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Rachel Portman and *The Joy Luck Club*

by

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ABSTRACT

Rachel Portman is a successful female film score composer known for her rich orchestral scores, many for films that can be classified as women's films. Portman has collaborated on several films with the Chinese-American film director Wayne Wang, who in many of his films has explored the issues of ethnicity, identity and family relationships, particularly Chinese-American identity and the reconciliation of the traditions of the old homeland with the culture of the new-found home in America. The most well known of these films is *The Joy Luck Club* (1993), based on the novel of the same name written by Amy Tan in 1989. I have examined the means by which Portman's score has reinforced Wang's narrative in the use and juxtaposition of traditional Chinese music with modern American musical styles, as well as examining the women's film genre, its musical codification and Portman's style of composition.

Due to the unavailability of an original score, the excerpts contained in this document are my transcriptions taken from the soundtrack of the film.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The topic of this study is the film scores of Rachel Portman, focusing on the score for the film *The Joy Luck Club* (1993). Rachel Portman is a female composer in a male dominated industry, who has had very little documentation of her work other than the reviews of her film scores in current magazines and newspapers. I will be discussing her style of composition, past influences, past film scores, and concluding with an in depth analysis of *The Joy Luck Club*. Portman's work falls into many categories: the historical drama, mystery/suspense films, children's films, scores for television, an opera and even a Broadway production, but the majority of her scores are for films that could be classified as woman's films.

The film *The Joy Luck Club* is based on the 1989 novel of the same name by Amy Tan. Through telling the stories of four Chinese women and their struggles to immigrate to America where they could provide a better life for their daughters, Tan highlights the issues of Chinese-American identity, mother/daughter relationships, East vs. West, and old vs. new. The director Wayne Wang, is known for his interest in these issues, particularly the issue of Chinese-American identity which he examines in many of his other films as well. The novel was adapted for the screen by Ronald Bass (*Rainman*) and Amy Tan herself. This is a much more complex film than it at first appears, with many different narrative threads and then sub-themes woven amongst those threads. My original intention

was to analyze several films scores by Rachel Portman, but *The Joy Luck Club* became a large project on its own.

Even though it is currently considered politically correct to call all Southeast Asians "Asian" rather than Chinese, Japanese, or Korean, I have chosen to use the designation "Chinese" because to include all nationalities under "Asian" does a disservice to their diverse individual cultures. Peter Feng supports this thought with his argument:

> …the term Asian encompasses several distinct cultures – Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Vietnamese, Indian, Laotian, to name a few. Even Chinese culture can be broken down further: mainland Chinese vs. Taiwanese, Cantonese vs. Mandarin.[1]

He continues further to argue that the term "Asian-American" is a political designation, but "Chinese-American" is a cultural designation.[2] The characteristics of Chinese music will not necessarily be the same as those of Japanese or Filipino music, and since I am dealing with a Chinese subject, I wish to be specific.

Because a score for *The Joy Luck Club* was not available, it was necessary to transcribe the musical examples from the film. I have done this within the framework of traditional Western music, but music of other cultures does not always fit into our rigid parameters perfectly. My apologies to Ms. Portman for any inadvertent inaccuracies.

The second chapter of this study is a discussion of the genre of *The Joy Luck Club,* which can be designated as "woman's film," a descendant of melodrama.

"Melodrama" is a title still applied to sub-genres of the woman's film such as "family melodrama" or "maternal melodrama". Regardless of the date, some of the components in this form have remained constant: emphasis on the family and the domestic; themes with which women can identify; and eliciting an empathetic or emotional response. In this section I have identified the ways in which *The Joy Luck Club* meets the criteria of a woman's film.

The third chapter examines the system of semiotics used in a film score functioning to support the narrative. These musical signifiers have evolved over hundreds of years, culminating in the operas of Richard Wagner in the second half of the 19th century. In the opinion of Martin van Amerongen, quoted by Jeongwon Joe in *Wagner and Cinema*, Wagner would have been well suited to composing film scores, particularly disaster movies.[3] In turn, Wagner's music had a great impact on the next generation of German composers including Arnold Schoenberg, Kurt Weill, Max Steiner and Franz Waxman, who immigrated to the United States before or during the Second World War. Many of these émigrés became the first generation of film score composers in Hollywood, scoring the woman's films of the 1930's and 40's. Their techniques have filtered down to current composers who also have the benefit of superior technology, as well as the impact of pop culture and the women's movement.

Wayne Wang and his concepts regarding Chinese-American film are the subject of the fourth chapter. His importance in the film community is summed up in this quote:

> Wang's Asian-themed films that explore the bonds of family and Chinese identity in the modern world make up one of the largest bodies of introspective work in independent film over the last 25 years.[4]

With his interest in these issues, Wang was clearly the best choice as director for *The Joy Luck Club*, and has now worked with Rachel Portman on four films: *The Joy Luck Club*, *Smoke* (1995), *Because of Winn-Dixie* (2005), and *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan* (2011).

A discussion of Rachel Portman's influences, composition style and work forms the basis for the fifth chapter. Her classical background can be heard in her large orchestral scores, and her opera *The Little Prince* (2003), but in her career she has been called upon to compose for many different genres requiring a less classical style, appearing to be equally at ease with all of them. She has worked with directors such as Jonathan Demme on *Beloved* (1998), *Manchurian Candidate* (2004) and *The Truth About Charlie* (2002), Robert Redford on *The Legend of Bagger Vance* (2000), and Lasse Hallstrom on *The Cider House Rules* (1999) and *Chocolat* (2000). Portman was the first female film score composer to win an Academy Award which she received for *Emma* (1996), directed by Douglas McGrath.

The final section is devoted to an analysis of the score for *The Joy Luck Club*. Portman has used one main theme as a unifying element running throughout the film. It becomes a basis for variation, and as well, motifs contained in the main theme are used to build new themes. The manner in which Portman composed the score as support for the narrative is of primary importance, because that is one of

the main factors in determining its success. With the overwhelming abundance of narrative material, it would be easy to incorporate too many musical concepts, but Portman manages to retain continuity creating a musically coherent score.

NOTES

[1] Peter Feng, "Being Chinese American, Becoming Asian American: *Chan is Missing*." *Cinema Journal* 35 no. 4, (1996): 88-118.

[2] Ibid., 89.

[3] Jeongwon Joe, "Why Wagner and Cinema? Tolkien Was Wrong," *Wagner and Cinema*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 2.

[4] "Magnolia Pictures Announces YouTube Premiere For Wayne Wang's *The Princess of Nebraska*," *Hollywood Scriptwriter* 29, no. 5, (October 2008): 10.

CHAPTER 2: GENRE AND THE JOY LUCK CLUB

> ...the term “woman’s film” is used disparagingly to conjure up the image of the pinched-virgin or little-old-lady writer, spilling out her secret longings in wish fulfillment or glorious martyrdom, and transmitting these fantasies to the frustrated housewife. The final image is one of wet, wasted afternoons.[1]

Understanding the genre of a film is a necessary component of understanding the film score and the intent of the film score composer. The importance of the woman’s film has only been recognized as the study of feminist film theory has evolved. Lack of consensus among scholars has even made it difficult to name this type of film, as each author has their own label. These labels include "women's film," "melodrama," "family melodrama," "weepie," and "chick flick."

Christine Gledhill, in the Introduction to *Home is Where the Heart Is*, gives a broad definition of melodrama as a cross-cultural form with a complex, international, two hundred year history. She proposes that the term denotes a fictional or theatrical kind, a specific cinematic genre or a pervasive mode across popular culture.[2] Mary Ann Doane states:

> The label "woman's film" refers to a genre of Hollywood films produced from the silent era through the 1950's and early '60's but most heavily concentrated and most popular in the 1930's and '40's.[3]

This type of melodrama did not disappear in the 1960’s, but continued to evolve and incorporate more “adult” themes as in *Picnic* (1955), *Peyton Place* (1957), and *Splendor in the Grass* (1961). The woman’s film continued to explore issues

relevant to women with *Georgy Girl* (1966) and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1966), *The Graduate* (1967), and in the 1970s *The Last Picture Show* (1971), *Julia* (1977) and *Kramer vs. Kramer* (1979).

In the opinion of Rick Altman, quoted in *Melodrama: Genre, Style, Sensibility* by John Mercer and Martin Shingler, since the late 1980s the status of the woman's film as a separate and specific genre has never been in doubt.[4] However, Roberta Garret argues that with the emergence of the "chick flick," "the way in which older expectations of generic gender/power relations are playfully repositioned in the light of the culture's broader registration of feminist approaches to sexual morality, social ethics and, in a broader sense, the cultural construction of gender identity, requires a revised view of postmodernist cinema."[5] Because of the enormous social changes of the second half of the 20th century, what had previously been acceptable in the woman's film (the perfect "June Cleaver" housewife at home looking after her family) was not any longer politically correct, or in some cases not relevant to current society.

In the Introduction to *Chick Flicks: Contemporary Women at the Movies*, the editors Susan Ferris and Mallory Young explain that "chick flick" is a term yet to be clearly defined, but the original meaning was derogatory - a sappy movie for women that men don't like. They explain further:

> At the height of the women's liberation movement of the 1970's, the word chick, along with the word girl, was considered an insult, a demeaning diminutive, casting women as childlike, delicate fluffy creatures in need of protection and guidance, or as appendages to hip young males.[6]

As the third wave or post feminist generation emerged, the word chick, like girl or bitch, has been used to convey solidarity and signal empowerment. Now these designations are viewed in terms of "Girl Power," and "Chicks Rule." Ferris and Young add that “chick flicks” are commercial films that appeal to female audiences, and that films from many periods can be included as chick flicks.[7] New types of female protagonists - strong, independent, liberated women, were featured in films (chick flicks) such as *Steel Magnolias* (1989), *Thelma and Louise* (1991), *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistlestop Café* (1991) and *Boys on the Side* (1995). The importance of female friendship replaced the importance of being part of a heterosexual relationship.[8] These developments helped to create a unique type of film that was directed specifically at a female audience of the late 20th century.

Regardless of the terminology, these films have a number of characteristics in common. Mary Ann Doane describes the woman’s film as films that have a female protagonist, and deal with “female” issues such as those revolving around domestic life, the family, children, self-sacrifice, and the relationship between women and production vs. that between women and reproduction.[9] She lists the unwed mother, the waiting wife, the abandoned mistress, the frightened newlywed and the anguished mother as common themes.[10] Women can identify with these narratives, or at the very least empathize with the heroine, helping to make viewing a pleasurable experience.

The litany of narrative themes that arise in the *The Joy Luck Club* includes: mother/daughter conflict; violence and abuse of women; rape; murder; suicide;

loss of mother; loss of child; separation from children; sacrifice for children, death; marriage; adultery; illegitimate birth; premarital sex; the fallen woman; divorce; and illness. Examples of narratives containing these themes can be found in women's films up to the present time, but not commonly all in the same film. Along with these issues are several themes specific to this particular film: translocation; Chinese/American identity and ethnicity.

The most prominent issue in *The Joy Luck Club* is mother/daughter relationships, which places it in the sub-genre of maternal melodrama. Molly Haskell, in *From Reverence to Rape*, defines the maternal melodrama as a film that focuses on ordinary women whose options have been closed by marriage or by children.[11] It is implied that a woman is dependent on the institutions of marriage and motherhood for her well-being and fulfillment.[12] Within this context sacrifice is an important theme, either self-sacrifice for the sake of the children, or surrender (sacrifice) of the children for their own good.[13] Linda Williams states:

The device of devaluing and debasing the actual figure of the mother while sanctifying the institution of motherhood is typical of "the woman's film" in general, and the sub-genre of maternal melodrama in particular. In these films it is quite remarkable how frequently the self-sacrificing mother must make her sacrifice that of the connection to her children – either for her or their own good.[14]

> In 1961, earlier than Williams' article, Simone de Beauvoir notes that because of the patriarchal devaluation of women in general, a mother frequently attempts to use her daughter to compensate for her own supposed inferiority by making "a superior creature out of one whom she regards as her double"[15]

The perspectives presented by Haskell, Williams and de Beauvoir are central in the narrative of *The Joy Luck Club* which weaves together the stories of the lives of two and sometimes three generations of Chinese mothers and daughters. Lindo's mother agrees to her arranged marriage when she reaches the age of 15 in hope of a better life for her daughter; Suyuan leaves her twin daughters under a tree when she becomes too ill to look after them, in the hope that someone will rescue them and save their lives; Ying-Ying drowns her baby in a fit of madness, and An-mei's mother committed suicide to give her daughter a stronger spirit and better life.

The Joy Luck Club begins with a tale about a woman who buys a swan that was once a duck that had stretched its neck in the hope of becoming a goose. The duck had surpassed its hope and become a beautiful swan. With the hope of giving her daughter a better life, and becoming more than she could be, the woman moved to America. All four of the mothers leave their homeland of China and immigrate to America to give their daughters a better life. In America, the daughters are, as de Beauvoir says "made superior creatures": Waverly becomes a chess prodigy as a child, and a successful businesswoman as an adult; June takes piano lessons in the hope that she will become a prodigy, and has a successful career in advertising as an adult, Lena becomes an architect and Rose becomes an artist.

In the process of negotiating their relationships with their mothers, the daughters discover the truth of their mothers' lives in China, and in some cases the stories of their grandmothers lives are disclosed as well. Suyuan leaves her

home because of the Japanese invasion, and becomes seriously ill while escaping, while Lindo is given to a high class, wealthy young man in an arranged marriage. Ying-Ying marries a cruel, adulterous, abusive man and An-mei's mother is widowed, raped causing an illegitimate pregnancy, and forced to become a concubine of a wealthy man. Finally her son is confiscated and raised by a higher ranking wife. The accounts of the lives of the four mothers, their mothers, and then their daughter's deals with every narrative theme mentioned previously.

The Joy Luck Club was directed by Wayne Wang, known for using the search for a Chinese/American identity as a central theme in many of his films. *The Joy Luck Club* documents this search as the older generation of Chinese mothers tries to preserve the traditions and values of their homeland, while their daughters want to discard the burden of their heritage and become modern, young American women. The means to understanding each other and resolving these issues is the motivation of the film.

Although *The Joy Luck Club* met with mixed reviews, it has accomplished two things: it is one of the first films to use a predominantly Asian-American cast; and because of its wide distribution it brought the difficulties of integrating into a different culture to the attention of a large audience. Laura Shapiro of Newsweek calls it a "four-hankie classic,"[16] ending her review with

> Melodramatic? Manipulative? Sure, at times, but a great storyteller can get away with anything, and the trio behind this film are in this class. Director Wayne Wang (*Chan is Missing*) and screenwriters Ronald Bass (*Rainman*) and Tan herself have come up with a shamelessly irresistible tale. The first-rate cast is another treat. Indulge yourself.[17]

Many of the reviews were written by male journalists who disliked the melodrama of the text, finding it predictable and unbelievable. Perhaps they lack the necessary hormones and understanding of the genre to fully appreciate the qualities of a woman's film, in the manner that a woman does. Women are able to identify and empathize with the characters in the narrative no matter how outrageous the action. This reinforces the belief that movies made for women have an important position in film. *The Joy Luck Club* is no exception.

NOTES

[1] Molly Haskell, "The Woman's Film," *From Reverence to Rape : The Treatment of , Women in the Movies, 2nd ed.* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 154.

[2] Christine Gledhill, ed., "Introduction," *Home Is Where The Heart Is,* (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 1.

[3] Mary Anne Doane, *The Desire to Desire*: *The Woman's Film of the 1940s*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 3.

[4] John Mercer and Martin Shingler, *Melodrama: Genre, Style, Sensibility,* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2004), 35.

[5] Roberta Garret, "Postmodernism, New Hollywood and Women's Films*," Postmodern Chick Flicks: The Return of the Woman's Film,* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 53.

[6] Susan Ferris and Mallory Young, "Introduction: Chick Flicks and Chick Culture*," Chick Flicks: Contemporary Women at the Movies,* Susan Ferris and Mallory Young, eds., (New York: Routledge, 2008), 2-3.

[7] Ibid., 2-3.

[8] Ibid., 19.

[9] Mary Anne Doane, *The Desire to Desire*: *The Woman's Film of the 1940s,* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 3.

[10] Ibid., 3.

[11] Molly Haskell, "*The Woman's Film," From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies,* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1974), 159-160.

[12] Ibid..159-160.

[13] Ibid., 163-170.

[14] Linda Williams, "Something Else Besides a Mother: Stella Dallas and the Maternal Melodrama," *Cinema Journal* 24, no.1 (Autumn, 1984): 2-27.

[15]Ibid., 3. Williams is quoting from *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (New York: Bantam, 1961): 488-89.

[16] Ibid., 2.

[17] Laura Shapiro, "The Generation Gap In Chinatown," *Newsweek* 122, (September 27, 1993): 1.

CHAPTER 3: THE SOUNDTRACK

> …music may be just as important as words or pictures in communicating how we should value, despise, admire, fear, love or hate other people or ourselves, other cultures or our own.[1]

Music, perhaps more than any other medium, can convey meaning. Plato considered specific modes and instruments as sources of social and sexual unrest, while St. Augustine felt that rhythm both appealed to the human senses and strived beyond them for higher spiritual completion.[2] Music has been used to inspire patriotism, incite violence and war, seduce, and create feelings of joy and sorrow.

The means by which we convey meaning in music have developed over a significant length of time. Some believe that it began with the advent of opera in the 17th century, but others argue that it began much earlier as the previous theories put forward by Plato and St. Augustine suggest. In this section I will not attempt to discuss all of the possible theories, but try to identify specific musical means by which composers signify non-musical concepts that will be relevant to my later discussion of Rachel Portman's scores for women's films.

The combination of music and the spoken word, particularly in dramatic works, heightens the meaning of the text, which by the 16th century had become increasingly important and known as word painting. The consummate combination of music and text culminated with the emergence of opera in the 17th century. Musical codes, many still used by contemporary composers, began to

develop. The basis for this codification is gendered: the opposition between the masculine and the feminine. The masculine was considered to be positive, strong, powerful, joyful, decisive and normal whereas the feminine was the opposite – negative, weak, incomplete and mournful. Susan McClary supports this by arguing that the binary opposition of masculine/feminine implies strong/weak, but also infers normal/abnormal.[3] She also advises that "music is also very often concerned with the arousing and the channelling of desire, with mapping patterns through the medium of sound that resemble those of sexuality."[4] This is particularly important to the women's film genre, as desire and sexuality are prominent features of the narrative.

Opera is not the only genre to use musical codification, as Eva Reiger also cites the "cantatas and oratorios of J.S. Bach as a rich source for the musical interpretation of words and the development of an expressive harmonic language."[5] Christian Wolff developed a system for musical depiction of emotions, published in his *Psychologia empirica* of 1732. The affects with positive emotive meaning (*affecti jucundi)* include love, hate, joy, courage, and merriment, while the affects with negative emotive meaning (*affecti molesti*) include sympathy, envy, regret, shame, fear, despair, pettiness, grief, boredom and anger.[6]

In the Baroque, according to Eva Reiger, feelings were expressed mainly by means of key (tonality), rhythm, tempo, instrumentation, inner movement, harmony, and intervals.[7] Major modality was associated with the positive masculine affects already mentioned, whereas minor modality was associated

with the feminine and viewed as inferior and less desirable, thus associating affects with positive emotive meaning to the masculine.[8] These positive masculine affects were also signified by diatonicism, consonance, the major scale, upward melodic leaps, rising melodic line, rising major thirds, rising major triads, basic triadic motifs, fanfare-like chordal progressions expanding beyond the octave, and loud and/or changing dynamic levels. Rising melodies, especially beginning with the upward intervals of a perfect fourth or even a perfect fifth convey heroism and bravery (think of the main *Star Wars* theme by John Williams), and similarly, a perfect octave (the "Tara theme" from Max Steiner's *Gone With the Wind* score) symbolizes strength and the grandiose.[9]

The less desirable feminine affects, such as weeping, lamentation, sickness, insanity, suffering, endurance of pain, evilness, sinfulness, misfortune, eroticism, deviation, sacrifice, renunciation, grief, despair, and hesitation, as well as those mentioned previously, are represented largely by chromaticism and falling or descending melodic lines or intervals. More specifically, these negative effects are also signified by dissonance, small intervals, decreased volume, little dynamic variation, limited range in melodic lines, slow tempo, and sarabande rhythm. A major second can indicate pettiness or mourning, rising chromatic steps indicate pleading or urging, descending chromatic steps can indicate despair, mourning or fright, the augmented fourth, or diminished fifth, also known as the tritone or *Quinta deficiens*, indicates pain, dejection, lamentation, evil or insanity, as do the interval of a diminished seventh and the diminished seventh chord. Ending a melodic line with a descending figure also emphasizes these affects.[10]

Orchestration also plays a large role in musical signification as particular tonal qualities are associated with certain affects or genders. Brass instruments in general tend to be related to the heroic or martial, particularly the trumpet which creates a dignified or ceremonial mood. The use of drums or other percussion can emphasize the military mood or create an atmosphere of fear. French horns are used to indicate hunting or to underscore the dignified or ostentatious. Woodwinds and strings are considered "soft" instruments and are most often treated as feminine. Flutes create the pastoral or idyllic, signify the naïve, joyous, wistful or lyrical and very often are used for a love theme. Solo violin and solo cello are also often used for a love theme, but muted or pizzicato they can indicate tenderness or melancholy.[11] However, when the entire orchestra is used it can be much more androgynous, meaning masculine or feminine, heroic, joyful or amorous.

The search for musical signification reached its zenith with 19th century romanticism, not only in the operas of Richard Wagner, Giuseppe Verdi, Giacomo Puccini, and other romantic operatic composers, but in the compositions of the 19th century instrumental composers as well. Romanticism of the 19th century, which used the concept of the programmatic as one of its mainstays, was clearly in tune with the techniques of musical signification handed down by previous generations of composers while expanding their vocabulary. Jeongwon Joe, in *Wagner and Cinema*, quotes Martin van Amerongen from *Wagner: A Case History* who claims

> "if Wagner had lived a century later, his home would not have been Bayreuth but Beverly Hills, and he would be composing not music-dramas but the sound tracks for disaster movies such as *The Towering Inferno.*[12]

When combined with its emphasis on emotion, it is not surprising then that a large portion of early film score, and later, the women's film in which emotion is of primary concern, was drawn from these romantic artists.

Richard Wagner revolutionized opera with his new philosophies including the use of the *leitmotiv*, a type of musical signature theme, which could signify a person, place, emotion, object, or even event. Wagner's use of the *leitmotiv* and extreme expressive chromaticism influenced the next generation of German composers in the first half of the 20th century, including Arnold Schoenberg and Alban Berg. Some of these composers remained in Europe passing on their ideas to their students, but some immigrated to the United States in World War II, settling in Hollywood.

By the end of the first half of the 20th century, active film industries had developed in France, Germany and the U.S. beginning with silent pictures. Music was a necessity in silent pictures, first to cover the noise of the projector, but also to reinforce the emotions shown by the actors who had no voice. 19th century music suited this medium well, already constructed with musical codification, and therefore was quickly appropriated for this purpose, with libraries and catalogues of musical possibilities readily available for use.[13] The advent of "talking pictures" did not preclude the use of music to accompany the narrative, but changed its use causing it to become more subliminal and sophisticated and

giving rise to the creation of the film score composer. Libraries and catalogues continued to be used for newsreels and films that needed scores quickly. These are still in use even today, particularly in advertising and television, incorporating the technological developments of the second half of the 20th century.[14]

As Europe fell under the power of the Nazi regime, the oppressive climate became unfavorable for composers, so many immigrated to America, creating a shift in cultural centers, to New York and Los Angeles where the majority settled. These composers included Arnold Schoenberg, Hans Eisler, Ernst Toch, Kurt Weill, Erich Korngold, Max Steiner, Miklos Rosza and Franz Waxman, who were all trained in the German romantic tradition. All of these composers became successful film score composers in Hollywood, with the exception of Arnold Schoenberg, who was perhaps the greatest influence on these men and in turn film scores of that time.

The second half of the 20th century saw major changes in society with the emergence of the second wave of the women's movement, pop culture, and the civil rights movement. These movements caused a shift in society lead by the younger generation questioning their parents' values, with the expression of their criticism of the older generation being directed through music, television, film, art and literature. The rapid growth of technology saw the development of the television, computers, new and improved musical instruments, more sophisticated recording techniques, and instantaneous communication, all of which changed the face of music and of course, the film score.

As an example of the influence of the technology of the later 20th century and in particular the influence of television advertisements and their use of musical semiotics that is just as pertinent to film score, I refer to an article by Ronald Rodman.[15] In this article he discusses the musical codification in two car commercials. The first, narrated by Michael Douglas, is for the Infiniti, a luxury car. The visual shows the Infiniti parked in front of a large house in the country with a cobblestone drive, while Douglas addresses the listeners as "Ladies and Gentlemen." This setting conveys wealth, luxury and upper class, reinforced by the musical score which uses what Rodman calls "two paradigmatic spaces"- New Age and classical. New Age is conveyed by the use of pentatonicism, diatonicism and electronically modified wind and percussion instruments. Classical style is transmitted through the use of traditional woodwind instruments, although modified, classical tonic-dominant tonality and a three part form ending in a final cadence.[16] As a complete unit, these codifications identify upper class, nouveau riche and Yuppie markets.[17]

Rodman's contrasting example is the "Like a Rock" commercial for Chevy trucks, targeted at the blue-collar market. The visual, hard-working men and trucks plowing through fields, is accompanied by the well-known country/rock song by Bob Seger. The harmonic structure of the song is a simple I-IV-♭VII-I progression, with accompaniment by electric guitars, bass and drums. The simplicity of the harmonic structure, use of the country/rock idiom, rock instrumentation, and even the roughness of Seger's voice all signify the masculine, and preservation of the American work ethic and way of life. The

commercial ends with a non-final fade-out on the dominant harmony, never ending, because we know that our Chevy trucks will keep going and going…[18]

Towards the end of the 20th century, partially fuelled by studies related to the emerging field of music therapy, studies began to be conducted examining the effect of music on emotions. In the 1980's Philip Tagg conducted a series of listening tests hoping to gain some understanding of musical meaning. Ten title themes from film and television each lasting between 30 and 60 seconds, were played for attendees of his lectures or lessons, after which they were asked to comment on what they thought might be happening on the screen during each excerpt. Even though there was the possibility for a great range of responses, there was extensive clustering of responses, suggesting significant consistency, the most striking in the area of gender codification in eight of the selections.[19]

Four of the selections (*The Virginian, Sportsnight, Owed to "g,"* and *Miami Vice*) were perceived as masculine, while *Dream of Olwen, Romeo and Juliet, Emmerdale Farm* and *Sayonara* were perceived as feminine. The masculine selections were faster, had shorter phrases, staccato articulations, repeated notes, little change in volume, active bass line, offbeats and syncopation. They were performed on electric guitar, guitar synth, trumpet and xylophone, were accompanied by guitar riffs, brass stabs, sequenced synthesizer and percussion, and were rock or jazz idiom. The perceived feminine selections were slower with long phrases, legato lines, no repeated notes, some volume change, a static bass line, and rarely had offbeats or syncopation. These pieces were performed by strings, flute, mandolin, oboe and piano with no brass or percussion. Their idiom

was classical, and most often romantic in style. The polarities of gender indicated by these results listed with the masculine first are: fast/slow; dynamic/static; urban/rural; sudden/gradual; upwards/downwards; jagged/smooth; modern/old; active/passive; outwards/inwards; sharp/rounded; and strong/weak. Some slightly different adjectives are used, but the dichotomies are very similar to those of the 16 through 19th centuries.[20]

Carol Krumhansl conducted a study which was documented in the *Canadian Journal of Experimental Psychology* in 1997 which rated emotions elicited by six classical instrumental compositions. The pieces were chosen to represent sadness (*Adagio in G minor for Strings and Orchestra* by Tomaso Albinoni and *Adagio for Strings* by Samuel Barber), fear (*Mars – the Bringer of War* from *The Planets* by Gustav Holst and *Night on Bare Mountain* by Modest Mussorgsky), and happiness (*La Primavera* from *The Four Seasons* by Antonio Vivaldi and *Midsommarvaka* by Hugo Alfven). The subjects were asked to fill out a short questionnaire regarding the music that they had listened to as well as being monitored physiologically. In the questionnaire they were asked to rate how they felt while listening to each piece on a scale of 0-8 in terms of afraid, amused, angry, anxious, contemptuous, contented, disgusted, embarrassed, happy, interested, relieved, sad and surprised. As well they were asked to rate pleasantness and intensity, and how familiar they were with the music before the experiment.[21] The results were as one would expect according to our preconceived notions of what is happy, sad or frightening music: the Albinoni/ Barber selections were rated higher for sadness because they have musical

characteristics that we associate with sadness – they are in minor mode, have a slow tempo, low volume, constant pitch range, and display elements of tension and release through dissonances; the Holst/Mussorgsky selections were rated highest for anxiety, fear and surprise because of their rapid tempo and tempo accelerations, rapid changes in volume, use of minor mode and tension caused by dissonance; and the Vivaldi/Alfven selections were rated highest in happiness, but also amusement and contentment because they are in major mode, have quick tempos, dance-like rhythms, less variation in dynamic levels, less dissonance and therefore less tension.[22]

Oliver Grewe, Frederik Nagel, Reinhard Kopiez and Eckart Altenmüller reported their study entitled "Listening to Music as a Re-Creative Process: Physiological, Psychological, And Psychoacoustical Correlates of Chills and Strong Emotions" in *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* in February of 2007. This study was designed to measure intense emotional response to music and pinpointed specific musical events that caused "chills." Chills are defined as a subtle nervous tremor caused by intense emotion, or in layman's terms, goosebumps and shivers down the spine.[23] These responses had previously been reported in similar studies by Goldstein in 1980, Sloboda in 1991, and Panksepp in 1995,[24] but this study was more comprehensive than the earlier ones, asking the questions: (a) how frequent is the chill response; (b) what are the musical and acoustical features that have the power to arouse such strong emotional responses; and (c) are chills in response to music a general phenomenon or are there specific chill responders that can be characterized by personality, musical education,

experience, or preference?[25] The subjects listened to seven different selections of various styles, some instrumental, some vocal, and each participant brought five to ten pieces of their own choosing that they thought would elicit strong emotional responses.[26] To qualify, a chill had to be recognized by the subject and measured physiologically.[27] Chill response was noted for the following musical events: 1) the entrance of the main theme, 2) a chord sequence combined with an ascending figure, 3) entry of a voice or solo instrument, 4) peak in volume,[28] 5) the beginning of the piece, 6) volume changes, 7) contrast between two voices,[29] 8) something new and unexpected, such as a sudden change in tempo, volume or harmony.[30] Music and musical styles that were familiar to the participants caused them to respond with strong emotional responses and as well more chills occurred in classical music than in other styles.[31] This may be the reason that we still support the tradition of classical music, but also makes a strong case for its use in film score, especially in women's films where emotion is paramount.

The purpose of the film score is to enhance the narrative, acting almost subliminally telegraphing emotion, mood, inner thoughts and feelings of the characters, highlighting and foreshadowing the action. Chion affirms that "sound adds value to the image,"[32] and Kay Dickenson says that "without musical anchoring, most would be forced to agree that the film would be a strangely hollow place."[33] Through the musical means examined we have developed a sophisticated system of codification well suited to the purpose of supporting the narrative of the film, consequently most of the signifiers present several hundred years ago are still present in some form in current film scores.

NOTES

[1] Philip Tagg, “Music, Moving Images, Semiotics, and the Democratic Right to Know,” *Music and Manipulation: On the Social Uses and Social Control of Music,* eds. Steven Brown and Ulrik Volgsten, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 169.

[2] Caryl Flinn, "Introduction," *Strains of Utopia,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 9.

[3] Susan McClary, "Introduction: A Material Girl in Duke Bluebeard’s Castle," *Feminine Endings: Music Gender & Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 10.

[4] Ibid., 8.

[5] Eva Reiger, “Wagner’s Influence on Gender Roles in Early Hollywood Film,” *Wagner and Cinema,* eds. Jeongwon Joe and Sander L. Gilman, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 134.

[6] Ibid., 134.

[7] Eva Reiger, “Wagner’s Influence on Gender Roles in Early Hollywood Film,” *Wagner and Cinema,* eds. Jeongwon Joe and Sander L. Gilman, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 134.

[8] Ibid., 138.

[9] Ibid., 134-137.

[10] Ibid., 134-137.

[11] Ibid., 135.

[12] Jeongwon Joe, “Why Wagner and Cinema? Tolkien Was Wrong,” *Wagner and Cinema,* eds. Jeongwon Joe and Sander L. Gilman, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 2.

[13] Philip Tagg, “Music, Moving Images, Semiotics, and the Democratic Right to Know,” *Music and Manipulation: On the Social Uses and Social Control of Music,* eds. Steven Brown and Ulrik Volgsten, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 171. This is also referenced in Annabel J. Cohen’s “Music as a Source of Emotion,” *Music and Emotion,* eds. Partik N. Juslin and John A. Sloboda, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 250.

[14] Philip Tagg, “Music, Moving Images, Semiotics, and the Democratic Right to Know,” *Music and Manipulation: On the Social Uses and Social Control of Music,* eds. Steven Brown and Ulrik Volgsten, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 171.

[15] Ronald Rodman, “And Now and Ideology from Our Sponsor: Musical Style and Semiosis in American Television Commercials,” *College Music Symposium* 37 (1997): 41-42.

[16] Ibid., 41-42.

[17] Ibid., 42.

[18] Ibid., 46-47.

[19] Philip Tagg, "Music, Moving Images, Semiotics, and the Democratic Right to Know," *Music and Manipulation: On the Social Uses and Social Control of Music,* eds. Steven Brown and Ulrik Volgsten, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 172-174.

[20] Ibid., 175.

[21] Carol L. Krumhansl, "An Exploratory Study of Musical Emotions and Psychophysiology," *Canadian Journal of Experimental Psychology* 51 no. 4 (1997): 340.

[22] Ibid., 350.

[23] Oliver Grewe, Frederik Nagel, Reinhard Kopiez, Eckart Altenmüller, "Listening to Music as a Re-Creative Process: Physiological, Psychological, And Psychoacoustical Correlates Of Chills and Strong Emotions," *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 24 no. 3 (February 2007): 297.

[24] Ibid., 297.

[25] Ibid., 298.

[26] Ibid., 299.

[27] Ibid., 300.

[28] Ibid., 303.

[29] Ibid., 308.

[30] Ibid., 311. Sloboda also documents this reaction in a 1991 study: 312.

[31] Ibid., 311. This was also noted in Panksepp's 1995 study: 311.

[32] James Buhler, David Neumeyer, Rob Deemer, eds., "The Sound Track and Film Narrative: Basic Terms and Concepts," *Hearing the Movies:Music and Sound In Film History,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1.

[33] Kay Dickenson, *Movie Music: The Film Reader*, 13.

CHAPTER 4: WAYNE WANG

> The perplexing question of course is who "we" are when we view what we view and how we view it. [1]

Wayne Wang is a Hong Kong born film director residing and working in the United States. He is also the director of *The Joy Luck Club,* a film that deals with the issues of Chinese-American identity and family relationships, both of which interest Wang. At the age of 18 Wang moved to Oakland, California, to study painting, photography, video and film making at the California College of Arts and Crafts. While studying in California, Wang was exposed to an eclectic variety of European and Asian films.[2] After graduating, he worked in television and on documentary films in San Francisco and Hong Kong, directing Chinese episodes of *The Golden Needles* in 1974, a television program based on *All in the Family*, and in 1975 a short film called *A Man, A Woman and a Killer.*[3]

Wang's films fall into two categories: big budget Hollywood films, and smaller, experimental, independent films in which Wang can explore issues of Chinese identity in America. The Hollywood variety include: *Smoke* (1995), *Blue in the Face* (1995), *Anywhere But Here* (1999), *Center of the World* (2001), *Maid in Manhattan* (2002), *Because of Winn-Dixie* (2005), and *Last Holiday* (2006). Even though these films have no Chinese affiliations, Wang is still able to explore the issues of identity and of family relationships.

Wang's Chinese films are independent and because of this he is able, perhaps more successfully, to explore issues of interest to him. Because he is also

"transplanted" from Hong Kong, the subject of Chinese-American identity has become very important in his work. Wang's first film exploring this issue is *Chan is Missing* (1982), a loosely scripted experimental film in black and white documentary style. The narrative is directed by the main character, Jo, who has a taxi cab business in San Francisco with his nephew and "number-one-son" figure, Steve.[4] Jo's friend, Chan-Hong, has disappeared, and the search for him precipitates conversations with many Chinatown residents with whom he was familiar. Their respective views of Chan-Hong, who he was and why he disappeared are very diverse, revealing differing perspectives on Chan's American-ness as well as their own. Jo sums up the film with his final monologue:

> I've already given up on finding out what happened to Chan-Hong. What bothers me is that I no longer know who Chan-Hong really is. Mr. Lee says Chan-Hong and immigrants like him need to be taught everything as if they were children. Mr. Fong thinks anyone who can invent a word-processing system in Chinese must be a genius. Steve thinks that Chan-Hong is slow-witted or sly when it comes to money; Jenny thinks that her father is honest and trustworthy. Mrs. Chan thinks her husband is a failure because he isn't rich…George thinks Chan-Hong's too Chinese, and unwilling to change. Presco thinks he's an eccentric who likes mariachi music. The problem with me is that I believe what I see and hear. If I did that with Chan-Hong I'll know nothing because everything is so contradictory. Here's a picture of Chan-Hong and I still can't see him.[5]

With Jo's description of the dilemma facing him, Wang is very clear about the confusion among the Chinese-American population regarding who they are in

their new country, and how they will integrate, and reinforces the need for further examination of this problem.

After *Chan is Missing*, Wang directed *Dim Sum: A Little Bit of Heart* (1985) and *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1989) explaining his concept with this quote:

> The three films I've done about the Chinese-American experience are a trilogy. "Chan introduced the American film-going audience to the complexities and contradictions of the Chinese community. "Dim Sum" focused microscopically onto one family and the relationship between a mother and a daughter. "Tea" went back to the source, to the beginning of the Chinese –American family. After these three films, I felt I had fulfilled a certain obligation." [6]

Dim Sum: A Little Bit of Heart, the second of the trilogy, was filmed over two years, and originally featured the lives of five young Asian-American women, but Wang was unhappy with the final result, so re-shot it focusing on one of the young women and her relationship with her Chinese mother, using the best parts of the first film in a short called *Dim Sum Takeout* (1985).[7]

In *Eat a Bowl of Tea*, Wang has presented another side of the issue of Asian-American identity by viewing it from the perspectives of the traditional Chinese father and modern Asian-American son, providing a counterpart to *Dim Sum: A Little Bit of Heart*, and later *The Joy Luck Club* (1993). In his review of *Eat a Bowl of Tea,* Caryn James tells us that the title is a literal translation of a phrase more loosely translated as "take your medicine."[8] This title is fitting for a film which, although dealing with the very serious topic of the American Exclusion Laws, is given a more humorous approach than Wang's previous films. The Exclusion Laws, enacted in the 1880's, and lifted after World War II, prohibited

Chinese workers from bringing their families to America, causing families to be separated for decades, and fathers to be strangers to their children.[9] *Eat a Bowl of Tea* becomes a vehicle for Wang to make subsequent generations of Chinese-Americans aware of the hardships afforded their parents and grandparents in their search for a better life in America.

1990 saw Wang's most experimental and graphic film *Life is Cheap…But Toilet Paper is Expensive,* filmed on location in Hong Kong. The narrative revolves around a young Asian-American man who is hired by the Chinese mafia to deliver a briefcase to a contact in Hong Kong. The film, shot in a documentary style becomes a bizarre, avant-garde collection of disturbing violent and sexual scenes. In this film Wang continues his exploration of the Asian-American experience and the conflict between the cultures of east and west but in a larger arena, not within the confines of the family.[10]

Dim Sum: A Little Bit of Heart appears to have been a practice run for the commercial and much more successful *Joy Luck Club* (1993), based on the novel by Amy Tan, with a much larger budget and backing from Hollywood Pictures, a division of the Disney Studios.[11] In the same vein as *Dim Sum: A Little Bit of Heart,* it examines the lives of four Chinese mothers and their Asian-American daughters, but also documents the hardships that they endured to immigrate to America so that they and their daughters could have better lives. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

In *The Chinese Box* (1997) Wang returned to his Asian roots in his study of Hong Kong before its return to Chinese rule on June 30, 1997. This was a very

personal film for Wang because he grew up in Hong Kong and felt that it could never be the same after the lowering of the British flag.[12] He admits to Anthony Kaufman in a *Director's Chair* interview:

> …I think there's a part of me that subconsciously suppressed how much I was a colonial citizen…So, I think what I found out is that I have to accept the fact that actually, I'm very influenced by the English and that's very much a part of my growing up. In a way that came even before the Americanization of myself, and that's something that was rekindled in this whole process. I also found out that the city of Hong Kong will be forever different… [13]

Chinese Box was shot in sequence on location in the six months leading up to the repatriation, incorporating actual events that were taking place in the city during that time period.[14]

A Thousand Years of Good Prayers (2007) and *Princess of Nebraska* (2007) were both adapted from a collection of short stories by Granta prize winning author Yiyun Li.[15] Film critic Todd McCarthy points out that this was third time that Wang paired two of his indie films on related topics, the others being *Eat A Bowl of Tea*/*Life is Cheap…But Toilet Paper is Expensive* and *Smoke*/*Blue in the Face*.[16] Both films present more recent faces of young Chinese women who have rejected their traditional heritage by whatever means they are able. In *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers,* Wang's main character is a thirty-something, divorced, Chinese American woman, Yilan, living in Spokane, played by Faye Yu, also in *The Joy Luck Club*. Her widowed father, Mr. Shi, played by Henry O, whom she hasn't seen for 12 years, has come from Beijing to visit. We become spectators in the struggle between the modern American woman and the traditional older

patriarch who has "come to help his daughter 'recover' from the divorce and avoid further shame by finding her a good second husband.[17] Yilan, having lived in America for over 10 years, has left behind her Chinese traditions, and is extremely irritated by her father's insistence on adhering to them. Coming from a Chinese proverb about the difficulty of sustaining long-term romantic relationships – peaceful cohabitation – and also applying to familial bonds this is appropriately titled[18]

Todd McCarthy says of The Princess of Nebraska:

> [it] is primarily concerned with aspects of being a modern post-Tianamen Square Chinese youth. As the film presents them, these kids have no moorings, no borders, no history, and no morals.[19]

The young woman in this film, Sasha, played by Ling Li, had been attending university in Omaha, but upon finding herself pregnant after a one-night stand with a student in an opera school while visiting her home in Beijing, travels to San Francisco to procure an abortion. She is assisted by a Caucasian American man who has also had an affair with the same young man. During her stay in San Francisco, Sasha shoplifts, meets some local prostitutes and business men in a bar, culminating in a same-sex fling with one of the prostitutes, all the while documenting her adventures with photographs taken on her cell phone. Always an innovator, Wang decided to premiere this film on YouTube Screening Room, (http://www.youtube.com/ytscreeningroom), a channel dedicated to premium film content.[20]

Wayne Wang is most comfortable making independent films where he is free to experiment. The influence of his early forays into the field of documentary film is apparent in many of these films, some even using black and white or hand held cameras, purposely lacking the "slick" look of mainstream film.[21] Kim Voynar describes these characteristic elements of Wang's style:

> Wang is known for using extreme close-ups of faces to put the viewer intimately in uncomfortable or awkward conversations, and he frequently uses physical spaces and things to define emotional interactions between characters, or to reflect inner feelings.[22]

They are shot on location retaining as much of the atmosphere and color of the area as possible, or in the case of *The Chinese Box*, even integrating into the fabric of the film.[23]

Wayne Wang and Rachel Portman have collaborated on three films in the past, and a fourth, *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan* (2011) has just been released. Their past collaborations include *Smoke, The Joy Luck Club*, and *Because of Winn-Dixie*. These films are remarkably different from each other in genre, style and subject matter: *Smoke* is an experimental film written by Paul Auster examining communities and urban life set in Brooklyn; *Because of Winn-Dixie* is a children's film set in the southern United States; *The Joy Luck Club* is a woman's film set in 20th century China and San Francisco; and *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan* takes place in China several hundred years ago and also in modern America. They each require a different style of composition for the score, even

The Joy Luck Club and *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan* which Portman says are completely different, having been written 20 years apart.[24]

On examining Wang's films, one can recognize the journey that he has undertaken, the chronicling of several generations of Chinese-American history, and the many ways in which immigration to America has changed them and their culture. Separately, these films were not all successful, but when viewed as a collection, like chapters in a book, they are snapshots of various aspects of Chinese-American existence in the United States documenting the integration into American culture and consequent changes in adherence to Chinese traditions. Wang has made a substantial contribution to Chinese-American film, and to Chinese-American history as well.

NOTES

[1] Peter Brooker, "In the Matrix: East West Encounters," *Modernity and Metropolis: Writing, Film and Urban Formations,* (New York: Palgrave), 164.

[2] Peter Todd, "*Chan is Missing*: An Interview With Wayne Wang," *Framework* 20, (1983): 21.

[3] "Wayne Wang," *Turner Classic Movies,* (2011). http://www.tcm.com:80/tcmdb/participant.jsp?participantId=510576%7C0

[4] Joel R. Brouwer, "Images of Indeterminacy - Wayne Wang's Visual representation of Ethnic Identity in *The Joy Luck Club* (1993) and *Chan is Missing* (1982), *Michigan Academician*, 29 no.4 (1997): 506.

[5] Ibid., 506-7. Dialogue from *Chan is Missing* (1982) by Wayne Wang.

[6]"Wayne Wang," *Turner Classic Movies,* (2011). http://www.tcm.com:80/tcmdb/participant.jsp?participantId=510576%7C0

[7] *Dim Sum Takeout – An Introduction*, from the "Extras" section of the DVD. Wayne Wang, dir., *Dim Sum: A Little Bit of Heart,* (Toronto: Video Service Corp.), BAL4421, www.videoservicecorp.com. This is an excellent addition to the DVD featuring an interview with Curtis Choy the sound recordist.

[8] Caryn James, "*Eat A Bowl of Tea* (1989): A Clash of Generations and Cultures," *New York Times* (July 21, 1989).

[9] Bill Ong Hing, "Asian Exclusion Laws," *Encyclopedia of the Supreme Court of the United States*, ed. Davis S. Tanenhaus,Vol. 1, (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2008), 114-116.

[10] Michael O'Pray, "*Life is Cheap…But Toilet Paper is Expensive*," *Sight and Sound* (June 1991): 51. *Sight and Sound* is no longer available, but this article can be found at *CineFiles.* http://cinefiles.bampfa.berkeley.edu/cinefiles/DocDetail?docId=53464

[11] Bernard Weinraub, "I Didn't Want To Do Another Chinese Movie," *New York Times* (September 5, 1993): A7.

[12] Anthony Kaufman, "Wayne Wang Wanders Through Hong Kong's *Chinese Box*," *The Director's Chair Interviews, indieWire*. http://www.industrycentral.net/director_interviews/WW01.HTM

[13] Ibid., p 3.

[14]Ibid., p. 3.

[15] "Magnolia Pictures Announces YouTube Premiere For Wayne Wang's *The Princess of Nebraska*," *Hollywood Scriptwriter* 29 no. 5, (October 2008): 10.

[16] Todd McCarthy, "*The Princess of Nebraska*," *Variety* 408no. 6, (September 24, 2007): 2.

[17] John P. McCarthy, "*A Thousand Years of Good Prayers*," *Boxoffice* 144 no. 8 (August 2008): 41.

[18] Ibid., 41.

[19] Todd McCarthy, "*The Princess of Nebraska*," *Variety* 408 no. 6, (September 24, 2007): 2.

[20] "Magnolia Pictures Announces YouTube Premiere For Wayne Wang's *The Princess of Nebraska*," *Hollywood Scriptwriter* 29no. 5, (October 2008): 10.

[21] Anthony Kaufman, "Wayne Wang Wanders Through Hong Kong's *Chinese Box*," *The Director's Chair Interviews, indieWire*. http://www.industrycentral.net/director_interviews/WW01.HTM accessed 07/03/11.

[22] Kim Voynar, "TIFF Review: *The Princess of Nebraska*," *The Moviefone/Cinematical* (September 14, 2007): 2.

http://blog.moviefone.com/2007/09/14/tiff-review-the-princess-of-nebraska/

[23] Anthony Kaufman, "Wayne Wang Wanders Through Hong Kong's *Chinese Box*," *The Director's Chair Interviews, indieWire*. 1.http://www.industrycentral.net/director_interviews/WW01.HTM

[24] Tim Grieving, "Portman and the Secret Fan," *FSM Online* 16 no. 7. http://www.filmscoremonthly.com/fsmonline/story.cfm?malID=3199&issuelD=77&page=2

CHAPTER 5: RACHEL PORTMAN

> I love music that tells stories. I love finding colors and dramatizing and energizing a film.[1]

Rachel Portman was the first woman film score composer to win an Oscar for her score for the film *Emma* (1996). She belongs to a select group of female composers for film, which includes Shirley Walker and Deborah Lurie. She began scoring films in 1982, and to date has over 50 film scores to her credit along with music for television, an opera and a Broadway production.[2]

Rachel Portman was born December 11, 1960 in Haslemere, England. She studied music as a child, but became particularly fond of the piano, and regrets not having learned the clarinet instead of the violin.[3] Portman attended the University of Oxford where she studied music, but became disenchanted with the classical route because she wanted more opportunity to use her music as a tool for communication.[4] As a student, she composed numerous scores for productions at the Oxford Playhouse, also receiving the opportunity to compose the score for *Privileged* (1982), the first film about Oxford students by the students themselves. It was in this film that Hugh Grant, at that time a student at Oxford, made his debut bringing him to the attention of the public.[5]

After graduating, Portman maintains that she learned her craft during the eight years that she worked in television composing music for British TV films because with their sound and dramatic structure they were just like miniature cinema films.[6] During this time she composed music for a number of television

movies including *The Last Day of Summer* (1984), *Reflections* (1984), *Four Days in July* (1985), *The Woman in Black* (1985), *Good As Gold* (1986), and *Sometime in August* (1988). Portman also composed music for the miniseries *The Young Charlie Chaplin* (1989) for PBS, *Jim Henson's The Storyteller* (1987), and *Jim Henson's The Storyteller: Greek Myths* (1990) for HBO. In 1990 Portman began collaborating with the British director Beeban Kidron on a television series for Arts and Entertainment called *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* which was about a young lesbian living in a working-class mill town in the northwest of England. It examines sexual, religious, family and class issues.[7] The beginning sequence incorporates a surreal scene at a fair ground finishing with a frightened child watching "adult whirling figures on a merry-go-round" for which Portman wrote dissonant carnivalesque underscoring.[8] Kidron and Portman continued to work together on *Antonia and Jane* (1990), a Woody Allen style television movie about a friendship between two very different women: an earthy Jewish intellectual and a cool WASPY career woman.[9] Portman and Kidron worked together on two American films: *Used People* (1992) and *To Wong Foo Thanks For Everything, Julie Newmar* (1995), a cult classic modeled after the Australian transvestite film *The Adventures of Priscilla Queen of the Desert* (1994). *To Wong Foo Thanks For Everything, Julie Newmar* was produced by Stephen Spielberg and featured Patrick Swayze, Wesley Snipes and John Leguizamo in drag.[10] In 1993, Kidron and Portman worked together on a British film, *Great Moments in Aviation*, also known as *Shades of Fear*, a portion of which was funded by the American company Miramax. Disagreements between the business partners, resulted in an

unsuccessful film that went straight to television. However, the score was a success, incorporating an aria for soprano as one of the two main themes of the film.[11]

Portman believes that "the purpose of a film score is to illuminate the story, in particular to guide the viewer through the emotions of the film."[12] Her scores feature the orchestra, which she considers to be her instrument or voice.[13] Woodwinds are frequently used as the prime melodic instruments, supported by strings. She describes her choice of instruments in this way:

> Instruments have color. For instance, I like using the clarinet because it can be happy and sad, although not as sad as an oboe, and not as romantic as a flute.[14]

Portman also has a preference for piano as a melodic instrument in her scores, but she also uses it as a compositional tool to develop her ideas, orchestrating later.[15] Until the demands of her work became overwhelming, she preferred to do her own orchestrating, but now works closely with Jeff Atmajian who is able to understand her style and short hand.[16]

Portman has used the voice in some of her scores, particularly *Beloved* (1998) based on Toni Morrison's novel of the same name and directed by Jonathan Demme, which is mostly solo voice or chorus and an assortment of traditional African instruments. The choral sections are in an African gospel style and the solo voice parts are early blues influenced, appropriate because the narrative takes place in Ohio c1870. *Great Moments in Aviation*, as previously mentioned employs soprano voice for one of the main themes, and *Sirens* (1993)

opens with an a cappella choral sea chantey, appropriate for a film alluding to the mermaid myth.

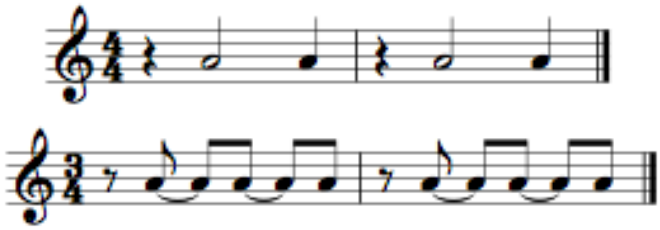
Portman structures her scores around one main melodic idea maintaining that this is the single most important element of any film.[17] She is quoted in a recent interview regarding her newest film *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan* in *FSM Online:*

> Whenever I'm starting a film, if it's gonna need a melody, I've got to crack that melody. And that becomes the thing on which to hang the whole score, from which you take everything else. All other branches come off it. So that was the first thing I wrote…To start and end with it, and to touch on it as you go through the film. It's like the musical voice of the film, the main musical voice.[18]

She elaborates further in the interview with Roel Van Bambost stating that she "believes in well-developed themes, with a beginning, a middle and an end."[19] In analyzing Portman's scores, this technique becomes very apparent as most of her scores are based on only one main theme, this is not to say that they are monothematic, as she then uses the main theme or a motif from it as a point of departure for subsidiary themes. It is in this manner, by introducing related, but varied versions of the main theme, that she is able to develop themes that support the narrative.

Harmonically, Portman's scores remain tonal with limited dissonance unless necessary for dramatic support, using harmonic progressions in tune with the style and time periods of the narrative. She does not write rhythmically complex material, but often uses syncopated rhythms as an underpinning for her melodic material giving it a sense of movement or urgency.

EXAMPLE 5.1 Syncopated rhythms



Portman has not studied film music or film scores, but lists her inspiration and influences as Bach, Ravel and Debussy.[20] In an interview with Scott Holleran she notes that she used to listen to jazz and Joni Mitchell but now does not listen to much outside of classical music.[21] Although Portman states that she does not know what chord sequences will result in an emotional response, she credits her ability to find effective motifs and her knowledge of orchestration as being a result of her study of classical music.[22] This admission is interesting because although not aware that she follows the codes of musical signification discussed in Chapter 3, they are so ingrained that they can be traced throughout her work.

Portman has composed scores for all genres of film, but her style and approach to scoring are most suitable for the woman's film and dramatic works. She concludes her interview with Roel Van Bambost by saying that she would like to compose for emotional dramas and possibly an animated film, but would like to avoid Hollywood action films full of violence and noise.[23] Portman feels that her gender has not been relevant to her success in a male dominated field, but perhaps her preference of genre and wish to avoid masculine action films is the one area where it becomes a factor.[24]

Portman has composed scores for three films that are masculine in nature dealing with violence, action and suspense: *Hart's War* (2002), *The Truth About Charlie* (2003), and *The Manchurian Candidate* (2004). Her scores for these films are very different because they employ techniques associated with masculinity. The orchestration involves use of percussion, strong rhythmic drive, brass instruments and in some cases synthesized sound. The suspense in *The Manchurian Candidate,* handled in a manner similar to Bernard Hermann's treatment of suspense in *Psycho* (1960) with the use of high violins, but Portman also juxtaposes this with a low rumbling bass. *The Truth About Charlie*, a remake of *Charade* (1963), is handled in a similar manner, but includes an eclectic mix of jazz style world music with an Eastern flavor.

Portman has composed scores for several period dramas including: *Emma; Oliver Twist* (2005); and *The Duchess* (2008). These scores evoke a sense of the time period, but are not "period specific." Portman comments on this in an interview with Yvonne Georgina Puig of *Daily Variety:*

> For a period film, I avoid using certain, more modern-sounding instruments like marimba or acoustic guitar…I also naturally avoid certain harmonies, which I might use freely in a contemporary film. However I would never feel constrained to use only the musical language of the time period, or the score might feel more like source music.[25]

She adds that because she listens to classical music all the time, she is able to draw on it for her inspiration.[26] This reinforces the value of her classical education, and explains the success of their scores, particularly that of *Emma*.

The bulk of Portman's scores are for films that can be classed as woman's film, drama, romantic comedy or even "chick flick." Most of these are in a similar style, using orchestra dominated by flute, oboe, clarinet and strings, and many have some form of popular music added to the score. For several films however, Portman has used a slightly different compositional approach. *The Joy Luck Club* (1993) is composed using Chinese influenced melodies and traditional Chinese instruments to define polarities of East and West. *Beloved*, directed by Jonathan Demme, already touched on previously is the most unconventional of Portman's scores in its use of African instruments, voice, and the almost continuous underscoring throughout the film. *The Human Stain* (2003), directed by Robert Benton is one of Portman's own favorites because the music has its own abstract voice running through the film. It relies heavily on piano, and in some instances uses the "broken" sound of a prepared piano to represent the pain of the narrative.[27] She also used a soprano saxophone played in an orchestral manner in juxtaposition to the strings, like a human cry. Unlike her other projects, there is a theme unifying the score, but not a melody that is obvious and singable.[28] *Because of Winn-Dixie* (2005), a children's film directed by Wayne Wang, evokes an atmosphere of the southern United States using a bamboo flute with no vibrato to reinforce the young girl's point of view, accompanied by guitar, mandolin, spoon, washboard and fiddling.[29] *The Cider House Rules* (1999), directed by Lasse Hallstrom received an academy award nomination for Portman. The piano figures prominently in an otherwise lush orchestral score with American folk overtones. *Chocolat* (2000), also directed by Lasse Hallstrom was composed by

Portman in three and a half weeks and uses two themes, one representing the wind, and the other representing the Compte de Renaud, the adversary of the heroine. In order to portray the main character, Vianne, a woman of Mayan heritage who has unspecified supernatural powers and uses her chocolates to change the French town in which she and her daughter have settled, Portman used a mixture of panpipes, accordion and guitar.[30]

Because she felt that there was a lack of live theater for children, Portman decided to write an opera appropriate for children, but also enjoyable for adults.[31] She settled on the children's story *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. Nicholas Wright was enlisted to write the poetry for the arias and choruses, but the recitatives are generally taken directly from the text.[32] Portman argued that children would not be interested in viewing a performance of all adults, so the role of the prince is played by a boy soprano, and the other 10 principal roles are played by adults, but the score also incorporates a children's chorus of 38 singers. It is scored for a small orchestra of 26 players, including a celesta, creating a texture that Portman describes as "transparent."[33] The opera is divided into two halves, the first is expository, introduced by the pilot, and in the second half the prince learns his lessons and pursues his destiny.[34] Portman's score is basically through composed relying heavily on strings, flute, clarinet, oboe and English horn, although there is some use of percussion and brass instruments.[35] *The Little Prince* was premiered at the Houston Grand Opera in 2003.[36]

Portman has since composed another serious classical concert work for children, *The Water Diviner's Tale* (2007), commissioned for the BBC Proms

concerts.[37] This is an hour long piece with text by Owen Sheers, urgently calling on a younger generation to redeem the sins of its elders on the subject of climate change.[38] The score calls for narrator, soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor, baritone, bass, STBarB and Youth choir, plus an orchestra made up of strings, english horn, bass clarinet, contrabassoon, percussion, and piano.[39]

Rachel Portman has received numerous awards for her work as well as her Oscar and other Academy Award nominations. These include The British Film Institutes Young Composer of the Year Award in 1988, The Carleton Television Award for Creative Originality for Women in Film,[40]a BAFTA award for *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit,* The Flanders International Film Festival Award in 1999 for *Ratcatcher* (1999),[41] and in 2010 she was appointed Officer of the Order of the British Empire.[42]

NOTES

[1] Christian DesJardins, "Rachel Portman," *Inside Film Music: Composers Speak*, (Los Angeles: Silman-James Press, 2006), 196-197.

[2] Jason Buchanan, "Rachel Portman," *allmovie*, http://www.allmovie.com/cg/avg.dll?p=avg&sql=2:106895

[3] Roel Van Bambost, "Rachel Portman," *Moving Music: Conversations with Renowned Film Composers*, (Tielt: Lannoo, c2003), 34.

[4] "Rachel Portman," *gURL*, http://www.gurl.com/showoff/spotlight/qa/0,,651977,00.html

[5] Roel Van Bambost, "Rachel Portman," *Moving Music: Conversations with Renowned Film Composers*, (Tielt: Lannoo, c2003), 34. This is also mentioned in Rachel Portman's biography provided on the Chester Novello website: "Rachel Portman," *Chester Novello*,

http://www.chesternovello.com/default.aspx?Tabld=2431&State_2905=2&composerid-2905=1934.

[6] Roel Van Bambost, "Rachel Portman," *Moving Music: Conversations with Renowned Film Composers*, (Tielt: Lannoo, c2003), 34.

[7] Anne T. Ciecko, "Sex, God, Television, Realism, and the British Women Filmmakers Beeban Kidron and Antonia Bird," *Journal of Film and Video* 51, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 22-23, 31-33.

[8] Ibid., 25. *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* is difficult to find, and may only be available on VHS tape, but this opening scene can be found on youtube at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hdpe-rkYVgQ

[9] Anne T. Ciecko, "Sex, God, Television, Realism, and the British Women Filmmakers Beeban Kidron and Antonia Bird," *Journal of Film and Video* 51, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 34. This does not appear to available on VHS tape or DVD, but is available on Youtube at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=08ir2pr1-ho

[10] Anne T. Ciecko, "Sex, God, Television, Realism, and the British Women Filmmakers Beeban Kidron and Antonia Bird," *Journal of Film and Video* 51, No. 1 (Spring 1999): 36-37.

[11] Ibid., 34-35.

[12] Maria Garcia, "Scoring for the Screen," *Film Journal International* 112 no. 7 (July 2009): 3.

[13] Christian DesJardins, "Rachel Portman," *Inside Film Music: Composers Speak*, (Los Angeles: Silman-James Press, 2006), 198.

[14] Maria Garcia, "Scoring for the Screen," *Film Journal International* 112, no. 7, (July 2009): 6.

[15] Christian DesJardins, "Rachel Portman," *Inside Film Music: Composers Speak*, (Los Angeles: Silman-James Press, 2006), 198.

[16] Ibid., 199.

[17] Scott Holleran, "Interview: Rachel Portman," *Box Office Mojo*, (October 30, 2003).

http://www.boxofficemojo.com/features/?id=1259&p=.htm

[18] Tim Grieving, "Portman and the Secret Fan," *FSM Online* 16 no. 7, (July 2011): 2-3. http://www.filmscoremonthly.com/fsmonline/story.cfm?malID=3199&issueid=77&page=1

[19] Roel Van Bambost, "Rachel Portman," *Moving Music: Conversations with Renowned Film Composers*, (Tielt: Lannoo, c2003), 38.

[20] Christian DesJardins, "Rachel Portman," *Inside Film Music: Composers Speak*, (Los Angeles: Silman-James Press, 2006), 199.

[21] Scott Holleran, "Interview: Rachel Portman," *Box Office Mojo*, (October 30, 2003).

http://www.boxofficemojo.com/features/?id=1259&p=.htm

[22] Ibid., 2. Portman comments on the value of a classical music education in Maria Garcia's article, "Scoring for the Screen," page 5.

[23] Roel Van Bambost, "Rachel Portman," *Moving Music: Conversations with Renowned Film Composers*, (Tielt: Lannoo, c2003), 41.

[24] Christian DesJardins, "Rachel Portman," *Inside Film Music: Composers Speak*, (Los Angeles: Silman-James Press, 2006) 197.

[25] Yvonne Georgina Puig, "The Duchess: Rachel Portman," *Daily Variety*, (2008).

[26] Ibid., 1.

[27] Christian DesJardins, "Rachel Portman," *Inside Film Music: Composers Speak*, (Los Angeles: Silman-James Press, 2006), 201-202.

[28] Ada Guerin, "*The Human Stain,* review," *Hollywood Reporter* 381 no. 12 (2003): 38.

[29] Ada Guerin, "*Because of Winn-Dixie,* review," *Hollywood Reporter* 387 no. 15 (2005): 24.

[30] "Rachel Portman," *gURL*, http://www.gurl.com/showoff/spotlight/qa/0,,651977,00.html

[31] Christian DesJardins, "Rachel Portman," *Inside Film Music: Composers Speak*, (Los Angeles: Silman-James Press, 2006), 204. Also, K.E.Watt, "Rachel Portman and *The Little Prince,*" *New York City Opera,* (2005): 1. http://www.kewatt.com/RachelPortman.pdf

[32] K.E.Watt, "Rachel Portman and *The Little Prince,*" *New York City Opera,* (2005): 2-3. http://www.kewatt.com/RachelPortman.pdf

[33] Ibid., 2.

[34] Ibid., 4.

[35] Ibid., 3.

[36] Ibid., 1.

[37] "Rachel Portman Biography," *The Official Website of Rachel Portman,* http://www.rachelportman.co.uk

[38] Michael Billington, "*The Water Diviner's Tale*," *The Guardian,* (Tuesday, August 28, 2007). http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2007/aug/28/proms2007.proms

[39] "Rachel Portman: "*The Water Diviner's Tale*," *Chester Novello*, http://www.chesternovello.com/default.aspx?Tabld=2432&State_3041=2&workid_3041=36030#

[40] "Rachel Portman," *The Danish Film Music Society,* (2008). http://www.filmmusic.dk/index.php?side=rachelportman&l=uk

[41] "Rachel Portman," *Chester Novello*, http://www.chesternovello.com/default.aspx?Tabld=2431&State_2905=2&composerid-2905=1934.

[42] "Rachel Portman Biography," *The Official Website of Rachel Portman* (2011). http://www.rachelportman.co.uk

CHAPTER 6: THE JOY LUCK CLUB SOUNDTRACK

What is ethnic is what Hollywood has made ethnic[1]

In composing the score for *The Joy Luck Club* Rachel Portman had to discover the means by which she could musically highlight the primary narrative issues in the film. Because this is a women's film, centered on the lives of four women and their daughters with no major male characters, she used many of the feminine codifications of semiotics discussed in chapter 3. This also meant finding ways of differentiating the characters and their stories musically. She had to locate the film in China and Chinatown in San Francisco, and indicate the ethnicity of the characters. Because there are two and sometimes even three generations involved in the storyline, she had to find the means to indicate the old versus the new, and the young versus the old in terms of characters and culture.

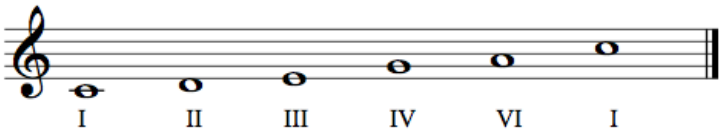
In *The Joy Luck Club*, there are nine narrative threads combined to create the whole. They are the stories of four Chinese women who have left China to find a better life for their daughters in America, settling in Chinatown in San Francisco. The mothers' stories take place in China in approximately 1940, the young daughters' stories in America in the 1960s, and the adult daughters' stories take place in the 1980s, but are still influenced by Chinese ethnicity. Ethnicity is difficult to convey in film because, as we are reminded by Kassabian, "music signifies ethnicity within our particular musical heritage, not simply by borrowing directly from the culture it attempts to evoke."[2] The film score composer Jerry

Goldsmith is also argues that "if one were to give the pure ethnological answer musically, they (presumably the director and producer) would throw it out in a second."[3] Therefore, the composer must devise a method for indicating a particular heritage or ethnicity in a manner that is understandable to our ears.

Our perceptions of ethnicity in music are conveyed through the broad characteristics of instrumentation, modality, harmony, texture and rhythm. Basically these are musical stereotypes, and need not be specific as they are targeted at an audience made up of the general public, not ethnomusicologists. Traditional Chinese instruments include woodwinds, strings, brass and percussion, from which Portman has chosen to use the bamboo flute and a bowed string instrument, probably the *ehru*, because these are the most recognizable as "Chinese." Percussion instruments are an important feature of almost all Chinese music, and are used to accompany ritual, opera, narrative singing, dance, and even political campaigns, but they are used in only one scene in the film; a wedding scene where traditional Chinese wedding music is used.[4] Using any percussion in the remainder of the score would have been inappropriate in expressing the narrative. Portman's orchestra for this score includes the string section, woodwinds, harp and trumpet. She does not use the whole orchestra as frequently as in her other work, uses trumpet only once, and does not use other brass instruments.

Another easily recognizable characteristic of Chinese music is the use of the pentatonic scale as a melodic basis. In Western musical terms, this means using the first, second, third, fifth and sixth degrees of the major scale.[5]

EXAMPLE 6.1 The pentatonic scale



Chinese musicians are expected to bring melodies to life with the use of embellishments, or ornamentation known as *jiahua* (adding decoration or adding flowers), or *caiqiang* (embellishing the melody).[6] Portman has employed the pentatonic mode more frequently for melodies used to convey China, the mothers and the old. Melodic decoration becomes a very powerful signifier in the same instances, but is used only with the traditional Chinese instruments. Chinese music is treble dominated, sometimes in combination with plucked or bowed string instruments in a lower range, or with a bass drum. Bass lines were typically not added until the 20th century because of the influence of western art music.[7] As well as being characteristic of Chinese music, the use of high instruments is also considered to be a codification for femininity.[8] In this score Portman frequently uses the flute and oboe to introduce the melodic line and supports it with a harmonic foundation played by the violins and possibly violas. She reserves the use of the lower strings for sections requiring more strength and heightened emotion or in conjunction with the appearance of the masculine.

In order to differentiate "Eastern" and "Western" Portman begins by choosing to use the bamboo flute and *ehru*, traditional Chinese instruments, to indicate Eastern, because this is the most obvious cue to the listener. Melodic

lines played on these instruments are generally heavily ornamented with bent pitches and other types of ornamentation, different from melodic lines in Western music which are much cleaner. To indicate the daughters or parts of the narrative taking place in America, Portman uses Western orchestral instruments and the Western orchestra. These sections are not modal, but constructed on major and minor tonality.

Portman has constructed the score around one main theme, which I will label the Hope theme, introduced in the opening credits. As well, each mother/daughter pair has a theme and tonal center supporting their stories and relationship dynamic. Music cues underscore the dialogue, action and emotion in the narrative, and act as transitions between scenes, but do not function as extended musical passages with the exception of the final credits, where the Hope theme returns bringing the score full circle.

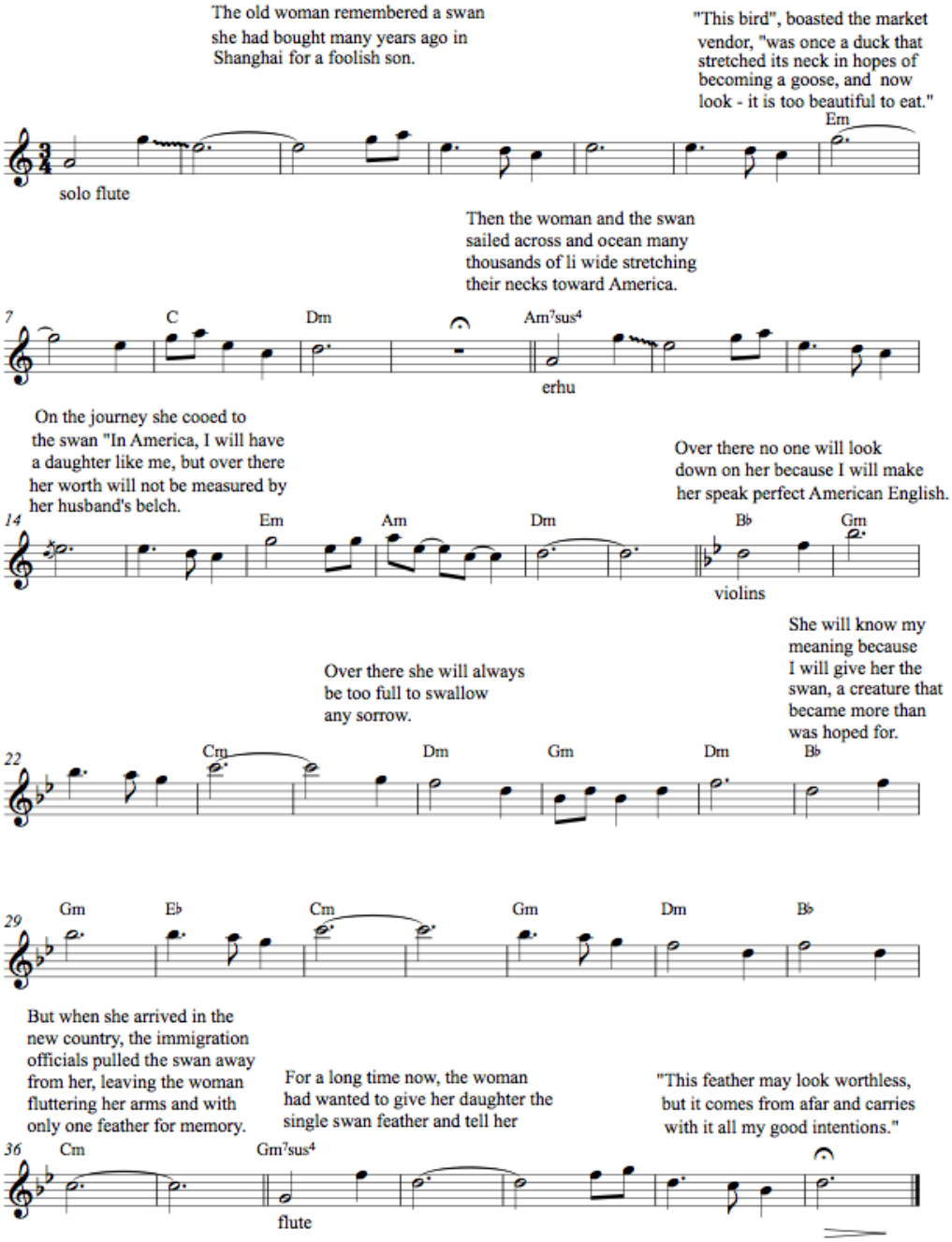
Before beginning the dialogue, visuals, or opening credits, the Hope theme is introduced, played on a bamboo flute over a black screen. Within the first three notes of this haunting theme, we are located in China, the slide between the G and E further conveying that it will be a rural, not an urban location. The upward leap of a minor seventh has positive attributes; hope, joy, happiness and prosperity.[9] This is supported by the use of red lettering for the credits because in the Chinese culture the colour red conveys the same meaning. As the narrator speaks the words “this bird,” a single white line appears on the black screen along with the credits. The line develops until a stylized feather becomes visible, accompanied

by the solo flute. This single feather and solo flute melody in turn represent all the hopes that the four mothers have for their daughters' futures in America.

The Hope theme (mm. 1-9, example 6.2) is constructed from the pentatonic scale beginning on C. It is repeated in mm. 11-19, but played on an *ehru*, a traditional bowed Chinese string instrument. This reinforces the codification of the first statement, and also conveys that the story, told by an old woman, comes from Chinese traditions and culture. A simple arpeggiated accompaniment is added, played by the harp.

The colour behind the swan feather becomes grey, more pleasant and less stark against the red letters and the white feather. The B section of the credit music begins, played by the whole orchestra, while the tonal center shifts to B flat major, (m. 20, example 6.2) As the old woman projects her perception of how life will be better in America for her daughter, the new melody rises to its climax on an E flat major chord (mm. 30-32, example 6.2), then shifts to a C minor chord, while on the screen the feathers multiply and swirl creating a visual climax simultaneously. The new melody in the B section is derived from the melodic motif of the main theme in m. 4, but has lost its ethnicity because it is not played by a traditional Chinese instrument but by the whole orchestra, and has shifted to a Western sounding major key conveying modern culture in America.

EXAMPLE 6.2 Hope theme, *The Joy Luck Club,* opening credits, by Rachel Portman, *Hollywood Home Entertainment*, 1993.



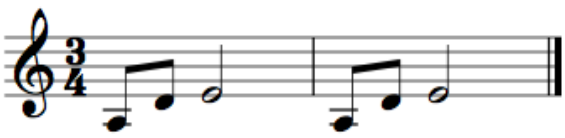
However, when the old woman begins to describe her arrival in America, and the confiscation of her swan by the immigration officials, the screen suddenly returns to black, and the melodic line begins to descend until the Hope theme returns. The restatement of five measures of this theme, again played on the bamboo flute, creates a ternary form, and re-establishes the woman as belonging to old Eastern culture. Even though there has been a disappointment, as implied by the descending melodic line, the return of the Hope theme convinces the viewer that there can still be a positive outcome. By ending the melody on the dominant, and not providing a dominant – tonic harmonic progression, there is a lack of finality and a sudden cut to the next scene.

In adapting the novel to the screen, the writers needed a means to link the separate threads of the mother/daughter narratives, which they found by having all the characters participate in a going away party for June on the eve of her trip to China to meet the twin sisters whom she believed to be dead. Each thread is allowed evolve through flashbacks inspired by the interactions between the characters at the party.[10] Each mother/daughter pair form a section of the narrative except for June and Suyuan whose stories are introduced at the beginning of the film, but not resolved until the end.

The music cue begins as June, the three mothers/aunties and their daughters have a group picture taken by June's father. June begins the narrative by explaining that her mother, who had founded the Joy Luck Club, had died four months previously. This is underscored by a flute supported by the harp accompaniment figure (example 6.3), playing a Westernized version of the Hope theme,

because now it reflects a young, American daughter's perspective. As it progresses, sustained minor string chords are added providing further foundation for the melody and continuing the melancholy mood. During this underscoring, June and her mother's best friends, Auntie Lindo, Auntie Ying-Ying and Auntie An-mei begin a game of mah jong. Because this is our introduction to the aunties/mothers and their old Chinese values, the bamboo flute is used for the Hope theme. The pentatonic harp accompaniment (example 6.3), strongly reinforces the signification of "old Chinese." This theme is stated twice, the second time re-harmonized, shifting to C major as the aunties are introduced by the narrator. The shift in modality emphasizes the sense of warmth, happiness and security, which they each found in their friendship. Even though a subdominant-tonic harmonic progression is used at the end, a sense of finality is negated by ending the melody on the seventh of the final chord. After all, strong bonds of friendship do not end.

EXAMPLE 6.3 Harp accompaniment



A transition to the next scene is created when Auntie Lindo asks June why she hasn't taken home the piano from her parents' apartment since she is the only one who knows how to play it. A piano solo version of Antonin Dvorak's well-

known “Humoresque” acts as a transition and sets the scene for a flashback to June’s childhood and the piano lessons she was forced to take in her mother’s attempt to compete with Auntie Lindo and her daughter Waverly. The soundtrack in this scene consists entirely of diegetic music, beginning with a talent show in which June is competing with her under-practiced rendition of Antonin Dvorak’s “Humoresque”. Here the novel and the screenplay differ, as in the novel June plays “The Pleading Child” from Robert Schumann’s *Scenes From Childhood,* instead of the “Humoresque”.[11] “The Pleading Child” clearly has much more connection with the narrative, particularly when as an adult, June discovers that on the opposite page from “The Pleading Child” is “Perfectly Contented,” and the two pieces are related, like two halves of a whole.[12] “Humoresque” was likely used in the film because it is more widely recognized than the Schumann piece.

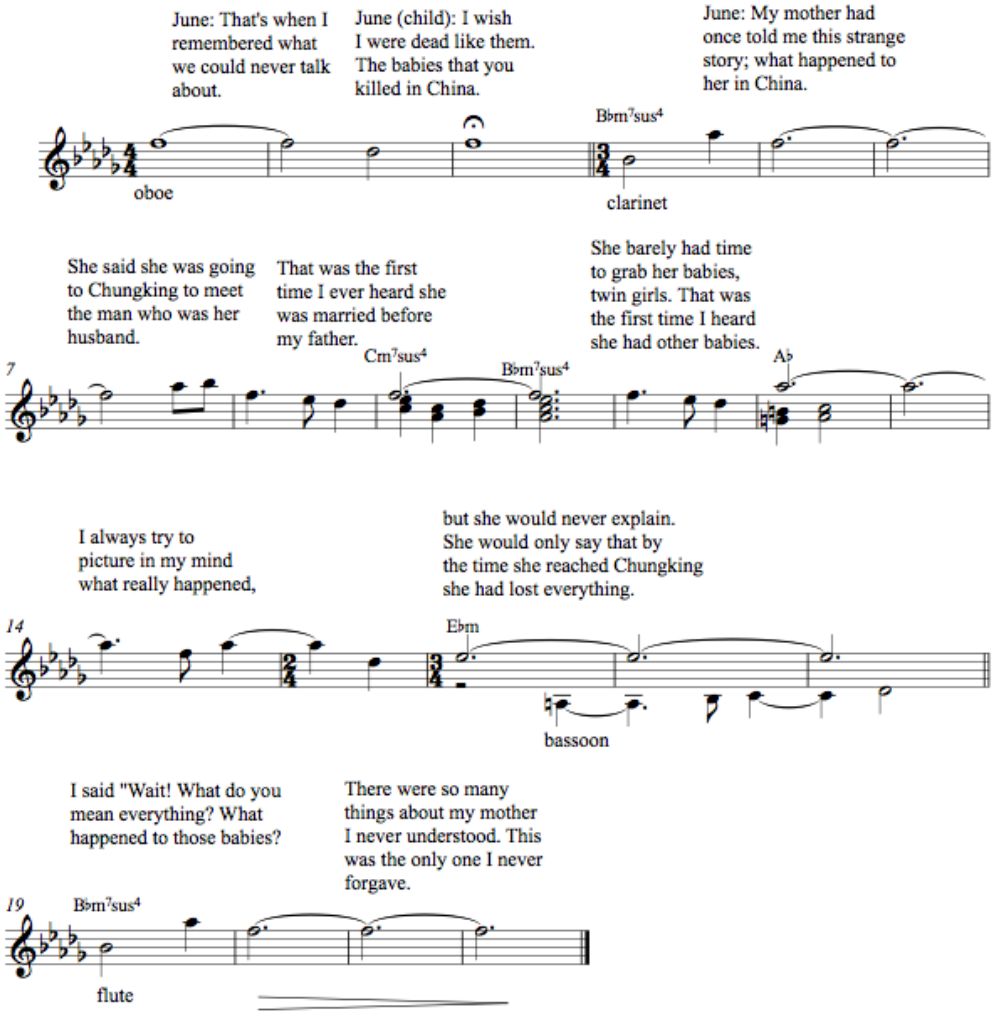
The transition to the talent show in the church basement is accomplished using the accompaniment to Rogers and Hammerstein’s “I Enjoy Being A Girl,” from *Flower Drum Song,* which was popular in the early 1960s since it had been on Broadway in the late 1950s and was made into a film in 1961. Appropriately, it is about the Americanization of a teenage Chinese immigrant. A young girl sings the song as June continues her dialogue above it, but as the monologue ends, the sound level of the singer is increased so that we can hear the text of the last line of the song: “I enjoy being a girl!”[13] This was not the experience of the mothers, and it was certainly not the experience that June was having at that moment.

Soon after the talent show disaster, we find June watching the Monkees, a popular television sitcom in the 1960s. Before June’s mother hauls her off to

practice piano yet again, the last line of the theme can be clearly heard: “we’re the young generation, and we got something to say.”[14] June does have something to say about having to practice piano, and ends the battle with her mother by saying what she knew would cause the greatest pain: “I wish I were dead like them. The babies that you killed in China.” An oboe begins the next music cue playing a downward major third under June’s cutting statement. This creates a foreboding introduction to a varied version of the Hope theme. (example 6.4) June tells what she knows of her mother’s story and the twin babies in China.

June’s mother, Suyuan, had been married in China and had twin daughters. When the Japanese invaded China she was forced to flee with her babies and nothing else. The visual of this scene shows hundreds of people struggling along the road on foot with whatever possessions they were able to carry. Suyuan is shown leaving the babies under a tree, hoping that someone would find them and take them in. She is clearly in distress, but June, recounting the story, doesn’t understand why her mother would do such a thing. This version of the Hope theme is presented by the clarinet in the key of B flat minor, a much darker key than previous statements. The actual theme remains unchanged, but dissonance is added through countermelodies in the violins, except in measure 16 where the bassoon plays a particularly grating countermelody as June says “by the time she reached Chungking she had lost everything.” Tension is increased with an undulating accompanying eighth note figure in the violas on F and G flat. This interval, a minor second, signifies pain, or despair, and low strings are used here adding to the sense of danger and foreboding.[15]

EXAMPLE 6.4 *The Joy Luck Club,* Only two kinds of daughter, by Rachel Portman, *Hollywood Home Entertainment,* 1993.

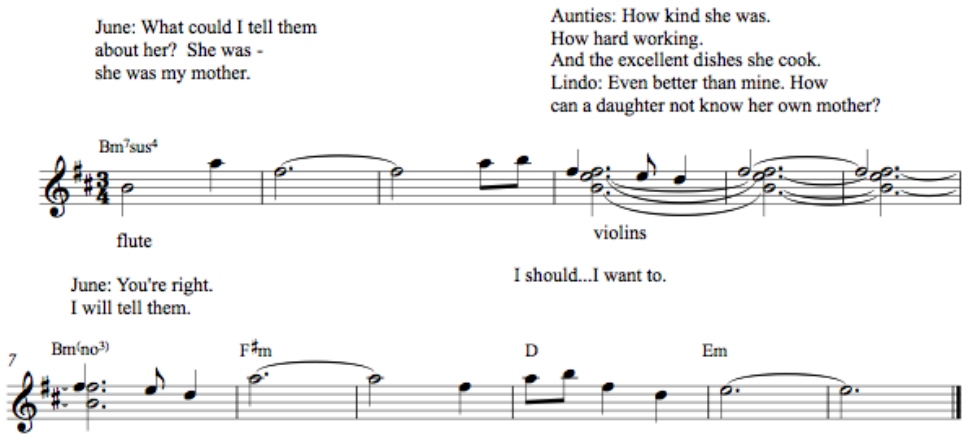


The cue ends with the Hope theme (up a minor seventh, down a minor third) still in the same key, but played by the flute, as the point of view has changed from Suyuan's story, to June's uncertain position. This is a non-final ending indicating that June still has questions and has yet to discover the whole truth. (example 6.4) The Hope theme has several meanings in this scene: the hope that

someone will find the babies; that they will survive; that they will have good lives; and that Suyuan will see them again some day, while the darkness and dissonance suggest the hopelessness of Suyuan's situation and her powerlessness to change it.

The last note of the Hope theme becomes the transition to the next scene with June and her aunties at a church picnic where they corner June and tell her that they have found her twin sisters so she must go to China to meet them. Again, the Hope theme underscores this dialogue, but a more optimistic version, up a minor second to the brighter key of B minor because the babies have been found. This cue reflects June, a modern young American woman so is not played by a traditional Chinese instrument in the old style. It is accompanied by the violins holding a B minor triad, but with suspended fourth which creates a sense of pause while June deliberates over what she should do. The chord resolves to a strong, open perfect fifth or a B minor chord with no third, when she affirms "You're right. I will tell them." (example 6.5) At measure 7 of this example the orchestra provides a lush accompaniment, and a definite ending as June makes a firm decision to go to China and tell her sisters about their mother with the words "I should, I want to."

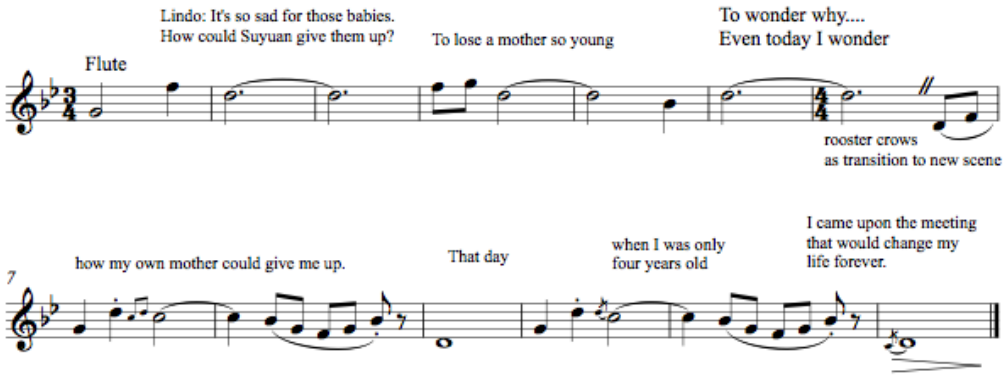
EXAMPLE 6.5 *The Joy Luck Club*, At the picnic, by Rachel Portman, *Hollywood Home Entertainment,* 1993.



At this point the stories of the other mother/daughter pairs begin with Auntie Lindo's story. As she reflects on how her mother could give her up, the diegetic sound of a rooster crowing transports us to a different time and place. The Hope theme begins the cue, but transforms into Lindo's theme. (example 6.6) The Hope theme is transposed down a major third to G minor while Lindo remembers how she was lost to her own mother. A young Lindo, about four years old, appears on the screen as her theme begins. This theme is played by a solo flute representing Lindo, one little girl, with a traditional Chinese plucked string instrument as accompaniment. The use of the flute and the traditional instrument, as well as the pentatonicism of the melody situate us in China at an earlier time. The melody is constructed in a typical manner that signifies a young girl: it has a wide range, short note values, is melismatic in comparison to the Hope theme, and has staccato articulation with added rests, like the running, skipping and hopping of a young child at play. The ascending minor seventh in the Hope theme is

transformed into an ascending perfect fifth, because Lindo is not fully grown yet, at the same time signifying strength as in the Romantic tradition,[16] and the time signature shifts from triple to quadruple time. This theme has a non-final ending because Lindo's story has not finished, it has only just begun.

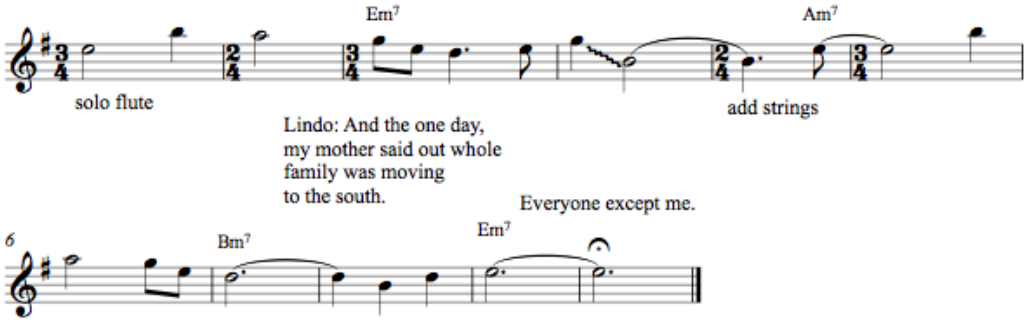
Example 6.6 *The Joy Luck Club,* Lindo's theme, by Rachel Portman, *Hollywood Home Entertainment,* 1993.



When Lindo was four years old her mother had arranged a marriage to the son of a wealthy family in hope of a better life for her. It was agreed that when she was 15 she would leave her family and go to the house of Huang Tai Tai to marry her son. In this scene, the time has arrived and Lindo is taken to meet the driver who will take her to Huang Tai Tai's house. A montage-like scene takes place showing Lindo growing up and being prepared to be the daughter-in-law of Huang Tai Tai, underscored by a melody combining elements of the Hope theme and Lindo's theme, played by the bamboo flute, (example 6.7). Like the Hope theme, it begins with an upward interval, but not a minor seventh, still only a

perfect fifth like Lindo's theme, and falls only a major second, not a minor third. Measures three and four are a loose inversion of measures three to five of the Hope theme in example 6.2. In contrast to the first version of Lindo's theme, this is much slower and because of the shifts in meter, much less stable, reflecting the unknown in Lindo's new home and marriage. The tonal center of Lindo's theme was G, but this has been shifted downwards to E, removing the flats to create a less colorful sound. Together with the narrow range of the melody, minor tonality and addition of low strings in the last four measures, it projects a mood of sadness and at the end, foreboding. The last four bars reinforce the finality of the situation by using dominant to tonic harmony, ending on the tonic in the melody as Lindo says "Everyone except me."

EXAMPLE 6.7 *The Joy Luck Club,* Lindo's moving theme, by Rachel Portman, *Hollywood Home Entertainment*, 1993.



The end of Lindo's life with her family takes place on a winter day in the woods where it is eerily quiet except for the wailing of the wind. There is no music underscoring this scene which creates an atmosphere of coldness and unreality. Fog hangs in the air around trees that have no leaves, the ground is

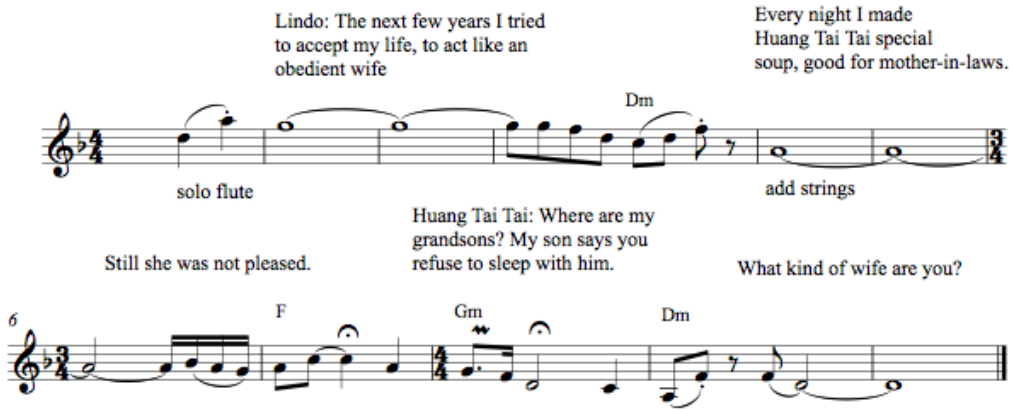
frozen and everything appears grey and bleak. A heart wrenching parting takes place as Lindo leaves with the driver who has come to take her to Huang Tai Tai's house, and her mother runs to the cart where the family has all of their belongings because they are moving to the south, also in hope of a better life. Lindo never sees her mother again.

There is no transition to the next scene, only a cut as abrupt and final as the ending of Lindo's life as she knew it. Suddenly it is Lindo's marriage to a groom whom she has never met. The colorful ceremony is authentically accompanied by traditional Cantonese wedding music and is one of only two instances in the score where percussion is used extensively.[17]

The next music cue begins further into the marriage as Lindo is trying to placate Huang Tai Tai because there are still no grandsons as promised by the matchmaker who arranged the union many years previously. Huang Tai Tai blames Lindo for this situation because her son has lied to his mother to save face, telling her that Lindo refuses his advances, when in actuality there have been none to refuse. Solo flute begins the Obedient wife theme, really a development of Lindo's theme because it retains many of the same motifs. It is presented at a sedate slower tempo, because Lindo is older now, and is trying to be an obedient wife and daughter-in-law. The staccato articulations, upward perfect fifth and wide range remain, but there is less ornamentation. The tonal center has shifted down a perfect fourth showing that she no longer has a "little girl voice." Gradually the melody descends as her situation deteriorates, until it ends with finality an octave lower than it began as Huang Tai Tai asks "What kind of wife

are you?" punctuated by Huang Tai Tai slamming down her soup bowl in frustration. (example 6.8)

EXAMPLE 6.8 *The Joy Luck Club,* Obedient wife theme, by Rachel Portman, *Hollywood Home Entertainment*, 1993.

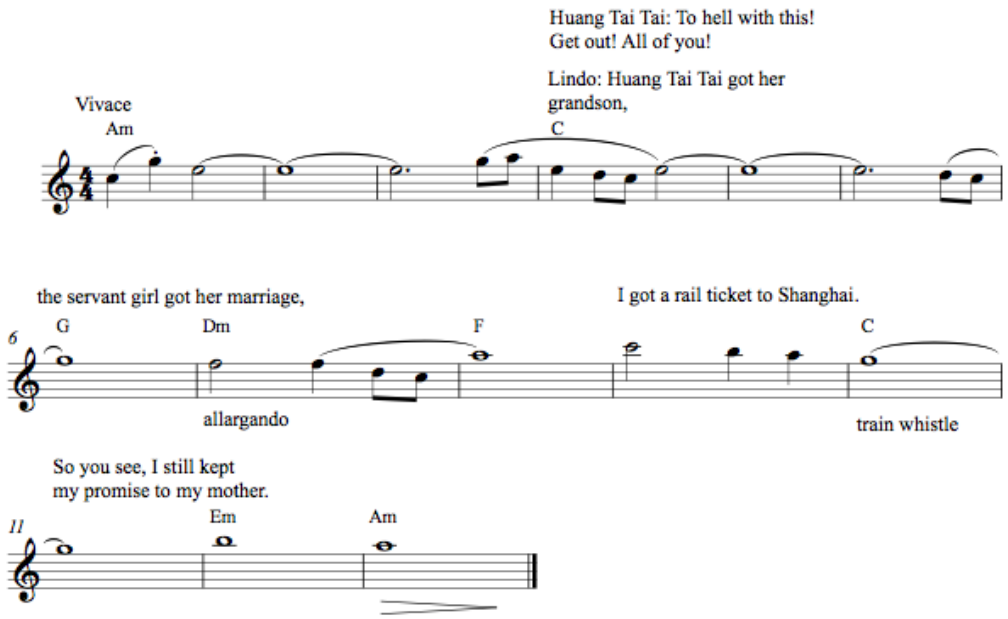


To remove herself from this intolerable situation, Lindo feigns a dream in which the ancestors have told her that terrible things will befall the family if she does not leave: her husband will die, and she will lose all of her teeth. Lindo has overheard a pregnant servant girl unsuccessfully begging the father of the unborn child to marry her, so Lindo, in recounting her dream, also rectifies this situation by identifying the servant girl as the true spiritual wife of Lindo's husband, and amazingly enough the ancestors have already planted his seed in her womb! This is underscored with motifs from the Lindo's theme one tone lower: the strong upward perfect fifth and the staccato articulation, but at a faster tempo, because events are moving quickly now. Here the interval of a perfect fifth gains more

significance, as Lindo shows her strength and courage, becoming heroic and even masculine in that she will not quietly stay and be the obedient wife as women are taught.[18] As the positive results of Lindo's scheme are retold, the melodic motif becomes an ascending sequence, beginning on E as Lindo says "Huang Tai Tai got her grandson," moving up one step to F on "The servant girl got her marriage," and a perfect fifth higher as Lindo declares " I got a rail ticket to Shanghai." A train whistle adds strength to the text, and the note values become longer giving the melody a sense of triumph. Solo flute begins the scene, but the orchestra is added by m.4, and supports the melody until the final cadence. Lindo ends her monologue with "So you see, I still kept my promise to my mother" as the scene closes on a strong dominant to tonic cadence, convincing us that her situation is resolved once and for all. (example 6.9)

Throughout her story, Lindo is dressed in either red or white, while everyone else is in grey or black, her bright color making her stand out as the "other" in the house of Huang Tai Tai where she clearly does not belong. The use of red conveys Lindo's personality; she is smart, strong and resourceful in comparison to those surrounding her. Since in Chinese culture red signifies luck and prosperity, we know that her narrative will have a positive ending.

EXAMPLE 6.9 *The Joy Luck Club*, Lindo's Dream, by Rachel Portman, *Hollywood Home Entertainment,* 1993.



The final chord of the previous scene is interrupted by the ring of a telephone. Lindo, now much older, answers the call which introduces Waverly, her daughter, and Waverly's story. Waverly and Lindo are preparing for Waverly's second marriage, and as they attend to this her story is told through flashbacks.

As a child, Waverly showed a special talent for playing chess, which was publicized at every opportunity by her mother, Lindo. Waverly's first music cue takes place as she and her mother walk down a Chinatown street, Lindo displaying the front cover of Life magazine with Waverly's picture on it. Waverly is embarrassed by her mother's behaviour, and runs away, accompanied by the unmistakable piano introduction to the Chiffon's version of "One Fine Day." On

the surface, this appears to be just a "fun" song, but it holds several layers of meaning, the most obvious being its ability to situate the narrative in 1960s America, and its inference that Waverly is a product of that culture. It is sung by a black American "girl" group who at that time were the "other" like Waverly and Lindo. (example 6.10)

The lyrics express Waverly's wish for Lindo to someday see her as she is, not what Lindo wants her to be, and to be proud of Waverly for being herself. Lindo's wish is that Waverly will realize how much she is loved, that she, Lindo, only wishes the best for her daughter, and that Waverly will not be embarrassed by her "other" Chinese mother.

EXAMPLE 6.10 "One Fine Day" by Gerry Goffin and Carole King, *Screen Gems-EMI Music, Inc.,* 1963.

One fine day,
you'll look at me,
And you will know our love was
Meant to be,
One fine day,
You're gonna want me for your girl.

The arms I long for,
Will open wide,
And you'll be proud to have me,
Right by your side.
One fine day,
You're gonna want me for your girl.

I'll be waiting,
And someday darling,
You'll come to me when you want to settle down.

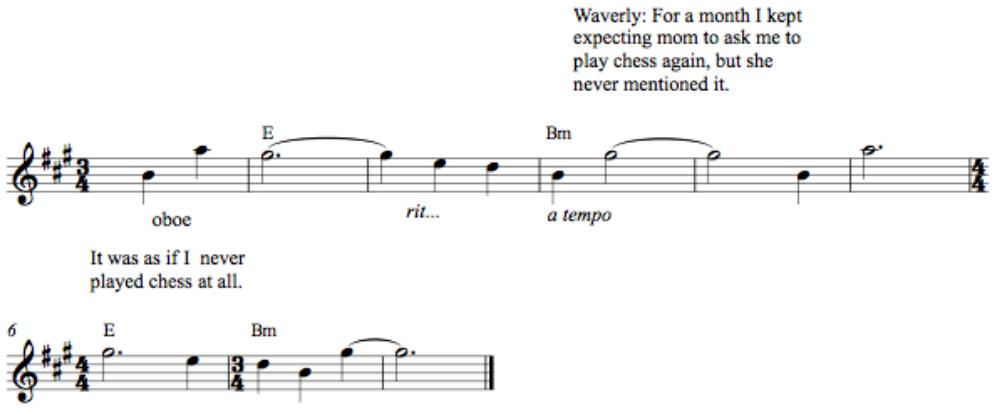
One fine day,
We'll meet once more,
And then you'll want the love you
Threw away before,
One fine day,
You're gonna want me for your girl.

Upon returning home after the argument, Waverly informs her mother that she will never play chess again, followed by Waverly's theme. (example 6.11) This theme has the sound of a minor diatonic Western key, with no acknowledgement of ethnicity. Portman uses Western orchestral instruments to represent Waverly, the American girl. Large ascending leaps are featured, beginning with the minor seventh leap of the Hope theme which does not fall a minor third, but creates angst by falling only a minor second.[19] In measures four and seven, dissonance is created by the addition of the G sharp to the B minor chord, making it a Bm6. This chord, the minor modality, dissonance, prominence of the descending minor second, shifting time signature and slow tempo all serve to convey a sense of unhappiness, and instability. This is heightened by the "edgy" sound of the oboe which plays the theme supported by sustained notes in the high strings. The ending of Waverly's theme is inconclusive because of the dissonance of the final chord, as is her decision never to play chess again.

As is suspected, due to the lack of finality of this cue, Waverly announces that she would like to play chess again, but is undermined by her mother's words "you think it is so easy?" and consequently loses her prowess in the game, finally

giving it up altogether. Accompanying this is a continuation of the previous theme, still with an inconclusive ending because the situation between Waverly and her mother has yet to be resolved.

EXAMPLE 6.11 *The Joy Luck Club,* Waverly's theme, by Rachel Portman, *Hollywood Home Entertainment,* 1993.

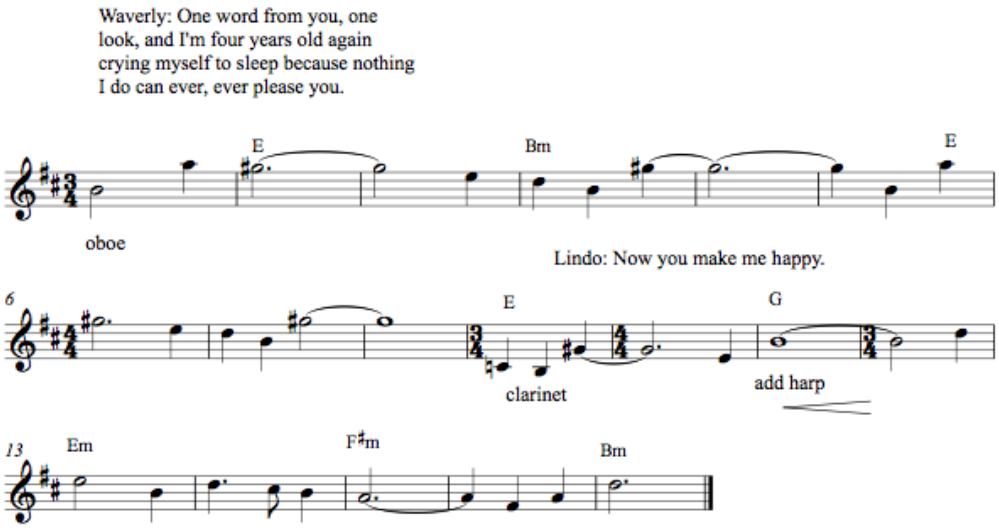


The narrative returns to preparations for Waverly's wedding, which includes a trip to the beauty salon to get Lindo's hair done. After their usual verbal sparring, Lindo expresses her previous sentiment "She is ashamed to be my daughter" leading to a flashback with her own mother and the preparations that they made for her arranged marriage. The Hope theme returns as the underscoring, played by the bamboo flute, first accompanied by a pedal tone in the strings, then counter melodies in the viola and cello, the flute situating the scene in China in an earlier time. The final cadence is D minor to A minor, or subdominant to tonic harmony, but is not a convincing ending because the tonic is

not in the melody, indicating that Lindo and Waverly still must resolve their differences.

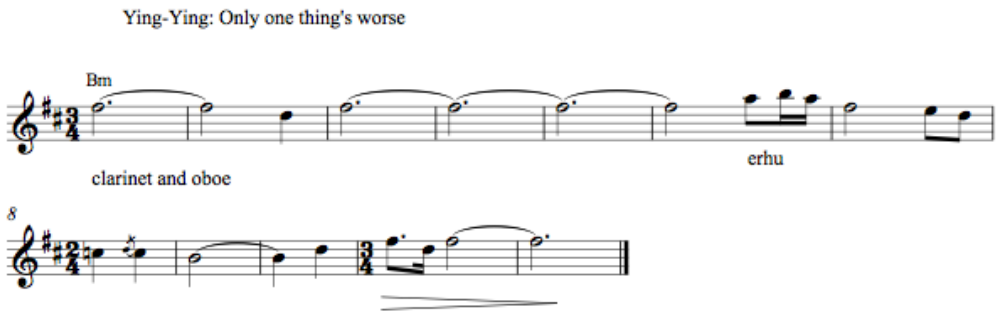
Upon returning to the present, Waverly voices her feelings accompanied by her theme. (example 6.12) At m. 10, when Lindo tells Waverly "Now you make me happy" a new mood is ushered in by the warmer sound of the clarinet taking over the melody from the oboe, less dissonant harmony and a shift to major modality. The orchestra enters with a crescendo to m. 13, reinforcing the strong emotions between mother and daughter. The last four bars return to a motif from the Hope theme before conclusively ending on a dominant to tonic cadence signaling that Waverly and Lindo have finally resolved their differences.

EXAMPLE 6.12 *The Joy Luck Club,* Lindo gets her hair done, by Rachel Portman, *Hollywood Home Entertainment,* 1993.



The last strains of the final chord of Waverly and Lindo's resolution create a transition returning us to June's going away party. From the party Auntie Ying-Ying's flashback to her earlier life in China is begun by the oboe and clarinet, but continued by the *ehru*, the use of which indicates the time and location. (example 6.13) Ying-Ying is a young girl of 16, as is shown by the ornamentation in the melodic line, but there is an unusual erotic chromaticism in measure eight, foreshadowing the sexual relationship upon which she is about to embark. During this underscoring Ying-Ying encounters her future husband for the first time. A huge knife slices violently through a watermelon, the pink juicy flesh is ripped out, and the perpetrator of this act proceeds to suggestively eat this handful of dripping watermelon flesh. Ying-Ying feigns disgust, but secretly she is clearly intrigued. The descending major third at the beginning of the theme, followed by the descending melodic line warn that this will be a dangerous situation.

EXAMPLE 6.13 *The Joy Luck Club,* Ying-Ying's theme, by Rachel Portman, *Hollywood Home Entertainment,* 1993.

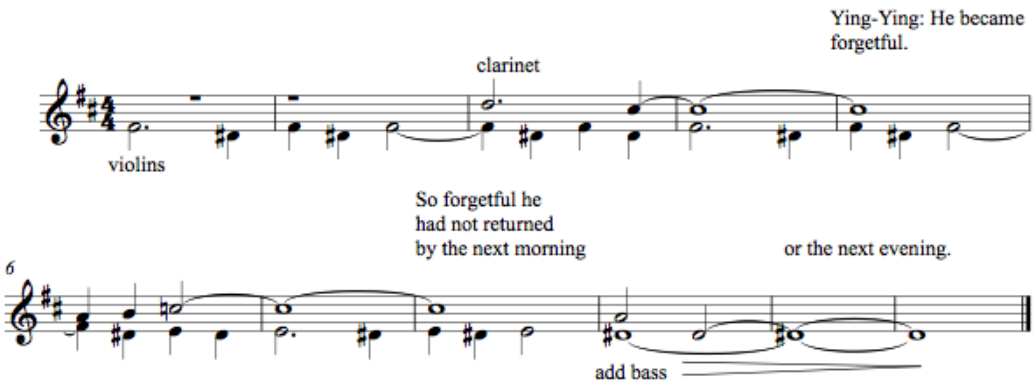


A diegetic musical cue underscores the next event in the relationship between Ying-Ying and her future husband, as they dance a steamy tango at a local night club where the young man has clearly visited before. This is in the form of a song known as "Ye Lai Xiang," or in English as "Scent of the Night," by Lee Lai Kwang and James Wong, and is sung by a female singer in Cantonese, accompanied by a Chinese version of a tango orchestra consisting of strings, accordion and *ehru.*[20] The scene ends with the consummation of the relationship on the stage in the empty ballroom, and cuts quickly to the baptismal ceremony of their new son.

Ying-Ying waits for her husband to come home for dinner, but he does not arrive for two days, because he is out womanizing. The baby cries and she waits hour after hour. As the tension mounts, she becomes increasingly disturbed by the situation, and begins her descent into madness. The clarinet mirrors this, beginning with a descending minor third, continuing chromatically until ending with a large downward leap to a low G sharp. The high strings provide a dissonant and unsettling background, similar to the viola figure used in Suyuan's journey to Chungking. (example 6.14)

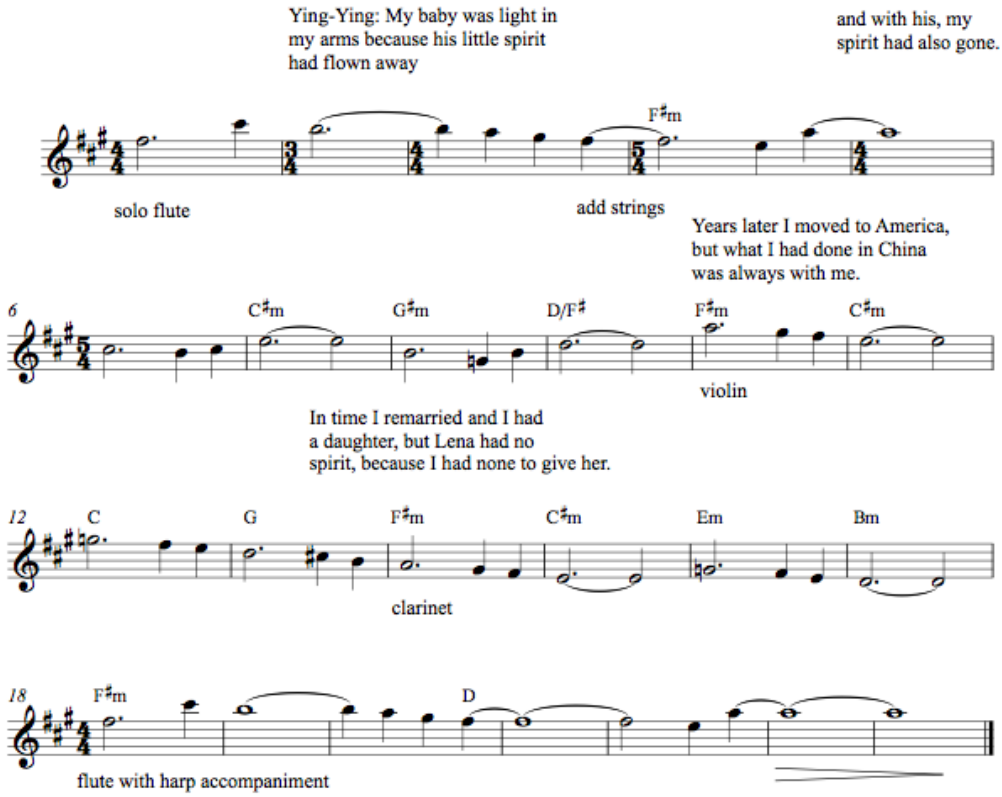
When her husband finally arrives home, he has brought a prostitute with him. He shows the woman his baby, and lets her hold him while Ying-Ying watches in horror, until she can tolerate it no more. She threatens him with a piece of broken china, he calls her a whore, beats her and throws her to the floor, at which point she resolves to get revenge in the only way she knows how.

EXAMPLE 6.14 *The Joy Luck Club,* Ying-Ying waits, by Rachel Portman, *Hollywood Home Entertainment,* 1993.



As the couple retreat to the bedroom, Ying-Ying retreats to the bathroom where she drowns the baby, her husband's pride and joy, accompanied by "My mind kept repeating a single thought – he had taken from me my innocence, my youth, my heart, everything." This is followed by a musical cue played by the flute and accompanied by the violins, the basis of which is another descending sequence, beginning in m. 11 and repeating five times like a single thought. The melody begins with an ascending leap of a perfect fifth, followed by a descending major second, a symbol of despair, accompanying the text "My baby was light in my arms because his little spirit had flown away." The high tessitura of this line and the use of the flute signify the baby's spirit flying away.

EXAMPLE 6.15 *The Joy Luck Club*, Ying-Ying's revenge, by Rachel Portman, *Hollywood Home Entertainment*, 1993.



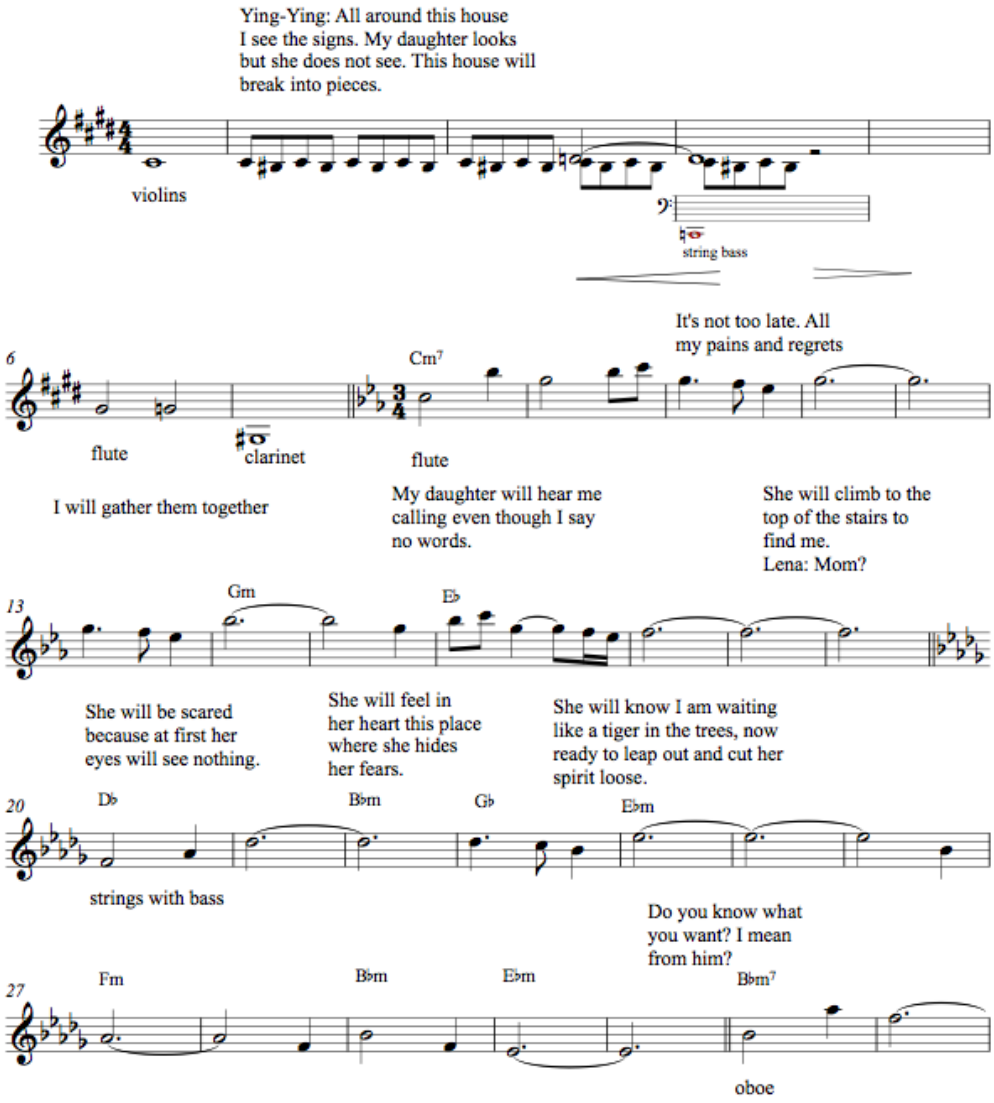
Previously, the ascending perfect fifth was used in Lindo's theme, and in this case could also represent Ying-Ying's childhood and innocence while the descending major second signifies the madness caused by the violation of these.[21] This melodic idea returns at the end of the cue when by this time the location has transitioned to America; Ying-Ying sits in a chair in a catatonic state, as her teenage daughter brings her a tray of food. (example 6.15) As Ying-Ying says "but Lena had no spirit, because I had none to give her" the clarinet takes over the descending melody in a lower range in contrast to the flute at the beginning

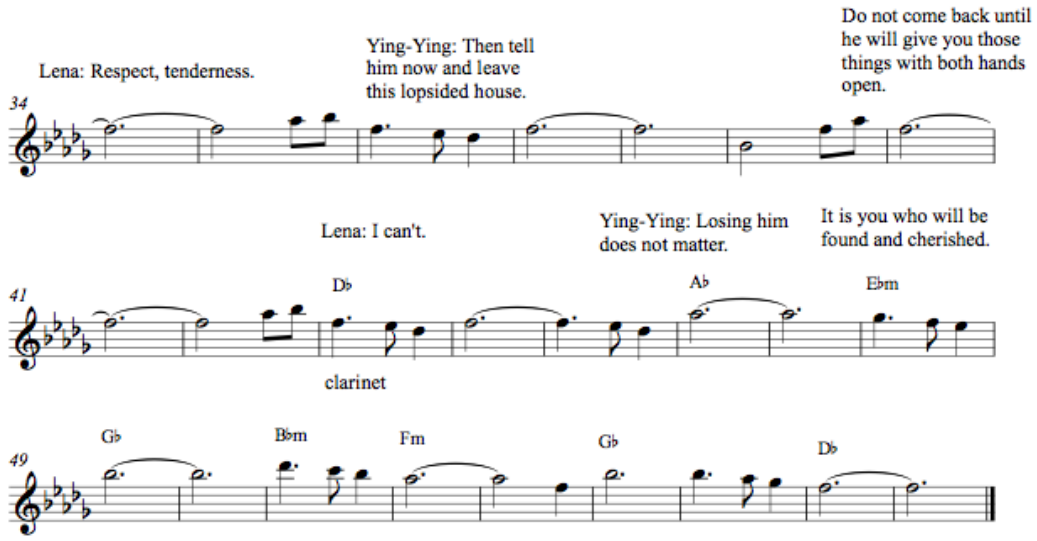
referencing the baby's spirit flying away. The ending is inconclusive, because there is no return to the tonal center; Ying-Ying's situation is not resolved.

Over time, Ying-Ying recovers and is visiting the new home of Lena and her husband. It is apparent that the relationship between Lena and her husband is unhappy because Lena's husband is condescending and miserly. As Ying-Ying is preparing for bed, she is reminded of her own first marriage to what she calls a "bad man." The underscoring begins with strings, including the low strings as well, growing like a whirling vortex and ending with a downward leap of a diminished octave, while she relives events from her past: the watermelon, the first sexual encounter, and the drowning baby, climaxing with the broken china which magically transforms into a broken vase of purple irises in the present. Slowly the clarinet enters, moving from the key of C sharp minor to the softer C minor, with the Hope theme, like a Phoenix rising from the ashes of her unhappy past. As Ying-Ying becomes more determined and optimistic, the underscoring reinforces this by shifting to major harmonies, finally arriving at the key of D flat major. A new theme is introduced as Ying-Ying realizes that if she is strong enough she can help her daughter. Lena, in an unhappy state, enters the room having just confronted her husband. Her melancholy mood is reinforced by a temporary shift to minor mode. The Hope theme returns, creating a ternary form, this time the melody played by the oboe as Lena enters the dialogue. When Lena speaks "I can't" the theme is taken over by the clarinet, as if in her voice, but Ying-Ying finishes the dialogue on a positive note with "it is you who will be found and cherished." The positive sentiments are reinforced by a rising sequence

using the motif from m. 36, continuing until reaching a final ending in the key of D flat major. (example 6.16) Ying-Ying has found the strength to help her daughter, and Lena has found the strength to end her unhappy marriage.

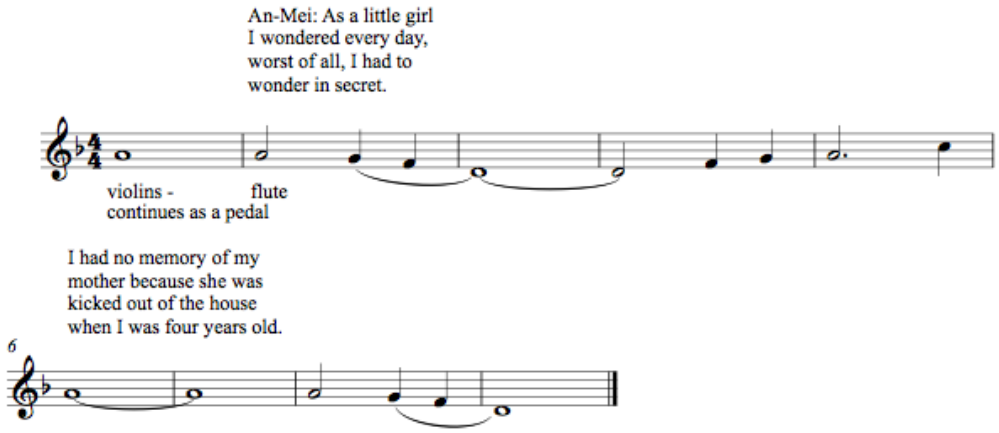
EXAMPLE 6.16 The Joy Luck Club, Lena, by Rachel Portman, Hollywood Home Entertainment, 1993.





Auntie An-mei and her daughter Rose are the final mother/daughter pair to tell their stories. An-mei begins to tell the story of her childhood before the visual transition occurs, and is accompanied by the final chord of Lena and Ying-Ying's scene. An-mei's theme is introduced by the flute with a supporting violin pedal tone. This is a static theme with a narrow range and only one ascending leap of a minor third, different from the other "young girl" themes, because An-mei, unlike the others, does not know her mother, or have any memory of her. She is even encouraged to hate her mother by her grandmother, aunts and uncles, and is trapped in a constant state of wondering. An-mei's theme is pentatonic, with no chromaticism as An-mei has no conflict to resolve. The use of bamboo flute returns the narrative to an earlier time in China. Only part of the first phrase returns as the last phrase leaving an unfinished melody and inconclusive ending. How could there be an ending when her life has hardly begun? (example 6.17)

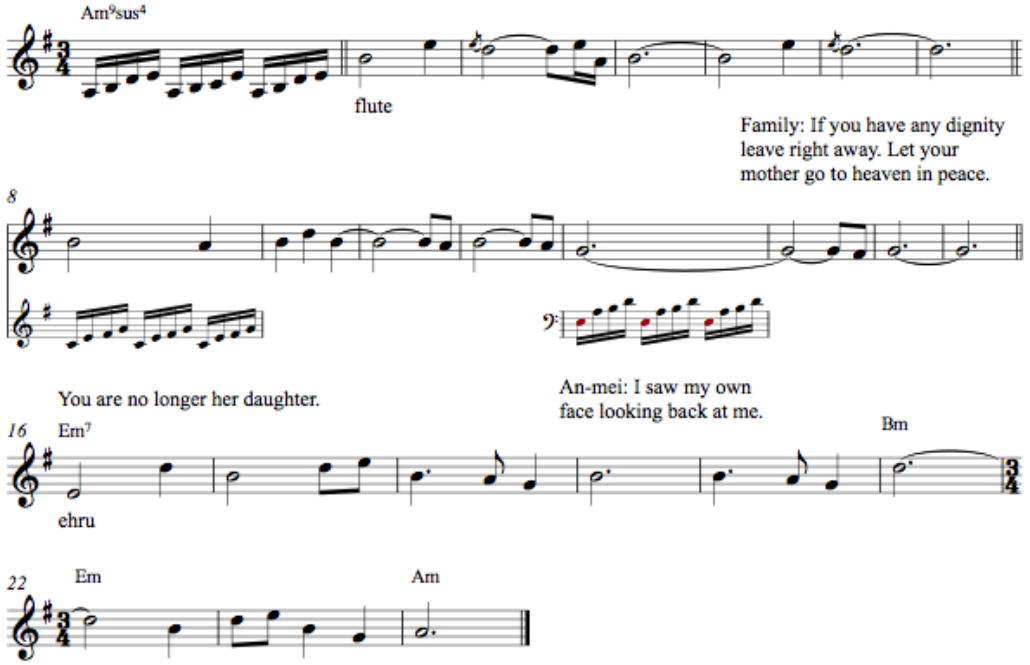
EXAMPLE 6.17 *The Joy Luck Club,* An-Mei's theme, by Rachel Portman, *Hollywood Home Entertainment,* 1993.



All that An-mei knows of her mother is what has been told to her by her family; that her mother ran away to marry a rich man who already had several wives, breaking her vows as a widow. As she narrates, a new musical cue begins conveying a sense of excitement and expectation as the harp plays a four note figure based on a suspended chord. The flute enters with a melody that, with its intervals of perfect fourths, fifths and ornamentation indicate a traditional Chinese family. These strong traditional values of An-mei's family shape her story more than those of the other mothers, as will be evidenced as her tale unfolds. A second segment of the melody begins with a similar accompaniment, but based on a new suspended chord. It has a range of only a minor sixth, and several lengthy notes, enhancing the state of suspension created by the accompaniment, while waiting for further developments on the screen. A pair of high heel shoes on feet wearing nylon stockings, and a suitcase appear on the screen, and gradually the camera

shows a smartly dressed woman in the doorway. The *ehru* plays the Hope theme to an accompaniment of violins and harp playing a lower four note figure similar to the previous ones while An-mei and the woman stare at each other. It is like looking in a mirror for An-mei because this is her mother who has come home to see her own mother (An-mei's grandmother) who is dying.

EXAMPLE 6.18 *The Joy Luck Club*, An-Mei and her mother, by Rachel Portman, *Hollywood Home Entertainment,* 1993.

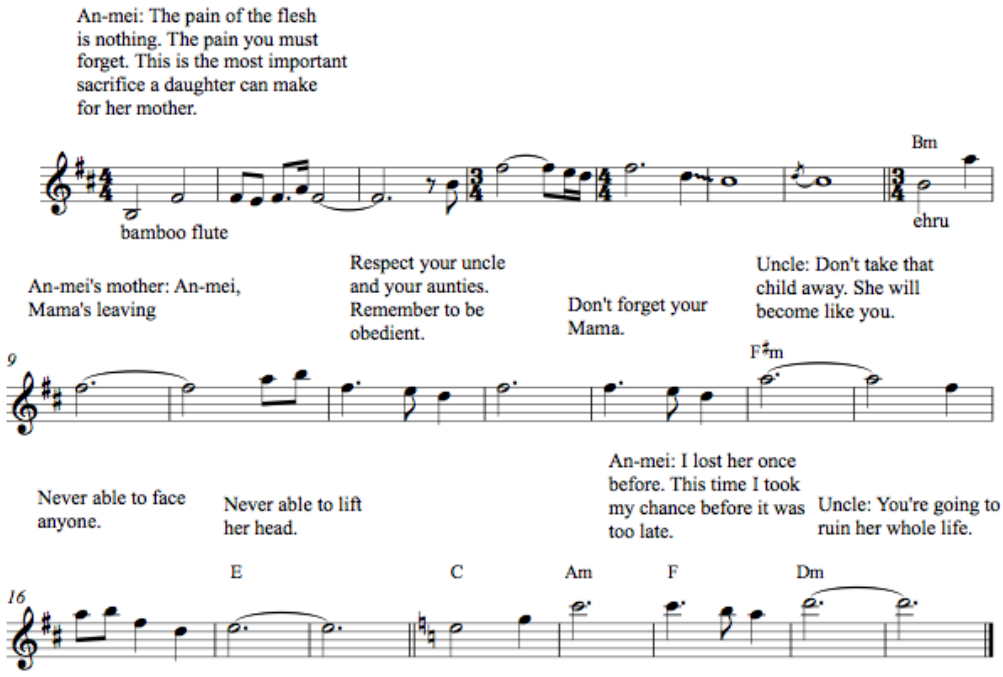


The appearance of the Hope theme implies that An-mei and her mother will have the relationship that each had hoped for. The ending has dominant to tonic harmony creating a final close to this section, because An-mei has finally met her

mother, and does not have to wonder any longer, while An-mei's mother is with her daughter who she had hoped to see again. (example 6.18)

An old Chinese tradition dictates that dutiful daughters bear the pain of putting their own flesh in a soup to save their mother's lives, which An-mei's mother does even though her mother has disowned her. It is the most important sacrifice that a daughter can make for her mother. The musical cue begins with the line "the pain of the flesh is nothing" played by the bamboo flute. Again, the underscoring uses the *ehru* and flute to reinforce the signification of the importance of tradition in this family. The ascending interval of a perfect fifth and ornamentation in mm. 5-7 also support this, particularly indicating An-mei's traditional grandmother. The theme begins in a low register of the flute, and is then repeated in the next octave as the grandmother will soon be rising to heaven. The D is bent downward to the C sharp in mm. 5 and 6 resembling a wail caused by her death. (example 6.19) A slow, sad version of the Hope theme played by the *ehru* reappears as the film cuts to the next scene in which An-mei's mother prepares to return to her home, reminding An-mei not to forget her. An-mei has no intention of forgetting her mother, so even though her aunts and uncles advise against this because she will be in danger of becoming like her mother, An-mei leaves with her. An optimistic E major chord ends this section (m. 17), and the whole orchestra swells to a return of mm. 28-31 of the introductory statement of the Hope theme, (example 6.2) up a minor second in C major. This finishes with an abrupt F major to D minor non-final harmony, because this story is still only partially told.

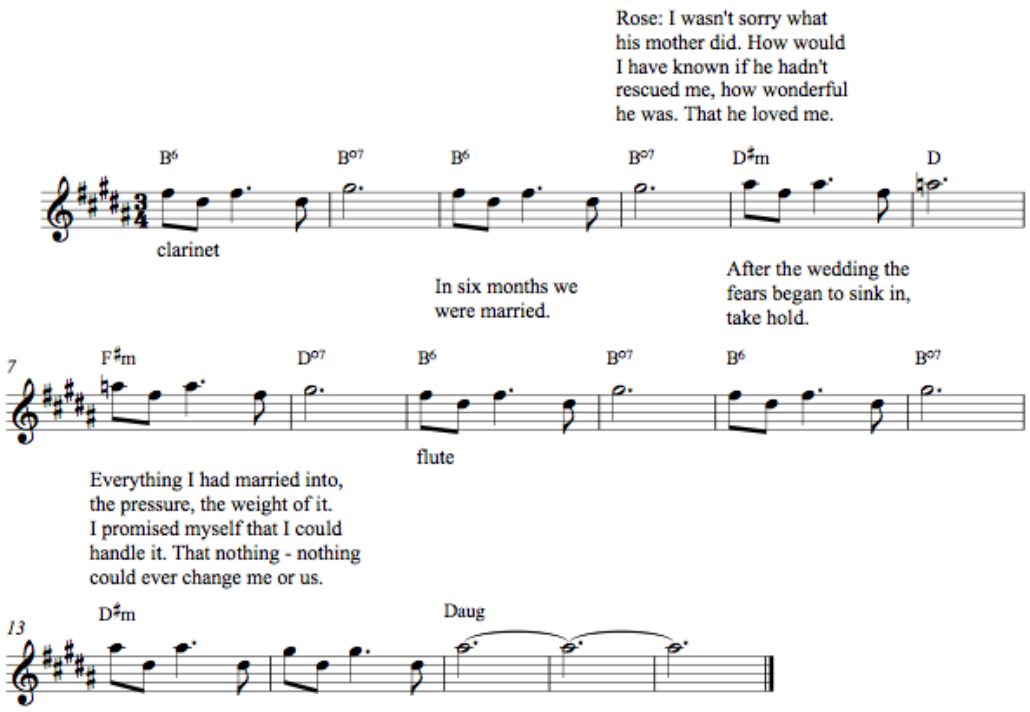
EXAMPLE 6.19 *The Joy Luck Club,* Soup theme, by Rachel Portman, *Hollywood Home Entertainment,* 1993.



The narrative is returned to the present time in the parking lot of a grocery store where An-mei's daughter Rose has just purchased peanut butter in order to make a chocolate peanut butter pie, the favorite of her soon to be ex-husband Ted. The film cuts to their first date, when Rose made this pie for Ted, and then to a garden party at Ted's parents' estate where the Andantino from Mozart's Flute and Harp Concerto in C, K.299 is playing diegetically in the background. As stated in Ronald Rodman's comparison of two car commercials, the use of classical music as an underscoring conveys a feeling of wealth, luxury, power and

upper class.[22] It also associates the classical qualities of structure and rigidity, which contrast with the seeming unconventionality Rose's career as an artist, and Rose and Ted's relationship. Ted's mother expresses her disapproval of the possibility of a "mixed" marriage in the family, especially "as Viet Nam was so unpopular." Rose is provided with the opportunity to affirm the fact that she is not Vietnamese, but American. Ted is appalled at his mother, leaving immediately with Rose, and cutting to a romantic scene where Rose and Ted are having coffee while holding hands across the table, against a sunset over the San Francisco bay. Rose's theme, a romantic reminiscence of a French bistro, underscores this beginning on clarinet with violin accompaniment. The melody, in B major, alternates between ascending and descending minor thirds, ending in an ascending perfect fourth harmonized with a B diminished seventh harmony. It is repeated at the same pitch, re-harmonized and then in sequence up a major third and a minor third. As Rose says "in six months we were married," the original version returns providing a sense of well being, but is followed in m. 13 by a shift up a major third, and widening intervals, harmonized with a D sharp minor chord and then a D augmented chord. These dissonant, unstable harmonies and the widening melodic intervals transmit a sense of unease and foreboding as Rose recounts the pressure and responsibility of her marriage. The ending is incomplete as the story is just beginning. (example 6.20)

EXAMPLE 6.20 *The Joy Luck Club*, Rose's theme, by Rachel Portman, *Hollywood Home Entertainment,* 1993.

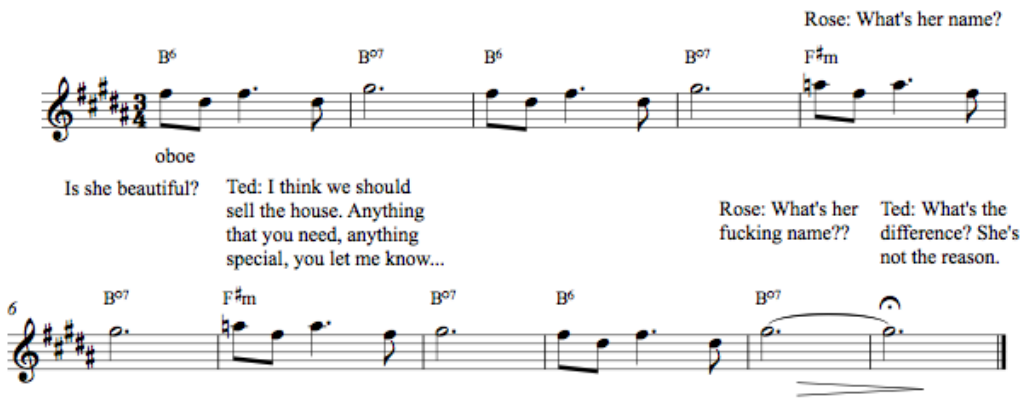


In contrast to the diegetic Mozart Flute and Harp Concerto used to underscore the garden party at Ted's parents' estate, jazz played by a trio of piano, bass and drums underscores the cocktail party at Rose and Ted's. This highlights the difference between the two generations, further affirms Rose's Americanism, and indicates that they are younger, affluent, and less conventional. However, Rose and Ted's marriage deteriorates as Rose easily falls into the Chinese wife's subservient role of pleasing her husband. Ted is not happy with this change because he loved the old self-assured, independent, American Rose.

Rose's theme is used to underscore the possible end of the marriage when Ted has told Rose that he is having and affair and wants to leave her.

The scene begins with a shot of Rose and Ted's garden in the autumn with dead leaves covering the ground on a gloomy, rainy day. The lawn chairs around a patio table are in disarray implying desolation, and the broken relationship. The oboe, accompanied by violins, plays Rose's theme, this time as Rose, her face reflected in a rain-streaked window asks "What's her name?" "Is she beautiful?"

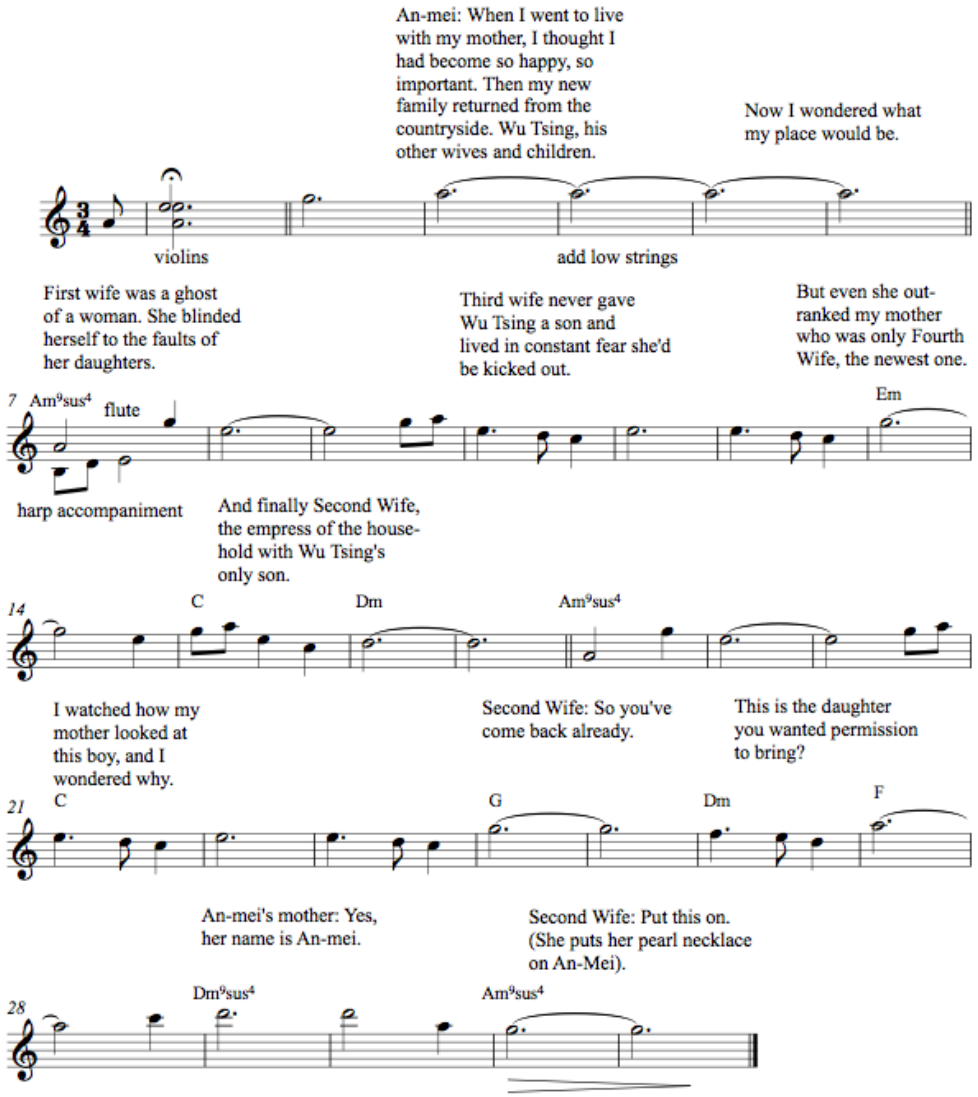
EXAMPLE 6.21 *The Joy Luck Club,* What's her name? by Rachel Portman, *Hollywood Home Entertainment,* 1993.



Receiving no response to her question, only Ted's concern regarding the division of their belongings, she asks much more forcefully. This repetition of the question is reinforced by the repetition of the central motif of the theme in the original version and in sequence. An indefinite ending is created by finishing on a diminished seventh chord that must be resolved to reach a sense of completion, just like Rose and Ted's conflict. (example 6.21)

An-mei returns the narrative to her childhood by comparing Rose to her mother; neither of them knowing what they are worth. The underscoring begins with an ascending perfect fifth followed by an open perfect fifth chord on harp and violins, as An-mei and her mother have returned to An-Mei's mother's home and are preparing to greet Wu Tsing, her husband, and the other family members on their return from a holiday in the country. As An-mei says "I thought I had become so happy, so important" on the screen a man's foot is shown stepping out of a car. The bass is ominously added to the high instruments while Wu Tsing, the owner of the foot, and husband of An-mei's mother is the focus of the narrative.[23] The Hope theme returns at measure 7 accompanying An-mei's description of the other wives and children of the household, as these mothers also have hopes for their children. When she reaches the son of the second wife, the harmony changes from A minor to C major, and An-mei says "I watched how my mother looked at this boy and I wondered why." Major harmony is traditionally used to represent the masculine, but this shift has two purposes, the second is to indicate An-mei's mother's positive feelings for the boy. The Hope theme is stated twice, the second time using a rising sequence based on mm. 22 and 23 of the introductory statement of the Hope theme, (example 6.2), until reaching a cadence as Second Wife gives An-mei a string of pearls. This is a non-final ending with the seventh of the harmony in the melody, as there are further developments yet to be told in this story. (example 6.22)

EXAMPLE 6.22 *The Joy Luck Club,* An-Mei meets her new family, by Rachel Portman, *Hollywood Home Entertainment,*1993.



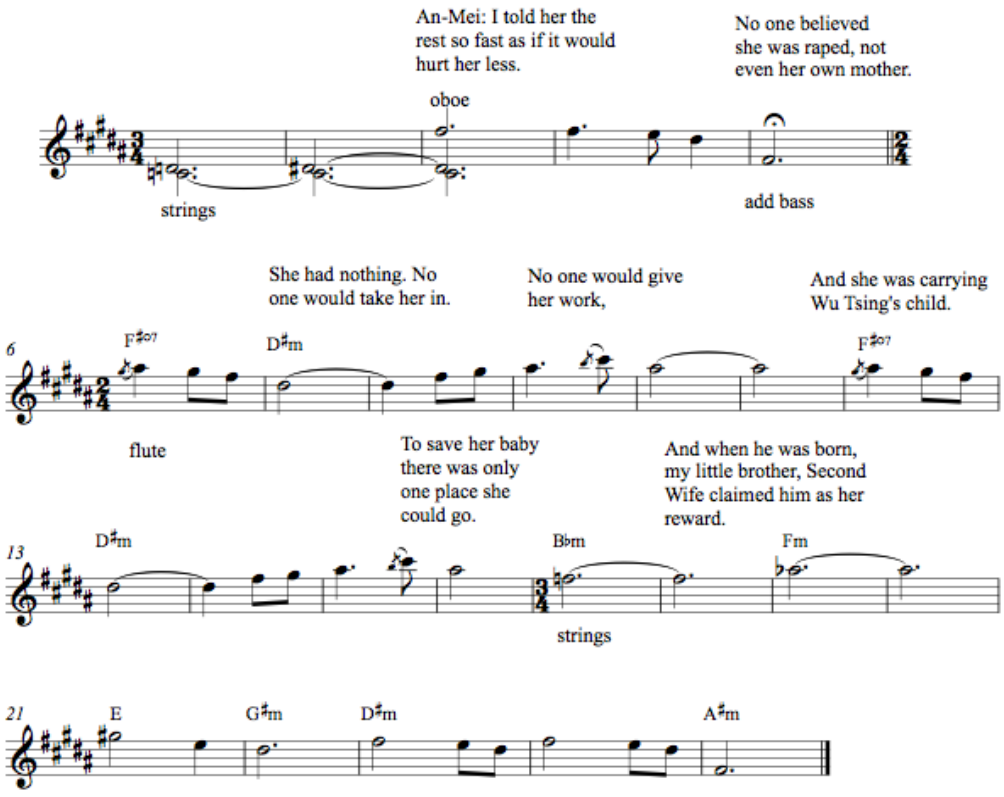
Before long, An-mei learns the truth about her mother's situation from her nanny. Wu Tsing first saw An-mei's mother when she was at a Buddhist temple making offerings in memory of her dead husband, An-mei's father. To gain

Wu Tsing's favor, Second Wife invited An-mei's mother to their home to play mah jong, the visit requiring An-mei's mother to spend the night. After she had gone to bed, Wu Tsing came to her room and raped her, causing her to become pregnant with his child. Her own mother would not believe that she had been raped and disowned her, leaving her with no work and nowhere to go. Wu Tsing agreed to take her in and make her his fourth wife, no better than a concubine. When the baby was born, An-mei's little brother, Second Wife claimed him as hers as her reward for her part in the conspiracy, raising her status in the house as the only wife to provide Wu Tsing with a son.

The underscoring for An-mei's mother's mistreatment begins as An-mei says "I told her the rest so fast, as if it would hurt her less," with dissonance in the violins, and the oboe playing a theme resembling Lena's theme with the downward leap of a diminished octave combined with the motif from m. 4 of the Hope theme. The bass is added to the downward leap to strengthen the implication of the pain and suffering caused to An-mei's mother by Wu Tsing, as the rape is shown on the screen. Underscoring An-mei's monologue, the bamboo flute plays a new melody, still with the same tonal center as the previous themes belonging to Rose and An-mei. The use of the bamboo flute, and ornamentation of the melodic material return the narrative to an earlier time in rural China with strict cultural codes. It clearly conveys the anguish and hopelessness felt by An-mei's mother with its slow tempo and descending melodic motif. This is followed by a short ascending motif and falling minor third, then a repeat of the previous six measures. The harmony is first an F sharp diminished seventh chord, which

signifies pain and suffering, and then a D sharp minor chord, reinforcing the sentiment.[24] The harmony, now played by the strings, shifts abruptly to B flat minor and then to F minor in mm. 17-20, reaching E major in measure 21 as if to emphasize the birth of An-mei's brother.

EXAMPLE 6.23 *The Joy Luck Club*, The rape, by Rachel Portman, *Hollywood Home Entertainment,* 1993.



A new melodic idea appears at m. 21, again descending, played by the clarinet in m. 23. To emphasize the tragedy of her life, the motif in m. 23 is immediately restated ending in a descending major sixth. After the initial five measures

underscoring the rape, the bass disappears from the accompaniment, except to punctuate the G sharp minor chord in m. 22 and the descending major sixth at the end, representing Wu Tsing who only enters An-Mei's mother's life long enough to do her harm.

The final chord is not the tonic, consequently the section has no sense of finality, but the minor mode emphasizes the negative, foreshadowing the next scene in which An-mei's mother has eaten many opium-laced sticky, sweet dumplings in order to kill herself and her own weak spirit to give An-mei a stronger one.

The funeral scene is accompanied by the diegetic sound of Taoist monks chanting, accompanied by a wood block and triangle. At the funeral, An-mei stands alone by the body of her mother facing Wu Tsing, the other wives and their children. She pulls her little brother away from them to stand with her and says "My mother's ghost will return in three days to settle scores. That will be the Lunar New Year and all debts must be paid by then, or horrible tragedies will befall you." An-mei's mother had chosen the date of her death to give An-mei power over her enemies. Wu Tsing immediately asks Buddha to forgive him, and promises to revere An-mei's mother as if she were his first wife, and to raise An-mei and her brother as his honored children, the highest position.

The Taoist chant ends and An-mei's words "And on that day I learned to shout" make the transition from her childhood to the present where she needs to help her own daughter Rose reclaim her voice before it is too late. This dialogue is underscored by a return of Waverly's theme, played by the oboe, used when she

lost her voice and was no longer able to play chess. The central motif is repeated by the clarinet, and then moves to a new section with a suspended chord in the violins creating uncertainty as we wait for the resolution of the dissonance and wonder if Rose will in fact, regain her voice. This dissonance is the transition to the next scene where Rose is no longer looking out of the window at the rain, because she has decided to participate rather than observe, and is now sitting outside in the rain. The oboe plays the Hope theme as Ted asks Rose if she is OK, and Rose tells Ted to leave, accompanied by the clarinet. The motif from m. 4 of the introductory Hope theme, (example 6.2), is the basis for the next section of underscoring, played by the *ehru* as Rose talks about her grandmother, ending with "now get out of my house!" The theme switches back to the oboe at a lower tonal center with minor harmony as she explains that she was the one who implied that she wasn't good enough. Five measures of the Hope theme end this scene, but not convincingly, as the Hope theme hints that something more positive will conclude this story. A transition is made returning to the party where Rose and Ted are a happy couple once again, and have resolved their differences.

The only remaining relationship yet to be resolved is that of June and her mother, Suyuan, which cannot be resolved as the other mother/daughter pairs have settled their differences because Suyuan has died. To accomplish a resolution of their differences, June and Suyuan must come to an understanding through flashbacks in two separate scenes. The first flashback is to New Years dinner the year before, where June is insulted by Waverly and mistakenly believes that Suyuan has supported Waverly's position. While cleaning up the dishes, June

confronts her mother who affirms that she never expected things from June, only hoped for the best for her. The Hope theme underscores this dialogue beginning from m. 10 of the introductory version (example 6.2), the melody in the violins. The accompaniment is only violins until Suyuan tells June that she does really see her for who she is, at which point the whole orchestra swells creating an emotional peak. Harp and oboe are added in the last few bars to reinforce the cadence, the oboe returning to the rhythmic motive of m.4 of the introductory Hope theme, releasing the tension created by the intensity of the situation. The melody ends with a triumphant ascending perfect fifth, an interval indicating a positive outcome.[25] The final chord reinforces the happy conclusion to their differences in a final cadence.

Waverly's theme returns once more as June addresses the aunties as the going away party ends, telling them how much they mean to her. It is begun by the oboe and repeated by the clarinet, ending with an incomplete cadence, as there is another issue that must be dealt with. As June cleans up after the party, she discovers Auntie Lindo sitting at the table, who then reveals the fact that the twin sisters who June is about to meet in China think that Suyuan is the one who will be coming. June will have to tell them that their mother is dead.

As June prepares to leave for China, her father facilitates the resolution of Suyuan and June's relationship. As a substitute for Suyuan, he produces the swan feather and gives it to June, telling her that her mother could not because she was unworthy, as she had lost hope for her twin daughters in China. There can be no music accompanying this because Suyuan had lost all hope. June's father then

provides June with the missing piece of information that she needs to understand her mother and forgive her for leaving her babies under a tree long ago in China.

The visual returns to the road in China where Suyuan is fleeing from the Japanese, pushing her babies in a wheelbarrow amidst a crowd of others also escaping the Japanese. The viola/cello motif from the first scene on the road accompanies the harmony of the Hope theme, but the melody is absent, because at that moment it was not possible to have hope. The clarinet presents a brief new melodic idea, followed by the Hope theme played by the trumpet; the first time in the score that a brass instrument has been prominent. It conveys a sense of danger, and emphasizes the military aspect of the scene. The violins take over with the melody from m. 20 of the introductory Hope theme, (example 6.2), ending with a descending minor third as Suyuan falls when her wheelbarrow breaks. The Hope theme returns played by two flutes, followed by a new descending motive played by the violins and a sustained bass note suggesting desperation as Suyuan leaves her babies under a tree. The underscoring shifts to major mode and the motif from m. 4 of the introductory Hope theme as Suyuan also leaves all of her valuables with the babies in hope that someone will help them. This scene ends on a dissonant chord as June's father says "so much bad luck." It is non-final because Suyuan's dream is not complete until the twins are reunited with the family.

As June stands on the deck of the ship with the swan feather in her hands, the Hope theme returns again played by the flute. The violins restate it to reinforce the emotional moments when June meets her sisters for the first time. The flute plays only five measures of the theme, and the *ehru* makes an appearance playing

mm. 11-19 to situate the narrative in China, and the clarinet follows. The entire orchestra plays the theme again, ending with a major chord and a final cadence as all issues are finally happily resolved.

Portman introduces the main theme, the Hope theme, under the opening credits, and uses it as a unifying element throughout. It returns sometimes modified to enhance the text, but Portman also uses elements of the Hope theme to create new themes that strengthen the portrayal of each character. For each character, or mother/daughter pair she has developed a melodic motif that reinforces their story. Although known for her lush orchestrations, she does not use the orchestra throughout the score, but focuses on flute, oboe, clarinet and violins because she is best able to convey femininity with these. Instruments in a high range serve the dual purpose of implying femininity and Chinese music. The harp is used as accompaniment in a number of instances because it can provide a sound that could be Eastern or Western. Portman uses the bamboo flute and the *ehru* in association with the Chinese locale and with the elders of the families, while she uses modern Western instruments to underscore the "Americanness" of the younger women.[26] She has successfully been able to capture both worlds and reinforce the many varied story lines with her thoughtful, complex, understated score.

CONCLUSION

The film scores of women's films of the 1930s and 1940s written by well known film score composers such as Max Steiner, Franz Waxman and Hugo Friedhofer have received some investigation, but in comparison the films scores of the second half of the twentieth century and beyond have not received a similar amount of attention. As new composers emerge, musical technology advances and society changes, so does the woman's film and its score, making this an area deserving of further examination. Although much of the musical signification remains the same, other elements of the woman's film have evolved and what was accepted in 1940 is dated and no longer acceptable in the present day.

Rachel Portman, who has composed scores for numerous women's films since the 1980s has become one of the foremost composers of this genre. Her scores, often based on only one theme appear to be straightforward, but upon examination reveal considerable intricacy, and masterful melodic development and orchestration. Her scores add depth and meaning to the narrative and character development in the film. Her gender, in a male dominated field has not affected her ability to work as a film score composer, and I believe has intuitively given her insight in how to compose for the woman's film.

Rachel Portman and Wayne Wang have successfully collaborated on four films, including *The Joy Luck Club.* Since its release 18 years ago in 1993, it has become a well known part of the women's film genre. Although Wang had made several independent films addressing Chinese-American identity, immigration,

ethnicity and the effect these have on family relationships, this was the first mainstream film to highlight these issues. Because of its popularity and wide-spread distribution, *The Joy Luck Club* provided the general public with insight into the problems caused by immigration and the difficulty in integrating two distinctly different cultures.

NOTES

[1] Jerry Goldsmith, quoted in *Scoring for Films:A Complete Text,* (New York: Criterion Music Corp., 1971) 164, included in Anahid Kassabian, "How Music Works In Film," *Hearing Film,* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 58.

[2] Ibid., 58.

[3] Ibid., 58.

[4] Stephen Jones, "Genres and Instrumentation," *Folk Music of China: Living Instrumental Traditions,* (New York:" Oxford University Press, 1995), 104.

[5] Ibid., 113.

[6] Ibid., 126.

[7] Ibid., 110-111.

[8] Eva Reiger, "Wagner's Influence on Gender Roles in Early Hollywood Film," *Wagner and Cinema,* eds. Jeongwon Joe and Sander L. Gilman, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 144. Reiger discusses the use of low instruments for the masculine and high instruments for the feminine in Wagner's *Tannhauser*.

[9] Ibid., 134-137. Reiger also says that to Wagner, the rising minor seventh meant the "love of a woman," appropriate for the "Hope Theme" theme as well. (135)

[10] Wanlin Li, "Adapting *The Joy Luck Club*, Thematic Emphasis Through Form, *Image and Narrative,* Vol. 11, No. 2, (2010), 40.

[11] Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 138.

[12] Ibid.,144.

[13] Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, "I Enjoy Being A Girl," *Flower Drum Song,* (New York: Williamson Music Inc., 1958)

[14] Tommy Boyce and Bobby Hart, "Theme From the Monkees," *The Monkees,* (New York: Screen Gems-Columbia Music, 1966)

[15] Eva Reiger, "Wagner's Influence on Gender Roles in Early Hollywood Film," *Wagner and Cinema,* eds. Jeongwon Joe and Sander L. Gilman, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 134-137.

[16] Eva Reiger, "Wagner's Influence on Gender Roles in Early Hollywood Film," *Wagner and Cinema,* eds. Jeongwon Joe and Sander L. Gilman, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 134, 140.

[17] Although I am unable to identify this specifically, Huilan Wang identified it specifically as Cantonese, and said that it is hard to identify any further because all Cantonese wedding music is similar.

[18] Eva Reiger, "Wagner's Influence on Gender Roles in Early Hollywood Film," *Wagner and Cinema,* eds. Jeongwon Joe and Sander L. Gilman, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 134, 140.

[19] Ibid., 134-137.

[20] Lee Lai Kwang and James Wong, "Ye Lai Xiang" or "Scent of the Night," EMI Music, SE Asia. This is corroborated by Huilan Wang who recognized the song immediately, but said that the title translates more precisely to "Shanghai Nights" and is commonly played in Shanghai night clubs.

[21] Eva Reiger, "Wagner's Influence on Gender Roles in Early Hollywood Film," *Wagner and Cinema,* eds. Jeongwon Joe and Sander L. Gilman, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 134-147.

[22] Ronald Rodman, "And Now an Ideology From Our Sponsor: Musical Style and Semiosis in American Television Commercials," *College Music Symposium,* Vol. 37 (1997), 42.

[23] Eva Reiger, "Wagner's Influence on Gender Roles in Early Hollywood Film," *Wagner and Cinema,* eds. Jeongwon Joe and Sander L. Gilman, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 144. Reiger discusses the use of low instruments for the masculine and high instruments for the feminine in Wagner's *Tannhauser*.

[24] Eva Reiger, "Wagner's Influence on Gender Roles in Early Hollywood Film," *Wagner and Cinema,* eds. Jeongwon Joe and Sander L. Gilman, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 134-137.

[25] Ibid., 134-137.

[26] Wanlin Li, "Adapting *The Joy Luck Club*, Thematic Emphasis Through Form, *Image and Narrative,* Vol. 11, No. 2, (2010), 46. Wanlin Li touches briefly on these aspects of the score in her analysis of the adaptation of the novel for film.

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