From Albums to Images
Studio Ghibli's Image Albums and their impact on audiovisual strategies

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Resumen

Los compositores japoneses para películas de animación escriben música preliminar a partir de arte conceptual y materiales de pre-producción. Esta música es editada en Cds llamados "image albums". La existencia de "image albums" influencia la creación de música de cine en la medida en que se espera que el compositor encuentre la inspiración dentro de los confines de la música preliminar, escrita al margen de las relaciones audiovisuales. Por ello, la música en las películas japonesas de animación funciona normalmente como un comentario genérico a las imágenes en movimiento. Los compositores del Studio Ghibli han encontrado, sin embargo, formas de definir funciones audiovisuales más complejas utilizando nuevos procesos de orquestación y variación.

Abstract

Japanese composers for animation are usually asked to write preliminary music based on concept art and pre-production materials. This music is released in CDs called image albums. The existence of image albums influences the creation of film music, as the composer is required to restrain inspiration within the boundaries of the preliminary music, written without concern for audiovisual relationships. Because of that, music in Japanese animation usually works as generic commentary to the moving images, without detailed forms of interaction. Studio Ghibli composers, however, have found ways to define more complex audiovisual functions by using processes of new orchestration and variation.

Palabras clave

Studio Ghibli, gekiban, commentario, orquestación, Joe Hisaishi, Isao Takahata

Key words

Studio Ghibli, gekiban, commentary, ochestration, Joe Hisaishi, Isao Takahata

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The CD releases known as "image albums" are a distinctive trait of Japanese animation as a whole.[1] Composers for films, TV shows or videogames are usually asked to write music during pre-production stages, using storyboards or concept art as a source of inspiration. This leads to the release of a CD album that usually anticipates by several months the debut of the production. It is possible for the image album to be accompanied or substituted by other releases, like image song albums, image song singles or symphony albums. Image songs are vocal compositions which are related to the atmosphere of the upcoming production or to the personality of its characters. Specially in the case of TV shows, they are interpreted by the same voice actors that are featured in the series. Symphony albums are instead collections of instrumental pieces written for orchestra. These pieces are usually longer than the average image album composition and they also display a more solid formal structure. Because of that, the contents of a symphony album are often used as concert pieces without remarkable changes.

The musical ideas that emerge within an image album need to become prominent features of the final score, also because of their main commercial purpose: to make the potential audience acquainted with the acoustic atmosphere of the film. In this sense, a lot of music for Japanese animation is written before the animation itself, without following the rhythms or other precise needs of actual film sequences.

This choice, however, seems to be also related with the overall approach to music that consolidated in Japanese cinema and audiovisual entertainment during the 20th century. Known as *gekiban* (which translates as "dramatic accompaniment"), this approach is based on the use of recurring pieces of music that serve as commentary for characters, locations or moods. Thus, such pieces of music are not required to build complex audiovisual interactions. As a consequence, they could also be composed during pre-production, on the basis of generic hints about the story. Rather than being just a way to reduce production times and costs, the *gekiban* approach is a heritage from ancient forms of musical strategies (*hayashi* and *kage-bayashi*) which used a large vocabulary of acoustic formulas meant to accompany dramatic action in *nō*, *kabuki* and other folk arts (Imada 2009: 178-179). The audience was well accustomed to these formulas, even if each

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[1] On the strategic use of image albums in the promotion of Japanese animation, see Okada (2006).

ensemble of musicians had its own style. So, it was easy and clear to understand when, during a performance, the music was signaling a certain character, or a feeling, or even a change in the weather (Imada 2009: 180).[2] When used in cinema, a *gekiban* style would generate only a limited set of audiovisual strategies. In reference to Sergio Miceli's description of audiovisual functions in cinema, it is possible to argue that a *gekiban* approach is likely to induce only commentary strategies: "The commentary interprets the meanings of the filmic event […] by using any feature of the musical language and assuming formal characteristics, even basic ones, of linguistic autonomy […]" (Miceli 2009: 634).[3] In this strategy, the music makes a "remark" upon the meaning of the images: for example, a funny scene can be accompanied by a lively and playful melody. In doing this, the music is only required to be pertinent to the sense implied by the film: for the rest, it can keep a structure of its own, hence Miceli's reference to its "autonomy". This strategy is the complementary of the "accompaniment" one, which instead refers to "musical events without a linguistic autonomy, as they have to reinforce by analogy a matching event of the film" (Miceli 2009: 632). An accompaniment strategy closely follows the pace of the moving images, so the music is shaped by the film itself and it is written specifically to achieve a single audiovisual combination. Taken to its limit, this strategy brings to *mickeymousing*, that is to say the translation of every movement of the characters into a "musical trajectory" (Chion 2001: 120): a strategy which especially developed thanks to the aesthetic of classic American cartoons.

Animation seems to be today the field where a kind of *gekiban* approach has resisted the most in Japanese audiovisual entertainment, notwithstanding the overall alignment of Japanese production of film music to the Western routines. As Kentaro Imada has argued, «Music in Japanese animated features can be characterized as a point of confluence between the traditional sound production styles employed in Japanese theatre and silent cinema, and the system, conception and aesthetics of western musical accompaniment» (Imada 2009: 175). Image albums, in contemporary Japanese animation, "prepare" a basic set of formulas that the film will need to exploit. So, the practice of the image albums seems to invite composers to write independent musical pieces, which are going to be somehow "linked" to the moving images afterwards. However, the standards of contemporary animation and the present state of the taste of the audience need more refined audiovisual strategies.

The impact of this conflict on audiovisual strategies and music writing can be perceived well

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[2] See also Imada (2000) and Imada (2004).
[3] Translation of the quotation from Italian by the author of the present paper.

by comparing image albums and finished scores of high quality animated productions such as the ones by the Studio Ghibli, founded in 1985 by Hayao Miyazaki, Isao Takahata and Toru Hara. The care of this studio in producing hand drawn animation has been paralleled since the beginning by a central concert for the management of music. This is formally proved by the direct involvement of one of the founders of the studio, Isao Takahata,[4] in the editing and post production of film soundtracks (Miyazaki 2009: 345). Moreover, the creative environment of the Studio Ghibli was able to harbor one of the longest collaborations between a composer and a director in film music history: the collaboration between Hayao Miyazaki and Joe Hisaishi, which started in 1984, developed through 9 films and 2 short features and it is still continuing.[5]

This study will point out some examples which will demonstrate how Studio Ghibli films manage to maintain the image album approach without sacrificing more comprehensive audiovisual strategies.

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Joe Hisaishi described the work behind the elaboration of an image album as follows:

> It's always the same process for each film. The production lasts from two to three years and it is always very long, because [Miyazaki] is very picky and demanding. Before handing me a true screenplay, he gives me a rather simple kind of storyboard, he introduces the characters to me and he speaks a bit about the story. Then he starts working, while I advance on my own. He also gives me ten keywords, on which I construct my work. In the first year, I begin to compose the music and after one year it is possible to make a CD: it is the first CD of the film, the image album, that is released before the full realization of the work. This image album has two purposes: it allows me to realize what the music will be like later, but it also allows Miyazaki, who continues to draw, to work while listening to the music. (Fallaix, Nguyên 2000).

For Miyazaki, working while listening to music (especially classical music) is apparently a habit, as it appears from several documentaries about him.[6] During the production of a new animated

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[4] Isao Takahata contributed to the management of music for *Kaze no Tani no Naushika* (*Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind,* Hayao Miyazaki, 1984)*, Tenkuu no Shiro Rapyuta* (*Castle in the Sky,* Hayao Miyazaki, 1986) *and Majou no Takkyuubin* (*Kiki's Delivery Service*, Hayao Miyazaki, 1989). About how he influenced the final shape of the music, see Fallaix, Nguyên 2000.

[5] About this relationship and their consequence on the audiovisual language of Studio Ghibli films, see Bellano 2010.

[6] One reference is *Ponyo Wa Koushite Umareta* (How Ponyo Was Born), a 2009 documentary produced by Studio Ghibli

feature, the music from the image album is just added to the usual listening routine, whose contents could thus still retain a role in influencing the director's inspiration. This does not happen for the other artists involved in the realization of the film, who actually do not know anything about the image album, unless the director decides to listen to it while at his desk in the Studio Ghibli. As animation director Kitaro Kosaka explained,

> It is possible to say that animators live in a world which is completely separated from the one of the musical score... Sometimes a sample CD arrives and it becomes a kind of "soundtrack" of our work at the studio. […] However […] a lot of animators prefer to listen to their own music, with earphones... (Bellano 2009).

As of 2011, Studio Ghibli has produced 19 films.[7] Only 3 of them were not accompanied by the release of an image album: *Umi ga Kikoeru* (*Ocean Waves*, Tomomi Mochizuki 1993; music by Shigeru Nagata), *Houokekyo Tonari no Yamada-kun* (*My Neighbors, the Yamadas*, Isao Takahata 1999; music by Akiko Yano) and *Neko no Ongaeshi* (*The Cat Returns*, Hiroyuki Morita 2002; music by Yuuji Nomi). Some image albums have a hybrid status: the image album of *Tonari no Totoro* (*My Neighbor Totoro*, Hayao Miyazaki, 1988, music by Joe Hisaishi), is a collection of songs (it is in fact known as *Imeeji Songu Shuu*, *Image Song Collection*) whose themes have been used as source material for the film music; the image album of *Gedo Senki* (*Tales From Earthsea*, Goro Miyazaki 2006, music by Tamiya Terashima) is a collection of songs as well, but only two of them were featured in the finished film, with a different arrangement. Symphony albums were released for three films: *Kaze no Tani no Naushika* (*Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, Hayao Miyazaki, 1984), *Tenkuu no Shiro Rapyuta* (*Castle in the Sky*, Hayao Miyazaki, 1986) and *Mononoke Hime* (*Princess Mononoke*, 1997). However, the image album of *Hauru no Ugoku Shiro* (*Howl's Moving Castle*, Hayao Miyazaki 2004, music by Joe Hisaishi), contains 10 quite long pieces played by the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra directed by Mario Klemens, and it could be thus considered a symphony album as well: sometimes, it is referred to as "Image Symphony". A peculiar case of a CD album of preliminary film music is the Classic Album of *My Neighbors, the Yamadas*, which collects all the pieces from the classical repertoire whose fragments appear in the finished film. Finally, it is necessary to mention that the most recent Ghibli production, *Kokuriko-zaka Kara* (*From Up On*

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and released in DVD and Blu-ray Disc.

[7] Including *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, which was actually produced by Studio Topcraft and added to the Studio Ghibli catalogue after the foundation of the Studio, in 1985.

Poppy Hill, Goro Miyazaki, 2011, music by Satoshi Takebe) is accompanied both by an image album and a song album, which includes songs based on alternative arrangements of the piano pieces from the image album.

The average Ghibli image album lists about 10 original compositions. Each piece has a name which recalls an element of the film. These names have a certain importance in helping the work of the director with music. Talking about *Castle in the Sky*, Miyazaki said:

> In terms of actual production work, there are places where music referred to with code names like M16 and M17 comes into play. So in that context I found the "image album" created to be very useful. It made me think, ah, this or that tune might work here or there. It was easier than using pieces coded with M and a number, etc. And I also could tell where we were lacking music (Miyazaki 2009: 345).

The order of these titles in the track list usually outlines the narrative structure of the future film. The titles are prevalently names, of characters or of relevant objects or circumstances (e.g. *Dola* or *Shiita to Pazu*, *Sheeta and Pazu*, from the image album of *Castle in the Sky*; *Moving Castle*, from the image album of *Howl's Moving Castle*; *Sekai Kyoukou*, *The Great Depression*, from the image album of *Kurenai no Buta*, *Porco Rosso*, Hayao Miyazaki 1992, music by Joe Hisaishi), or they are descriptions of events related to characters as well as generic ones (e. g. *Ponyo kuru*, *Ponyo comes*, from the image album of *Gake no Ue no Ponyo*, *Ponyo*, Hayao Miyazaki 2008, music by Joe Hisaishi; *War war war*, from the image album of Howl's Moving Castle), or indicators of place (e. g. *Adoriano no Mado*, *Adriano's Window*, from the image album of *Porco Rosso*; *Chikyuu-ya Nite*, *At the Earth Shop*, from the image album of *Mimi wo Sumaseba*, *Whisper of the Heart*, Yoshifumi Kondou 1995, music by Yuuji Nomi) or of time (e. g. *Machi no Yoru*, *Night at the Town*, from the image album of *Majou no Takkyuubin*, *Kiki's Delivery Service*, Hayao Miyazaki 1989, music by Joe Hisaishi; *Haru no Yoru Ni*, *On a Spring Evening*, from the image album of *Tales from Earthsea*). The presence of musical terms in the titles is very rare: in the image album of *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* there are three pieces where the composer specified *Naushika no Teema* (*Nausicaä's Theme*): *Haruka na Chi he...* (*Towards the Far Away Land*), *Tooi Hibi* (*The Days Long Gone*) and *Tori no Hito* (*Bird Person*). The term "theme" appears then only in the image albums of *Porco Rosso* (*Maruko to Jiina no Teema*, *The Theme of Marco and Gina*) and *Ponyo* (*Fujimoto no Teema*, *Fujimoto's Theme*). Actual songs are sometimes signaled by the presence of the word "song" in the title (*Baron no Uta*,

Baron's song, from the image album of Whisper of the Heart; *Arrietty's song*, from the image album of *Karigurashi no Arrietty*, *Arrietty the Borrower*, Hiromasa Yonebayashi 2010, music by Cécile Corbel; *Asagohan no Uta*, *Breakfast Song*, from the image album of *From Up in Poppy Hill*). Only in a couple of other cases the title refers to the musical form of the composition: *Chihiro no Warutsu* (*Chihiro's Waltz*), from the image album of *Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi* (*Spirited Away*, Hayao Miyazaki 2001, music by Joe Hisaishi) and *Ponyo no Komamori* (*Ponyo's Lullaby*), from the image album of *Ponyo*. It is quite surprising that the quantity of titles referring to feelings or moods is decidedly scarce: two of them are featured in the image album of *Omohide Poro Poro* (*Only Yesterday*, Isao Takahata 1991, music by Katsu Hoshi): *Yokan: Taeko to Yoshio* (*Presentiment: Taeko and Yoshio*) and *Wagamama* (*Selfishness*). Then, other two appear in the image album of *Spirited Away*: *Samishii, Samishii* (*I'm Lonely, Lonely*) and *Solitude (id.)*. It might be pertinent to mention also *Ai o Komete. Umi* (*Plenty of Love. Umi*), from the image album of *From Up on Poppy Hill*.

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The influence of the preliminary music is always very strong. While it could happen that some composition from the image album is not featured in the film, it is only in very exceptional cases that the film music introduces totally new musical materials. However, the music in the final film is always distinctly different from the image album version. Miyazaki himself noticed this peculiar feature of Studio Ghibli music, at least in one occasion, when talking about his film *Castle in the Sky*:

> -*The image album is quite different, isn't it?*
>   Miyazaki: Right, and there are places where you wonder, why is it so rousing? [Laughs] But it's
>   good (Miyazaki 2009: 345).

This happens because Studio Ghibli composers mitigate the restraints that a predetermined set of musical pieces would bring to film music writing, finding also a peculiar creative freedom, by using in an original way two processes, when transforming image album materials into film music: new orchestration and variation.

Orchestration is a crucial task in film music production. In Western countries, and especially in the American model built around the Hollywood industry, the composer often produces just a

rough sketch of the music, which then an orchestrator (or more orchestrators) will translate into a piece for an ensemble of instruments, with or without the supervision of the composer.[8] At Studio Ghibli, it is instead usual for the composer to be the orchestrator and also the conductor or performer of his/her own music. The importance of orchestration in Joe Hisaishi's approach to film music is particularly evident. The composer frequently writes alternate orchestral versions of his past film compositions destined to concert performances or to new CD albums, even many years after the release of the original films. For example, the *Symphonic Poem Nausicaä* was published in Hisaishi's 1997 album *Works I*; and a symphonic suite of *My Neighbor Totoro* was published in 2002, with the title *My Neighbor Totoro (Orchestra Stories)*.

New orchestration is extensively used by Studio Ghibli composers to have the possibility to meet the expressive needs of specific film sequences, reinforcing the link between images and sound while keeping the image album music recognizable. A pertinent example regards one of the three tracks which are identified as *Naushika no Teema* (*Nausicaä's Theme*) in the image album of *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind: The Days Long Gone*. In the image album, it appears as a composite piece, which joins a song with a very basic A-B-A tripartite form (a main phrase, then a secondary phrase, and then the reprise of the first phrase) with another one of the Nausicaä's themes, with a bipartite form (A-B, with B including also a conclusive section), *Towards the Far Away Land* (which in its full version features, in turn, a short reference to the melody of *The Days Long Gone* at its very beginning, as to reassess that both the pieces refer to the same character of the story). The piece presents its main theme in the form of a melody sung on a single repeated syllable ("la") by a female voice, accompanied by guitar chords and a rhythmic ostinato of a tambourine. In the "B" section, a bass guitar and a synthesizer join the accompaniment (the synthesizer will stop at the reprise of "A"), but the overall impression remains that of a naïve and popular song. Then, the song gets repeated, but its style changes: the singing voice disappears, and melody and accompaniment are rendered only by synthetic sounds, with the addition of a loud and regular drum beat which moves the composition towards the territories of rock or pop music. The final repetition of the song one semitone up is another reference to a typical formal device of pop music. After the appearance of *Towards the Far Away Land*, arranged with a similar "pop-electronic" flavor, the main phrase of *The Days Long Gone* returns, this time again with the female voice, which however concludes the melody with a new high-pitched cadenza. This gives a more

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[8] See Bellano 2009b, Bellano 2009c.

frenetic feeling to the music, which moreover keeps accelerating its rhythm constantly.

In the film, the melody of *The Days Long Gone* appears three times, always to underline the special relationship Nausicaä developed with the giant insects named *ohmu* since her childhood. It is used when an *ohmu* telepathically shows to Nausicaä a place where the corrupted ecosystem is regenerating; in a dream sequence where Nausicaä recollects her childhood and the opposition of her parents and her people to her relationship with the insects; and finally, in the sequence of Nausicaä's resurrection thanks to the healing powers of the *ohmus*. The nostalgic and vaguely sad feeling of these sequences could not take advantage of the "pop" and exuberant orchestration of *The Days Long Gone*, which, in fact, does not appear at all in *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*. Actually, Hisaishi kept the beginning of the image album version, the one with tambourine, guitar, synthesizer and bass guitar, just in the childhood recollection sequence, with the addition of an introduction and a conclusion assigned to the chanting voice alone. In the other cases, he wrote a different accompaniment to the melody, orchestrated for synthetic cello, echoing synthetic sounds and flute. More importantly, the chanting female voice was substituted by the voice of a little girl (Hisaishi's own daughter, which would have then pursued a career as a singer and has today the pen name of Mai). This voice is always slightly out of pitch, as if the singing child is uncertain about the melody or is just a bit shy. The music is thus imbued now with a direct reference to the idea of "childhood", with feeling of humanity, fragility and warmth at the same time. These choices, together with the absolutely regular and slow pace of this version of the song, are surely the result of Hisaishi's consideration of the meaning of Miyazaki's film sequences: even if the musical "formula" set a priori in the image album is clearly maintained, the music interacts actively with the images, creating a more detailed commentary to their expressive content.

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The use of creative orchestration to reshape image album music and construct pertinent audiovisual relationships has persisted as an important device of Studio Ghibli film music through the years. A recent example of this technique is the musical commentary of the tsunami sequence in *Gake no Ue no Ponyo*, (*Ponyo*, Hayao Miyazaki 2008) which testifies a meaningful evolution in the attitude of the composer towards the image album music. In fact, the re-orchestration is now accompanied by a deeper intervention in the structure of the music itself: an image album piece is not only re-arranged from the instrumental point of view, but it also undergoes a process of

musical variation.

The image album of *Ponyo* featured ten preliminary compositions, including the song destined to the ending titles of the film: *Gake no ue no Ponyo* (*Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea*), with vocals by nine year-old Nozomi Ohashi and the duo of singers Fujioka Fujimaki. While in most Ghibli films the ending song has no or little relation with the music which is used in the film, the main melody of *Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea* reaches the status of a true leitmotiv for the 5 year-old main character. To do such a thing, Hisaishi had to write not just one, but a series of newly orchestrated and varied versions of the original melody. The version which accompanies the tsunami sequence is outstanding, because of the way it manages to mediate between the necessity to keep the image album music, the personal sensibility of the director and the feelings conveyed by the visuals. In that sequence, the goldfish Ponyo, now mutated into a little girl, runs on the tsunami waves which she sees as big fishes and that she herself involuntarily caused, by using the magic of her father. While this brings disaster to the city where lives Sosuke, the little boy she befriended, she is actually happy, because by riding the waves she will return sooner to her friend. The quirky joining of a catastrophic impression with feelings of childish joy could not be matched with any piece from the image album. However, it is known from the documentary *Ponyo Wa Koushite Umareta* (*How Ponyo Was Born*) that while drawing watercolor sketches of this sequence, Miyazaki repeatedly listened to Richard Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries", from Act III of *Die Walküre* (*The Valkyrie*, 1870). The director said[9] that his vision of Ponyo in the tsunami sequence was that of "a little valkyrie": consistently with this, it is explained in the film that her real name is Brunhilde. Because of that, in order to prepare an opportune musical commentary, Hisaishi decided to operate a large-scale variation on the melody of *Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea*. He used as a reference Wagner's orchestration of the "Ride of the Valkyries", as well as its rhythmic pattern. Then, he transposed the original music from B minor to F major (the tonality of Ponyo's theme) and adapted the melody of the song to the pace of Wagner's composition. The result is filled with musical irony, because of the joining of a simple and childish theme with the majestic solemnity of Wagner's original. The audiovisual strategy built here works at a triple level simultaneously. First of all, it provides a function of generic commentary, as it underlines the sense of urgency and peril of the spectacular events on screen while encasing them in a playful mood. Then, more specifically, it offers to the audience a clear leitmotivic function, because of the

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[9] According to an answer Miyazaki gave to the author of the present paper, press conference for the screening of *Ponyo* at the 65th Mostra Internazionale del Cinema di Venezia, August 31, 2008.

presence of both Ponyo and her musical counterpart. Finally, it sets a signaling function (Miceli 2009: 671-675), as the reference to Wagner is openly recognizable and it stays as a signal of the wagnerian subtext inherent to this film (which is not just reduced to this musical quotation, but regards also the figure of Ponyo's father, Fujimoto, which is loosely based on Wagner's Wotan, as well as the theme of the unbalance in the world which would bring to the end of all things).

Even if with the creative processes of new orchestration and variation Studio Ghibli composers manage to avoid too generic audiovisual relationship, it is evident how the necessity to make constant references to the image album music induces the audiovisual strategies of Studio Ghibli films to prevalently remain in the field of commentary functions. For the sake of completeness, it is however necessary to remark that accompaniment functions are not totally stranger to these animated productions. For example, one of the most evident occurences of a very clear accompaniment strategy can be found in *My Neighbor Totoro*. In the scene where the little girl Mei meets the Little Totoro for the first time (Hisaishi 1988: 149), the music changes at every single event in the sequence. A joyful marching rhythm follows the girl as she walks behind the little spirit, but then, as the Totoro becomes invisible, the music stops on long notes and sounds of wood percussion that are inserted into a context of suspended harmony, creating an almost 'searching' feeling. While the girl is crouching still, waiting for the Totoro to reappear, a butterfly flies into the frame accompanied by slow and circumspect arpeggios of flutes and clarinets, which translate into sound the fickle and broken flight of the insect. Later, when the Totoro shows up again and Mei chases it, the music builds to a great crescendo that breaks suddenly as the girls runs into some bushes. This sequence of *My Neighbor Totoro* is the first where Hisaishi and Miyazaki experiment with something similar to the so-called "mickey-mousing" of classic American cartoons. In this sequence, the use of mickey-mousing as a prevalent audiovisual strategy causes one of the rare exceptions to the practice described previously. The closely synchronized cue that accompanies the scene signals the appearance of the Totoro with a brief motif that appears in its full melodic context only at the very end of the film, in the song "Tonari no Totoro" (*My Neighbor Totoro*). In this special instance, synchronization prevails on Hisaishi's usual way of dealing with melodies from image albums.

There is however at least a single example of a use of previously composed music that leads, unexpectedly, to an accompaniment strategy, without the use of new orchestration, variation or other forms of intervention on the music. It happens in a film by Isao Takahata: *Only Yesterday*. In Takahata's films, image albums themes are usually featured without many evident

alterations. Their themes are often used in full, and no one of them needs to be repeated: they just appear once and accumulate as the story unfolds. This attitude is paralleled by a tendency to have the music appear as diegetic: it can be heard by both the audience and the characters of the story, because it is supposedly played within the universe of the narration, as in the case of music coming from a radio or a TV. This setting seems to provide a counterpart to Takahata's objective and almost documentary-like approach to direction.[10] *Only Yesterday* is based on the free childhood recollections of the 27 year-old heroine, Taeko. The incidence of the image album music on the finished soundtrack is surprisingly somewhat low, as in this film the greatest part of the music comes from other kinds of pre-existent music: classical music or old pop and folk songs. This choice recreates a believable acoustic feeling of the Japan of the Sixties, the place of Taeko's memories. So, the overall impression is that of a music which underscores the images almost by chance, mimicking an impression of "live" recording. Takahata is however well aware of the contrast between this impression of realism and the evident artificiality of the animated image: so, sometimes he voluntarily plays with this contrast, achieving a peculiar form of audiovisual irony. One example is the scene where a 10 year-old Taeko decides to exchange her meal with one of her classmates: for a few moments, the two children start to move following the rhythm of the *Hungarian Rhapsody no. 5* by Johannes Brahms, which is being played by loudspeakers in the classroom. At first, the two prepare to switch their dishes, by looking around furtively while the music slows down and decreases its intensity. Then, when a loud burst of sound is heard, the exchange happens. The music becomes suddenly a musical accompaniment to the comical gestures of the two characters and unexpectedly shifts from a function of diegetic music to one of *mickeymousing*. This sequence proves once again how a function of close accompaniment is not something that Studio Ghibli films completely ignore, notwithstanding the prevalence of commentary strategies based on image album music.

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In conclusion, Studio Ghibli films are the place of a positive audiovisual struggle. Vivid images and

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[10] «The notion of realism that [Takahata] conceived is not to be understood as a mere photographic resemblance of our world. [...] Often, Takahata's relationship with realism is defined by the careful approach to the characters, with a sensibility and a sense of humanity unusual for an animated film, a minute craftsmanship in the backgrounds and the everyday feel or the seriousness of the themes of the stories». (Le Roux 2009: 13). Translation from French by the author of the present article.

complex storylines ask for a careful planning of their musical counterparts. However, the existence of the image albums seems to set a limit to the request images could make and to suggest a *gekiban* approach, because of the necessity to thoroughly quote the preliminary music. However, composers react by creating inside the image album restraints, through original techniques of orchestration and variation. These techniques are the fundamental premise for a series of other processes, like accumulation of thematic materials and development of peculiar strategies of accompaniment inspired by the aesthetics of classic American cartoons, which however would require more time to be discussed. It is suggestive, however, how the itinerary inside the production of Studio Ghibli music seems to imply a loose parallel with the sense hidden in the most of Studio Ghibli stories: to go away from reality only to give to the viewer a new perspective to watch the world from. As animation director Kitaro Kosaka said:

> Ghibli fantasies are a form of criticism of the human intellect. A criticism that works in the way of a negation. The contemporary society is something familiar to us, and we are used to its positive or frightening aspects. Ghibli films allow a critical separation from this context, because they show the world we passively live in from a whole new perspective (Bellano 2009a).

Similarly, the compositions from the almost "abstract" CD albums are guided into concrete and conscious relationships with the images, inviting the listener to experience them one more time in order to discover in them a new and previously unexpected meaning.

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Cita recomendada