

AMS Annual Meeting Model Submission Abstracts Individual Papers

Proposal Title: A Tale of Two Jubas: A Tale of Two Jubas: Racialized Difference in Metastasian Opera

Topics: 1650–1800, Opera / Musical Theater, Race / Ethnicity / Social Justice

Keywords: imperialism, opera seria, racialized difference

“I never thought I’d leave you in Africa,” laments Roman senator Catone, dying in his daughter’s arms. Catone’s suicide in Pietro Metastasio’s *Catone in Utica* (1727) tragically resolves the opera’s central conflict between imperial “slavery” and republican “liberty.” In the ancient Roman colony of Utica (modern-day Tunisia), dictator Giulio Cesare and republican Catone wage an ideological war over Rome’s political future. Their battlefield, however, is less African soil than the body of Marzia, Catone’s daughter and Cesare’s beloved. In typical Metastasian fashion, the political dilemmas of empire play out through the emotional dilemmas of love and duty—here imbricated not only with gender, but with race. After Catone’s death, Marzia will marry and thereby “Romanize” her father’s North African ally, Arbace. Once “left in Africa,” Marzia will embody an eighteenth-century colonial fantasy in which the “civilizing” effects of empire smooth over racialized difference.

Taking *Catone in Utica* as a case study, this talk explores how representations of European imperialism and colonialism intersected with conceptions of race in opera seria. Many of Metastasio’s libretti, from *Didone abbandonata* to *Alessandro nell’Indie*, dramatize fictionalized historical encounters between Greco-Roman “Europeans” and Asian or African “others.” Yet because these early Settecento texts do not portray race in a recognizably modern sense, they are often overlooked as sites for excavating pre-Enlightenment constructions of racialized difference. This talk interprets *Catone* alongside its sources, including Lucan, Behn, and Addison, and through its first musical setting, by Leonardo Vinci for Rome, to propose a critical reading of how Africanness, Europeanness, and imperialist ideology were projected on the eighteenth-century stage.

Drawing on musicological studies of race and exoticism in early modern opera (Bloechl 2008, 2015; Locke 2015; Wilbourne 2021), literary studies of race and empire in coeval spoken theater and sentimental fiction (Ellison 1999; Festa 2006), and theories of early modern representations of race (Hall 1995; Robinson 2000; Hartman 2008), this talk argues that Metastasian opera indeed portrayed racialized difference, but not as biologically determined. It suggests that race was instead conceived as mutable—as a mode of feeling, a state of mind—and therefore, crucially, as subject to rationalizing control.

Proposal Title: From 'Agitato' to 'Yearning': Interpreting Stock Music for Silent Film through Data Analysis and Musical Topoi

Topics: Music Theory and Analysis, 1900–Present, Film and Media Studies

Keywords: silent film music, topos, digital humanities

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Silent film music research of the last several decades has been predisposed toward specific films, score recreations, genre studies, or accompaniment practices. Stock music, written for general use in silent film accompaniment, has received less robust scholarly focus (Buhler, 2013). Ephemeral in nature, much of this music can be difficult to locate, thought lost, or impossible to link to identifiable productions.

This paper combines newly created metadata for thousands of stock silent film music titles housed in the Library of Congress Music Division with close analysis of certain musical topoi to explore how silent film music developed. Although registered with the U.S. Copyright Office, many of these titles have been unknown to previous scholarship and comprise the bulk of a forthcoming digital collection. With over 130 discrete foreign and domestic stock music series represented, this music constitutes one of the most comprehensive collections of stock music for silent film that circulated in the United States from 1910-1930. These publications come from the expected publishers in New York, London, Paris, and Berlin, but also less-expected publishers in Stockholm, Brussels, Vienna, Copenhagen, and even Butte, Montana. Moreover, other non-film-music stock series, like Schirmer's *Galaxy Music* or Jungnickel's *Artist's Orchestra Repertoire*, used similar musical content and techniques. These series were frequently used in silent film accompaniment, but not necessarily titled and marketed as such from their inception.

By drawing on the metadata gathered from these publications, I demonstrate the usefulness of big data to grasp how creators, but not necessarily contemporary practitioners, conceptualized music for film at the time. This data facilitates tabulation of topoi such as “hurry,” “pathetic,” “misterioso,” and terms used to characterize specific nations and ethnicities at levels previously unavailable to scholars. Moreover, close analysis of their musical content and data comparisons of additional descriptors (for example, a hurry in cases of storm and/or fire; a misterioso for cases of premeditated murder) allows us to unpack the development of American film music practices as well as reconsider how those very practices continue to inform film-scoring in the present.