

THE POP SONG IN FILM

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Introduction

This is a study of the pop song *in* film narrative, rather than an account of the pop song *and* narrative film. The distinction indicates my interest in understanding the transformations pop songs undergo when they are asked to accompany the events of a fiction film: at these moments the song is no longer something that stands alone; its meanings can only be fully apprehended by understanding its placement within a particular narrative cocoon. When pop songs are used in narrative cinema, they become an integral part of a particular fictional world, whilst simultaneously retaining their status as pop music. It is the interaction between the pop song and the narrative situation to which it contributes that this study will explore.

The interactions between pop song and narrative situation result from a series of choices made by filmmakers. In the first place, a decision has to be made about the selection of a particular song to accompany specific narrative events. What is it about *this* song that makes it appropriate to *this* dramatic context? There are also often choices to be made to do with the *form* the song will take within the fictional world of the film: will an on-screen source be established for it, or will it take its place in the position traditionally reserved for the specially composed film score, which has no discernible on-screen source? Decisions are made about the *choreography* between visual action and song: for instance, will visual elements be made to correspond with particular rhythmic or musical aspects of the song, and/or will the correspondence between music and image be understood more according to their shared ‘themes’? Choices are also made concerning the relationship between the song and other elements of the soundtrack. Will other sounds be audible as the song is heard, or will it dominate the film’s soundscape at that moment entirely? What other kinds of (musical) sounds are used in the film, in relation to which the use of a pop song at a particular moment will be placed?

These choices affect the manner in which the viewer is encouraged to understand the narrative status of a song in

relation to the fictional world it inhabits. The vast majority of the songs contained in this study come to their films with a history already behind them: unlike the specially composed score, these songs have enjoyed an existence in their own right before being selected for use in a particular film. The pre-existing quality of these songs does not, however, lead to a simple importation of meanings into the films in which they are used. The choices made by filmmakers as to the relative weight given to both the song’s purely musical and culturally resonant qualities in relation to a particular dramatic situation, are decisive in shaping the viewer’s understanding of the role the music plays.

To demonstrate the importance of these acts of selection, chapters one, two and three will each consider two uses of pop music that are comparable in terms of raw material (whether that be comparable types of music or similar narrative contexts), but differentiated through the specific interactions contrived between pop song and the dramatic situation. Chapter one compares the use of the same song (Portishead’s ‘Glory Box’) in two films, *Stealing Beauty* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1996) and *When the Cat’s Away* (Cédric Klapisch, 1996), to illustrate how exactly the same musical material can generate different meanings according to its particular positioning within a filmed fictional world.

In these opening examples, the pop song figures as a *narrational device*. That is to say, it helps to present the film’s story to the viewer and to offer a particular perspective on that story, in the same manner as other elements of narration such as camerawork, the organisation of mise-en-scène, editing or the specially composed film score. Chapter two will consider the pop song in the fiction film in a different guise: as a *narrative element*. The pop songs discussed in this chapter are rendered through on-screen performances, as the result of the visible and audible activity of characters within the drama, rather than existing as a disembodied presence on the soundtrack. This is not the only way the pop song can appear as a narrative element. Pop songs often appear as part of the ‘visible’ world of the film by being played through stereos, jukeboxes, in club scenes, or simply being ‘in the air’ as background noise in street scenes. Such instances will be discussed in chapter four, through the detailed analysis of *Baby, It’s You* (John Sayles, 1983).

The case studies in chapter two consist of two star-vehicle musicals from the mid-1950s, *Young at Heart* (Gordon Douglas, 1954) and *Pal Joey* (George Sidney, 1957), where the central (but not only) musical performances are enacted on-screen by Frank Sinatra, the biggest pop star, along with Elvis Presley, that the era had to offer. In certain ways, the genre these films inhabit, the musical, marks them apart from the other films discussed in this study. The musical offers a specialist space in which pop songs can be performed, and which usually guarantees that attention will be dedicated to the detail of the song being delivered. There is no such guarantee that the song will be the main focus of attention in the non-musical. In addition the type of attachments made between the song used as narrative device and the song performed by character on-screen, as narrative element, are different: the 'distance' between song and film character in the first instance gives the potential for the music to act as commentary on the character's situation (as a musical type of voiceover), whereas the song performed by an on-screen character works more directly (as a musical form of first-person speech).

However, in other respects, an understanding of the number in the musical as an instance of the *pop song's* involvement in narrative cinema is important to what I wish to say about the use of pop music in other contexts. Firstly, the song sequence in the musical provides a limit case, in terms of the extent to which the pop song is fully embodied by a particular character or characters. I discuss a number of sequences throughout this study where filmmakers arrange the relationship between pop song and non-singing character in a way which suggests that the character aspires to act in a manner fitting to the music on the soundtrack, even when it is not indicated that the song has a literal on-screen source. The extent to which the desire on the part of the character to 'embody' the song is allowed to be achieved, or is seen to fail, is a crucial way in which the interaction between song and character activity can be made meaningful.

Secondly, the Frank Sinatra musicals help to map out the cultural territory occupied by the type of pop song that is focused upon throughout this study: that is to say, a kind of overtly commercial popular music which differentiates itself from

other types of music in terms of commonly held perceptions about its cultural currency. This specificity will be described more closely in chapter one, but for now it is enough to say that both *Young at Heart* and *Pal Joey* point to the centrality of notions of *pop stardom* to the delivery and understanding of the pop song. When filmmakers make use of a particular pop song, the persona of the star who sings it becomes a possible element to be referred to and made meaningful to the dramatic situation. The Frank Sinatra musicals in chapter two provide a setting where the inter-relationship between the pop song and the pop star, and the implications this has for understanding the pop song's place in a particular narrative context, is tackled head on.

Finally, chapter two corresponds to the overall aims of the study in its attention to the relationship between the pop song and film character. The song sequences in these musicals negotiate between representing Sinatra as a star, performing in a style for which he is already renowned, and tailoring the performances to the particular dramatic requirements of the film. In keeping with my interest in exploring the consequences of filmmakers making different choices with regard to the same source material (here the material is Sinatra himself), I have chosen two films which represent two different sides of the Sinatra persona, and which handle the 'fit' between star persona and fictional character in different ways.

Chapter three returns to the use of pop songs with no discernible on-screen source, as a kind of commentary on the characters for whose movements they provide the soundtrack. Like chapter two, this section engages with the cultural specificity of the pop song, but this time in terms of its consumption by *fans*, rather than its production through the agency of stars. I suggest, following work on pop music by Simon Frith, that the pop song represents a particularly 'possessable' cultural form. The affiliations struck between the pop music listener, the pop song, and the pop star(s) associated with it have been viewed as exhibiting a unique intensity. In this chapter, I relate this understanding of the pop song's cultural value generally to its functioning as dramatic film music in sequences from *Midnight Cowboy* (John Schlesinger, 1969) and *Saturday Night Fever* (John Badham, 1977). I argue that the assumption that

the pop song can take a role in constructing identities in everyday life is another area filmmakers can play upon when using songs to help construct the identities of their films' characters.

Chapters two and three, then, are interested in understanding both different formal aspects of the use of the pop song in narrative films (as narrative element or narrational device) and the specific cultural qualities commonly associated with the particular type of pop music under discussion in this study (pop stardom and pop fandom respectively). Chapter four, 'The Pop Song and Screen Identities,' offers an extended analysis of a film where the formal and cultural qualities discussed in the previous two chapters are brought together. *Baby, It's You* makes use of the pop song as narrative element *and* narrational device. It also identifies the cultural specificity of the pop song as lying in its emphasis on notions of both stardom *and* fandom. In the film, Sheik (Vincent Spano) is a huge fan of Frank Sinatra who tries to forge a pop career of his own. *Baby, It's You* constructs a fictional world in which common assumptions about pop music culture are central, whilst also holding those assumptions up for scrutiny, as they are worked through in a particular narrative context.

As such, *Baby, It's You* brings to the fore the double nature of the pop song in film: as a culturally meaningful object in its own right on the one hand, and as an integral part of the film's fictional world on the other. My interest throughout is in exploring how filmmakers enable specific songs to tell a story about themselves at the same time as these songs are made to help tell the story of a particular film.

Chapter one begins by clarifying key terms and concepts. Thereafter, the study relies on close readings of sequences and films to make its arguments, and as such, the reader will ideally have viewed the film before reading the analysis. I have attempted to use language that is precise and evocative, without resorting to the jargon of film studies or musicology.

However, on occasion I do use two terms that require brief explanation: when I refer to 'non-diegetic' music, I am discussing music that does not have any visible or plausible on-screen source. This is the type of film music traditionally associated with the composed orchestral score, but which can also be provided by the pop song when it is used as a narrational device; 'diegetic music', on the other hand, is music which *does* emanate

from an on-screen source. In practice, some of the most interesting examples of the use of pop music in film are those when the status of a song crosses over between these two categories.

1. Pop music as film music

Defining the pop song

Pop music has always had a role to play in cinema, even before sound film became the industry standard in the late 1920s. In the earliest film showings, a live pianist and singer would play accompaniment to song slides illustrating the popular hits of the day, to cover the time it took to change film reels (see Altman 2001). Live music also accompanied the screenings of silent films, with melodies as likely to be culled from popular songs as they were from the more ‘respectable’ classical repertoire recommended in the cue sheets sent to theatres by distributors (Reay 2004: 10). The musical, one of Hollywood’s most buoyant genres between the coming of sound in the late 1920s and the mid-1950s, showcased performers and songs whose star status and popularity were established through radio, musical theatre and record sales, as well as through the movie screen. It is also the case that a number of non-musical films have used pop music on their soundtracks in imaginative ways, from the earliest days of sound cinema (*The Public Enemy* (William Wellman, 1931) is just one early example).

The particular focus of this study is the *pop song* in narrative film, and, as a first step, it is necessary for me to explain what I take the term to cover.

Pop music as a particular mode of performance

The pop song in narrative film provides a special instance of the popular film music score more generally, a form whose distinctiveness from the classical score lies, according to Jeff Smith,

in its greater sense of rhythmic and melodic freedom and its emphasis on unique timbres ... things that cannot be captured in traditional Western notation, but rather are identifiable by a certain “feel” to the music, a feel that is only

actualised in the process of performance. Unlike classical music, the individual character of a pop piece is not inherent in its form, but rather in the materiality of its sound. (1998: 10)

This distinction is not absolute: for instance, the ‘individual character’ of a classical music performance can be registered through its ‘unique timbre’, but Smith argues that due to the ‘comparatively rigorous performance standards of classical music’ ... [the range of interpretive possibilities] is much narrower than that of popular music.’ (1998: 9). One element of pop music where this difference is particularly apparent is in the singer’s voice: one of the ways pop singers differentiate themselves from each other is through the idiosyncrasies of their vocal delivery, rather than their attainment of a classical standard.

Pop music as a particular kind of sound

The materiality of sound to which Smith refers is created by instrumentation that is also different to the conventional classical combinations, whether the big-band arrangements bolstering Frank Sinatra’s swing jazz style in *Pal Joey*, the sparse ensemble of bass, drums and sampled effects that accompanies Beth Gibbon’s brittle singing of ‘Glory Box’ discussed below, or the urgent combination of strings, clipped guitar and funk rhythms that accompanies Bobby Womack’s soulful rendition of ‘Across 110th Street’, heard at the beginning of *Jackie Brown* (Quentin Tarantino, 1997), discussed in the conclusion.

Not all pop music includes the voice as part of its sonic material, but this study does focus on such instances. The concentration on the song’s use in film is due, in part, to the especially important role the lyrics can play as a kind of commentary on a narrative situation, or, when the song is performed by an on-screen character, as a particularly heightened form of self-expression.

The pop song as a particular commercial cultural form

The connotations surrounding particular songs will be discussed at relevant points, but it is useful here to make some

broad claims about the pop song as a cultural form. The pop songs discussed in this study belong to a musical canon that has been constructed within certain commercial parameters. The pop music industry as it exists today is generally viewed as taking shape in the mid-1920s, with the development of electrical recording techniques and the establishing of radio networks such as NBC and CBS. These developments allowed for the effective mass distribution of popular music, and the packaging of it as a particular type of commodity form.

One aspect of this commercial process is the common association of the individual song with a particular star or group. The song is routinely understood as helping to articulate the star persona of the singer or group who performs it, as well as existing as a discrete entity in its own right. Simon Frith identifies the importance of the star to the production and reception of the pop song in his book *Sound Effects*:

The music business doesn't only turn music into commodities, as records, it also turns musicians into commodities, as stars ... Record companies (like film studios) seek to reverse the "rational" relationship between stardom and music (or films) – if acts become stars because people like their records, the commercial object is to get people to buy their records because they are stars. (1983: 134)

Commenting specifically on rock music, Frith continues:

"Stardom" describes a relationship between performer and audience ... rock records, however privately used, take their resonance from public leisure, from the public ways in which stars are made. (1983: 135)

It is part of the cultural currency of this type of pop music that the individual song is wrapped up in the revealing of the musical persona of its performer. The resonance of the pop star persona, therefore, provides a powerful resource to be made use of by filmmakers when they involve a particular performer's songs in their fictional scenarios.

Frith's description of stardom as a 'relationship between performer and *audience*' (my italics) points to the second feature associated with the cultural functioning of the type of

pop music discussed in this study: namely, the relationship between pop stars, songs and the construction of the individual and group identities of pop music fans. It has been commonly accepted that pop fans use music imaginatively in the construction of their own identities, in a more intense manner than is associated with most other cultural forms. In chapter four, I shall discuss the role of the pop song in the formation of identity, as it is conventionally understood, and suggest equivalences between this wider cultural process and the specific use of the pop song in providing identities for film characters.

The first two features discussed above refer to pop music generally as a type of sound and mode of performance that is distinguishable from classical music (which has traditionally formed the basis for the specially composed orchestral score). The pop song, that is to say pop music with words, exists as a special example of this musical form. The final feature, the significance of particular modes of stardom and fandom, differentiates the pop song from other forms of popular music. This precludes from my study such instances of popular music in film as the 'pop score' (that is, the specially composed instrumental score which makes use of pop music styles and idioms rather than classical ones). It also excludes a consideration of types of popular music which are lyric-less or do not revolve around notions of pop stardom and fandom in the manner characteristic of the pop song (for example, the folk music which pervades the soundtrack of, in particular, the Hollywood Western).

The importance of voice and notions of stardom and fandom to the operation of the pop song in narrative cinema are what mark it out as distinctive from other types of film music. This is not to say, however, that these are the only elements that are important. Lyrics may be made meaningful to the particular narrative event which they accompany; viewers may be encouraged to appreciate the star persona of the singer behind the song as part of their understanding of the song's function in relation to a particular scene. However, the emphasis on these particular qualities of the music is only the result of decisions made by the filmmaker. The pop song provides rich source material, in terms of both its 'musical' and 'cultural' qualities. Filmmakers choose to exploit the expressive potential of certain of these qualities through the manner in which the song

is made to interact with the other material that constitutes the film's fictional world.

Two uses of Portishead's 'Glory Box'

In order to demonstrate the rich potential of using a pop song as dramatic film music, I will examine the use of the same song in two different films. The purpose of this analysis is to demonstrate how the filmmakers make a different set of choices with regard to their source material, the song, due to the different dramatic effects each filmmaker is pursuing. In its transformation from pop song to film music, the song retains a certain sense of its own cultural and musical specificity, whilst also taking its place within the unique context of the film's fictional world.

Portishead achieved international commercial and critical success with their debut album 'Dummy' (1994) and one of its most well known songs, 'Glory Box', was used in Bernardo Bertolucci's international art movie, *Stealing Beauty* and Cédric Klapisch's French drama, *Chacun cherche son chat* (*When the Cat's Away*), both released in 1996. The version of 'Glory Box' featured on 'Dummy' fades in gently with a simple, leisurely descending bass figure (b flat up to e flat, then notes down the scale played twice on its way back to b flat), a snare drum sounding out in the gaps between the pairs of bass notes, with a more complicated 'roll' at the end of the riff. A swirling strings melody is also repeated, continuing when singer Beth Gibbons begins the first verse, her voice somewhat brittle as she intones the lyrics with cool precision:

I'm so tired ... of playing
 Playing with this bow and arrow
 Gonna give my heart away
 Leave it to the other girls to play
 For I've been a temp-ter-ess too long

Gibbons' detached vocals give way to the throaty 'yes' which follows the verse and heralds the entrance of the chorus. Whilst the same bassline, drum pattern and strings continue unchanged (as they do throughout the entire song), a churning,

distorted guitar riff lurches to the fore, and Gibbons' voice discovers new-found body and flow:

Give me a reason to love you
 Give me a reason to be ... a woman

On both occasions, there is a melodic turn on 'reason', 'be' is stretched at high pitch, and 'a woman' is delivered dreamily in the breath that follows. The guitar riff runs out and Gibbons sings 'I just wanna be a woman' in a more conversational tone, as if making sure the listener understands the point she had made so passionately in the preceding two lines. In short, the chorus is as revealing of the grain of Gibbons' voice as the verse is determined to bestow a feeling of iciness upon it.

This description of the song up until the end of the first chorus is intended to identify the musical elements available to be made use of by each sequence: the spare drum pattern and simple bass riff, each allowing the other room to be heard, offering a sense of musical space; the icy vocals of the verse, detailing a desire to throw off the shackles which the maintenance of this coolness imposes; and the shedding of inhibitions of the chorus as Gibbons pleads for a reason to abandon her distanced poise, whilst the lurching guitar ranges over the measured space of the other instrumentation.

Stealing Beauty uses 'Glory Box' to accompany a scene in which a teenage girl exhibits a yearning with parallels to that voiced in the song. Lucy (Liv Tyler) is an American teenager spending her vacation in an Italian village. Seeking out Niccolo (Roberto Zibetti), the local lad she had enjoyed a childhood romance with some years earlier, she patrols the foyer of his family's villa, before spying on him making love to another woman in a grove outside.

The opening passage of the song offers the sense of waiting for something else to be released. If the standard practice of fading out a pop song represents a gradual climbing down from the intensity which had preceded it, the gentle fade-in of 'Glory Box' suggests a building towards something more intense. Gibbons is demonstrably holding her emotions back in the first verse and the words she sings anticipate an untethering from this restraint. Furthermore the spaciousness of the

musical backing seems to be leaving room for something else to emerge to fill out the sound. This impression of anticipating something more intense finds a correspondence in the sequence, choreographed to Lucy's gangly wandering about and wide-eyed gazing. Lucy is shown first cycling down the avenue leading to the villa, densely tangled trees arching over her, then walking down the fresco decorated reception hall, the earthy paintings she gazes upon featuring carnival scenes, men and women dancing and finally two bulls staring out of the picture (and looming to the front of the frame with a zoom). The setting is lush, in terms of both the natural landscape and the vibrant frescoes, the sights she registers heavy with eroticism (through the frescoes) and history (through the maturity of the natural setting and the age of the buildings) that is at odds with her own sexual inexperience and youth. At the same time, Lucy demonstrates a fascination with these sights and a sense of expectation: she is, after all, searching for the man who had provided her with her first romantic experience.

The song, then, represents on the soundtrack both Lucy's lack of experience and her anticipation. However, during the chorus, when music and vocal gain more body, the force of the transition is lost as Lucy drowns out the music by asking a maid where Niccolo is. The sequence wards off any sense of climactic release being associated with Lucy at this moment. Instead, after she has walked through the villa's garden towards a dense grove during the second verse (sung in the same terse style as the first and with a similarly yearning lyric) – 'From this time unchained/we're all looking at a different picture/through this new frame of mind/a thousand flowers could bloom/move over and give us some room' - she discovers and watches Niccolo having sex with a woman against a tree. The camera begins to dolly around the couple as the grinding guitar kicks in, the view obscured by foliage, before a cut to Lucy looking away and



up. Here the repetition of the guitar riff continues over a brief, but expansive, dolly around part of the crumbling villa wall, dominated by a baroque statue. Whilst the first chorus is cut off in its prime by Lucy's questioning, here its increased passion is allowed a correlative in the imagery, which intensifies a spectacle of uninhibited eroticism (as she watches Niccolo having sex) and ancient environment (represented by the villa's architecture and state of repair) with which Lucy is at odds.

By overlaying the first chorus with Lucy's everyday conversation, and by diverting attention away from her in its choreography of the second, the sequence withholds from Lucy the leap into passion enacted by the song: Lucy remains conspicuously the innocent onlooker. This is in fact more appropriate to the spirit of the song than it may at first appear, in that, despite its more engaged delivery, the lyric of the chorus still finds the singer pleading for something to happen, rather than celebrating it happening.

In *When the Cat's Away*, by contrast, 'Glory Box' is used at the film's climax and actually becomes the soundtrack for just such a celebration, providing the spectacle of a woman revelling in the feeling of experiencing something new. Chloé (Garance





Clavel), the woman in question, has struggled throughout the film to find contentment in her home city of Paris, her unease exacerbated by the disappearance of her cat. Forced to team up with the tight-knit network of old ladies who live in her block of flats, all of whom display unshakeable confidence in their cat-finding abilities, Chloé gradually comes into contact with the outside world more generally, with mixed results. By the end of the film, however, her cat has returned and she has unexpectedly begun to form a relationship with her artist neighbour Bel Canto (Joel Brisse), who, ironically, she has only got to know by helping him move out. 'Glory Box' emerges on the non-diegetic soundtrack as she stands on the street outside the local café, pictured from shoulders up, smiling broadly whilst watching Bel Canto's removal van disappear into the distance. She giggles to herself and then turns away. The cut after her turning coincides exactly with the beginning of the first verse, the camera tracking with her in a shot from waist up as she runs joyfully along the pavement, still laughing. On the first lurching guitar riff that immediately precedes the chorus, the

camera also 'lurches' down as it blurs past a parked car, then lifts itself up again, to follow Chloé's movement once more, but this time with only her head and shoulders in view (the result of a jump cut). When the chorus is finished, the film cuts to the credits, the song fading out as they end.

This sequence is more specific in its articulation of the meanings the song can be taken to convey than the *Stealing Beauty* sequence. Firstly, the song is far more precisely placed in relation to a particular character. If the conventional orchestral score, appealing as it does to assumptions about music's special access to, and expression of, emotional states, is routinely used to convey what is on a character's mind, it may be that pop music, with its more immediate association with the body and physical movement, is often made to give the impression that it is actually playing in a character's head. Here, Chloé turns and runs as if on command, in response to the emergence of Beth Gibbons' voice. The combination of the diving camera, the jump cut and Chloé's carefree stumbling with the introduction of the lurching guitar riff provides a reciprocity between

sound and image to indicate that both are in fact exhibiting the same degree of 'giddiness'.

Furthermore, 'Glory Box' emerges as the sound 'playing in Chloé's head' by fading in behind, then swiftly superseding, the off-camera, diegetic singing of the old women in the café. Their song, 'Ça, c'est Paris', is in the French cabaret tradition (originally popularised by the legendary music hall singer Mistinguett) and it is the emphatically repeated chant of its title that is heard as 'Glory Box' makes its presence felt. The version of the song heard in the film begins off-screen as we watch Bel Canto waving goodbye to Chloé and climbing into his van (with close shots of Chloé interspersed). Only then does the film move inside the café to focus upon the leading singers (including the old lady behind whose cooker the titular cat had in fact been stuck), before returning to a shot of the van finally departing and then the mid-close shot of Chloé which signals the arrival of 'Glory Box'.

The lyrics to 'Ça, c'est Paris', as translated in the subtitles, run as follows:

Paris, Queen of the world
Paris is a blond
Her nose in the air, mockingly
Her eyes always smiling
Everyone who knows her leaves in the thrall of her caresses
But they always come back
Paris here's to our love!
That's Paris!

The 'Glory Box' sequence leaves 'Ça, c'est Paris' behind in five ways. Firstly, it replaces the demonstration of music being used communally with a song undergoing a personal attachment to one character. Secondly, the use of the woman as a metaphor for the city in 'Ça, c'est Paris' is replaced by the display of a real woman experiencing freedom in the real city for the first time. Thirdly, the assertion that Paris remains inescapable is overlaid with images of Bel Canto in fact 'escaping', and followed by the demonstration of a personal sense of freedom within the city that is represented by Chloé's giddy run. Fourthly, 'Glory Box' offers a contrastingly spacious sound to the raucous sing-song it replaces, as well as an international one. Except

for 'So Tired of Being Alone' by Al Green, which accompanies Chloé's assistance of Bel Canto packing, 'Glory Box' is the only English language song in the film. As a pair, both accompany moments which show Chloé escaping the oppressive feelings of loneliness that have stifled her throughout. Finally, the lyrics of 'Glory Box' contrast with 'Ça, c'est Paris' in their insistence on the personal ('give *me* a reason to love you' as opposed to 'here's to *our* love'), and the desire to change a situation ('I'm so tired of playing...'), rather than the celebration of the status quo ('her eyes *always* smiling ... they *always* come back' [my italics]).

The transition from one song to the other, then, enacts a movement away from the communal to the private, from the parochial to the international, from woman as metaphor to woman as real, from vocal descriptions of entrapment by the city (no matter how benign) to images of the self-sufficient pleasures provided by feeling comfortable in one's own skin, and from the celebration of an unchanging situation to the depiction of a key moment of change. The film demonstrates 'Glory Box' to be an appropriate soundtrack for this movement by virtue of its audible difference to what has been heard before it.

Stealing Beauty casts 'Glory Box' in tandem with a young woman's unfulfilled yearning, while *When the Cat's Away* has it accompanying a woman demonstrating that her shackles have been cast off. *Stealing Beauty* may be more faithful to the reasonable interpretation of the song's lyric as one of unfulfilled desire, but *When the Cat's Away* is more specific about its potential resonances as a pop song and more responsive to its sense of musical space, even if it proposes the lyrics as a strident clarion call for action rather than as a desperate plea.

Areas of choice: obtrusiveness, cultural resonance and quality of distance

We can derive from these analyses a number of key concepts for considering the choices filmmakers can exercise in terms of the relationship a song will have to its narrative context. Three issues seem central: (i) the pop song's quality of obtrusiveness; (ii) the cultural connotations associated with a particular song or type of pop music, before its use in the film in question; and,

in all but the special case of the on-screen performance in the musical, (iii) a quality of potential ‘distance’ from narrative events. This comes as a result of both the song having a life of its own, rather than being designed specifically for a moment in the film, as is customary with the specially composed film score, and as a consequence of the song’s physical separation from a particular on-screen body.

Obtrusiveness

Much criticism of the use of the pop song in narrative cinema has revolved around the perception that it is excessively obtrusive, when compared to the more traditional orchestral score. This obtrusiveness has been seen to derive from:

- (i) the supposed lack of flexibility of the song form, which, due to its existence as a pre-determined structure in its own right, has been perceived to be less malleable than the specially composed score, which is often constructed of deliberately short phrases, designed to weave in and out of the soundtrack with the maximum dexterity and minimum of fuss;
- (ii) the presence of words in the pop song, which have been seen to offer a potential source of distraction for the viewer, leading them away from an engagement with the dramatic content of the narrative; and
- (iii) an obtrusiveness in terms of the cultural connotations a well-known song may ‘import’ in to a particular film (this will be dealt with further below).¹

It is the contention of this study that these elements of obtrusiveness, far from being blocks to the expressive potential of the pop song as dramatic film music, lay the ground for such a potential. In the uses of ‘Glory Box’ already cited and in several of the examples that follow, the specific form of the pop song is integral to the manner in which the filmmaker co-opts it for the requirements of a particular scene. It becomes a matter of choice on the filmmaker’s part to choreograph the other elements of the film’s fictional world in relationship with this structure.

It is not inevitable that the song’s integrity as a pre-existing structure will determine its placement within a particular scene. The filmmaker is at liberty to select which part of the song is to be used for dramatic effect, and to weave the song in and out of the soundtrack (for instance to allow dialogue to remain intelligible) in a manner characteristic of the conventional specially composed score. Furthermore, the extent to which the different structural units of a song are allowed full expression in a film can be decisive in guiding the viewer’s understanding of the relationship between the music and its dramatic context. For instance, in the example from *Stealing Beauty* the sense of unfulfillment associated with Lucy’s character is represented, in part, by the reduction of the song’s obtrusiveness at a key structural point of the song (that is, the first chorus). *When the Cat’s Away* highlights the unusual fade-in intro of ‘Glory Box’, by making it sound out in between the gaps of the final chorus of ‘Ça, c’est Paris’ and attaching it to a close-up of Chloé. In so doing, the sequence draws attention to an element of the song so that it becomes associated with aspects of the protagonist’s subjectivity (the rising quality of the song’s introduction comes to represent the rising feeling of freedom experienced by Chloé at this point).

The ‘obtrusiveness’ of the singer’s voice can also be a source of rich expressive potential, rather than distraction, when the pop song is transformed into film music. Both *Stealing Beauty* and *When the Cat’s Away* encourage the viewer to understand the lyrics as a commentary on Lucy’s and Chloé’s situations. In the case of *When the Cat’s Away* the lyrics take on an extra significance through the contrast made between the sentiments expressed in ‘Ça, c’est Paris’ and those of ‘Glory Box’.

Cultural Resonance

The extent to which the pre-existing histories of the pop song, the artist singing the song, and/or the song as representative of a specific genre of pop music is taken in to account is another area of choice for the filmmaker when a pop song is chosen to accompany a particular dramatic situation in a film.

It is undoubtedly the case that viewers will bring different levels of knowledge of a particular song with them when

confronted with the use of an ‘imported’ pop song in a particular film: this is not something under the control of the filmmaker. However, the filmmaker *can* decide which existing connotations will be made meaningful to the dramatic situation at hand. For example, in the comparison between the two uses of ‘Glory Box’, I identified a distinct difference in the manner in which the song is made to refer to itself as a particular kind of pop sound in each case. Whereas the acknowledgement of the song as a specific kind of pop music is *not* especially determining to its narrative effect in the case of *Stealing Beauty*, *When the Cat’s Away* is very careful to differentiate it from other types of pop music in the film.

In *When the Cat’s Away*, the immediate contrast between the old women singing the Mistinguett staple ‘Ça, c’est Paris’ and the non-diegetic rendition of ‘Glory Box’ is made significant at a number of levels, as has already been noted. The awareness of Mistinguett and Portishead as different but related types of artists can add an extra level in the understanding of this contrast. Both have been placed in a tradition of female cabaret performance: Mistinguett directly, through her career in French music hall in the early twentieth century; and Portishead more obliquely, through Beth Gibbons’ adoption of a torch singer performing style, in terms of the music itself and the iconography associated with it.² As such both Mistinguett and Gibbons represent a specific kind of female performer that is then associated with particular female characters within the dramatic context of the film.

Understood in this way, the old women in the café gain a sense of group identity by singing together a song popularised by Mistinguett, a female voice from their youth. In a related manner, Chloë’s identity is posed as a more individual one by the decision to accompany *her* final actions non-diegetically by Gibbons, a female voice from her youth, which, unlike the old women, she is currently experiencing. Mistinguett, therefore, figures as a present absence in this scene. An awareness of the song’s association with her can help the viewer to understand ‘Ça, c’est Paris’ and ‘Glory Box’ as comparable material in certain respects, if ‘Glory Box’ is accepted as referring to the female cabaret tradition represented by Mistinguett. However, the scene works to emphasise the differences between the two songs, rather than their similarities, by involving them

in the representation of contrasting narrative situations. The scene’s use of both songs is appropriate in its response to the cultural connotations surrounding each piece of music. Both Mistinguett and Beth Gibbons embody a particular type of youthful female musical identity and the scene does make reference to an understanding of them as such. However, these cultural identities are then integrated in to the dramatic situation in different ways: the Mistinguett song becomes the occasion for a communal and nostalgic remembrance of youth, whereas the Portishead song accompanies a moment of intimate and immediate experience on the part of the film’s young protagonist.

According to Jeff Smith, the meanings generated by a pop song when it is used as film music are ‘often dependent upon the meaning of pop music in the larger spheres of society and culture’ (1998: 155). Whilst agreeing that the pop song represents an excessively familiar element of the film soundtrack, I do not believe that the pre-existing connotations of a pop song are as all-determining to the meanings it generates in a particular film as Smith and other writers have suggested. A song may carry any number of potential connotations in to the film with it, but, as the example of *When the Cat’s Away* suggests, it is up to the filmmaker to make certain of these connotations relevant to an understanding of the narrative situation at hand.

Distance

When the pop song is used instead of the specially composed score as a narrative device, it brings with it a capacity to maintain a sense of ‘distance’ between itself and the narrative action it accompanies. The specially composed score appears in a film with the sense that it has been brought into being precisely for the particular moment it accompanies. The obtrusiveness and cultural resonance of the pop song offers an alternative sense that the song is not necessarily reliant on this particular moment in the film for its very existence. The filmmaker has to make what might be called an effort of attachment for the song to be understood as meaningful in relation to particular aspects of the film’s fictional world.

One of the most significant ways a filmmaker can modulate the narrative significance of a particular song is to close the

gap between song and other elements of the fictional world to a greater or lesser extent and this relationship will be discussed further in subsequent chapters.

2. The pop song as narrative element

The special case of the star-vehicle musical

This chapter has two main aims. Firstly, it provides case studies of the use of the pop song as a narrative element in its most fully embodied guise: the on-screen performances of the pop song within the special context of the musical offer examples of a complete attachment between character and song, against which subsequent examples may be judged. The second aim of this chapter is to expand upon the notion of the pop song as ‘culturally resonant’. In particular, this section discusses the importance of *stardom* to the kind of pop music featured in this study.

The pop song in the musical is generally heard within the context of the number, a structural unit which is crucial to the musical’s specificity as a genre. Within the space of the number, an expectation exists that other narrative elements (for example, the characters, objects and settings) and the film’s narrational devices (such as camerawork, the organisation of mise-en-scène, editing, lighting and so on) will be deployed in considered relationship to qualities of the song itself.

The song sequence of the musical offers a privileged space, in which the focus usually remains on the details of the featured performer’s rendition of the song. This means that the manipulation of a distance between the song and other narrative elements is uncommon as a decisive factor in such sequences.

The concentration on the particulars of the performer’s on-screen rendition of the song is even more likely when that musical is conceived as a star vehicle for an established pop musician, as has often been the case. As Steven Cohan explains in relation to the musical in the Classical Hollywood era, these stars were likely to have cultivated their public personas in a number of arenas *outside* of the movie musical itself:

One may usually think of Hollywood performers being discovered at an early age and then groomed by a studio into major stardom, as was the case with Judy Garland at MGM, but most stars of movie musicals (Fred Astaire at RKO, Eleanor Powell and Gene Kelly at MGM, Alice Faye and Carmen Miranda at Fox, Bing Crosby and Betty Hutton at Paramount, Dick Powell and Doris Day at Warners), first found renown in another entertainment industry, if not radio, then Broadway, records, or one of the big bands. (2002: 7)

This chapter focuses on two star vehicle musicals for Frank Sinatra, whose status as a pop star was cultivated initially through records, live performances, radio and the promotional machinery of the music industry, and whose film appearances were always only one component amongst many through which his musical persona was articulated.

In the musicals under discussion, Gordon Douglas’s *Young at Heart* from 1954 and George Sidney’s *Pal Joey* of 1957, the most important decisions made by the filmmakers are those to do with the second area of choice discussed in chapter one: the pop song’s cultural resonance. There are three significant components to this resonance. Firstly, the song itself may already be well known before its use in the film, and this may be taken in to account in the way it is integrated in to the film’s fictional world. In the case of *Young at Heart*, only one of the songs was composed specifically for the film itself, and I suggest that there is a marked difference between the way Sinatra performs this and the rest of his songs in the film. *Pal Joey* is a screen adaptation of a 1940 Rodgers and Hart Broadway musical, and as such its songs had already enjoyed wide circulation, through the performances (on stage and record) of a number of stars. A number of the songs were composed for the original show and therefore deliberately narrativised, but the film also features Rodgers and Hart songs culled from their other musicals (as was the custom of Hollywood adaptations of Broadway musicals). Two of these, ‘The Lady is a Tramp’ and ‘My Funny Valentine’, had already enjoyed a particular association with Sinatra. For those viewers aware of it, this prior association becomes an informing feature (but crucially not the only one) of their understanding of the songs’ performances in the film.

This points to the second aspect of the song's potential cultural resonance in the star vehicle musical: its propensity to be used to establish a relationship between the pop star's performance in the film and his or her musical persona more generally. This can be achieved by providing a space for the singer to perform songs on-screen for which he or she is already known, but the relationship can also be established more indirectly. The song sequence allows aspects of the performer's musical persona to be translated into a cinematically specific context. On a general level, this may involve a particular kind of 'fit' between the star's pre-existing persona and the kind of character he or she is asked to play. Within the space of the song sequence itself, the articulation of a star persona is achieved through both the performance of the singer (the way the song is sung, and the manner in which the performer moves through this performance) and the style in which this performance is framed cinematically. In my analyses of both *Young at Heart* and *Pal Joey*, I pay particular attention to how film space is organised in relation to the musical performances, arguing that, in each case, Sinatra's character is allowed a privileged kind of space in which to perform that is not at the disposal of the other characters.

The third, related, aspect of the pop song's cultural resonance is its potential to disclose assumptions about popular music culture generally. As well as providing a space in which the unique qualities of a star persona can be demonstrated, the song sequence can also reveal underlying assumptions about pop music, which, for example, make stars so important to the manner in which the commercial pop song is produced and consumed.

By their very nature, as pop star vehicles, *Young at Heart* and *Pal Joey* are testament to the importance of stardom for this type of popular music. In addition, each film casts Sinatra in the role of a *fictional* professional musician. This decision allows the films to make explicit arguments about the centrality of stardom to commercial pop music. In *Young at Heart*, this argument is made by contrasting the Sinatra character's charismatic individual musical performances to the more 'folk-oriented' communal performances of the other characters. In *Pal Joey*, Sinatra plays a character whose musical performances and worldview are in sync with the performing

style and lifestyle associated with the Sinatra star persona during the 1950s: that of the 'playboy'. Within the song sequences of the film, the specialness of the pop star playboy asserts itself through a freedom of movement and vocal delivery which is denied to the other characters.

Cohan notes the tendency for performers to address the camera directly, as if facing a live audience, in the song sequence, and concludes:

As a musical moves back and forth between the diegetic realism of story and extradiegetic awareness of the star's performance in numbers, the oscillation between indirect and direct address heightens the audience's sense of not observing the star play a character so much as witnessing her or his own authenticity, charisma, and talent without the mediation of fictional narrative or cinematic technology. (2002: 13)

This chapter attempts to understand how a star persona is embodied through a specific fictional characterisation. In the song sequences under discussion, Sinatra the star and the fictional characters the star embodies are present and significant at one and the same time. The particular choices made by the filmmakers in relating selected aspects of the star persona to the fictional character are what give each film its distinctiveness.

***Young at Heart*: making music popular**

A star entrance

Frank Sinatra's entrance in *Young At Heart* is boldly iconographic. A door is opened to disclose a suited figure with his back to the camera. As he turns around, a close-up of Sinatra's face shows his hat tipped back in his trademark style, as depicted on his album covers throughout the '50s. A further cut to accommodate his movement through the door reveals a tie lowered to half-mast and a collar whose wings flop loosely around the neck, in the manner shared by the carefree hipster on the cover of 'Swing Easy', the moody balladeer of 'In The Wee Small Hours' and the avuncular figure looking over a courting couple on 'Songs For Swinging Lovers'. Released in

1954, the same year as the first of these albums, the nature of Sinatra's first appearance in *Young At Heart* demonstrates how familiar his new public image had already become.



Sinatra's presence is felt before his on-screen entrance, however, with the airing of his rendition of 'Young At Heart' over the film's opening credits. His first number one hit for eight years, the song was one element, along with his Academy Award-winning role in *From Here to Eternity* (Fred Zinnemann, 1953) and his debut Capitol LP 'Songs For Young Lovers', in his celebrated return to popular acclaim, described by The Penguin Encyclopaedia of Popular Music as 'the most famous comeback in history' (Clarke 1998: 1194). He had reinvented both his singing style and screen persona, revealing an artistry which stridently announced its own integrity and intensity, as opposed to the softer romanticism and sweetness which characterised his musical and acting performances in the 1940s.

Young At Heart casts Sinatra as Barney Sloan, a morose but talented composer whose defences are broken down by the decidedly more cheery Laurie Tuttle (Doris Day). Throughout the narrative, Barney's music is held in consistently high regard, yet his incorporation into Laurie's world of suburban domesticity, registered in the final scene of the film, requires not just a thawing out of his character, but also a change in his musical

style. *Young At Heart* undoubtedly exploits Sinatra's reputation as a high-quality singer outside his role in the film, and allows his newly 'matured' voice an uncluttered musical platform (his numbers are all performed at an on-screen piano, and his voice stays firmly on top of any non-diegetic backing that does emerge). However, the narrative does not simply serve as a fictionalised showcase for the virtues that have allowed the real-life singer to get back to the top. Indeed, the closing scene of the film features Sinatra performing in a manner which can be heard as running counter to the reinvented vocal style that had marked his comeback.

The role of music in the Tuttles' household

Music is important to the lives of all the main characters in *Young At Heart*, and before Barney makes his entrance the film demonstrates how music circulates within the Tuttles' contented household. As Sinatra's rendition of the title song finishes and the opening credits end, the camera moves from the street outside into the Tuttles' sitting room, where Laurie's father, Gregory (Robert Keith), continues to play the song's melody on his flute. Gregory reads from a music sheet as he plays, as do his daughters in their later performance of 'Until My Lover Comes To Me'. Even when Laurie launches into a spontaneous version of the hit 'Ready, Willing and Able' on the beach, she reads the lyrics off a song sheet. In the opening sequence, a close-up of the father's doctoral diploma in music, framed on the wall, further testifies to his learned credentials.

Yet, the association of the Tuttles with music in its written form is not offered as a sign of the family's stuffiness. As the father continues playing the flute, he ambles away from his music stand over to Aunt Jessie (Ethel Barrymore), who is watching a boxing match on television. The raucous sound of the crowd clashes with his melodious playing, but Gregory does not retreat (as it turns out, he is waiting to see the outcome of the fight - he duly pockets a quarter from Aunt Jessie when 'his' man wins, without dropping a note). Later, after leading a recital by his daughters, the father complains: 'the orchestra, no matter how small, should have only one voice', to which his daughters mockingly interject, 'the conductor's', showing they have obviously heard this maxim many times before. When

Laurie sings 'Ready, Willing and Able', she is both reading from a sheet and singing along to the record as it plays on their portable gramophone. The Tuttles' attitude towards music is not precious; their evident formal musical training is used as a means by which they can enjoy music as a shared, sociable experience.



Jane Feuer identifies the 'singalong' as one of the song formats used by the musical in its attempts to present itself as a folk rather than mass art (1982: 16). Laurie leads her family in a campfire rendition of 'Hold Me In Your Arms', a romantic ballad with lyrics directed to a single lover, but which Laurie addresses to the whole group. It is clear that the song does play a part in her courtship rituals with her genial companion Alex Burke (Gig Young), as she snuggles closer to him as the song progresses. However, a sustained shot of the whole family sitting around the fire at the beginning of the song, together with cuts to the reactions of her two envious sisters (who are both besotted by Burke), stresses the wider environment in which her singing is received. The family's democratic vision of how popular song should be performed means that even the most intimate of musical moments is rendered within a discourse of sociability. Furthermore, this sharing of musical experience is not necessarily an entirely comforting one: Laurie's sisters

show their jealousy both here and during Laurie's later duet of 'There's A Rising Moon For Every Falling Star' with Alex around the family piano.

Thus, before Barney Sloan makes his entrance (over half an hour into the film), a way of performing and listening to music has been mapped out which has formality without dryness and sociability that is not completely idealised. The mode of musical appreciation with which Barney's initial performances contrast is not criticised by the film, even though his character is played by the singer who, at that time, was supposed to embody the virtues that made music popular in the 'real world'.

Barney Sloan's 'anti-social' musical performances

Barney's entrance follows the rendition of 'Hold Me In Your Arms'. Brought in by Alex to help compose the musical score he is working on, he comments sarcastically on his friend's neat notation, and soon disregards the sheet music in front of him as he effortlessly embellishes and expands Alex's basic melody. Laurie's first encounter with Barney is a reversal of her initial meeting with Alex. Laurie mistakes Alex for a vet as she happens upon him helping out with the delivery of puppies on the next door front lawn. Her first impression of him is felt through the easy social charm he displays, rather than through his musical abilities (he is actually on his way to see her father about his musical project). In contrast, Laurie's introduction to Barney is through his music, as his piano playing filters through to the kitchen into which she has just walked. Laurie is immediately impressed by Barney's improvisational flair, and this moment constitutes a new type of listening in the film: for the first time music is appreciated outside a context of explicit social interaction.

However, once face to face with Barney in the living room, Laurie is appalled by his off-hand attitude to his own talents. When he absently plays one of his own unfinished compositions, which eventually becomes 'You My Love', the ballad played in the film's closing scene, she urges him to complete it, arguing that it is a crime to leave a song 'without face or feet'. Yet at this point Barney sees no value in articulating his intense musical vision in a form which would make it more accessible to others.

The film, then, features an explicit argument about the pop song as a structured experience, in terms both of the form it takes and the manner in which it is consumed. The specificity of the song as a cultural form, discussed in chapter one, becomes the subject of debate by the film's characters. It also becomes an informing feature of the structuring of the song sequences themselves. In the numbers led by the Tuttles, the song offers a vehicle for group participation. This participation is made possible due to the characters' shared awareness of the conventional form the song will take. The progress of Barney's solo numbers, by contrast, is more idiosyncratic. In these sequences, the performances are made more intimate by being choreographed around Barney's private emotions, even when the numbers are being played in public settings. These performances are played out in a series of stages, moving towards a more and more narrow mode of address on the part of the singer.

The musical provides a space for a song to be played out in its entirety as the central focus of the scene. As such filmmakers are less likely to exercise choice in their use of a pop song by modulating its obtrusiveness in terms of volume, by choosing to use only one part of the song, or by combining a particular structural unit with the narrative situation in a specific way. However, *Young at Heart* demonstrates that issues of song form can still be made significant to the understanding of the dramatic situation in the musical. In this instance, the invitingly open form of the numbers associated with the Tuttles is contrasted to the comparatively closed form imposed on the songs by Barney's solo performances.

The narrow focus of Barney's musical performances is demonstrated in his rendition of 'Someone To Watch Over Me'. Playing to a disinterested clientele in a bar, the sequence is split into three stages, each with a distinct mode of address. He begins the song against a hubbub of background noise, in the foreground of a shot which shows the diners with their backs turned away from him. A shot looking along the people chatting at the bar emphasises their inattentiveness, as does the cut to Laurie, her sister Amy (Elisabeth Fraser) and Alex, with Laurie asking 'why don't they keep quiet?' A return to the original shot of Barney at the piano shows him looking around

distractedly, as background chatter continues to dominate the soundtrack.

At this stage Barney is singing just for himself, playing on regardless of his unappreciative audience. However as he sings, 'I'm a little lamb who's lost in the woods', in the first close-up of the sequence, he looks to his right, clearly directing his singing at Laurie, with whom he has fallen in love. A two shot of Laurie and Alex shows her trying to pay attention to the song, whilst Alex works on his own score. Laurie is not yet transfixed by the performance, however, and she is distracted by a couple arguing behind her, the camera panning across to them as their words flood onto the soundtrack.

There then follows an exchange of glances between Amy and Alex before the camera returns to Barney. As he sings 'but to her heart I'll carry the key', again in close-up, his gaze reverts to Laurie, who is now looking on more attentively. The final two close-ups of Barney and Laurie acknowledge the fact that his heart-felt singing has enraptured her as the sound of the diners fades out for the final few lines of the song. The final shot of the sequence views Laurie in a close-up, no longer part of her group, with non-diegetic strings lending the song an emotional final flourish.





'Someone To Watch Over Me' is performed in such a way as to bypass any address to its primary audience - the patrons of the bar. Barney directs his song inwardly at first, but then gradually out toward Laurie, until the *mise-en-scène* and soundtrack is completely dominated by their two faces and the song which connects them. At the beginning of the film, Laurie had told her sister Amy that she demanded one thing from marriage: 'lots of laughs'. The charming Alex, to whom she becomes engaged, would seem to fulfil this criterion admirably. However, her reaction to the pleading of 'Someone to Watch Over Me' (in both the style of vocal delivery and the lyrical content) demonstrates a deeper attraction to Barney's vulnerability, at the same time as it offers the possibility for a musical performance to create intimacy. In contrast, Laurie's singing of 'Hold Me In Your Arms', despite its specific message of love to Alex, is offered to everyone sitting around the campfire, so that all may gain comfort (or, as it turns out, feel envy) from its emotional resonance.

The film continues to interiorise and personalise space and sound during Barney's remaining nightclub performances. 'Just One Of Those Things' features him alone after the bar has closed, seeking solace in a song to ward off the pain after Laurie has announced her marriage to Alex. Again a non-diegetic backing fills out the emotional space, and Barney sings

with such self-absorption that he fails to notice the presence of Laurie who has been standing behind him.

His rendition of 'One For My Baby (And One More For the Road)' occurs at a point in the narrative where he and Laurie are most divorced from the stable domestic life offered by the Tuttle household. By this time, Laurie has jilted Alex at the altar and married Barney. Relocated to another city, the couple are trying to make ends meet through his song-writing and nightclub engagements. He has just challenged Laurie to pawn a bracelet given to her by Alex, in order to show she no longer feels anything for him. Storming out of the flat, he goes to fulfil a date at a bar, playing 'One For My Baby' to yet another uninterested audience. Midway through the song Laurie enters and pulls up her sleeve to show Barney that she has sacrificed her bracelet as a signal of her love for him.

The sequence is filmed in such a way that the song becomes a soundtrack to the resolution of their domestic dispute. From the second verse onwards, background noise is obliterated, non-diegetic instruments come to the fore and the camera focuses on the exchanges between Barney and Laurie. As in 'Someone To Watch Over Me', 'One For My Baby' is shown to channel its address to an audience of one, but this time Laurie accepts the intense focus of this address without hesitation.

Yet, even Barney knows the act of sacrifice for which the song provides a soundtrack is one that he should have never asked Laurie to make. In the following sequence, as the couple return to Laurie's family for Christmas, he returns the bracelet to her, having rescued it from the pawnshop. *Young At Heart* identifies Barney's intensity of feeling (evidenced by the interior focus of his singing) and his artistic integrity (his refusal to give his songs recognisable 'face and feet') as faults which inhibit him from a full-hearted engagement with the sociable world represented by the Tuttles. Only when given a second chance after a near fatal (and deliberate) car crash does he apply his particular musical talent in a manner appropriate to the idea of what music means to the Tuttle family.

Barney's transformation

The final sequence begins with the same crane-shot through a window which had opened the film. This time a lush string



arrangement gives way to Barney's full-bodied piano accompaniment to his self-composed 'You My Love', the song he has been encouraged to finish by Laurie throughout the film. As he expresses his new-found love of life to Laurie, singing from the song sheets he had previously mocked, the camera cuts between close shots of the two. Midway through, Barney tells Laurie 'It's got a face and feet now, how d'ya like it?'. When she

responds favourably he invites her to 'come on in and join the family' and they duet in a two shot. By referring to his creation in human terms, Barney acknowledges his song as an entity separate from himself, with the ability to communicate more widely even as it serves as a means of personal expression. Although it is performed with only Laurie and Barney in shot, as it ends the whole family gathers around the piano to congratulate him on the song's success, and by extension, on his adoption of an outgoing mode of performance to which they can all relate.

'You My Love' differs from the earlier numbers Barney performs not just because it is framed more sociably, but also due to it being a different type of song. Here, the cultural resonance of Sinatra as a performer outside of the film ceases to inform the development of his character within the fictional world of the film.

Of all the songs performed by Sinatra in *Young At Heart*, 'You My Love' is the only one to have been written especially for the film. Even the title track was a hit before Sinatra was cast in the role, the movie naming itself after the song rather than vice versa. 'Someone to Watch Over Me' had been recorded by the singer ten years previously with the Tommy Dorsey Band and 'Just One of Those Things' was chosen as the opening track on his second Capitol album, 'Swing Easy', released in the same year as *Young At Heart* (not surprisingly Sinatra's phrasing in both versions is very similar, even down to the 'improvised' quality of the last verse's opening line, 'so goodbye, goodbye, bye, bye, baby and now and then'). 'One For My Baby', the Johnny Mercer-Harold Arlen 'saloon song' detailing a man's broken-hearted conversation with his barman, had already been interpreted by Sinatra in 1947, and was to become the stand-out track on his 1958 album 'Only the Lonely', often cited as his greatest work.

The version of 'One For My Baby' sung in *Young At Heart* demonstrates the interpretive, storytelling quality that Sinatra was being praised for at the time. One example of this is the way he deals with the song's rhymes. The first lines ('It's quarter to three/There's no-one in the place except you and me') are lost amongst the chatter of the bar's clientele, but Barney's voice takes prominence on the soundtrack from then on. The following four bars introduce the intentions of the singer: to have a

few drinks and pour his heart out, as far as his male pride will allow, to the bartender: 'So set 'em up Joe, I got a little story you ought-a know.' The phrases, 'set 'em up Joe' and 'you ought-a know', are covered by the same notes (although the final note on 'know' is longer than that on 'Joe'), but Barney sings the first with brisk authority and the second more tenderly. This sets the mood of a song whose protagonist wants to get down to business ('set 'em up'), but whose melancholy may get the better of him (he never gets around to delivering the details of his 'little story'). This pattern of briskness followed by melancholy is repeated in the internal rhyme of the next line, 'We're drinking my friend to the end of a brief episode' - 'friend' is sung with most emphasis during the line, the singer convincing himself of his close ties to his bartending confessor, whilst 'to the end' is more wistful, as if the very mention of the word 'end' is bringing on new pangs of sorrow.

After the chorus line ('So make it one for my baby and one more for the road'), Barney sings, 'I got the routine, put another nickel in the machine'. By pausing slightly before singing 'I' and then elongating its sound, Barney has to tumble out the phrase 'got the routine' in the manner of 'set 'em up' in order to keep in time. This gives the words a suitably off-hand quality (the singer has done this before), but once again the corresponding rhyme 'in the machine' is sung more softly: even the commonplace act of dropping a coin into the jukebox has become poignant. The next line's opening declaration 'I'm feeling so bad' sees 'so bad' being almost thrown away, whilst the passage that follows, 'won't you make the music easy and sad', finds 'music' being lovingly caressed and 'sad' sung with far more regret than 'bad' had been. Once again this reinforces the struggle of the singer to articulate his sorrow specifically (shrugging it off with the general observation that he feels 'bad'), whilst at the same time making that sorrow clear (the music does his talking for him).

However, this contrasting of briskly delivered phrases and more melancholy rhymes is not slavishly followed throughout the song. The next line features an internal rhyme between 'lot' and 'got' ('I could tell you a lot, but you got to be true to your code'), but here the first part of the line is sung far more dramatically than the second: the singer seems ready to pour out his heart, but then is held back by his own sense of how a man should display his emotions (punching out 'you've got to

be' far more conversationally). The subsequent phrase, 'You'd never know it but buddy I'm a kind of poet', finds both 'know it' and 'poet' sung in a comparatively brusque manner, rather than contrastingly, the importance of the line being to underplay the singer's poetic credentials at the same time he announces them (with the clumsy metre and slanginess of the words 'buddy, I'm a kind of poet'). From this point on, however, Barney's vocals do become more evenly melancholy and conventionally lyrical, so that even the hectoring line 'you simply gotta listen to me' is sung as dreamily as its preceding rhyme ('and when I'm gloomy'). Whilst the singer manages not to give anything away of the specifics of his situation (thereby remaining true to his code), he does betray his emotions through the manner in which he delivers his words, before realising that he must stop his confession before he is overwhelmed by emotion entirely ('But this torch that I found must be drowned/for it soon might explode'). This struggle between the singer's attempts to shrug off his situation and need to voice it lyrically is most clearly felt in the way he apologises to the bartender for 'bending your ear', a phrase that may suggest nagging, but which is delivered with a distinctly non-onomatopoeic gentle melodic twist.

This description of Sinatra's delivery of the song's rhymes is intended to highlight how his phrasing is tied up with acting out the developing themes of the song rather than simply delivering the notes on the page. John Rockwell, in his analysis of Sinatra's 1958 recording of 'One For My Baby', identifies it as his finest moment because 'it most completely calls upon his skills as both singer and actor' (1995: 73), and it is this sensitivity of vocal interpretation that has been taken as one of the hallmarks of Sinatra's singing during the Capitol years (1953-1961). However, in *Young At Heart*, Barney's excessive immersion in the narratives of the songs he performs is part of what delays the happiness he eventually finds at the end of the film.

'You My Love' does not display the nuanced storytelling characteristics of 'One For My Baby'. In fact, the number does not fit at all with the two main strands that constituted Sinatra's songbook of the time: it is neither a 'saloon song' like 'One For My Baby' nor a swing number, such as the ones featured in *Pal Joey*. Written especially for the film by Mack Gordon and Jimmy van Heusen, the lyrics are appropriate to the narrative context, with Barney thanking Laurie, through song, for

walking into his lonely world and bringing him peace of mind. However, the style of the singing does jar with how Barney has been seen to perform earlier in the film, the careful phrasing of the earlier numbers abandoned for a more uniform 'open' vocal delivery which sees Barney emphasising every vowel sound to a consistently full-bodied piano accompaniment. The effect is as 'innocently balladic' as that attributed to Sinatra's 1947 version of 'One For My Baby' by John Rockwell (1995: 71). The final scene of *Young at Heart* does indeed reveal a 'younger' Sinatra, eschewing the more worldly-wise musical delivery that had become the defining feature of his comeback.

Young At Heart is a musical remake of *Four Daughters* (Michael Curtiz, 1938). In the original, the Sloan character (John Garfield in his first role) kills himself. Once it had been decided that this would not be the case in *Young At Heart*, and that Barney would find contentment with the Tuttle family, it was reasonable that the character should adopt a less immersed musical style at the end. Within the terms of a fictional world seeking a source of narrative closure, Barney's completion of a song that Laurie had been pleading him to finish throughout the film, and his adoption of a performing style that signals his new-found comfort in the family home, does provide a suitable closure. However, if *Young at Heart* closes events in a congruous manner, the narrative is itself enclosed by a voice which may cast doubt on the ending's appropriateness. The film in fact closes with the voice of Sinatra, outside of his role in the film, reprising the title song. Like many of his singles throughout the 1950s (for example, 'Love and Marriage' and 'High Hopes'), 'Young At Heart' is more straightforwardly spry than the material he recorded for his albums. However, his new 'mature' singing style is still evident: in the playfulness of phrasing as he sings the title first swooningly and then more matter-of-factly, as if the idea should now be sinking in; in the fuller grain discernible in his voice on the 'you' of 'if you should survive to 105' (the more weathered quality of his vocals valued as a positive side-effect of the vocal haemorrhage sustained in the early 1950s); and in the restraint he displays by keeping the singing low-key until the affirming crescendo of 'alive'. Whilst the film provides a place for the showcasing of these musical qualities, it also contrives a narrative which ultimately denies their articulation by the character Sinatra plays.

I have stated that songs in the musical do not usually feature the quality of distance between music and narrative situation which can be crucial to the storytelling role of the pop song in the non-musical. However, *Young at Heart* does conclude with a song which is marked by a sense of distance, Sinatra's weathered singing of the title number contrasting with the performing style adopted by his character towards the end of the film. The song sequence of the musical offers a secured space where the viewer may be *particularly* encouraged to relate fictional events to the performance history of the star(s) involved. As such the cultural resonance of the performer outside the film becomes a crucial factor in the understanding of the performance within it. However, within this environment, issues of obtrusiveness and distance, the two other areas of choice discussed in chapter one can also be of importance. In *Young at Heart* the obtrusiveness of the pop song is made meaningful by the contrast presented between the open form of the Tuttles' musical performances, and the closed form of Barney's numbers. The distance suggested between Sinatra's non-diegetic performance of 'Young at Heart' at the end of the film and the on-screen number that has preceded it casts doubt on the appropriateness of aspects of the narrative's conclusion.

In these concluding events, Barney determines to complete the composition of 'You My Love', thereby acting upon Laurie's entreaties that he should discipline his unquestionable musical talent. *Young At Heart* presents the results of Barney's acquiescence to her encouragement at the same time that it demonstrates his new found ease within the Tuttle household: the song is presented as a sign that he has eventually found a place in their suburban home. Unlike certain melodramas of this period, such as *All That Heaven Allows* (Douglas Sirk, 1955) and *Rebel Without A Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955), the landscape in which the household is set remains uncriticised. Barney's transformation at the end of the film is rendered as a willing surrender to the nurturing warmth of the family rather than, as he had earlier feared, the capitulation to a restrictive domestic regime. That Barney needs to be brought in from the 'outside' at all indicates that this world holds carefully set limits and rules, but these are never articulated in aggressive terms. Barney's initial antagonistic stance towards the family is viewed

as a self-imposed exile, the cessation of which can only be to his benefit.

The disciplining of music is also integral to the film version of Rodgers and Hart's *Pal Joey*, conceived as a star-vehicle for Sinatra. However, whereas in *Young At Heart* this involves a sudden change in the singer's performing style, *Pal Joey* allows a particular strand of Sinatra's musical personality to dominate throughout. At the conclusion of *Young at Heart*, Sinatra's unique qualities as a pop star after his 'comeback' do not find expression through his fictional character. Instead, the final sequence presents his character performing the song as a type of 'folk music', whose most important function is its communal, social use. Within the film's fictional world, this involves the rejection of the view that pop musicians represent unique kinds of stars, *separated* from their audience by virtue of their charismatic talent. As such the ending of the film rejects an assumption which underpins the production and consumption of commercial pop music, and which motivates, amongst other things, the manufacturing of star vehicle musicals such as itself. The problems of making such a move narratively, in the context of a pop star film vehicle, are indicated by the isolated nature of Sinatra's musical performance in this final scene, which is quite unlike any that he had enacted previously, and which also contrasts to the non-diegetic rendition of the title song which succeeds it.

***Pal Joey*: the disciplines of the 1950s playboy**

Access all areas? The disciplining of musical performance

Pal Joey is much more consistent in its celebration of commercial pop music as a cultural form which relies on the performances of charismatic stars. Throughout the film, the character Sinatra plays embodies star qualities commonly associated with him at the time of the film's release in 1957. These qualities are of a different order to the ones of intensity and integrity made use of (and, at the film's conclusion, momentarily subdued) in the fictional world of *Young at Heart*. Instead, *Pal Joey* plays on Sinatra's status as the era's most renowned pop star 'playboy'. The star presence of Sinatra, as an embodiment of the 1950s playboy, is allowed to exert an exceptionally dominating influence

over the manner in which the song sequences are played out. Pop song, pop star persona and fictional character are set in a relationship whereby all three elements reinforce each other to an extent not matched by any of the other examples in this study. In *Pal Joey*, the title character is allowed the fictional authority to present an ideal version of himself through song in a manner to which the other characters discussed in this study can only aspire – and fail. As a direct comparison, this failure is witnessed most poignantly in Sheik in *Baby, It's You*, which scrutinises his unsuccessful attempts to construct his identity through pop music, and an image of Sinatra in particular.

The unique mutually reinforcing quality of the relationship between song, Sinatra as star, and fictional character in *Pal Joey* is not just registered by its comparison to other instances of the relationship between pop song and fictional character in other films. Within the fictional world of *Pal Joey* itself, Joey's musical performances are allowed an authority that exceeds those of other characters who break in to song (that is to say Joey's benefactor Vera (Rita Hayworth) and the chorus girl Linda (Kim Novak)). In fact, the male-centred playboy discourse embodied in Sinatra's fictional role resonates across the film so thoroughly that even when the female characters sing, they are still often playing to Joey's tune. The song sequence in the musical is often presented as a utopian moment, in which problems and inequalities present in the rest of the narrative find ideal solutions.³ *Pal Joey*'s version of a musical utopia, however, is one which continues to privilege the male character's perspective. The film is so heavily involved in the cultural resonances associated with its star that it distorts the conventional utopian possibilities of the musical genre.

Pal Joey displays an unusually combative tone in its musical segments, with songs being predominantly sung at, rather than to or with, other characters. It features only one duet, and even this is played out in unequal terms. In the original stage production, nightclub heel Joey seduces the innocent Linda through his rendition of the romantic ballad 'I Could Write A Book'. She responds to his (false) entreaties of love by taking over the number, expressing her feelings within exactly the same musical structure used by Joey. The same song in the film, however, finds Joey dictating how it is to be performed. He drags Linda onto a nightclub stage unexpectedly, leads her in

all the dance steps, and tells her when to sing (she is given two lines). When Linda nevertheless shows that she has enjoyed the performance, Joey deflates her romantic musing by snapping 'How's it feel to work with a star?'

All three of the main characters (Joey, Linda and Vera) are given the opportunity to sing at one another during the course of the film. However, Joey's performances display a form of mastery withheld from those of Linda and Vera, a mastery secured by the film's commitment to the ideals embodied in the 1950s playboy.

The publicity surrounding the release of the Kinsey Reports on male and female sexual behaviour (in 1948 and 1953 respectively) indicated an increasing openness in public debates about sexuality. Throughout the 1950s new magazines like *Confidential* and in particular *Playboy* circulated stories and images which sought to define how this new awareness should be articulated. The playboy embodied a particular type of 'ideal' masculinity and, during the decade, Sinatra was the entertainer most associated publicly with this mode of masculinity, as Karen McNally notes:

The figure of the playboy is one of the lasting masculine images of the 1950s. Its associations of sexual predatoriness and invulnerable confidence were set up as a stark contrast to the world of steady propriety within which the suburban husband was said to exist. Frank Sinatra seemingly fit the mould of this symbol of the age to a tee, his life and art combining in an image of the affluent urban swinger which stretched across the breadth of his popular cultural depictions of the American male. (2002)⁴

In this description, McNally points to the key qualities of the 1950s playboy: sexually predatory, immensely self-confident, affluent, and associated with the sophistication of city life rather than the domesticity of the suburbs.

Crucially, as will be discussed at further length presently, the swing jazz style which was central to Sinatra's comeback in 1953 was seen as the musical equivalent of the playboy lifestyle. In *Pal Joey* Sinatra's character demonstrates a freedom of movement and musical expression in keeping with the discourse of the 1950s playboy. This freedom, however, was only secured

by regulating those elements which might threaten it, and in its orchestration of its musical numbers the film demonstrates the unequal distribution of power which allows the playboy his liberty.

Pal Joey as star vehicle

The original production of *Pal Joey* introduced an unprecedented tone of cynicism and frankness about sexual behaviour to the Broadway musical when it premiered in 1940. As Gerald Mast notes: 'There had never been a musical like *Pal Joey*; bitter, cynical, seamy, sordid, with no romantic resolution, no change of heart, no happy ending - no ending at all.' (1987: 181) Its two main characters, Joey and the philandering millionairess Vera, remain steadfast in their determination to act solely according to their own self-interest. The show ends with Joey out of work and broke, after being thrown out by Vera when a blackmailer threatens to reveal their affair to her husband. Earlier, Linda, the innocent chorus girl whose desire for Joey would exert a transforming influence in a more conventional musical, had been disabused of any romantic notions by his callous seduction and subsequent discarding of her.

Contemporary reviews of the film version of *Pal Joey*, whether favourable or disparaging, generally recognised two differences from the original production: a watering down of the stage show's uncompromising bleakness; and the shaping of the source material to provide a star vehicle for Frank Sinatra. Evidence of the film's comparatively lighter tone was provided by what *Variety* termed the 'happy ending stuff' of the finale, in which Joey leaves town with Linda amidst intimations (but no declaration on his part) of marriage.⁵ In addition, Vera has changed from an adulterous wife to a lonely widow, and she selflessly clears the way to true love by telling Linda where to find Joey as he prepares to sneak away.

Yet the language used to describe Sinatra's performance suggests that the dilution of the original's bleakly unromantic vision was felt to be compensated for by his charismatic star turn. The *Hollywood Citizen-News* called it 'almost a one-man show' (Shaw 1970: 230). *Variety* described Sinatra as 'forceful' and 'potent', ideal as 'the irreverent, freewheeling, glib Joey'.⁶ Rose Pelswick of the *Journal-American* echoed these

sentiments, commenting: ‘He brings vividly alive the glib, egotistical, raffish opportunism of John O’Hara’s well-known story, and invests the part with such tremendous charm that he simply wraps up the picture’ (quoted in Shaw 1970: 230). Whilst Pelswick uses negative adjectives to describe the nature of the source material, she also acknowledges how Sinatra’s particular brand of ‘charm’ renders these qualities attractive. The uniformity of language used to describe Sinatra’s role and performance suggests that the film of *Pal Joey* placed itself within a well-defined discourse. By common consent, ‘there had never been a musical like *Pal Joey*’ when it arrived on Broadway, but by the time it appeared on film there had grown a framework of accepted male sexual behaviour within which Joey’s rakish actions could be accepted by, and even ‘charm’, a mainstream audience.

The cultural resonance of Sinatra as a performer is reflected throughout the film in terms of the character Sinatra plays, and in the way the fictional performance is framed. This offers a contrast to *Young at Heart* which ultimately constructs a rift between Sinatra’s star persona and the development of the character within the film. In the song sequences of *Pal Joey*, Sinatra’s playboy persona is embodied in Joey in two ways: through the particular manner in which the songs are performed vocally; and through the physical movement of the character as he sings. My analysis of these sequences will take each element, voice and movement, in turn, before considering the relative lack of vocal or physical freedom allowed to the other characters in their song sequences. What is also crucial, however, as already indicated, is that numbers not written for the musical have been inserted into the film. Particular attention is thus given to the ways in which these work on and with their previous associations as Sinatra numbers.

The playboy’s singing style: ‘The Lady Is A Tramp’

A number of Sinatra’s albums in the 1950s elaborated the swing ballad style inaugurated in his first Capitol albums. ‘Songs for Swinging Lovers’ (1956), ‘A Swingin’ Affair’ (1957) and ‘Come Fly With Me’ (1958) featured ebullient, big-band arrangements with Sinatra stretching his lyrical phrasing more audaciously than ever. This vocal audacity is evidenced in his

playful rendition of ‘The Lady Is A Tramp’ in *Pal Joey*, which had become a staple of Sinatra’s live set in the year leading up to the film’s release.

In the film, Joey directs this song at Vera (Rita Hayworth), as an impertinent dismissal of the social gap between them. One of the ways in which he demonstrates his mastery over her, and eventually captivates her attention, is to surprise her with unexpected variations in his vocalising. Commanded to grant her a private audience, Joey begins the song seated at a piano. He renders the first verse with low-key precision, stretching a vowel sound at the same point in every line and clipping the words at their end:

She gets too hungry for dinner at eight
 She likes the theatre, never comes late
 She’d never bother with people she’d hate
 That’s why the lady is a tramp
 (elongated sounds bold and underlined)

The first three lines of the second verse reverse this strategy, with each beginning with every syllable precisely spelled out and ending with the elongated singing of ‘earls’, ‘pearls’ and ‘girls’:

Doesn’t like crap games with barons and earls
 Won’t go to Harlem in ermine and pearls
 Won’t dish the dirt with the rest of the girls

The repeated refrain of ‘that’s why the lady is a tramp’ is sung as before, the film cutting both times to Vera in order to note her discomfort.

During the release of the song, Joey pushes the piano away and begins striding in a predatory way around Vera as he sings. When he returns to the lyrics of the first two verses, he changes the words slightly and takes liberties with the melody, allowing it to see-saw up and down, instead of contrasting elongated sounds with staccato phrasing as before. ‘She gets too hungry for dinner at eight’ becomes ‘She gets far too hungry for dinner at eight’, and ‘She likes the theatre, never comes late’ is changed to ‘she adores (sung with parodic affectation) the theatre and she doesn’t arrive late’. The witty bravado of his performance

begins to seduce Vera, so that by the time he substitutes a self-satisfied shrug for the expected repetition of 'Ok' in the second release, she is held in his thrall, pictured seated in the bottom edge of the frame with Joey towering above her, arms held open.

On his Capitol albums, Sinatra often demonstrates his mastery over the song he is singing by twisting its melody, changing its structure, or unexpectedly shortening or stretching a vocal line. Yet as Steven Petkov notes:

Classical musicians use such terms as glissando, tempo rubato, and mordent to describe many of these practices; they can all be found in Sinatra's singing. But the listener must pay attention because Sinatra makes it seem casual and effortless and never calls attention to the techniques being employed. All he does sounds natural and inevitable, as if it were being composed on the spot. (1995: 82)

The offsetting of uninhibited displays of skilled vocalising with a seemingly off-hand naturalness was fundamental to Sinatra's 'swinging' singing style of the 1950s. In an analysis of his performance of 'I've Got You Under My Skin' (from 'Songs For Swingin' Lovers'), Stephen Holden identifies what this balance between vocal dexterity and naturalness articulates:

In the song's climax, Sinatra admits that for the moment he's a smitten fool, and this exhilarating expression of a perfect balance between intoxication and wry knowingness may be the apex of all his 'swinging' music ... Sinatra's artfully casual readings of Porter embody [an] ... enviable ideal of grown-up fun. (1995: 68)

Sinatra's singing style and the mode of male sexual behaviour (its 'ideal of grown-up fun') that *Playboy* sought to popularise in the 1950s share common properties. As Richard Dyer has noted, the magazine's philosophy was based on a 'drive reduction model' of sexuality, positing the sex drive as 'a basic biological mandate' seeking 'expression' or 'release' (1987: 31). Thus the magazine's unprecedented openness in sexual matters was justified as something healthy, paying heed to natural desires that ought not to be repressed.

On the other hand, the playboy differentiated himself from the other major male non-conformist stereotype of the time, the 'beatnik', by the worldly sophistication with which this free expression was exercised. Whereas beat writers sought to detach themselves completely from mainstream American culture, engaged in a desperate search for an alternative, *Playboy* offered a 'square counterpart' who operated within a widely recognised milieu, yet demonstrated a greater freedom than the common man by casting a sceptic's eye over society's limiting institutions and conventions, most predominantly marriage (Reynolds & Press 1995: 10).

It is this seemingly paradoxical imperative to allow oneself to be overwhelmed by desire, yet also to remain self-aware and to act within certain boundaries that finds its musical counterpart in Sinatra's combination of 'intoxication' and 'wry knowingness'. It is in this manner that his 'swinging' music can be identified as part of the homology that constructs the playboy lifestyle. As Joey's performance of 'The Lady Is A Tramp' shows, the freedom of movement (musically and culturally) associated with the pop star playboy had to be reasserted aggressively, dictating in the process the relative lack of mobility afforded those who constituted the 'norm' against which he defined himself. Neither Linda nor Vera is allowed the casual mastery over a lyric displayed by Joey. Vera's emotional rendition of 'Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered', for example, is immediately undercut by the first seconds of the following scene.

Vera is moved to song after spending a night with Joey. She wanders around her apartment the following morning in a state of heightened sensuality, dreamily testifying to her reawakened passions through her movement and singing. The action then cuts from her bathroom to Joey's, where he is absent-mindedly humming the tune to 'The Lady Is A Tramp' whilst shaving in front of the mirror. The reprise of this melody at this moment is not only a reminder that Vera was originally seduced by the power of Joey's rendition of the song. It also contrasts the heart-felt mode of her musical interpretation (she sings what cannot be adequately expressed in speech) with the attitude Joey displays in relation to vocal performance. Here, in a moment of privacy, Joey's performance of music is light-hearted and flippant. On other occasions, Joey uses his musical

voice to demand attention (his spontaneous rendition of 'I Didn't Know What Time It Was' convinces the nightclub owner to hire him) or exert control (his hijacking of the duet 'I Could Write A Book' and performance of 'The Lady Is A Tramp'). In none of these instances does Joey perform the song to articulate emotions that cannot be spoken, as Vera does throughout 'Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered'.

Moving with a playboy's freedom

It is only towards the end of the film, during 'I Can Do Without Dames', that Joey's mastery over the songs he sings begins to slip, as if it is there to represent his emotions tumbling out, in the same way that 'Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered' works in relation to Vera. This demonstrates the extent to which Joey's freedom of expression is being threatened at this moment, by both Vera's patronage (she has just withdrawn her financial backing for the club) and Linda's devotion (his underlying feelings for her caused the confrontation between him and Vera which led to her decision to pull out of the club). All his other performances are delivered with the cultivated 'sexual insouciance' which John Rockwell identifies as one of the main interpretive strands of Sinatra's singing (1984: 142). This confidence of musical expression is complemented in the film by an equally forceful display of physical movement, and it is to this aspect of the performance that I will now turn. In particular, the film refers to an irreverent style of live performance, involving the transgression of conventional boundaries between stage and audience that was commonly associated with Sinatra and like-minded entertainers, at the time. Within the film's fictional world, this style of performance is only allowed in relation to Joey, thereby adding a physical dimension to the relative freedom that is also asserted vocally.

The Clan, a loose collective of freewheeling entertainers led by Sinatra, was renowned for an irreverence towards the boundaries of the stage during the 1950s, as Arnold Shaw notes:

The en masse appearance of The Clan at an important club engagement of one of its members and the staging of an improvised, unbuttoned show, proved the peak point of

night-clubbing for many customers, an offence to some, and a matter for adverse comment by others. (1970: 236)

Reports detailing The Clan's hijacking of other entertainers' shows proliferated during the late 1950s. Such a display of high-spirited non-conformism finds expression in *Pal Joey* in Joey's very first number, when he jumps onto the stage uninvited, cracks a few gags and then launches into a version of 'I Didn't Know What Time It Was' which leaves the audience transfixed.

Later, at the high society ball hosted by Vera, he enacts the opposite process, cultivating a presumptuous intimacy with her from the stage as he sings, rather than simply providing a soundtrack to which the guests can dance. During 'There's A Small Hotel' he directs the last line of each verse specifically at Vera, and, playing as the lines do on variations of spending the night together, prompts a shocked reaction from her. He continues to ignore the boundaries of class which map out the space of the ballroom (the high society partygoers on the dance-floor and the hired help on stage) when he forces Vera to perform 'Zip', a number which sees her unwillingly acting out a striptease routine in front of her guests.

The stages of seduction: 'The Lady Is A Tramp'

Joey's ability to move freely in space reaches its peak with his rendition of 'The Lady Is A Tramp'. He begins the number from a position of vulnerability. He has had to beg Vera to turn up at the nightclub, and her reaction to his performance will determine whether he keeps his job. However, Joey transforms this potential trial into an irresistible act of seduction, which thrills through its potent disregard for the conventions of performance, not just vocally, but also spatially. Despite its seemingly hostile title, the lyrics of 'The Lady Is A Tramp' are intended as a back-handed compliment to the woman it addresses: she is looked down upon by uptight, polite society only because she refuses to bide by its stiff codes of behaviour. Joey's performance acts as an exercise in forcing Vera to see the joke.

As Joey begins to play at a piano on stage, the camera dollies around the back of the table at which Vera is seated, so that



she is placed at the very right edge of the frame whilst Joey occupies the left, viewed sideways on. The seduction begins, then, with both singer and his audience stationary in their

conventional positions, one on stage, the other watching on from the floor. The song proceeds with an exchange of medium close ups between Joey and Vera, he singing the first two verses with arrogant casualness, she registering somewhat more emotion as she realises what he is singing to her. These shots mark an early reversal of the positions they held before Joey began to sing. Vera had arrived at the club to see how Joey would react to the challenge of performing for her, but already the challenge has been reframed, with Joey asking her to react to his performance. Once this transformation has been set underway, Joey rises from his piano (during the first release of the song) and moves towards the band with a swagger. This movement brings Vera back into the right hand side of the frame, so that they are both in shot again, but now he stands above her, picked out by the stage light above him, band swinging to his command. The exchange of medium close ups continues with Joey in his new position, growing ever more uninhibited with his gestures, mimicking the brass punches which punctuate the song by snapping his head back and shrugging dramatically. Vera is viewed from the same position as before, but now her features begin to break into a smile as her resistance breaks down.



Joey breaches the division between stage and floor completely when he dances around Vera's table before disappearing from frame back onto the stage. Vera follows his movements, registering delight at his self-assured prowling, before joining Joey on stage to dance, the band striking up an encore in celebration of a seduction fully achieved. The conventional



demarcations which mark the nightclub as a place of musical entertainment have been so utterly transformed by Joey's aggressive mobility that even the band leave their posts with their instruments to follow the two lovers as they exit into the night.

Linda's 'naive' musical performance: 'My Funny Valentine'

'The Lady Is a Tramp' is one of the songs in the film not to have been part of the original Broadway musical. The decision to include it in the film version of *Pal Joey* was no doubt influenced by the fact that the song had become a staple of Sinatra's live act in the year preceding the release of the film. For viewers with an awareness of this, Joey's performance of the song becomes even more seductive: Vera's challenge is combatted by a song which has already been recognised as a show-stopper in the act of the performer taking on Joey's role in the film. However, it is important to the wider claims of this study to note that the fictional character's performance is *also* charismatic. Further, the power of the performance is not just the result of Sinatra's singing and movement, but also the consequence of the manner in which the performance is presented through the film's various narrational devices. The *extent* to which the cultural resonance of the song is made important to the drama unfolding in the film's fictional world is a matter of choice on the part of the filmmaker.

A similar point can be made in relation to another song imported into the film: 'My Funny Valentine'. It is highly likely

that many viewers at the time of the film's release would have recognised the song as the opening track on Sinatra's 'come-back' album 'Songs for Young Lovers' and as a constant fixture on the set-list of his concerts subsequently (of course, viewers watching the film in *any* historical period may also know this). With this in mind, it may seem odd that Sinatra does not perform the song in the film. Instead, it is sung by Linda. However, as the scene is played out, an awareness of the song's prior association with Sinatra allows an extra layer of understanding on the part of the informed viewer as to the appropriateness of having Linda perform the song in the film. For within the fictional world itself, Joey 'controls' the way Linda's song is presented. The knowledge that this song is intimately connected to the performing career of Sinatra outside of the film adds to the sense that Linda is playing along to someone else's tune. However, it does not provide the whole basis for understanding the scene.

Linda performs 'My Funny Valentine' ostensibly as a love song directed towards Joey, but her performance is characterised by an artlessness that prevents her from exerting control over how her song is received. This lack of control is signalled in the first place by the fact that she is performing the song as part of the show Joey is putting together in his nightclub. The space in which she is allowed to move and the style in which she sings all fall under his supervision. Attention is also diverted away from Linda's use of the song as an expression of love, by the scene being played out in such a way as to emphasise its relevance to the struggle being engaged between Joey and Vera. Whilst Linda tries to display her feelings for Joey within the limited space allowed to her, the camera blocks this effort of self-expression by turning its gaze onto the other two main characters.

When the camera is focused upon Linda, she is either viewed through an ornate love-heart or in an extreme close up of her face, of a type not to be found elsewhere in the film. Encased within a prop which over-determines her role as a tender-hearted romantic, and dressed in a pure white gown which theatricalises her virginal innocence, the artificial staging of this number ensures that the potential for Linda to express what she 'really' feels through song is severely curtailed. In fact her positioning on stage blocks her attempts to address Joey

directly through her song. The curtain closes on her the second she stops singing, to emphasise even more the restrictions placed upon her mode of performance by its setting.



Similarly the two close ups of her face in this sequence indicate naivety in the way she addresses the emotions which are contained in her singing. As Joey demonstrates in his performance of 'The Lady Is A Tramp', the film views the control of the gaze as essential for the successful targeting of a song towards a particular person: he counters Vera's initial gaze onto him with an irresistibly aggressive gaze back at her. When Joey sings, the close ups always allow enough room to make the direction of his gaze clear. The extreme close ups of Linda, in contrast, transmit the intensity of emotion behind her singing, but do not reveal where this intensity is being directed. The feeling is simply 'there' for Joey to see; it is not projected towards him in the forceful manner displayed in his own performances.

Significantly in this context, the moment at which Joey experiences a crisis that leads to the closing of his club is articulated as an inability to focus his gaze. Vera has threatened to withdraw her funding unless Joey fires Linda. Not able to confront her directly, he asks Linda to perform her striptease routine, hoping she will refuse and walk out on him. When she actually goes through with the number, Joey cannot bring himself to watch. An abrupt zoom into his startled eyes precedes his instruction for the performance to stop, an action which effectively ends his dream of running his own club.

The timidity of Linda's address during 'My Funny Valentine' is emphasised when her performance is relegated to the

background upon Vera's arrival onto the scene. Her entrance prompts a dramatic zoom from the stage to her position on the balcony, as if she were physically wresting control of the camera's gaze from Linda. When she begins speaking to Joey (the song now barely audible), the conversation is filmed in medium shot/reverse shots. The 'naked' emotions of Linda's singing give way to the measured threats exchanged in Joey and Vera's conversation. Joey is not immune to the appeal of Linda's performance, as his subsequent actions bear out. However, Linda cannot keep his attention focused upon her, allowing her relationship with him to become a prop in the power games conducted by Joey and Vera.

Young at Heart offered an example of song form still being made important to the understanding of narrative events, even in the musical genre where the integrity of that form is usually guaranteed. Song form is also a useful point of comparison in *Pal Joey*. The difference between Joey's mastery over his environment and Linda's comparative lack of control is demonstrated, in part, by the sense of expansiveness and contraction associated with their respective performances of 'The Lady Is A Tramp' and 'My Funny Valentine'. The performance of 'The Lady Is A Tramp' exceeds the bounds of the stage on which it is begun and receives a musical reprise as the band provide an instrumental version of the melody to accompany Joey and Vera's dancing. The sense that the vitality of the number is causing the song sequence to burst at its seams is emphasised by the music continuing non-diegetically as the scene transfers to the couple on Vera's boat. By contrast, Linda's performance of 'My Funny Valentine' is utterly constrained, the performance lasting only as long as the original musical script, dictated by Joey, allows. Furthermore, in the middle of the sequence, attention is drawn away from the details of the performance itself, putting the song in the kind of distanced commentary role normally reserved for the non-diegetic pop song in the non-musical.

Vera's musical 'strips': 'Zip' and 'Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered'

The power struggle between Joey and Vera, alluded to in the 'My Funny Valentine' sequence, begins at Vera's charity ball where, as already demonstrated, Joey challenges her by blatantly



ignoring conventions of musical performance and their difference in class. His most obvious attempt to orchestrate events in this scene occurs when he forces Vera into a potentially humiliating position, leaving her no choice but to re-enact her past life as a stripper in front of the high society audience.

'Zip', the number which follows, was sung in the original Broadway production by Melba, a female reporter who had come to interview Joey at his club. Her bookish appearance and obvious intellect convince the enlightened singer that she must be a lesbian. Melba launches into the parodic strip routine of 'Zip' unexpectedly, to convince him that she is heterosexual as well as smart. Clearly then, in keeping with the film's general tendency to allow Joey to orchestrate events, the motivation for the number's appearance has been reversed from the stage version. Whereas Melba exposes Joey's misogyny through the song, in the film Joey uses it to exert his control - he wants to find out if Vera, despite her uptight appearance, can still display what she learned as a stripper.

Yet Vera responds to this challenge with a verve and wit that echoes the bravado of Joey's musical performances. In common with the strategies of 'The Lady Is A Tramp' sequence, this scene gathers the non-performer onto the edge of the frame in order to show how he is seduced by the song's delivery. Despite her unwillingness to reveal her past life to her audience, once the performance is underway Vera moves with a knowing insouciance which resembles that of the playboy, and displays the combative tone characteristic of Joey's performing style. Her freedom of movement here is still contained within the particular vision of female sexuality proposed by the *Playboy* philosophy, however, and not only because it is Joey who initiates her performance.

Vera first appears with her hair brushed back at the sides and curled tightly on top. Her low cut ball-gown reveals broad shoulders and a tight corset ensures that the curves of her body are sharply defined. When called upon to perform her routine, she uses the tightness with which her body is defined to

transform the clichéd erotic gyrations of the strip into aggressive, angular movements. It is in this way that Vera, with a great deal of humour, resists Joey's attempts to embarrass her by forcing her in to a 'proper' strip routine. As she sings 'Sigmund Freud has often stated, dreams and drives are all related', for example, her wiggles while she pretends to pull down her gown are so overstated that they describe a sharp zig-zag rather than a shimmering 'S'. Whereas a stripper might climax her performance with a brazen, open-armed wiggle of what has been revealed, Vera ends the song with a series of symmetrical shrugs of each shoulder, keeping all her movement on an even plane.

If her performance does demonstrate a gestural control reminiscent of Joey, it does not result in the complete reversal of the balance of power between the two that is the effect of Joey's rendition of 'The Lady Is A Tramp'. The only way she can signal her resistance to Joey's attempts to take control is by acting as though he is not there. She addresses her performance primarily to the audience in front of her, offering only the occasional withering glance towards Joey. She sometimes delivers her parodic striptease moves as violent swipes in his direction (a back kick, bum wiggles and flicks of her gown), but always avoiding eye contact. She acts in these moments as if she were distractedly swatting away a fly, pretending that the orchestrator of this unwanted performance does not exist, a pretence that Joey is delighted to expose in his subsequent rendition of 'The Lady Is A Tramp'.

Vera's sexuality is performed through a discourse more specific to the *Playboy* philosophy in her rendition of 'Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered', sung after she has spent her first night with Joey. This is presented as a complement to 'Zip', allowing comparisons to be made between the display of Vera's body before and after the encounter with her lover. Both numbers feature a displaced 'strip' routine, in this case the revealing of Vera's body as she prepares to take a shower. Yet whereas her movement in 'Zip' displays a knowing subversion of the routine's erotic strategies, with her body deliberately hardened, 'Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered' finds her suddenly soft and supple, conforming to the 1950s ideal of how a woman felt sexual pleasure.

Richard Dyer demonstrates how oceanic imagery dominated descriptions of the female orgasm in popular culture and Freudian psychoanalysis during the 1950s. Despite the suggestion in The Kinsey Report that the vaginal orgasm was a biological impossibility,⁷ it continued to be celebrated as an experience which flooded the whole body with sensual ecstasy: 'Where the visible/visual analogue for the male experience derives from the penis, for the female it is everywhere. The visual analogue of the vaginal orgasm is the female body itself.' (Dyer 1987: 55)

Pal Joey is remarkable for the way it so over-determines Vera's transition from the deliberately 'hardened' physicality displayed in 'Zip' to the soft and blurred, 'feminine' sexuality portrayed in 'Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered'. The contrast between Vera's appearance before and after her night with Joey is evident as soon as she awakes the next morning. Viewed in medium close up from above, her hair has been let down and her arms stretch wide to either side. Whilst she sings 'I'm in love, but don't I show it, like a babe in arms' she rolls down her bed towards the camera, her whole body laid across the frame, before gathering herself up into a sitting position, arms trailing behind her. Later in the song, the camera cranes above her as she reclines on her chaise-longue, once again offering the viewer the spectacle of her whole body loosely stretched. By this time her naturally broad shoulders have been covered (and blurred) by the bushy fur lining of her dressing gown.

When the camera shows Vera's whole body in 'Zip' it reveals how strictly she marshals the standard poses of the strip through her tautly controlled performance. She wittily prevents each gesture functioning as part of a seamless erotic whole (culminating in the spectacle of the woman in her 'natural' state), by making each movement appear discrete and mechanical. During 'Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered', in contrast, she shows how her sexual encounter with Joey has caused her body to blur with sensual pleasure, her movements no longer clipped and discrete, but rather languorous and diffuse. At the end of the sequence, she enters the shower singing, 'the way to my heart is unzipped again', after which she throws her arms open and pushes her breasts forward, albeit behind the shower's frosted glass. Even though the sequence is only



a 'strip' for the viewer (whereas 'Zip' is diegetically marked as such), Vera's newly sexualised body conforms far more closely to the conventional poses of a public strip routine than before.

The song itself has been cut considerably from its original incarnation on Broadway. In the stage show, Vera awakes from her wild night with Joey singing:

After one whole quart of brandy,
Like a daisy I awake.
With no Bromo Seltzer handy
I don't even shake.

The implication is that sex with Joey has been the ideal hang-over cure, one type of intoxication counteracting the effects of another. In contrast, the film's version runs:

He's a fool and don't I know it,
But a fool can have his charm.
I'm in love, but don't I show it,
Like a babe in arms.

The imagery here is immediately associated with the enveloping warmth provided by love ('like a babe in arms'). Both versions then continue in a similar vein, celebrating a reawakening of passion with the standard imagery of romantic song (she has turned into 'a simpering, whimpering child again,' 'has lost [her] heart, but what of it'). However, in the film, as Vera moves from bedroom to bathroom, she begins humming the

melody rather than singing the lyrics, thereby disguising the twist which the Broadway version takes. In the original, the clichéd romantic imagery of the first line of each verse begins to be followed by ever more explicit descriptions of the physical sensation which has moved Vera to song. It is worth quoting some of these lines to demonstrate how they articulate a sexual response far removed from the oceanic model popularised in the 1950s:

I'll sing to him, each spring to him,
And worship the trousers that cling to him.

When he talks he is seeking, words to get off his chest.
Horizontally speaking, he's at his very best.

Vexed again, perplexed again.
Thank God I can be oversexed again.

and finally:

I'm dumb again, numb again,
A rich, ready, ripe little plum again.

Whilst both versions maintain a faith in male penetration as the ultimate source of female sexual pleasure (the vaginal orgasm), the stage show is far more specific about the biological origins of this pleasure. In the film Joey provides Vera with an experience that prevents her from thinking of her body in terms of individual parts, thus robbing her of the awareness she had previously demonstrated in her performance of 'Zip'. Joey's 'unzipping' of her defences transforms her body instead into the ideal of diffused female sexuality which was integral to the male produced playboy discourse.

The 'perfect' fit between pop star and film character

A fundamental difference between the original stage version of *Pal Joey* and the film version discussed here lies in the fact that by the time the film was made Joey's freewheeling behaviour could be viewed through the prism of a newly articulated male lifestyle - that of the playboy. If, as Gerald Mast claims, Joey and

Vera were 'two of a kind' in the original production, they have lost that parity in the film (1987: 181). Instead both Linda and Vera are framed within the power mechanisms which ensure Joey's ability to roam freely.

Pal Joey is illuminating because it shows how these structures of power have to be kept aggressively in place, even within the space of the song, which has often been the occasion within the musical for utopian flights from social realities. In the original series of letters by John O'Hara, upon which the musical was based, Joey is cut down to size by an obvious limitation of the epistolary form (O'Hara 1952). He continually boasts about his singing talent to his pen-pal Ted, but as the reader cannot hear him in action and he never seems to get anywhere, we are not inclined to believe him. By giving a voice to Joey, the Broadway musical allowed the character a chance to prove his claims (the role in fact made a star of Gene Kelly). By making that voice Sinatra's in the film version, Joey gains access to both a performing style that was predicated in part on a display of mastery through song, and to the performer who most prominently acted out the fantasy of male freedom offered by the playboy. With Joey's character so safely guarded by its performer, the narrative 'threats' posed by Linda and Vera to his boundless mobility carry little weight. They are never allowed to speak entirely in their own voices or move with their own freedom, Joey's orchestration of events being achieved through a charismatically controlling use of voice, space and the direction of the gaze.

Conclusion

The different ways in which the musical persona of Frank Sinatra is accommodated in *Young at Heart* and *Pal Joey* demonstrate that the choices filmmakers make are just as decisive to the understanding of the performance of a pop star within a particular fictional scenario, as they are when a 'disembodied' song is used to accompany a specific narrative situation. There are two processes at work that result in the differences between the relationship of pop song, star and fictional characterisation in each film. Firstly, each film makes use of two different aspects of the Sinatra persona, both of which were equally prevalent during the mid-1950s. The character of

Barney Sloan in *Young at Heart* refers to Sinatra's status as an exceptionally sensitive interpreter of popular song. The character of Joey Evans in *Pal Joey* embodies the qualities of musical virtuosity and free-wheeling sexual swagger which exemplified Sinatra's 'swinging' singing style and the mode of performance and playboy lifestyle associated with it.

Secondly, these qualities are then represented through characters that inhabit their fictional worlds in crucially different ways. *Young at Heart* simultaneously provides a showcase for, and offers a critique of, the qualities of intimacy and intensity displayed through the musical performances of the character Sinatra plays. *Pal Joey*, by contrast, embraces the task of embodying Sinatra's playboy persona in a fictional setting so enthusiastically that the persona's presence is made to be felt even in those song sequences in which Joey is not the main performer. As well as referring to popular music culture outside of its own fictional bounds, through the casting of Sinatra, each film also offers the viewer its own unique perspective on that pop music culture within its fictional world. The song sequences provide the most appropriate setting in which this unique perspective can be established and developed.

3. The pop song as narrational device

In this chapter, I return to a discussion of the pop song as a narrational device to consider how filmmakers have made creative use of the pop song's propensity to be understood as existing in a particularly intense relationship with its fans.

The sequences from John Schlesinger's *Midnight Cowboy* from 1969 and John Badham's *Saturday Night Fever* of 1977, discussed presently, are both marked by a series of 'incomplete' attachments, including those between non-diegetic pop song and film character. The relationship between song and character, and the attachment of both to other features of the fictional world, allows the viewer to understand, in a way that the characters themselves do not, the extent to which each character fails to project his desired self-image on to the world around him. The pop song is able to communicate this failure of self-expression so powerfully because of the status pop has achieved as a cultural form with a privileged role in the construction of identity.

The pop song and possession

The commercial pop song, as defined in this study, takes its place within a popular music culture that encourages its audience to 'possess' the music in a special way. As Simon Frith notes:

Popular music is something possessed ... In 'possessing' music, we make it part of our own identity and build it into a sense of ourselves ... the intensity of this relationship between taste and self-definition seems peculiar to popular music - it is 'possessable' in ways that other cultural forms (except, perhaps, sports teams) are not. (1987: 143-144)

The conscious mapping out of identity through an affiliation with a particular song, musical style or artist has played an integral part in people's everyday use of pop music and in accounts of that use, whether it be rock'n'roll's role in the cultural production of the teenager or sub-cultural theory's emphasis on music's potential to be used as a tool of resistance against hegemonic forces.

Cultural conventions guide the consumption of all types of music. The classical concert, for example, provides a particular kind of setting for its listeners to register their identification with and appreciation of classical music. However, this setting constructs a relationship between audience and performer which is marked by a certain outward passivity on the part of the listener. Put another way, the activity of the classical music fan in this case is meant to lie in their listening attentively, rather than being encouraged to adopt a more overtly participatory response.

The rituals of pop music consumption, by contrast, are marked by more ostentatious displays of affiliation. Unlike the audience of a classical concert, attendees of a pop concert are typically encouraged to join in with the music through activities such as singing along, clapping in time with the music, or dancing. Different genres of pop music encourage such participation to a greater or lesser degree, and each genre's rituals of participation take different forms. However, it is one of the distinctive features of pop music overall that such participation forms at least part of the music listening experience. To use Simon Frith's phrase, the consumption of pop music is a particularly 'bodily matter' (1996: 274).

As well as encouraging a physical response in the listener, the consumption of pop music is also a 'bodily matter' in terms of physical appearance. One way this is registered is through the importance of particular dress codes to different types of pop music. The history of pop music is also a history of changing fashions, as pop fans have asserted their affiliation to particular genres of music by the clothes they wear, whether that be the oversized zoot suits sported by fans of Latin/Mexican swing jazz in 1940s America, the 'Rasta' style typical in the late 1970s UK reggae scene, or the 'baggy' look associated with rave culture in the late 1980s. In *Midnight Cowboy*, *Saturday Night*

Fever and *Baby It's You*, all three of the male protagonists are particularly interested in their appearance. In the latter two cases, the way the characters dress is explicitly connected to a particular type of pop music (disco in the case of Tony (John Travolta) in *Saturday Night Fever*, the 1950s playboy in the case of Sheik (Vincent Spano) in *Baby It's You*). Without being as explicitly stated, Joe's (Jon Voight) cowboy outfit in *Midnight Cowboy* is also associated with the country-folk of 'Everybody's Talkin', the song that provides him with a theme tune throughout the film.

The 'possession' of pop music on the part of the fan, then, is often demonstrated through the body. However, this possession is a psychological as well as a physical matter. Music in general has been considered to be an art form that is particularly adept at accessing the emotions of its listeners. Indeed, the idea that music resonates emotionally with the viewer in a way that other aspects of a film, such as dialogue, cannot, has provided a common justification for the necessity of the composed score. This view is represented by Claudia Gorbman:

Music enters to satisfy a need to compensate for, fill in, the emotional depth not verbally representable. Bernard Herrmann [film composer]: 'The real reason for music is that a piece of film, by its nature, lacks a certain ability to convey emotional overtones. Many times in many films, dialogue may not give a clue to the feelings of a character ...' All music, say [cultural theorists] Eisler and Adorno, 'belongs primarily to the sphere of subjective inwardness.' (1987: 67)

In the case of the commercial pop song, the fan can be seen to identify emotionally with three aspects of the song: its 'purely musical' qualities, which may prompt an emotional as well as physical response (in fact, the physical activity can be viewed as a particular expression of the emotional reaction); the lyrics, which fans can relate imaginatively to their own identities; and the star through whose performance the song is embodied. This type of identification gives an emotional justification for the physical display of affiliation to a particular piece of pop music. The pop fan demonstrates identification with a pop song by 'exterior' means because it also connects with them 'inside'.

When filmmakers include pop music in their fictional worlds, they exercise choice in deciding which of the cultural assumptions associated with it in terms of its consumption (as well as other aspects of its cultural resonance) are to be made relevant in the particular narrative context. The sequences from *Midnight Cowboy* and *Saturday Night Fever* display a number of similarities: they both feature their characters walking along the streets of New York, accompanied by a non-diegetic pop song; both characters display an interest in presenting themselves ostentatiously to the world around them. In *Midnight Cowboy*, Joe is a male prostitute hustling for business. In *Saturday Night Fever*, Tony is simply walking to work, but he does so in a manner which suggests a desire to differentiate himself from the crowd, something that is illustrated later through his performances on the disco dance floor.

The sequence from *Midnight Cowboy* makes use of 'Everybody's Talkin' in a way which privileges the psychological or interior affiliations between pop song and film character. By contrast, in the opening sequence of *Saturday Night Fever*, more emphasis is placed on understanding the character's identification with the song ('Stayin' Alive') through physical or exterior means. In neither case, however, do the filmmakers present an unproblematic fit between song and the character's identity.

Many of the songs discussed in the rest of this study act as ideal identities against which the viewer can judge the characters' actual situations. As suggested at the end of the previous chapter, Joey's performances in *Pal Joey* offer an example of song and character being coordinated to produce just such an ideal identity. In neither the sequence from *Midnight Cowboy* nor *Saturday Night Fever* are character and song allowed to cohere to produce this type of ideal representation. Instead, in *Midnight Cowboy*, a certain attachment is made between the song and aspects of Joe's state of mind, but the viewer is discouraged from understanding the music simply as a representation of the character's subjectivity. In *Saturday Night Fever*, moments of 'ideal' coordination between character and song are made to co-exist with moments where these attachments falter. Both of these examples prepare the ground for the extended analysis of *Baby It's You* in chapter four. This film interrogates, throughout the entire course of its narrative, the

differences between the ideal identities seemingly offered by the pop song and the actual existence of the characters whose lives the songs accompany.

The ‘psychological’ attachment between song and character: ‘Everybody’s Talkin’ in *Midnight Cowboy*

Harry Nilsson’s country-tinged ballad ‘Everybody’s Talkin’ accompanies the hustler Joe Buck at various points in *Midnight Cowboy*. In the sequence in which he walks around New York for the first time, apparently on the look out for rich women to pick up, the song is affiliated, to a certain extent, with Joe’s subjective experience of finding himself in a new environment. However, the relationship between song and character and the other elements of the fictional world remain deliberately detached. Despite moving to New York to find his fortune, Joe’s identity is constructed through an attachment between song and character that only serves to highlight the indifference to Joe displayed by the world around him. Furthermore, the song is used to propose an ideal identity with which to combat the city’s indifference that Joe fails to claim as his own.

The invitation to understand the attachment between song and character as psychological rather than physical is made, in part, by the lack of formal interaction between the music and image. In this sequence, there are no rhythmic matches between song and image. Shot transitions occur in the middle of lines or cut across melodic phrases, whilst Joe’s movement does not correlate to the pace of the music.

The song first appears in tandem with a deliberately disorderly image and in the company of soundtrack elements which reduce the impact of its introduction (in terms of showcasing its musical qualities). In the first shot of the sequence, the camera zooms up from street level to Joe looking out from the window of his high-rise apartment. The speed of the zoom is so quick that it blurs his body until it is unrecognisable, and then halts suddenly, still a distance away from its intended target. This violent camera movement is the cue for the song to begin, but the arpeggiated guitar intro is disrupted by the sound of a car horn beeping. The song’s partial alignment with the perspective of Joe, discussed below, exists in a fictional world where

other narrational devices are used to demonstrate a self-conscious lack of interest in Joe’s activities. For instance, later in the scene shots pull from shop windows onto brief glimpses of Joe passing by (a pan from someone opening a safe; a zoom from a jewel in a display case), as if desperately trying to maintain an interest in charting his progress through the streets, even though there are so many distractions to lure that attention away.

Both song and character, through their country styling (whether that be the country folk style of the music or the cowboy outfit worn by Joe), exhibit qualities that jar with the city environment. Both are also made to struggle to align themselves with other aspects of the fictional world (as evidenced by the lack of formal interaction between song and image and the preponderance of framings that prevent Joe from being the centre of attention). In this way, the song can be seen to parallel the character’s feelings at this particular moment: both are struggling to fit in.

However, the song also provides a more distanced commentary on Joe by proposing, through its lyrics, an ‘ideal’ solution to his situation which is not taken up by the character. In so doing, it offers an example of the pop song’s ability both to represent a character’s subjectivity and to indicate that character’s limited understanding of his or her situation.

The lyrics to ‘Everybody’s Talkin’ are narrated by a character who is lost in reverie:

Everybody’s talkin’ at me
I don’t hear a word they’re saying
Only the echoes of my mind

People stopping staring
I can’t see their faces
Only the shadows of their eyes

I’m going where the sun keeps shining
Through the pouring rain
Going where the weather suits my clothes
Banking off of the North East wind
Sailing on a summer breeze
And skipping over the ocean like a stone

Everybody's talkin' at me
 I don't hear a word they're saying
 Only the echoes of my mind

 And I won't let you leave my love behind
 I won't let you leave my love behind

The character in the song seeks protection from the real world by immersing himself in his own imagination. In the film as a whole, suggestions are made that Joe, too, lives in a kind of fantasy world. He is actually first heard, rather than seen, singing a song representing his anticipation of moving from his country home to New York, over a shot of a blank screen at a drive-in theatre. This immediately associates him with the world of fantasy represented by the movies. He is then shown grooming himself and striking poses in front of his bedroom mirror, inter-cut with shots of him addressing the camera directly to respond aggressively to his co-workers in the kitchen which he is evidently leaving behind. The direct address to camera and the disruptive nature of the inter-cutting imply quite clearly that these confrontational exchanges are taking place in his imagination (whether as memories or complete fabrications). The suggestion is made at the very start of the film that Joe's expectations of how he will cope in New York are based on a fantasy image of himself.

Joe's fantasy unravels after he arrives in New York and is forced to come to terms with the harsh realities of city life. However, at the point in the narrative considered in detail below, Joe has no understanding of the gap between his image of himself in the world and the reality of his situation. The scene could have been represented from Joe's point of view, to demonstrate how *he* imagined his arrival on the streets of New York to have been received. Had this been done, the sentiments of the song would have been aligned more straightforwardly with Joe's subjectivity: the characters in both song and film seek protection from the outside world by immersing themselves in their own imagination. However, this is not the way the sequence is actually constructed. Instead, the scene shows Joe attempting and failing to impose himself on the 'real world'.

The sequence makes an issue of, rather than wards off, the city's obliviousness to his presence. Shots marked as being

from Joe's point of view do not just receive indifference from the women under his gaze. They also lead to a relay of shots that efface the presence of his look entirely. The second shot of the sequence films Joe from a distance, in the middle of a



crowd, marked out by his distinctive hat, walking towards the camera. A closer shot singles him out further, chewing gum, swaggering his shoulders, and looking about. A glance to his right is followed by a cut to a woman shot ostensibly from his point of view: she is walking in the same direction (from right to left) as Joe, and the track from her side that traces her movement could be seen as a representation of Joe's gaze following her. However the tracking shot is considerably quicker than Joe's walking. Furthermore, this image is rapidly succeeded by a similar tracking shot of another woman walking in the opposite direction, from left to right, and then by a slower track from right to left that depicts a woman turning away from the



camera and heading towards a shop window at the back of the frame. Joe's initial look becomes disorientated in shots that display a tangle of movement from right to left, left to right, right to left again, and then front to back.

A return to a tracking shot of Joe, now walking from left to right, on the left hand side of the road, is followed by a similarly paced tracking shot in the same direction of a group of women greeting each other. However, it is shot from the opposite side of the street, cars cutting across in the front of the frame, making it impossible to consider as a literal point of view shot.

Point of view shots are always only representations and approximations of what a character is meant to be seeing. Yet in this sequence, Joe's looks are mismatched in a deliberately sustained way. At one point he comes to a stop and looks ahead, as if someone has caught his eye. The next shot tracks behind a woman with a handbag draped over her shoulder, before cutting to a very brief head and shoulders' backward tracking shot of Joe striding after her. The return to the camera trailing behind the woman reinforces the impression that the image represents Joe's pursuit of her. However, the next shot cuts away from the chase completely and consists merely of a bus blurring quickly past the camera in extreme close-up. When we return to Joe, he is now at the shoulder of a different woman altogether. It is not just the case that Joe fails to catch up with any of the women he pursues. His gaze is robbed of any authority, so that we cannot even be sure if the chase is taking place at all.

The relationship of the song to all of this is two-fold: firstly, an attachment is made between elements of the music and aspects of Joe's situation. Both strike a note of incongruity in the city setting, and neither song nor character is given support by the film's other narrational devices. The song also bears some relation to the character's subjective state of mind, in that its lyrics describe a character who lives in an 'interior' world, like Joe.

However, the song depicts a character who *knows* this to be the case, and who succeeds in protecting himself by immersing himself in his imagination. Joe, by contrast, is depicted trying and failing to impose the fantasy he has of himself on the outside world. In this way, 'Everybody's Talkin' offers a vivid illustration of a pop song being used to propose an ideal identity which the character associated with the song cannot actually match. The repeated use of 'Everybody's Talkin' throughout the film provides the opportunity to understand how Joe's situation relates to the ideal solution proposed by the song at any given moment.

The 'physical' attachment between song and character: 'Stayin' Alive' in *Saturday Night Fever*

The opening credit sequence of *Saturday Night Fever* offers an example of the pop song enjoying a much more visible, 'physical' attachment to a particular character than is the case in the example discussed from *Midnight Cowboy*. As Tony walks through the streets of Brooklyn to the strains of the Bee Gees' 'Stayin' Alive', a coordination between character movement and pop song is achieved that resembles that more normally associated with the fully embodied performances that can take place in the musical (as was evidenced most strongly in the song sequences involving the title character in *Pal Joey*). In addition, a sense of the fictional world as a whole being shaped around the musical performance is provided by the manner in which various narrational devices (chiefly editing and shot composition) seem governed by particular rhythmic qualities of the song.

Apart from 'You My Love' in *Young at Heart*, 'Stayin' Alive' is the only song featured in this study that was composed specifically for its film. Although Tony does not literally sing the song as he walks through Brooklyn, and no on-screen source is provided to imply that Tony is actually listening to it, this scene *does*, in parts, resemble the song-and-dance sequence of the musical in its close choreography between song, performer and other aspects of the fictional world (*Saturday Night Fever* is, indeed, often described as a musical). As such, there are moments when Tony's character is understood as being embodied *fully* through the song and the way he performs in relation to it. At these points the distance between song and character is reduced to an absolute minimum, with the result that the viewer is encouraged to understand the identity of Tony as being revealed through the ideal identity of the song. However, the instances of maximum synchronicity between character, song and other narrational devices are also the moments in which Tony is depicted as occupying an abstract, fantastic environment rather than the actual streets of Brooklyn. This is a problem for a character who wishes to mark himself out as special within *this* particular social milieu, a desire most vividly expressed through his performances on the dance floor of the

local disco, a venue which acts as a microcosm for the Brooklyn community as a whole.

'Stayin' Alive' plays non-diegetically over a title sequence in which the film's hero Tony struts down the streets of Brooklyn, pausing to chat up women, grab a bite of pizza, and pop into a clothes' shop, the song fading out when he reaches the DIY store where he works. All the shots of Tony 'just' walking are cut to the beat of the song: two bars of 'Stayin' Alive's well-known opening riff accompany Tony's entrance, registered by a close up of his shoe as he raises it to compare it to one in a shop window. At the end of the shot, he resumes his walk, the gliding motion of his foot coinciding with an upturn in the melody of the song which leads to the introduction of the swooping strings that rise at the beginning of the next image. This melodic escalation and addition of strings suggests an increase in musical intensity, and this is registered in the *mise-en-scène* by having the camera pushed back by Tony's pounding gait. This retreating of camera establishes Tony's irresistible ability to forge through space, to define his own channel of movement. The alignment of this power with the rhythm of the song is intensified by having each footfall stamp onto the pavement in time with the accented snare drums. This shot appears twice more, on both occasions at the beginning of the section that signals an ascent to the song's chorus ('and now it's all right, it's OK'), the driving back of the camera equated to the doubling of the song's efforts as it drives towards its refrain.

As the singing of the first verse begins, there is a cut to a backward tracking shot that pans up from Tony's feet to his upper torso, his shoulders swaying in time to the music. The image places Tony at its centre, the railway bridge to his right and the buildings to his left meeting at a point behind his head and stretching out in a pronounced perspective to the opposite edges of the frame. Additionally his movement is singled out as being particularly attuned to the rhythm of the song, with people cutting across the frame behind him or walking the opposite way, but with no one moving toward the camera in his direction. The camera accommodates Tony's rhythmic swagger by tracking backward at his pace, the shot covering the verse until it reaches the bridge that ascends to its chorus (where it is superseded by the close-up of his feet). The second verse is

filmed in the same manner, a backward tracking view of Tony, now eating pizza, followed by the close shot of his feet.



Three other shots, which occupy two each of the first six bars of the second chorus, are cut to the beat of the song, all of

them presenting Tony's body as being lost in musical rhythm. The first two are mirror images of each other, taken from angles that suggest they are filmed with the camera pointing upwards from a position around Tony's feet. The first shot has Tony's body (from waist up) canted to the right, blue sky behind him, the railway bridge creeping into the top left corner of the frame. The second pictures him tilted to the left, the buildings cutting across the right corner of the frame. The next shot returns to the perspectival image with Tony's head at its centre that occurred at the start of the first verse.

The odd angles of the first two shots result in an abstraction of the objects which surround Tony. The bridge and buildings in these shots appear to float at the top of the screen, as a kind of frame for Tony's performance (rather than appearing more straightforwardly as part of the busy backdrop in front of which Tony walks as is the case in other parts of the sequence). The sense of these objects as frames for Tony's moving body in these shots is intensified by the manner in which they are made to 'rhyme' with each other (the bridge cutting across the left corner of one shot, the buildings cutting across the right corner of the other). The symmetry of the following shot is also highly stylised, turning a bustling, cluttered street into a corridor that Tony's movement perfectly bisects. The close-ups of his feet, meanwhile, are so tightly choreographed to the pulse of the song, that the pavement gains the character of a percussive instrument, his shoes rapping out the beat. Every shot in which Tony appears to be most attuned to the rhythm of the song is marked by the suggestion that in doing so he transcends the real space of the busy streets around him.

These moments of transcendence are not maintained throughout the entire sequence. Whenever Tony becomes engaged with the life of the streets, either through contact with fellow pedestrians or by diverting his path into the neighbouring shops, the rhythmic presentation of his walking falters. The first shot that does not accompany a regular number of bars of music is also the one in which Tony's thrusting swagger is interrupted for the first time. The end of the opening verse and most of the chorus runs over a long shot of Tony walking along the street, pausing as a woman going the other way catches his eye, chasing back after her, before thinking better of it and picking up his stride once more.



It is not just the narrative detail (failing to pick up a woman) that delivers a blow to the confidence with which Tony has hitherto strutted along. The whole composition of the frame denotes a weakening of attachment between the music and his body and of the effect this combination has in ‘musicalising’ the image (by which I mean the organisation of all the elements in a shot to provide a frame for Tony’s rhythmic movement). Tony’s figure is no longer central to the frame. The perspective of the previous upper torso backward tracking shot has been lost, shop fronts stretching off to the right without the balance of the railway bridge on the left. With the names of the supporting cast obscuring Tony’s body at the beginning of the shot, the most striking line of motion in the frame is supplied by a train which cuts across the back at the top of the screen from left to right, diverting attention away from Tony’s trajectory of movement towards the camera. A closer view of the train cutting across from left to right, with diegetic sound spreading over the song, is in fact the image that succeeds this shot, cutting in off the beat as the Bee Gees harmonise on an elongated ‘alive’. Additionally the increased distance between camera and body allows passers-by to cut in front of him or become visible walking in the same direction, thereby compromising the unique attention given to his particular strutting in the previous shots. The visible stutter in Tony’s stride is surrounded by a *mise-en-scène* that has already placed in the balance his efforts to impose his presence on his environment.

Tony’s thrusting forward, emphasised by the backward tracking of the camera, is the key to the differentiation of his

movement. The camera movement contained in the first shots of the film, before the music starts, shifts *across* the frame: an aerial pan sweeps from left to right across Brooklyn bridge; a train exits the right hand side of the screen, and then is viewed from the back, pulling away from the left of the frame. Tony’s first paces also take place on a horizontal axis, but his act of turning the corner, accompanied by swooping strings as the music hits its stride, is the moment his movement is singled out as unique. However, the narrative landmarks of this sequence all divert him from his forward trajectory, whether he is buying a pizza (chronicled in a shot/reverse shot that cuts across the street rather than along it), darting into the clothes store to order his shirt, or chasing after another woman (the backward tracking shot abandoned in favour of a forward tracking point of view shot that ends up filming the street from the opposite direction and excludes Tony from the frame entirely).

The moments in which Tony is most closely attached to the music physically are also the moments where he is depicted as being most removed from the real-life hustle-and-bustle of the Brooklyn streets through which he walks. One section of ‘Stayin’ Alive’, obscured by dialogue in this sequence, begins with the lyric ‘life goin’ nowhere’. The repetition of exactly the same upper torso tracking shot at the end of the second chorus as was used at the beginning of the first verse, suggests that Tony’s self-confident swagger is not actually getting him anywhere. The rhythmic qualities of the song provide a base upon which Tony is shown to construct a sense of his physical identity. However, at the same time the attachment robs him of a culturally specific identity (he loses his connection with a particular social environment). In its very first moments, then, *Saturday Night Fever* suggests that Tony’s physical investment in music, later embodied in scenes where he dances to diegetic music (that is to say music which appears as a narrative element, rather than in a narrational role), will not be enough on its own to provide him with a secure sense of identity within his community.

Conclusion

Both the sequences discussed in this chapter make reference to assumptions about the pop song's role in the process of forming identities. However, each of them does so with a productive sense of cynicism. The characters do not simply take on the identities proposed by the songs. Instead a distance is left between the song's qualities (whether musical or lyrical) and the character's activities. The establishing of this distance allows the viewer to understand each character through the *constructed relationship between* character and song, rather than accepting the song simply as a reflection of the character. Even when the distance between character and song is reduced to a minimum, as it is at times in the *Saturday Night Fever* sequence, other aspects of the scene serve to contextualise such moments and question their 'ideal' nature (that is, is being 'lost in music' really an effective way for Tony to construct a sense of his own identity if it is seen to remove him from the very social environment in which he wishes to shine?).

The next, final, chapter features an extended analysis of *Baby It's You*. The film provides an appropriate conclusion to this study, as it engages with all the aspects of the pop song's use in narrative film discussed so far.

4. Pop music culture and screen identities

Baby, It's You: two-part structure

John Sayles' *Baby, It's You* from 1983 focuses upon the relationship through high school and beyond of two teenagers, both of whom seek a sense of self through excessive role-playing: middle-class Jill (Rosanna Arquette) as an aspiring actress; and the working class Italian-American Sheik (Vincent Spano) as a would-be singer in the style of his hero Frank Sinatra. In its use of pop songs from the period (the film is set in 1966 and 1967) and through the anachronistic non-diegetic presence of Bruce Springsteen songs from the 1970s, the film casts its music as an element in Jill and Sheik's role-playing and as a commentary upon them, as both individuals and as a couple. At the same time, the film also undermines the music's status as a source of ideal identities by the nature of the narrative action it is asked to accompany.

Baby, It's You, unusually for a 'teen romance', splits its action between high school and college, rather than choosing between the two. Paramount, the film's backers, were sceptical about this two-part structure, as writer-director Sayles explains:

My distanced opinion on it is that they had seen *Valley Girl* and *Porkys* and *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* and felt, 'Jeez, we could have a big hit high school comedy.' and *Baby, It's You* just was never going to turn into a high school comedy. So they said to me, 'Look, the high school section is really great, and we really want to cut down on the college parts, because it's kind of long and it's kind of a downer.' (Smith 1998: 92)

A re-edit by Jerry Greenberg was rejected by Sayles, who threatened to take his name off the credits should the film come out

in that form. Eventually, Paramount backed down and Sayles retained the right to the final cut.

The extension of the narrative into Jill's first year at college and Sheik's attempts to make it as a singer in Miami is crucial to the film's use of pop music as a source of possible identities and to its reflections upon the nature of this provision. The two parts reflect on each other more generally, being paralleled in terms of location, narrative progression, rhyming characters and in repeated references by Jill in the second half to events that had occurred in the first. The care with which these parallels are set up is indicated in the first four scenes of each section, which echo each other exactly in terms of location:

Section One	Section Two
School	University
Drama hall	Drama class
Jill at home with parents	Parents reading letter from Jill
School canteen	University canteen

The two parts also close with parallel sequences - of Sheik driving frantically and with the school/college prom. Both also include one sequence away from each section's two main sites of action, Jill and Sheik's hometown of Trenton, New Jersey, and Jill's university. In the first section, Sheik persuades Jill to skip school and drive out to Astbury Park, and, in the second, Jill visits Sheik in Miami. These two sequences in turn reflect upon each other in their dramatic structure. In the first, Jill and Sheik drive out to the pier and walk along the beach before dancing to Frank Sinatra, playing on a diner jukebox. They then kiss goodbye passionately by Sheik's car. The Miami sequence also opens with Jill driving towards and walking along a beach, this time with an old school-friend. The diner episode is echoed by Jill's arrival at the bar where Sheik is making a living lip-synching to Frank Sinatra: he has become the jukebox. Finally, their passionate car-side kiss is paralleled in the unsatisfying sexual encounter undertaken by the couple in Sheik's apartment, and their cold goodbye at the airport.

If the Miami sequence recalls the Astbury Park episode, but replays it with characters who have conspicuously drifted apart from one another, the various pieces of music that accompany the scenes are just as telling in their different dramatic roles. In the first, Ben E. King's 'Stand By Me' strikes up powerfully on the soundtrack as Sheik and Jill hit the road, whilst in the diner Sheik tells Jill what buttons to press on the jukebox to select Sinatra's 'Strangers in the Night'. I will attend to the specific alliance of music and narrative action and the sonic profiling of the songs later, but it is enough to note now that there is at least an indication that 'Stand By Me' expresses what the characters feel at that moment and that 'Strangers in the Night' helps Sheik to deliver a performance of feeling in front of Jill. 'Stand By Me' takes its place in, and seems in its lyric to aptly comment upon, a familiar display of transcendent coupledness: as long as Sheik and Jill remain true to each other, they can overcome the social divides that threaten to tear them apart. Sheik manufactures a moment of intimacy on his terms in the diner by encouraging Jill to put on the Sinatra track.

By contrast, the Miami sequence is typical of the film's concluding section in its refusal to allow music a role in the representation of characters' emotional states. This episode signals Sheik's reappearance into the narrative after his absence from the opening of the second part. His miming to Sinatra (and, later, 1960s crooner Jack Jones) is both a humbling display of his lack of progress in becoming a successful performer in his own right and a vocal reminder of how much the presentation of his character in the first section had relied on the musical voices of others. In the opening section, Sheik reveals his obsession with Sinatra, but it is accompanied non-diegetically and anachronistically by Bruce Springsteen songs from the Seventies. The suggestion that Sheik's performance is enabled, rather than simply accompanied, by the Springsteen songs, is discussed below, but his miming to Sinatra here puts such a suggestion in an entirely transparent form: the tape of Sinatra singing is literally what allows the performance to take place. This episode brings the contrivance of Sheik's performance onto a concrete diegetic level.

In Jill's case, the first section of the film shows her incorporating the music she listens to into her efforts of self-display, whether dancing in front of the mirror to 'Stop! In the Name

of Love', or singing 'Chapel of Love' with her friends in the car as they tease her about her relationship with Sheik. As we will see, the film, even in its opening section, reflects upon, rather than merely represents, this spectacle of Jill performing to pop. However, in the second part, Jill is pointedly disinterested in the music that plays in the background. She crouches disconsolately in the corner of the college disco as a 1960s beat band thrash out a soundtrack for the raucous crowd. 'Venus in Furs', Velvet Underground's paean to sado-masochism, plays in a student's room as Jill regales her fellow dorm residents with yet another story about Sheik. Finally, the 'unapplied' nature of the music in relation to Jill is asserted to such an extent that Simon and Garfunkel's 'Bookends' album moves quietly from track to track in the background whilst Jill casually asks her new friend Steve if he wants to sleep with her.

Jill is unconcerned about the music she hears in the second half of the film, and the attachments made between her character and a song when it appears non-diegetically in this section also indicate that pop music is no longer as important to the construction of her identity as it had been. The first song of the second section is Procul Harum's 'Whiter Shade of Pale', which plays quietly (non-diegetically) as Jill's mother reads aloud a letter from her daughter describing her first semester. The visual montage of events of the past term that accompanies the letter clearly contradicts much of what she has written: as her mother reads that Jill is taking the 'wonderful opportunity to make friends among people I would never have met in Trenton', we see her walking to her room alone and then sitting on her bed, morosely inspecting a sandwich. Her letter claims that she is concentrating on her acting skills rather than worrying about the size of the parts she gets, yet we see Jill looking deflated as she scans a cast list to see if her name is included.

Significantly, 'Whiter Shade of Pale' does not take part in this mismatching of information: it simply indicates the period to which the action has now moved (1967). The letter montage signals that pop will no longer be associated with Jill in order to express her subjectivity. In so doing, it draws a line under the tendency of the first half of the film to first propose, and then increasingly call into question, homologies between different types of music and different types of character.

Suggesting homologies between music and character

Jill's singing of 'Chapel of Love' in the car with her friends is indicative of the film's perspective on pop music as a source of identity that can only be utilised as such through self-conscious performance. After quizzing Jill about her recent first date with Sheik, her friends serenade her with a chorus from the song (Jill soon joins in), a Number 1 hit for girl-group, The Dixie Cups, of the period in which the film is set. This scene could be regarded as paying testament to a popular notion of how closely teenage girls related to girl-group pop in the early 1960s. Susan Douglas, for example, states:

The most important thing about this music, the reason it spoke to us so powerfully, was that it gave voice to all of the warring selves inside us struggling, blindly and with a crushing sense of insecurity, to forge something resembling a coherent identity ... In the early 1960s, pop music became the one area of popular culture in which adolescent female voices could be clearly heard. (1994: 77)

In *Baby, It's You*, Jill is indeed associated initially with girl-group songs, but the songs are never made to 'speak' for her in a transparent manner. 'Chapel of Love' follows a conversation which has dwelt on Sheik's incongruity, in terms of both race and class, as a suitor for Jill. The song is sung mockingly, rather than seriously, as if the simplicity of its romantic scenario ('going to the chapel and we're gonna get married') bears no relation to the complexities of Jill and Sheik's socially-problematic relationship. Throughout its course, *Baby, It's You* hints at a homology between the gender, class and race of its characters and particular types of music, only for the strength of those attachments to founder as the musical sequences are enacted.

The film opens conventionally for a teen movie, by introducing two lead characters occupying disparate positions within the rigorously defined social order operating in their high school. The rock'n'roll song 'Woolly Bully' by Sam the Sham and the Pharaohs has been playing over the titles, and continues throughout the opening sequence. The transition from the credits is signalled by the sound of the school bell whereupon the film fades into a shot of an empty school corridor.

The bell prompts a speedy exodus from the classrooms to either side of the passageway, and the hall floods with students, the space suddenly awash with noise and movement in all directions. Out of the *melée*, the camera settles upon Jill and her three friends, tracking back to accommodate their movement. Clutching her books to her chest, Jill heads the group and leads the conversation, their chat finally resting on the forthcoming meeting of the sorority, of which Jill has been elected president. On the ringing of another school bell, Jill enters the classroom to the left, exiting the frame, as the corridor empties of bodies and noise as quickly as it had been filled.

Jill's movement is choreographed between the diegetic sound of the two school bells that frame her passage from one classroom to another. In this manner, despite the presence of a non-diegetic song on the soundtrack, she is located in 'school time'. Sheik is also introduced in this sequence but in contrast to Jill, moves in 'song time'. The ringing of the first bell heralds the subduing of 'Woolly Bully' on the soundtrack in favour of the sounds of the school and, in particular, Jill's chatter. Sheik's first appearance prompts both an interruption in Jill's conversation, a disruption of the smooth backward tracking shot that had chronicled her movement, and the re-emergence of the song to prominence on the soundtrack.

Underneath the dialogue, the song is about to reach its sax solo. Jill's description of a film she has just seen is interrupted when a boy greets her as he walks past. This acknowledgement of her existence causes great speculation amongst the girls, although Jill laughs off any suggestion of romance. Turned to





her friend, rather than looking forward, she bumps into Sheik, who has emerged in the middle of the corridor, front of frame, with his back to the camera. At this point, the tracking shot is abandoned in favour of a glide into a mid-close shot of Sheik as he turns around coolly to appraise Jill. Up to this moment, the sax solo had aped the chugging rhythm of the song's verses, but in tandem with the glide in on Sheik the sax dips down the scale and then sallies upwards. A correlation is thereby suggested between the disruption of the regular pattern of the solo and the suspension of the smooth tracking shot, as well as a parallel between the movement upwards of the melody and the shot's gliding towards Sheik's face.

There is a brief close shot of Jill as she looks at Sheik and begins to turn away, before a return to the tracking shot that dominates the sequence, Sheik remaining stationary in the background. The second bell clears the hall, leaving Sheik

alone. At this point his movement is made to fall in time with the music. The impression is given that the singer's concluding cry, 'watch it now, here he comes!', triggers Sheik's movement, as he begins to stride towards the camera, his steps choreographed to chime with the emphatically slammed down guitar chords and snare beats that form the song's climax. In this manner, Sheik becomes associated with the wild bull of the lyrics. Sheik's brief entrance isolates him from the flow of students walking between classes, his movement associated instead with elements of a song (the sax solo and climax) that has no source in the diegesis and is otherwise subdued when attached to the activities of other characters in the scene.

The opening sequence places Jill in a position of comfort in relation to her surroundings, whilst Sheik is isolated from them, not party to the movement from one room to the next marshalled by the school bells, and instead singled out through



association with elements of 'Woolly Bully'. The next two musical sequences continue to secure Jill within the diegesis whilst identifying Sheik with a non-diegetic song whose narrational role is to mark his difference. The two scenes are also played out in such a way as to make the music on the soundtrack gender specific. Jill plays the intro to 'You Don't Have To Say You Love Me' by Dusty Springfield on her bedroom Dansette, a scene which is immediately followed by Sheik walking into the school canteen to the non-diegetic strains of Bruce Springsteen's 'It's Hard to Be a Saint in the City'. The first sequence is conveyed in one static shot and renders naturalistically the tinny sound coming from Jill's record player, whereas in the second the

comparatively glistening production values of Springsteen's song are displayed to their best advantage without any competing diegetic sounds. Furthermore, the sequence cuts around Sheik's strutting body to emphasise equivalences between Sheik and the streetwise character Springsteen sings about.

It has been common to equate cultural expressions of femininity with passivity and those of masculinity with activity. These two sequences throw those distinctions into sharp relief, Jill reclined on her bed, toying distractedly with her teddy bear, Sheik making his presence felt as he swaggers around the dinner hall. 'You Don't Have to Say You Love Me' shares with the film's title song, 'Baby, It's You', a lyric that describes a woman's self-sacrificing devotion to her partner. 'It's Hard to Be a Saint in the City', on the other hand, details a man ranging through the city streets, taking from them whatever he desires. The fact that one song is identifiably 'pop' and the other 'rock' also demonstrates an awareness of a familiar alliance between the feminine and pop and the masculine and rock. The manner in which the numbers are sonically presented inflects yet another assumption that stems from this division: the appeal of 'You Don't Have to Say You Love Me' lies in its ephemerality (it offers Jill comfort at that moment in her bedroom, but is also limited to that space); 'It's Hard to Be a Saint in the City' has a more pervasive and lasting stature, actually 'cheating' time (a 1970s rock song playing in a film set in the 1960s) and ranging over diegetic space and sound.

Problematising Homologies Between Music and Character

'You Don't Have to Say You Love Me' and 'It's Hard to Be a Saint in the City' both indulge conventionally coded displays of feminine and masculine behaviour. However, these sequences also exhibit a strain between the situations which the songs accompany and the actual rendering of them. I have noted that Sheik's miming to Sinatra in the Miami bar in the second section of the film crystallises his lack of an original voice and reliance on his hero to provide him with a sense of identity. The school canteen sequence provides the first full expression of this self-conscious 'trying on' of musical personas, and in the process suggests the

possibility that pop songs set the scene for on-screen action rather than simply accompanying it.

Bruce Springsteen's song is, in itself, concerned with performance. A first-person description of a man swaggering through the tough city streets, it makes constant recourse to simile or metaphor: he has 'skin like leather', 'the diamond hard look of a cobra', bursts 'just like a supernova', walks 'like Brando right into the sun' and dances 'just like a Casanova'. The song describes its protagonist's activity by reference to phenomena outside of himself, just as Sheik's journey through the canteen relies on a deliberate manufacturing of alliances with the song for its impressive effect.

'Woolly Bully' brings itself to a full stop in a conspicuous manner: its emphatic guitar chords combine with the altered drum pattern (forsaking its rolling 4/4 rhythm by dropping the bass drum and hi-hat, leaving the snare to sound out in tandem with the guitar) to signal that the song has reached its climax. The beginning of 'It's Hard to Be a Saint in the City' is as self-consciously an introduction to a song as the 'Woolly Bully' ending is a climax. It features the musicians gearing up before launching into the swaggering attack of the main body of the song. The drummer taps his hi-hat whilst the guitarist tentatively strokes, rather than continuously strums, the opening chords, and the pianist plays a wandering melody which only acquires a coherent, vamping rhythm when the full drums kick in.

This impression of getting musically organised plays over Sheik's own efforts at organisation, as he looks at his reflection



in a pane of glass on the canteen door and combs his hair ('slicked sweet' in the manner described in the song later on), his actions choreographed exactly in sync with the first stroke of guitar and the two hi-hats that play underneath it. Satisfied with his appearance, Sheik walks into the canteen and stands by the entrance, surveying the scene. Two cutaways show students glancing over their shoulder or looking up, presumably in his direction. At this point, the song is still in its intro. When Springsteen begins to sing, the camera returns to Sheik in medium close up. His first action is to turn his head to the right and shift his eyes from side to side. Springsteen, meanwhile, sings 'I had skin like leather and the diamond hard look of a cobra.' Sheik's studied movement gives the impression that he is displaying his body in terms of the song (he is indeed tanned, and his gaze is steely). Furthermore, it is only at the end of this line that he begins to walk around the room, as the film cuts to a side-tracking shot. The deliberation with which Sheik is made to wait for Springsteen's lyric before moving emphasises the extent to which the song is instrumental in providing his movement with a sense of authority. Later, Sheik stands still during the piano crescendo that separates the first and second verse, and only moves when the singing starts again. The lyric, 'I could walk like Brando right into the sun,' plays over a profile shot of Sheik, who turns his head on the mention of Brando and, at the end of the line, tips his finger. Without the presence of an on-screen recipient for Sheik's action, the gesture gives the impression of acknowledging the compliment of being compared to Brando by the song. Immediately after the following line 'dance like a Casanova', there are more cutaways to two girls looking towards him, the reference to the renowned lover in the song again seeming to encourage the display of on-screen action, rather than simply accompany it.

Without the presence of 'It's Hard to Be a Saint in the City' on the soundtrack, Sheik's pacing around the dinner hall would appear undynamic. The chief dramatic incident of the scene, after all, involves him stealing a French fry from someone's plate, an episode which is choreographed to a moment of musical drama in the song (the drums dropping out momentarily to foreground the racing electric-acoustic guitar). The deliberately uncanny synchronisation between Sheik's movement and the song begins to indicate his over-reliance on pop music to



provide him with a sense of identity. In this way, the song is not made simply to 'speak for' Sheik throughout the sequence. Rather, his mannered movement suggests that the music is a necessary requirement if he is to be allowed to 'speak' in such a way at all.

The intro of 'You Don't Have to Say You Love Me' immediately precedes the canteen sequence as Jill listens to it in her room. The notion that this may be a natural choice to provide the soundtrack for Jill's passive posing on her bed is undermined, this time by manufacturing ambiguity over the state of mind Jill is in when she plays the song.

In the penultimate scene of *Baby, It's You*, Jill admits that she does not know what she wants. Throughout the film, she remains in a state of conjecture: dreaming about winning the lead part in the school play; fretting over whether she has been accepted to university; and then, once at college, retelling

stories about her relationship with Sheik, even though she claims to have disowned him. In its opening sequences, the film performs a series of juxtapositions that cast doubts over what Jill is dreaming about at any one time.

The early sequences of the film indicate the two factors occupying Jill's mind: her audition for the school play and her first encounter with Sheik. After 'Woolly Bully' ends, towards the close of the first scene, Sheik is seen in close-up looking silently through the classroom window at Jill, who does not see him. The scene cuts to Jill's audition, where she immediately intones the line 'I dream about him all the time': the audition speech becomes a reciprocation of the interest Sheik displays in her in the previous shot. The next scene shows Jill returning home and discussing the importance of getting the main part in the play with her parents. She then goes into her room and puts on the Dusty Springfield record, apparently preoccupied with the outcome of the audition (she is meant to be doing her homework).

The question of what Jill is feeling as she lies on her bed listening to 'You Don't Have to Say You Love Me' is problematised by its positioning within a network of scenes that deliberately re-orientate the direction of her daydreams. The film undercuts the viewer's assumption that Jill is thinking about the audition by pairing the scene with Sheik's performance to 'It's Hard to Be a Saint in the City', the intro to 'You Don't Have to Say You Love Me' becoming a subdued preliminary to the bolder sound of the Springsteen song. 'It's Hard To Be a Saint in the City' fades out when Sheik begins to chat up Jill, in their first sustained encounter. The next scene features Jill daydreaming in class, writing something in her exercise book. At this point it would be plausible to assume she may be thinking about Sheik, but the film thwarts this expectation when it reveals that Jill has been drawing a picture of her own name up in lights.

I have argued that the use of 'Whiter Shade of Pale' over the montage of Jill's first weeks at college and the contradictory voiceover reading the letter she has written to her parents, signals the abandonment of any attempt to associate Jill's subjectivity with the music that accompanies her actions. However, the letter montage also compresses into one sequence this initial strategy of juxtaposing various narrative elements to call into question the version of events as they are presented by

Jill. Even at the moments when alliances between Sheik and Jill with particular types of music are first being suggested, the film undermines the 'naturalness' of these alliances: in Sheik's case by marking his entrance into the canteen as a performance enabled rather than simply accompanied by the music; and in Jill's by resisting the characterisation of the song as 'giving voice' to her emotional state, by deliberately creating ambiguity about what that emotional state precisely is.

Viewing music from the 'wrong' perspective

A Bruce Springsteen track and girl-group song are subsequently used to undermine further the simple equation of Sheik with male rock and Jill with female pop. 'E Street Shuffle' by Springsteen and 'Baby, It's You' by the Shirelles both feature in sequences that deny the perspective that might be expected: namely, they become attached to the point of view of the 'wrong' character.



'E Street Shuffle' plays non-diegetically when Sheik takes Jill on their first date to Joey D's, an Italian-American bar which he frequents and which is obviously unfamiliar to Jill. Like 'It's Hard to Be a Saint in the City', the song provides a street-level view of the hustle of city life. Whereas in the first sequence, Sheik's attachment to the song is made to seem too dependent, here the scene is wrested from his perspective entirely, so that the energy of the song and its confident appraisal of the environment it surveys are not registered visually. Instead the chance to see Sheik impose himself in his 'natural' habitat is

deliberately confounded in favour of chronicling the far less dynamic interaction with the location offered by Jill's bewildered and bored glances around the bar.

'Baby, It's You' also accompanies a sequence whose action would seem to make the choice of song inappropriate. The lyric concerns a woman's undying love for a man despite his indifference towards her:

It's not the way you smile that touched my heart
 It's not the way you kiss that tears me apart
 But many nights roll by, I sit alone at home and cry
 Over you, what can I do?
 I can't help myself, cos baby, it's you



Yet the scene features Sheik fruitlessly pursuing Jill after they have had an argument. Apart from the discrepancy in giving Sheik a female 'voice', there is another displacement involved. The song describes the woman's love as a passive longing, but Sheik's efforts are characterised by active harassment (soon after this scene, he even goes as far as kidnapping Jill). From the initial indication in the opening sequences that Jill and Sheik are to be connected with distinct types of music, the film reaches a point here where Sheik is accompanied by 'Jill's' music. The certainty with which the song can be related to character action is further problematised by the disparity between Sheik's behaviour and that narrated in the song. Both Sheik and the singer are convinced their lover is made for them, but each display exactly opposite methods of demonstrating their devotion (one

longing passively, the other actively harassing). These acts of placing the pop song in 'inappropriate' relationships with the film's characters further call in to question pop music's ability to provide the characters with a secure sense of identity.

Pop music and cars

The concentration on the role of music in characters' performances within the film and its undermining through attachment to the 'wrong' perspective is borne out in *Baby, It's You's* many driving sequences. The car has, of course, been a potent symbol of the rock'n'roll teenager's new spirit of autonomy and desire for escape from parental control. In addition, a familiar trope of the teen movie has been to combine driving sequences with the pop music that is seen to voice teenagers'





desires (the most celebrated example being *American Graffiti* (George Lucas, 1973)). The film's first such scene over-determines the car as a vehicle for teen seduction and its association with rock'n'roll, to the extent that Sheik's attempts to impress Jill by taking her for a spin in the 'Ratmobile' take on the character of a well-rehearsed ritual.

The episode is prefaced by a protracted, playful discussion between the couple as to whether Jill can accept Sheik's offer of a ride - a negotiation about whether they should engage in this particular teen rite of passage. Once in the car, the Isley Brothers' frantic version of 'Shout' strikes up immediately as Sheik hits the drive button. The two shots that follow, of Sheik pressing down on the accelerator and the car racing towards the ground-level camera, come so quickly that they could be said to approximate the song's dramatic kicking into gear: both car and song explode out of the blocks.

This overplayed connection between music and machine is developed as the car skids to a halt past Jill's female friends, who are looking on at the action in an unnaturally static pose, in a shot that lasts longer than might be expected, thereby signalling an abrupt end to the energetic pacing of the scene up until this point. The girls look like a professional panel of judges, coolly appraising Sheik and Jill's performance. As the car stops dead, the song simply grinds to a halt, mid-flow. The framing of the sequence as an elaborate performance is further emphasised by Jill and Sheik's final words before she steps out of the car. With Jill framed in the open car window and Sheik outside, leaning on the hood, they engage in a deadpan



exchange: Sheik – 'You like to drive fast?'; Jill – 'I love it'. Sheik then pulls open the door and Jill gets out, both maintaining eye contact as Sheik says 'I'll see you tomorrow then?', to which Jill replies with a cocky 'Don't count on it'. Both Jill and Sheik

sound like actors delivering lines and their movements appear equally predetermined.

I have identified the girls' singing of 'Chapel of Love', the second sequence to combine music with driving, as a moment where the film's questioning of pop's ability to match itself to the emotional situations of the film's characters is brought onto a diegetic level (that is to say, as a narrative element commented upon by the characters themselves). The third sequence, describing Sheik and Jill's drive to Astbury Park and stroll on the beach, to the strains of Ben E. King's 'Stand By Me', may, as already intimated, seem to be attempting just such an unproblematic match: Sheik and Jill demonstrate their determination to stay together by playing truant from school, the institution in which their social differences are most keenly felt. However, yet again, the sequence is marked first as a performance of transcendent coupledness, and then undermined as such by refusing to make the bodies of the lovers the focus of the *mise-en-scène*, whilst the song plays on regardless.

Sheik initiates the episode as a self-conscious testing of the strength of their love, stepping out in the path of Jill's car to persuade her to skip school. The powerful introduction of 'Stand By Me' non-diegetically on the soundtrack follows from this dramatic intervention, but the song is deliberately contrasted to the drab, unemotional details the film presents as a chronicle of Jill and Sheik's day together. The early part of the sequence places an emphasis on the effort it takes for them to get to the coast, rather than on the intimate pleasures of the journey (Ben E. King's voice is heard powerfully over a series of aerial shots of the car or signs by the side of the road). The song's celebration of transcendence is contrasted to the actual mundane presentation of Jill and Sheik's interaction. Subsequently, the sequence features banal shots of the sea and deserted pier, keeping Jill and Sheik, when they are shown, at long distance.

The only exception to this is the camera's recording of their conversation in the car and as the music peters out, on the pier, about Sheik's admiration for Frank Sinatra. He explains to an amused and bemused Jill that he admires Sinatra because of his sense of style and continuing acknowledgement of his working-class roots. Like Springsteen's 'It's Hard to Be a Saint in the City', Sinatra's persona offers Sheik a model of dignified, class-specific, masculine performance to which he can aspire.

However, this monologue actually serves to remind Jill of their different cultural backgrounds (she offers Sheik the ultimate insult to his musical tastes: her parents like Sinatra). The only closely observed interaction between the two during 'Stand By Me', then, undermines any hope that the escape from school could provide them with an opportunity to forget their differences and focus on the strength of their attachment to each other.

John Sayles, in conversation with critic Gavin Smith, has agreed that the final driving sequence of the film, with Sheik racing to Jill's college from Miami to the sound of Bruce Springsteen's 'Adam Raised a Cain', is the point at which his maintenance of a self-conscious pose is abandoned:

Smith: Sheik is gradually stripped of his identity during this sequence. By the time he finds Jill, he's become a real person for the first time, he's no longer playing a character.

Sayles: Yes. He doesn't believe that he is going to be the next Frank Sinatra anymore. As he says in the argument with her, 'I'm going to be a garbage-man like my father.' He's gotten to that point. (Smith 1998: 99)

Both sections of *Baby, It's You* head towards their climax with Sheik driving frantically, accompanied by a Springsteen song. Each episode details a point of crisis in Sheik's keeping up of appearances. If the first section concentrates upon Sheik's self-styling of his own difference from the rest of the school and confrontation with authority (leading to his expulsion), it closes with a more serious clash: whilst the prom night from which he has been barred takes place, he and his friend Rat break into the town's costume hire shop, leading to a car chase with the police and forcing Sheik to flee to Miami. The sequence, accompanied by Springsteen's 'She's the One', opens with a shot that comments in absurd fashion on the manner in which Sheik has stylised his 'otherness' throughout the high school section. The opening scene associates Sheik with 'Woolly Bully' to imply that he is a kind of wild animal in relation to the other school kids. The raid on the costume hire shop begins with a slow pan from Rat, standing guard with a gun, to Sheik at the till, both wearing ridiculous plastic rat masks as disguise. In between them, as 'She's the One' begins, we see two



sharply dressed mannequins displayed in the shop window, as if to remind the two thieves of the prom night to which they have been denied access. The shot visualises with 'real' masks and dummies Sheik's adoption of different poses to enact his difference in earlier sequences.

The sequence develops into a frantic car chase, the police coming into view at precisely the moment the song moves from its low key verses, buoyed by a tinkling piano, which had been subdued under the screech of the Ratmobile and the conversation in Jill's car as a police siren wails past her. An electric guitar suddenly crashes out chords to a Bo Diddley beat, whilst Springsteen yelps, and the Ratmobile skids around the corner with the police car on its tail. The interest here is that the music's affective role in the sequence is purely percussive: the song moves in to a more dramatic register at the same time that the car chase gets into full swing. There is none of the

(over) careful choreography to narrative action or deliberate mismatching of music to narrative event that had characterised pop's use in the preceding sequences.

The same is true of the relationship built between 'Adam Raised a Cain' and Sheik's angry drive to Jill's college, and subsequent trashing of her room. Sheik has been sacked from his job miming to Sinatra and in a rage storms out of the restaurant, steals a car and heads for Jill. When he reaches the college, he impatiently demands to be shown to her room, where he is outraged by the visible signs of how much they now inhabit different worlds (he tears down a modish poster, pulls out the clothes from her drawers and discovers she is on the pill). The song is, in itself, conspicuously full of rage, at one point hitting an extended crescendo where the whole band just pummel one note, and resolving in a ferocious call and response between singer and backing band of the title line. It is displayed as

unambiguously, and simply, the soundtrack to Sheik's aggression. It even stops completely when the film cuts mid-song to Jill, and re-enters as Sheik finally pulls into the college.



As Gavin Smith notes, Sheik's identity is stripped down in the sequence. Motifs from the musical episodes of the first section are reprised without the same degree of stylisation: as in 'Woolly Bully', Sheik strides towards the camera as he storms out of the restaurant, but not, on this occasion, in time to the music. The driving montage recalls the 'Stand By Me' sequence, but this time the focus is on Sheik's face, rather than fetishising the car as a romantic symbol of rebellion in itself. Finally, Sheik's careful look at his own reflection at the beginning of the 'It's Hard to Be a Saint in the City' episode is re-enacted here,

but now he surveys his weary, dishevelled appearance in a dirty truck stop mirror. As John Sayles notes, the music acts to give a general sense of desperate energy to the scene:

I wanted this thing to actually build, to just push the thing forward so I used the Springsteen song 'Adam Raised a Cain' and it's very driving, percussive music. I just needed to keep his anger going through this whole sequence and have that feeling of 'I'm going to get there.' (Smith 1998: 99)

Both 'She's the One' and 'Adam Raised a Cain' are attached unironically to their action, yet this suggestion that the music is attuned to the emotional level of the events it accompanies also makes it relatively inarticulate in relation to the specific details of the scenes. Throughout *Baby, It's You*, pop's propensity to be used in the forging of identity is foregrounded and scrutinised. However, the notion that Sheik's 'true' emotions are finally being revealed in the closing sequences of each section, requires that this interrogation into pop's role in self-display is temporarily suspended. The result is pop music that works in the manner of the conventional composed score, providing musical resonance to sensations already present on-screen. The consideration of pop as involved in a particular type of self-conscious social performance, a characterisation so fundamental to the music's representation in the rest of the film, must be suppressed if these two Springsteen songs are to achieve a degree of 'sincerity' in mapping on-screen emotions.

Conclusion

Baby, It's You ends with a return to the spectacle of pop music being used to enable a public performance of identity. After Sheik has confronted Jill in her room, and both have admitted to their disappointment at not having found a 'role' with which they feel comfortable, Jill convinces Sheik to be her partner at the college prom. The live garage band respond to their unusual request to play 'Strangers in the Night' and, as they dance, the camera spirals up and away from them, Sinatra's own version taking over on the soundtrack, heard, at last, in its 'ideal' form. Sayles comments on this scene:

What they finally do is a performance — a performance with each other so other people will see them. They could spend the night talking. Instead, what they don't do, because she understands him and how important display is to him, and she understands to a certain extent she has to make a statement in front of these other people, is sit in the room and talk all night - they go out and do a performance. (Smith 1998: 82)

The achievement of *Baby, It's You* is to identify, enact and provide a perspective upon the specific role of pop in the forging of identity. A popular model of the classic orchestral score relies on the music being characterised as operating from the 'inside-out': the score expresses musically what the characters are 'really' feeling. *Baby, It's You* explores the consequences of characterising its music as working determinedly from the 'outside-in': being taken on by its characters in their efforts of self-display.

John Sayles comments that Jill and Sheik are forced to face up to and reject 'some things in the romanticism of the songs' and that he uses 'the music to inflate something that is then deflated' (Smith 1998: 83, 101). The cultural assumption that pop music does offer its listeners potential ideal identities, as discussed in the previous chapter, means that the self-conscious, performative aspects of people's collusion with various types of music can be at the forefront of its representation in films, whether that collusion be romanticised or critiqued, as happens in *Baby It's You*. It is significant that the opening school hall sequence in *Baby, It's You* does not end precisely with the climax of 'Woolly Bully'. Sheik's pacing towards the camera may be synchronised with the final chords of the song, but continues after the music has stopped. Alone in a corridor suddenly evacuated of noise and bustle, Sheik looks in at Jill in her class, before continuing his walk along the empty hall. A strutting bull with the music, wandering alone without it, *Baby, It's You* is as interested in what happens to its characters when they are robbed of their soundtrack as it is in interrogating the music's role in their acts of self-display.

Conclusion

This study has been concerned with mapping out the potential in narrative cinema to provide a perspective on the spectacle of characters performing, responding or being linked to a pop song in a variety of ways, with varying degrees of awareness or non-awareness (ranging from singing a song on-screen to being accompanied by music which they cannot ostensibly hear). A final example, from Quentin Tarantino's 1997 film *Jackie Brown*, incorporates many of the strategies I have identified which attach pop songs to a particular character. The relationship between pop song and film character in this instance moves from one whereby the attachment between the two is initially very partial, to a much closer relationship by its conclusion, in which it is suggested that the title character deserves to be aligned with the ideal identity proposed by the song.

The credits sequence of *Jackie Brown* begins with the sounds of Bobby Womack's early 1970s soul track 'Across 110th Street', its wah-wah guitar and swooping strings intro heard over the logos for 'Miramax Films' and Tarantino's own production company 'A Band Apart'. The screen fades to black just as Womack is about to let out a melismatic 'wooh', which actually finds visual accompaniment by a shot of a wall consisting of a chunky mosaic of pale and dark blue strips, arranged in a haphazard order. After a stab of strings, a second 'wooh' and another orchestral punch, Womack begins singing the first verse, which acts as a cue for the film's eponymous heroine, evidently an air hostess, and played by Blaxploitation star Pam Grier, to enter the picture. With her upper torso profiled at the right of the frame, she is carried along by a moving walkway, the camera tracking by her side at its pace, so that Jackie remains at the frame's edge. At the end of the first verse, and on the cymbal splash that accompanies the movement to the chorus, the title of the film unfurls from screen left, rendered in big yellow bubble letters.

Five elements here may be offered as evidence that Tarantino is simply indulging the retro-hip tastes for which his films are renowned: the allusion to the similar opening shot of *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols, 1967), which features Dustin Hoffman being carried along on a moving walkway to the non-diegetic strains of 'Sounds of Silence'; the discernibly '1970s' combination of choppy guitar, orchestral swell, and soulful black voice on the soundtrack; the chunky, somewhat garish (a rainbow of colours are revealed as Jackie glides past) mosaic on the wall; the presence of 1970s icon Pam Grier, 'rescued' from obscurity by the director's patronage; and the bright, bubblegum font selected to spell out the film's title.



However, the precise orchestration of sound and image and the subsequent action of the sequence work to put this somewhat posed opening into perspective. If Jackie is immediately associated with the lyrics of the song by the choreography of her entrance exactly as the first verse begins, it is also clear that there is a shortfall in the impact of this association. Bobby Womack moves from heavenly 'wooh-ing' to a declamatory vocal style for the verse, his words tumbling out in increasingly uneven metre, as if he is struggling to fit in a description of all the ills that surround him:

I was the third brother of five
 Doing whatever I had to do to survive
 I'm not saying what I did was all right
 Trying to break out of the ghetto was a day to day fight
 Been down so long, getting up didn't cross my mind

But I knew there was a better way of life that I was just
trying to find
You don't know what you'll do until you're put under
pressure
Across 110th street is a hell of a tester

The urgency of Womack's delivery, with the music chattering insistently behind him, is contrasted to the curiously serene view of Jackie, penetrating the frame at first, but her features frozen thereafter, and her movement a matter of being conveyed by the walking pavement rather than by her forging through space.

The static pose of Jackie in the first shot does act as a statement of the film's 'off-beat' credentials, offering a concentrated view of a lead character in a Hollywood movie who is not only mature (*Jackie Brown* makes an issue of the age of its characters throughout), but African-American and female as well. Her immobile position on the right of the frame also allows the viewer to contemplate the star names listed on the left of the image (Bridget Fonda, Robert de Niro, Samuel L. Jackson, Michael Keaton). However, this exaggerated sense of Jackie's entrance precisely as an introduction (perhaps also to welcome Pam Grier back to the 'big-time' after such a long absence), does jar with the song, which has descended from the heavens to the hurly-burly of life in the Harlem ghetto. The sudden halting of the tracking shot after the chorus, so that Jackie is carried off-screen by the moving pavement, adds to the impression that in her first shot Jackie is being offered as an object to be contemplated rather than as a character whose personality can begin to be judged. In this first shot, then, a certain distance is constructed between song and a film character who has yet to fully 'come to life'. However, the dramatic potential of creating such a distance can only be evaluated with reference to the sequence's subsequent progress.

A distance between 'Across 110th Street' and the events it accompanies continues to be contrived in *Jackie Brown*'s second shot. When, after the chorus, the song returns to the luscious between-verse 'wooh-ing' that punctuates Womack's grittily descriptive lyrics, the image conversely begins to engage with the quotidian detail of the film's opening location only previously apparent in Jackie's sporting of an air hostess'

uniform. Over the break between chorus and second verse are two shots detailing the airport's security checks: a shot of the X-ray machine screen and a pan down a woman's T-shirt as she is scanned by a metal detector.

The first shot of Jackie contrasts her stylised introduction with the plunging of the song into no-nonsense description; the shots of the X-ray machine and metal detector introduce the activities of the 'real world' at the same time the song takes respite from the world it describes in its verses. However, during the course of the sequence, this wilful mismatching between music and image becomes ever less apparent, as Jackie ceases simply to be an object of contemplation, her actions becoming more attuned to the bustling character of the song.

This process begins after the metal detector shot, with the camera pivoting from right to left to follow a now walking and talking Jackie moving past the X-ray machine and greeting its attendant, the shot taking in the whole of the room. This is choreographed with the bridge line to the second verse ('I got one more thing I'd like to talk to you all about right now'). At this point, Jackie is placed for the first time within the 'real' environment that had been withheld in her first shot.

The following three shots, each taking up two lines of the song, make Jackie's movement appear special within the frame, without freezing that special attention into spectacle as in the first shot. Jackie is first fully profiled in a side shot that places her in the centre of the image, in terms of width and depth, as she walks through the bright, marbled departure lounge, her steps traversing the luminous pools cast from the overhead spotlights. The frame is expansive enough also to take in the movements of those around her, all of whom walk in the opposite direction. A backward tracking shot follows, with Jackie viewed from just below waist up, swaggering towards the camera, before giving way to a profile shot of Jackie's face on the right of the frame, with blurred figures passing in the background on the left.

These three shots, capturing Jackie walking with assurance through her workplace, align themselves to the song's confident rhythmic swagger, the shots evenly edited and Jackie's movement poised. The increasing attachment between 'Across 110th Street' and Jackie's movement is part of the sequence's building of narrative momentum: as Jackie becomes more attuned

to qualities audible in the song, her movement also becomes more integrated within a more 'active' (rather than posed, as in the first shot) type of fictional world.

In these three shots, Jackie's assured passage through the airport finds a correlation with the song's lyrics as well as its rhythm. Whilst Womack acknowledges the dangers of the ghetto, he also boasts of his superior perspective on the situation and his own ability to transcend it. This is particularly apparent in the six lines that accompany the shots:

Hey brother, there's a better way out
 Snorting that coke, shooting that dope, man you're copping out
 Take my advice, it's either live or die
 You've got to be strong if you wanna survive
 Your family on the other side of town
 'I'll catch hell without the ghetto around

If these shots find Jackie becoming attuned to the singer's sense of self-confidence, she herself exhibiting sure-footedness in her day-to-day environment, the final two shots involve her with the equally prevalent 'hustling' tone of the music. The last two lines of the verse ('In every city, you'll find the same thing going down/Harlem is the capital of every ghetto town) are predominantly covered by a tracking shot, again at some distance, following Jackie as she turns a corner, and for the first time in the sequence, loses some of her poise, hastening her stride as she evidently realises she is late. This faltering in her composure is measured by the shot, unlike any others depicting her in the sequence, not exactly occupying a measured unit of the song, giving way to the next image before Womack has sung 'town'.

The final action of the sequence is covered by a side-tracking shot akin to the one that first introduced Jackie, but now she is running with an anxious expression on her face (rather than gliding serenely), against a windowed wall which shows planes taxiing on the runway outside (rather than against an abstract mosaic of colour) and her body is no longer confined to one part of the frame (her movement is too erratic for the tracking shot to keep in one place and must eventually trail behind her as she runs towards the departure gate she is meant



to be attending). Meanwhile, Womack sings the chorus for a second time, becoming ever more impassioned as the song comes to an end behind the sound of Jackie welcoming the passengers aboard:

Across 110th Street, pimps trying to catch a woman's that weak
 Across 110th Street, pushers won't let the junkie go free
 Oh, across 110th Street, a woman trying to catch a trick on the street, ooh baby
 Across 110th Street, you can find it all in the street, yes you can, oh look around you, look around you, look around you, ooohh

The development of this sequence involves a conscious 'closing of the gap' between off-screen music and on-screen action, whereby the partial attachment of the song in relation to the image suggested in the first shot is gradually replaced by Jackie's movement within the frame being made to associate itself with discernible elements of the music, without being laboriously literal about it (the action remains within the spacious surrounds of an international airport, rather than suddenly relocating to the inner city): like the singer, Jackie puts on a show of strength, offset by its locating within the daily grind, and her actions become more harried as the song works itself up into a climactic frenzy.

The song in this sequence, then, is ready and waiting for its 'meaning' to be elaborated upon by other elements of the

narrative, but this sense of already containing a dramatic charge is in itself contained within the narrative as a whole by the enactment in Jackie's first shot of an 'unfulfilled' relationship between music and image. 'Across 110th Street' is repeated over the film's final frames, as Jackie drives towards the airport, in possession of the half million dollars she has duped from Ordell and the police. Not realistically sited as emanating from her car stereo (the song actually begins over a shot of her accomplice, Max (Robert Forster), in his bail-bond office), Jackie nevertheless silently mouths the words of the chorus before the film cuts to its closing credits. The tentative attachment of the song in the opening sequence to Jackie is resolved in the film's final shot, Jackie, through her actions in between, having 'earned' the right to take on the singer's voice as her own. In this process, carrying the song from a position of distance from the character it accompanies to a much more complete attachment, *Jackie Brown* offers a particularly explicit example of the propensity I have described in various forms throughout this study: for pop songs in narrative films to be placed in relation to characters' bodies and minds, in a manner which reveals to the viewer their particular position in a film's fictional world.

Notes

- 1 For a good summary of these concerns, see Reay 2004: 37-41.
- 2 Descriptions of Beth Gibbons as a cabaret or torch singer, or chanteuse, abound in reviews, as do specific comparisons to particular female singers (most commonly Billie Holiday). These comparisons are supported by visual material released by the band which self-consciously presents Gibbons in a torch singer pose (for example, the live concert film *Portishead: Roseland NYC Live* and the promos for 'Over' and 'Tom the Model').
- 3 For a subtle analysis of the utopian possibilities of the Hollywood musical see Dyer (1977).
- 4 It should be noted that McNally provides an interesting counter-reading to my account of *Pal Joey*, in which she claims that the playboy persona exhibits a number of 'cracks', both in the film itself and in the manner in which it was marketed.
- 5 'Pal Joey Review', *Variety*, September 11, 1957
- 6 'Pal Joey Review', *Variety*, September 11, 1957
- 7 See Morantz (1977)

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