



Smithsonian Associates

Magnificent Movie Music: Classical Sounds of the Cinema

Dr. Rachel Franklin

Wednesday, January 24, 2024 - 12:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. ET

Since the beginning of the talkies, film directors have turned to classical music for their soundtracks. Whether it's Beethoven, Mozart, Rachmaninoff, Richard Strauss, Mascagni, Puccini, or Bach, opuses of almost every famous composer have added emotional depth to hundreds of films. Comedies, war films, romances, tragedies, you name it: all film genres have been enhanced with classical music. Is this just piggybacking on the power of the classics? On the other hand, why would you mess with success? And how can a long and complex pre-composed piece even be matched with a short film cue?

With fascinating clips, witty commentary, and piano demonstrations, concert pianist and movie fanatic **Rachel Franklin** delves into the magic of some of the greatest film music ever composed (even when it was unintentional).

Jan 24 Lecture 1: Mozart Goes to Hollywood (and so do Mahler, Strauss, Bach etc)

Directors have long picked great concert music to enhance and underpin their films. Max Reinhardt's gloriously extravagant 1935 film of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* used re-orchestrated works by Felix Mendelssohn. If there are corsets and wigs, it must be Handel. Mozart projects aristocratic elegance, Wagner is all about might, and Rachmaninoff signals the weepiest of romances. Classical music can persuade us we're experiencing history, identity, and culture—but is it really all in the ears? We explore the impact film music can have on our subconscious responses, illustrated by some of the most iconic classical music moments in film history.

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Films discussed

“2001: A Space Odyssey” Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1968

Director: Stanley Kubrick

Composers: Richard Strauss, Gyorgy Ligeti, Johann Strauss II, Aram Khatchaturian

Academy Award: Best Visual Effects

Works featured: Richard Strauss – Thus Spake Zarathustra, Op. 30, 1896

Johann Strauss – The Blue Danube, Op. 314, 1866

Alex North - composer of rejected score for this film

“A Midsummer Night's Dream” Warner Brothers, 1935

Director: Max Reinhardt

Composers: Felix Mendelssohn, Erich Wolfgang Korngold

Work featured: Mendelssohn – overture to A Midsummer Night's Dream

“Trading Places” Paramount Pictures, 1983

Director: John Landis

Film composer: Elmer Bernstein

Work featured: Mozart – Overture to the Marriage of Figaro

“The King’s Speech” UK Film Council/Weinstein Company, 2010

Director: Tom Hooper

Composers: Beethoven, Mozart, Alexandre Desplat

Academy Awards: Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor, Best Original Screenplay

Work featured: Mozart – Overture to the Marriage of Figaro

“The Truman Show” Paramount Pictures, 1998

Director: Peter Weir

Film composer: Burkhard Dallwitz

Work featured: Mozart – Turkish Rondo

“Schindler’s List” Universal Pictures, 1993

Director: Steven Spielberg

Film composer: John Williams

Academy Awards: Best Picture, Best Director, best Adapted Screenplay, Best Original Score, Best Film Editing, Best Cinematographer, Best Art Direction

Work featured: Prelude from English Suite no. 2 in A minor – J. S. Bach

“Master and Commander” Miramax Films, 2003

Director: Peter Weir

Film composer: Richard Tognetti and others

Academy Awards: Best Cinematography, Best Sound Editing

Work featured: J. S. Bach - Suite no. 1 in G for solo cello

“Casino” Universal Pictures, 1995

Director: Martin Scorsese

Film composers: multiple

Work featured: J. S. Bach – St. Matthew Passion, final chorus: "Wir setzen uns mit Tränen nieder"

“Death In Venice”, Warner Brothers, 1971

Director: Luchino Visconti

Composer: Gustav Mahler

Work featured: Mahler – 5th Symphony, 1902. 4th movement, Adagietto

“The Shining” Peregrine Productions, Warner Brothers, 1980

Director: Stanley Kubrick

Primary composers: Georgy Ligeti, Bela Bartok, Krzysztof Penderecki, Wendy Carlos and Rachel Elkind

Works featured: Bartok – Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta, BB 114, 1936. 3rd movement, Adagio. Penderecki – De Natura Sonoris no. 1, 1966

“Manhattan” United Artists, 1979

Director: Woody Allen

Composer: George Gershwin

Work featured: Gershwin - Rhapsody in Blue, 1924

Rachel Franklin

British-born classical and jazz concert pianist Dr. Rachel Franklin is a renowned performer and public speaker. Her acclaimed wit, scholarship and insights about music have led to countless speaking engagements for such distinguished organizations as the Smithsonian Institution, the Library of Congress, and National Public Radio.

Besides appreciating her performing artistry, her listeners rave about her warm, engaging style as she illustrates on the piano.

Since 2020 she has been greatly in demand for her unique online presentations. She is one of the Smithsonian Associates' most popular live-streaming music lecturers, and her topics explore intersections between classical and jazz music, film scores, and the fine arts.

Last June she was one of the featured speakers at the Aspen Ideas: Health Conference in Colorado, presenting and performing on the subject of Music and the Natural World. She has also recently been interviewed on this topic by WHYY's Maiken Scott for The Pulse. This past New Year she was invited to give the Plenary Lunchtime Performance for the prestigious Renaissance Weekend conference in Charleston, SC.

Rachel Franklin's great passion is provoking connections and sparking imaginative pathways for her listeners and students, so their own creativity can be inspired by extraordinary musical art.

She has concertized in major halls across Europe, Canada and the US. The Washington Post has praised her "cool-headed bravura and panache" and the Baltimore Sun lauded "a flawless crystalline technique, and warmth and electricity in her playing."