtime and dance pre-jazz forms were actively in demand in silent cinematograph and the art of tappers. No surprise the main expressive means, inherited subsequently by jazz proper, have an impact the film narration nowadays.

There are a lot of movies having jazz as its background music as a diegetic or non-diegetic component. In both cases jazz style affects the genre of the film, its architectonics, time and visual expressive structure. In some of them jazz music becomes dramatic, and the film story acquires the jazz style of narration.

Methods

The methodology of the research is based on a complex approach in survey of these phenomena to systematize the common ground and the constancies of creative process. In order to determine the specifics both systemic and structural-functional methods are involved. The comparative method of analysis is used to generalize the connections of jazz thinking with audiovisual conception. And the interpretative approach helps to synthesize the results of survey. Scientific novelty consists in attempt to outline the essential connection between music and audiovisual creativity which lies in the temporary nature of both arts and the tendency to non-verbal expressiveness.

Results

Among other areas of musical creativity, jazz is distinguished by its ability to go beyond music to non-musical spheres of cooperation, not to mention the fact that the jazz compositions present all the existing musical styles as classic, folklore, pop music, rock etc. Being the same age as cinema jazz has a similar development history since early forms which were in a constant relationship. Both early jazz and first films were the kinds of amusement until they grew into independent arts. Like any other music, jazz had different ways of participation in filmmaking such as an association with a situation or an emotion, a place or a character. Furthermore, as a kind of music, jazz also acquired “a special status in filmic narration” (Gorbman, 1987, p.3). Filmmakers actively used jazz as a form of commentary on events and dramatic situations, and in the result the expressive and compositional qualities of jazz sprouted into narrative and metaphorical audiovisual structures.

What are the main distinguishing features of jazz music? First of them is improvisation underlying the jazz performance. This is “a kind of artistic activity in which the bearer of artistic content is the activity itself” (Batashev, 1987). This quality characterizes jazz as a form of communication with the emotional inconsistency of an individualized speech. This dialog is carried by dialogues of actors in films with the participation of jazzy music are often akin to improvisation.

Such characteristic features of jazz as timbre heterogeneity, constant search for new ways of sound production, the inconstancy of variation in colors – they all are reflected in the vividness of the plot lines and the variability of the narrative character. In other words, the narration in films with jazz does not obey the laws of formula cinema with clear predictable dramatic schemes. Each subsequent plot situation arises unexpectedly, spontaneously as a result of improvisational playwriting. The behavior of the characters is also on the spot and unpredictable. Freedom and inconstancy in statements unites a jazz artist and a character in the film.

Improvisation and composition, closely intertwined in jazz, are in their own way refracted in screenplays, where a thoughtful story structure is combined with an improvised play of dramatic situations of verbal or psychological action. And the game situation that requires “a partnership, the distribution of roles among participants” (Batashev, 1987), serves as a common beginning, which brings together jazz and actor

performance. Both contain in their nature a spirit of competitiveness, the manifestation of the individual beginning of each performer in the conditions of following strict rules and feelings of the ensemble. Thus, the duality of stable and mobile elements becomes another related quality between jazz and films.

Many movies tell us about a life of a famous person or unknown jazz musicians, while others employ jazzy forms as a component of film composition and script. In general, the narrative of such films is based on the principle of a suite or rondo where life stories play the role of episodes alternating with completed (in musicals) or open (in biopic) musical compositions as a refrain. In the latter one jazzy improvisation replaces the hero's monologues, being his main figurative characteristic. In musicals, early pre-jazz dance forms interrupt the dramatic narrative, as a result of which the overall scheme can be represented as a dotted line with a dot.

Talking about the popularity of jazz in films, it is necessary to mention the movies that experience an influence of jazzy language in dramatic narrative. In such movies, one can see how jazz and films exchange their artistic regularities. Both jazz and films unfold stories in time, which makes it possible to find overlapping points in these arts.

Drama films with a complex dramatic structure serve as a vivid example of such interplay. As it is known, the first popularity came to Jazz as a full-fledged element of expressiveness in cinema with Noir movies, which told about nightlife of criminals. The atmosphere of the night and the dark visual palette brings together jazz and cinema because it is associated with a night and entertainment time. Beside this, a night criminal and jazz life was originally associated with African-Americans. The action in such films usually occurs at night. Therefore, the dark scale distinguishes the visual structure of the film. In response to this, musical improvisations in the style of cool, modal and free Jazz are used in the films of this genre. These jazz styles differ from the classical norms of the tonal-harmonic system and focus on the intonation-expressive beginning. In the film narrative, this is accompanied by the situations of wandering, searching, unpredictable turns of events. The film "Lift to the Scaffold" (Luis Malle) (1958) is a perfect illustration to it. Jazz's improvisations of Miles Davis are used as a turning dramatic means strengthening the situation. Composition in jazz is formed through the interaction of improvisation with arrangement, where "an individual performer is a compositional component" (Kinus, 2004). Similarly, like jazz improvisation is free but based on a strict preparation, the equally planned actions by the film characters Florence Carala (Jeanne Moreau) and Julien Tavernier (Maurice Ronet) acquire spontaneity. Alongside the heroes, we do not know what will happen to them in the next moment. And at the same time we have a clear pattern of detective stories. This is akin to a combination of clearly thought out composition scheme with free improvisation. The wandering of modal lights and shadows in solo melodies of cool mysterious jazz reflects the unpredictability of characters' decisions accompanying the irregular movie rhythm. The narrative feature of these films is the unpredictability of a dramatic situation, which is similar to the aleatory episodes of jazz improvisation. In addition, the predominantly non-diegetic status of this music is intended to convey to the viewer the main emotion of Noir movie. On the other hand, this is a vivid example of music "as a sign of the fictional state of the world created on screen" (Winters, 2010).

The ultimate form of interaction with the improvisation of Jazz is the so-called "jazz cinema" or "improvised films", based on the communication of characters and "Shadows" (John Cassavetes) (1959) happened to be the first specimen of such kind of films. The first work of Cassavetes in independent cinema is remarkable in fact that there is no script in it. There is no linear storyline in the film the plot unfolds as a collective improvisation around relationship in a group of young people living on the margins of society. And it all centers on an African-American family of siblings. It is a common knowledge that the idea of this film was born in the process of acting sketches, a form of exercises close to a jazz jam session. During the filming, the actors were given a specific situational task and were provided with freedom in the dialogues and character development. Improvised communication of characters is accompanied by conversational

remarks of such instruments as saxophone, contrabass and percussions. The story line moves from one character to another one, the beginning and the ending of the film tell the story of Ben's (Ben Carruthers) wandering with friends, Denis (Denis Sallas) and Tom (Tom Allen), about the city streets in search of adventure. The central part of the narrative is devoted to his brother Hugh (Hugh Hurd), a jazz singer, and his teenage sister, Lelia (Lelia Goldoni). Like the musical dialogue of jazz artists, all the replicas of actors are improvisation where "the characters meet and compete, there is a challenge and overcoming" (Batashev, 1987). These are rather contemplative films than action films and the main dramatic situation in them is the dialogue between the characters. It resembles the situation of communication in jazz, which nature is related to the priority of the process over the result. In other words, improvisation at the time of performance dominates over the preliminary composition. It is expressed by the unexpectedness of heroes' lines or behavior.

Film "Round Midnight" (Bertrand Tavernier) (1986) has the same feature in his dramatic narrative, which is divided into two main situations of communication between characters and the improvisation performing of the hero in a night bar. Schematically the narrative is cyclical and can be represented by a spiral.

Biopic is the rare case when the direct value of music in the frame is updated. According to Claudia Gorbman, the value of music in the film is divided into three levels and each of them can be singled out in one particular fragment. The first is a "pure musical code" and a case of "generating musical discourse, music on this level refers to musical structure itself" (Gorbman, 1987, p.13). The second is a "cultural musical code" deal with a narration subject and the last one is a "cinematic musical code" reflecting the film diegesis. Speaking of the films discussed above, the most attention should be paid to the third type – "cinematic code" because the film music is mostly associated with a dramatic narrative characterizing the action on the screen. Film "Round Midnight" is dedicated to the fate of a jazz musician, saxophonist Dale Turner (Dexter Gordon). The narrative is based on showing the musician's performances in the night bar. So together with his friend and admirer Francis (François Cluzet), the viewer enjoys the listening to a languid night tenor saxophone. In these episodes that form the basis of the dramatic composition, the "pure musical code" is updated. Virtually jazz improvisation builds a film composition.

Film "Ragtime" (Miloš Forman) (1981) is the next example of the music influence on screen narrative. Being one of the pre-Jazz kinds of music, ragtime developed its own system of expressive means and became a sensitive reflection of its time or "a metaphor for an era" (Hasse, 1985, p.1). Subsequently, the jazz itself inherited from ragtime the ability to interact with any music styles, rhythmic significance and impermanence, timbre diversity, contrast of composition and improvisation. As it is known, ragtime culture combined such basic forms as instrumental pieces for piano or orchestra, ragtime songs, syncopated waltzes and "ragging" of classics and other preexisting pieces" (Hasse, 1985, p.2). All of the types are reflected in film episodes. So the main title musical theme of the film is a waltz that symbolizes the happiness and aspiration of the characters for a happy life. Appearing unchanged at the beginning and at the end of the film, this melody sounds airily and carelessly performed by the piano then by the violin and the entire string group. Actually instrumental ragtime abounds in the film and here it can highlight the themes with solo piano and fragments performed by the symphonic or wind orchestra. The first of them is associated with the main character Coalhouse Walker, Jr. (Howard E. Rollins, Jr.) and expresses his image, his propensity for a protest and his difficult fate. The second one is related to an upper-class society reflecting the splendor of luxury, the idleness of pastime, the nobility of manners and at the same time the absurdity of actions. In addition to this, a number of plug-in musical numbers are represented by a repertoire of vaudeville shows and household music as a sign of the time. Indeed, in Madison Square Garden episode we can hear the song with dancing performed on the stage. Considering that at that time any song "with rhythmic life, particularly if it were danceable and in a duple or quadruple meter, was called a rag" (Hasse, 1985, p.75), this diegetic plug-in number can represent a corresponding genre variety. The special attention is given to this kind of ragtime as a syncopated classic so-called "ragging" of classics. This is a

culminating episode in the lyrical line of the relationship between the hero Coalhouse Walker, Jr and his lover Sarah (Debbie Allen). The pianist begins to play the prelude of Frederick Chopin A major and then introduces it into a ragtime melody. This music symbolizes the authenticity of the heroes' feelings, the true significance of the situation. So it can be concluded that ragtime with its genre varieties has certain impact on the film narrative structure supplementing the plot with episodes which fix the forms of this music. Schematically this composition can be represented in the form of rondo with a waltz-refrain and other theme-episodes. In other words, the effect of cyclist and a closed composition is created due to the use of ragtime music culture.

As for the instrumental ragtime, this kind was "influenced by the prevailing fashion in dance music" (Hasse, 1985, p.272). Among them there were two-step, cakewalk, polka and even military quick-step march. The diegetic part of film soundtrack contains all these genres, for instance the cakewalk with dessert at the White's gala reception or the polka at Delmonico's restaurant or piano polka performed by Evelyn at the dance lesson and finally the two-step dance at the Clef club and quick-step march at the meeting with vice president. Moreover, "classic" ragtime helps to convey the signs of time, namely, accompanying a silent movie session in Newsreel episode. The abundance of instrumental and harmonic colors expressed in the diversity of performers should be added to the genre variety as a feature of ragtime. The piano is leading here because this timbre is connected with the main character. It is then followed by a violin and strings characterize sublime sensory moments in the life of heroes. The next type of timbre colors are winds represented in ritual episodes of the vice president meeting and the Sarah's funeral, in the latter case, with an organ. Wind orchestra music is also performed before the turning point in the fate of the main character when he meets fire volunteers. In other words, the wind instruments symbolize simultaneously the rapture of the senses and the tragic predestination of the hero's life. All in all, the timbre diversity serves as a good complement to the variety of genres around ragtime and equally identifies both the diegetic narration and the states and experiences of the characters in metadiegetic narration of "sound-emotional landscapes" (Denikin, 2013).

As a genre, ragtime is known for its combination of a highly syncopated treble lead and a rhythmical steady bass and also for its composition of three or four contrasting sections. And this feature of ragtime can be compared with the specifics of the narrative in the film. The equal-beat rhythm of the bass is associated with the measured life of the upper-class society while the capricious syncopated melody line is comparable to the unpredictability of events in their lives. In fact, an architect Stanford White (Norman Mailer) who celebrates the completion of his new creation does not suspect of an unexpected invasion of an insulted millionaire's Harry Kendall Thaw (Robert Joy), and certainly does not mean to perish from his hand in Madison Square Garden. Someone unexpectedly invades the quiet solitary life of a rich family in a suburban home in New Rochelle. First it is a dark-skinned baby found by a maid in the garden, next is his mother Sarah, then father Coalhouse Walker, Jr. and, finally, policemen and reporters disturbing their lives. By the end of the movie, the couple is completely apart and the Mother leaves suburban home with a film director Tateh (Mandy Patinkin). Similarly, the losses, one after another, haunt the main character Coalhouse Walker, Jr.: his honour, his car, his beloved and his life. Thus, the film narration is based on a constant collision of a stable life course and unexpectedly bursting circumstances that destroy it like a ragtime "featuring a syncopated melody against an even accompaniment" (Hasse, 1985, p.2). The fate of the characters is just as unpredictable as the syncopated twists of a ragtime melody. The moment the melody is broken up into short rhythms, the lives of the heroes break, too.

Being in actively demand in silent films ragtime sensitively responded to the frame movement change of the action and atmosphere. This variability is emphasized by a variety of melodies which are usually three or four in "classic" ragtime. The film soundtrack composed by Randy Newman portrayed the tone of the movie and its storylines, in which three or four couples are shown to be either family or lovers. These are pianist Coalhouse and washerwomen Sarah, millionaire Harry and model Evelyn, unnamed Father and

Mother of a rich family, a street artist Tateh and his wife. In the course of events, these couples change where Evelyn is in affair with the Younger Brother and the Mother departs with a film director. The diversity of the New York population in the film time is associated with a variety of melodies included in ragtime which is adaptable to any style and invention. So being sensitive in the era of silent movies, nowadays ragtime again explains the wider non-musical concepts. In this case, ragtime participates in shaping thus influencing the plot and the film composition.

Speaking about the impact of ragtime on the narrative structure of the self-titled film, it is necessary to mention the ratio of the diegetic and non-diegetic musical levels. The first one is connected with situations of motivated usage of music in accordance with events. These are episodes of a newsreel session, various parties, an official meeting with the vice-president and Sarah's funeral. The second is functionally divided into those characterizing the situation and those conveying the main character's inner state. These are, on the one hand, the episodes of the artist's journey, the family in the suburban house New Rochelle, the scenes in the Lower East Side, in the seized Pierpont Morgan Library, and in the Atlantic City, on the other hand, it is a scene of Coalhouse Walker's meeting with his beloved Sarah and his joy about her consent to marry him. Of a particular interest are the cases of the transition of music from the diegetic to the non-diegetic level of the narrative. These include a White party's cakewalk turning into a scene of a family dinner in a suburban house; Clef Club contest where the Walker's performance flows into an episode of a street artist Tateh's moving with his daughter; Walker's performance in Clef Club connected with Evelyn's travelling to Lower East Side; Walker's playing the piano in the family house passing to his and Sarah's love scene. Evenly alternating at the film beginning, these scenes connecting the two levels of narration disappear after the first Walker's loss in the episode with firemen. In this case, ragtime participates in the formation of "audiovisual plastics of the screen language" (Denikin, 2013).

To sum up, it should be noted that in such films as "Ragtime" with a lot of storylines and a complex dramatic narrative structure the interaction with the musical component is carried out simultaneously on several levels: in the genre-stylistic sphere, compositional-dramaturgic features and on the level of language expressiveness. This type of interrelation seems to be particularly fruitful.

Conclusion

On the basis of the above-mentioned films we can conclude that jazz and pre-jazzy genres are open to active exchange with any movie form rethinking it in the original creative way. The common trope of the Jazz and films is the time nature that allows them to be in cooperation. The narrative feature of Noir films is the unpredictability of the dramatic development, which is similar to the aleatory episodes of jazz improvisation. The ultimate form of interaction with the improvisation of jazz is the so-called "jazz cinema", based on the communication of characters. These are rather contemplative films than action films reflecting jazz as a form of communication. On the contrary, biopic films actualize the monologue in jazz as a form of self-expression. Drama films with a more complex structure and several story lines are open to a more versatile dialogue with jazz reflecting genre features, means of expression, compositional properties.

One of the main features that unite film structure and jazzy music is the dialogical character of narration. This property pulls improvisation as method of presentation and composition building.

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