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Film and Music in the Process of Integration

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Zofia Lissa;
Conference of Composers
and Music Critics 1949;
film music;
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autonomous music

Abstract

The author describes the first stage of Alicja Helman's academic career, which took place in the 1960s and was devoted to reflection on film music. Her education in musicology and film studies allowed her to take a unique and in-depth look at what occurred on the border between these two fields. She was a student of professor Zofia Lissa, who dealt with the aesthetics of film music. Helman, who was primarily a film enthusiast, although she valued the achievements of her mentor, went her own way. She included her first thoughts on this subject in several texts written for the first edition of *Kwartalnik Filmowy*. She then developed these concepts in three books: *Rola muzyki w filmie* [*The Role of Music in Film*] (1964), *Na ścieżce dźwiękowej* [*On the Soundtrack*] (1968) and *Dźwięczący ekran* [*The Sounding Screen*] (1969). Her interests then broadened considerably and she took up film theory, but the musical aspect was always close to her. **(Non-reviewed material).**

The year 1949 was proclaimed in Poland the Chopin Year in connection with the centenary of the composer's death. In the same year, something occurred that temporarily halted the creative momentum in Polish music cutting it off programmatically from everything that had happened in the previous half-century.¹ The Conference of Composers and Music Critics, preceding for a few months the Film Convention in Wisła, was held in Łagów Lubuski between 5th and 8th of August. It followed the Congress of Writers in Szczecin, of visual artists in Nieborów, of the theatre community in Obory and of architects in Katowice.² Socialist realism, becoming a compulsory political doctrine, occupied more and more areas of artistic and social life. The tone for the composers' debates was set by Włodzimierz Sokorski's paper. The author expressed his condemnation of contemporary music as *formalist, cosmopolitan, anti-national and ahumanistic, a tool used by "American imperialism ... to blunt the ethical and aesthetic sensibilities of human psychology, to destroy folk creativity and the strand of national music."*³ During the congress, the supervision of the state and political authorities over culture was raised to the level of the obligatory norm, being what the observers and participants of artistic life had to deal with from the very beginning of the new political system until its end in 1989. In the first postwar years, it was not yet too rigorous and was guided primarily by the idea of "art for the masses."

Film music, in a sense, could be treated as the realisation of this assumption, since film, by its nature, is a mass form of art. Its authors were often outstanding composers, including Witold Lutosławski, Artur Malawski, Zbigniew Turski, and Roman Palester. In practice, illustrative music (in both feature films and documentaries) was niche work, because, except for situations when a given production gained great popularity, it was, colloquially speaking, barely audible. This gave its authors the opportunity to try out experimental approaches, applied on a broader scale in autonomous music. The aforementioned Łagów Lubuski conference put an end to creative exploration. It prompted some composers to make opportunistic concessions in the spirit of socialist realism and made others emigrate. There were also attempts to defy the rules, as was the case of Grupa 49 formed by Tadeusz Baird, Jan Krenz, and Kazimierz Serocki. This, however, meant operating outside the mainstream of musical life.

On the wave of commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Polish People's Republic, Alicja Helman, in her 1964 article on the connections between music and film culture in Poland after World War II, proposed a periodisation according to a political key: 1945-1949; 1950-1954; 1955-1964. From today's perspective, the congress is the most crucial point of reference here. The author outlined the circumstances that heralded it and then described its effects and the gradual acquisition of subjectivity by artists. Ideological mechanisms, although clear to the audiences of the time, were present in her reflections mainly in the subtext. This applies, for example, to the chapter on socialist realism entitled "Postulative Realism" ("Realizm postulatyczny"), which, in a way, indicated a conviction about the limited possibilities of implementing it in the field of music.⁴ Helman considered the notion of realism in music more broadly. She took up the subject of topicality, style, folklore, and national distinction, including in relation to film. The analysis

of Aleksander Ford's *Young Chopin* (1951) in Kazimierz Serocki's musical arrangement allows us to recognise this strategy.

The scholar does not mention the Warsaw Autumn Festival, which turned out to be a symbolic harbinger of changes, proclaiming a kind of 'October' in Polish musical life and a retreat from schematism. It took place in 1956 on Tadeusz Baird and Kazimierz Serocki's initiative submitted at the conference of the Polish Composers' Union a year earlier. Helman associated the openness to seeking new paths in film music with the participation of the most interesting and talented composers, also of the younger generation, such as the aforementioned Tadeusz Baird, Włodzimierz Kotoński, Andrzej Markowski, Krzysztof Penderecki, and Bogusław Schaeffer. But she did not ignore the influence of film technology and, broadly speaking, sound recording techniques on autonomous music. After the phase of delighting in artistic freedom, there came, in a sense naturally, a period of stabilisation. For Helman, the exemplary model was that of the *integrated film work, in which a harmony of factors prevails and none dominates the others*.⁵ It was this arrangement (in all its varieties) that would inspire her the most in her subsequent works on film music.

The year 1964 marked a turn in the field of reflection on music and film. Two important books were published almost simultaneously filling a gap in the domestic film studies and musicology literature at the same time: Zofia Lissa's *Estetyka Muzyki Filmowej* [*Aesthetics of Film Music*]⁶ and Alicja Helman's *Rola muzyki w filmie* [*The Role of Music in Film*].⁷ It is worth mentioning that the groundwork for both publications had been prepared three years earlier by a special volume of *Kwartalnik Filmowy* [*Film Quarterly*] devoted to film music, in which both authors presented interesting texts.⁸ Zofia Lissa was one of the first scholars in Poland, and also in the world, to be involved in film music. She contained her ideas in a book published in 1937 under, for that era, a bravura title: *Muzyka i film. Studium z pogranicza ontologii, estetyki i psychologii muzyki filmowej* [*Music and Film: A Study on the Intersection of Ontology, Aesthetics, and Psychology of Film Music*].⁹ As she wrote, she based it on her limited viewing experience, referring to films screened in Lviv cinemas in the first years after the sound breakthrough. Yet, she had a firm conviction that these preliminary considerations lead to thinking about film as a synthetic art, that is, combining two sensory spheres: visual and auditory. Lissa was inclined to attribute a central and dominant role to the former one.¹⁰

From this angle, she attempted to identify the psychological and physiological foundations of film perception in relation to the perception of reality. Lissa also considered the differences between silent and sound films. A comprehensive work on the aesthetics of film music, its function, and place in the film, written thirty years later, was already evidence of extensive research and bibliographic workshop. However, it developed the concepts signalled in the first book at a completely different stage of cinema's artistic and technical development. Lissa discussed hundreds of films from different periods of cinematic history and various countries of origin. However, she did not present a classical history of film music. As she wrote in the introduction, *it was because her work is an attempt to systematise musical (and auditory in general) manifestations in sound film and an attempt to describe their foundations*.¹¹ Once again, Lissa considered both silent and sound cinema but focused on the latter. The most important chapter of the book

is devoted to the functions of the audio sphere in sound film, of which the author distinguished a dozen or so. She also considered the significance of form and style and the features of musical illustration in various film genres.

Alicja Helman, one generation younger, was Lissa's student. However, her intellectual formation and 'museum of imagination' were of clearly different provenance, as evidenced by the texts and examples she quoted.¹² Both scholars were aware of the limitations resulting from the difficulties in reaching international film productions, although Helman noted more of them. In her case, the concerns also touched upon the ways of improving the research method and overcoming technical obstacles. The young scholar pointed to the difficulty of accessing films for accurate, verifiable analysis and multiple viewing in a situation where work at the editing table immobilises the film and deprives it of its agentive dynamic. While researching this matter, she had virtually no access to Polish (not to mention foreign) film scores, whether archival or current, since they rarely came within the scope of extant documentation. In this sense, it would be fair to say that film studies work was accompanied by uncertainty and possessed a margin of error.

Lissa and Helman were already familiar with each other's work before it was published. They referred to it sometimes in a subtly polemical and sometimes in an approving tone, aware that, each in her own way, they were blazing new trails on domestic ground. The latter seems to have adopted more of a film studies perspective, while the former adopted a musicological approach. In this respect, Helman's study is closer to those engaged in film studies or, more precisely, film theory. Then there is also the question of the concept of film as art. Helman noted that her mentor identified the developmental tendency of film with the need to expand the network of functional connections, but this functionality had limited cognitive potential and once established, lost its significance.¹³

However, the most significant difference between the two scholars was that Lissa focused on the relationship between music and the visual aspect in a film work, while Helman complicated this relationship: *We consider music as an expressive means of film, not a phenomenon existing on the basis of even limited autonomy.*¹⁴ She argued that music is not a simple component of a work, but a factor of it that is entirely conditioned by a network of connections and dependencies with other factors.¹⁵ For film, music becomes just a material that, in the process of production, almost independently of its autonomous properties, is subject to both technical-formal and emotional-expressive shaping.¹⁶ She saw the successive stages of aesthetic and technical changes in film as a path to visual and sonic integration. This process was precisely the subject of her further considerations which sometimes led her to completely unobvious conclusions. Such as the one concerning the significant role of the British school of documentary film in the modern inclusion of music in the visual aspect, not only by inviting outstanding composers to collaborate,¹⁷ but also by integrating the entire sonic aspect (including dialogues, commentary, and noises) with the image, *which was an issue of primary importance, put before the purely musical qualities of the composition.*¹⁸

Helman was also intrigued by the process of forming a new type of audio-visualism,¹⁹ which was based on the ontological conflict between the factor that was fully constructed and the factor that was only a selection and stylisation of specif-

ic real world situations.²⁰ She saw the possibility of overcoming this conflict and followed the developments in the cinema of that time. She argued that *the full, organised sonority of a film was as much an equivalent of reality as organised visualism*.²¹ Analysing the numerous ways in which music is incorporated into a film, she also noted a certain paradox. It boils down to the fact that music brings to the film its own, unprocessed reality, which in the final message becomes broken up or even eliminated once it is pushed into the depths of the viewer's consciousness and thus becomes inaudible. In this way, we are no longer dealing with synthetic art, but with a completely new quality.

Helman's work (being also her doctoral thesis) was characterised by courage in formulating judgements, an ability to use the literature on the subject critically, and her independence of thought in relation to the authority that Zofia Lissa was at the time. It was quite a challenge, considering the author's young age of 29. Her next book, *Na ścieżce dźwiękowej. O muzyce w filmie* [*On the Soundtrack: On Music in Film*], published four years later, continued this way of thinking.²² Although written in a more accessible style, it was an excellent complement to the earlier theoretical considerations and was intended as an introduction to the systematic history of film music. The publication takes the form of concise columns full of curiosities and anecdotes that form a certain sequence. It reflects subsequent musical trends that were created with the participation of eminent composers and have permanently entered film history, remaining in the memory of filmgoers to this day.

The technical problems that the author had to grapple with were compounded by the number of film examples. Her analysis encompasses not only masterpieces but also popular films and screen hits, from *The Assassination of the Duke de Guise* (*L'assassinat du duc de Guise*, dir. Charles Le Bargy, André Calmettes, 1908) with music by Camille Saint-Saëns to *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* (*Les parapluies de Cherbourg*, dir. Jacques Demy, 1964) with compositions by Michel Legrand. Helman was interested in approaches involving not only classical music, opera, and musical, which she was not fond of, but also folklore and song. She analysed trends in French, Russian, British, American, and Asian cinema, the work of master directors and composers, experimental films, avant-garde, and electronic music. She also devoted attention to Polish composers and their relationship with film. Her book is written in a colloquial manner and has not aged. Like its predecessor, it is one of the standard readings for film students.

However, the planned complete history of film music has not been written. A kind of closure of Helman's reflections in this area is a slim volume *Dźwięczący ekran* [*The Sounding Screen*]²³ where she took up the issues discussed earlier, returning to music and the ways it manifests in film. In doing so, she referred to specific examples, clearly emphasising the musicological aspect, as evidenced by fragments of musical scores of well-known film compositions at the beginning of each chapter. The work also includes an appendix containing composers' biographies and a glossary of musical terms. Entries such as: musical theme, polyphony, opera or musical spectacle, films about musicians and music, and film realisations of musical works became an opportunity for concise analyses of specific works.

The conclusion drawn from these considerations is interesting and surprising. Helman suggests that standard film music evokes trivial, obvious emotions in the viewer, while the use of classical, early, autonomous music is more neutral and does not evoke emotional associations, thus acquiring a different status. As examples, she mentions the films of Bresson, Renoir, and Bergman, as well as Witold Leszczyński's *The Life of Matthew* (*Żywot Mateusza*, 1968) with Arcangelo Corelli's music.²⁴

Shortly afterwards, Helman turned to other film theories, taking up a post at the Department of Film History and Theory. She gradually broke away from the pattern that dominated the milieu later called the "Warsaw School," which was oriented towards studying the art of cinematic reproduction of reality. In her next important book, and at the same time her habilitation thesis, entitled *O dziele filmowym* [*On the Film Work*],²⁵ Helman attempted to combine various aspects of the film message as art, technique, reproduction, and creation. Sound, that is music and various noises, remains in this approach an essential element of the work. In fact, in all her subsequent books, including the last one entitled *Miłosierdzie szatana. Adaptacje audiowizualne powieści i nowel Tomasza Manna* [*The Mercy of Satan: Audiovisual Adaptations of Thomas Mann's Novels and Short Stories*],²⁶ she took music into account as part of the cinematic creative process.

Alicja Helman combined musical and film erudition, which was not often the case. Her considerations, especially in the early period, being somewhere at the intersection of the two fields, did not find too many followers. Most scholars have tended towards one aspect or the other. Exceptions include the scholarly output of the late Iwona Sowińska.²⁷ Some interesting, though not as systematic, proposals can also be found in monographic studies published with the establishment of the achievements of world-famous Polish film composers.²⁸

Transl. Artur Piskorz

¹ A commentary written by the musician and music critic Konstanty Regamey (under the pseudonym Jerzy Zawadzki) in the Parisian *Kultura* [Culture], indicating the enthusiastic reception of Polish contemporary music abroad at that time, is significant in this context. The critic mentions Andrzej Panufnik (especially his *Requiem*), Antoni Szałowski, and Michał Spisak who were in exile in France and could join Polish artistic life only after October 1956. Works by Lutosławski, Szymanowski, and Malowski were increasingly performed in Europe and overseas. The artistic achievements of Stanisław Skrowaczewski, Tadeusz Baird, and Julian Krenz also attracted the interest of foreign critics. See: J. Zawadzki, "Kronika muzyczna", *Kultura* 1950, no. 2, pp. 206-208.

² See: *Zjazd Filmowy w Wiśle. Źródła. Komentarze. Opracowania*, eds. B. Giza, A. Wyżyński,

Filmoteka Narodowa – Instytut Audiowizualny, Warszawa 2024.

³ J. Zawadzki, op. cit., p. 207.

⁴ In this section of her argument, Helman gives extensive credit to Stefania Łobaczewska (1888-1963). She was a Kraków scholar of Lviv origin, serving as the rector of the State Higher School of Music in the years 1952-1955. Although Łobaczewska was advocating socialist realism, she was considered an ethical and musicological authority, which was rare. Helman refers to her work "Próba zbadania realizmu socjalistycznego w muzyce na podstawie polskiej twórczości 10-lecia", *Studia Muzykologiczne* 1956, vol. V (written in 1954).

⁵ A. Helman, "Związki kultury muzycznej i filmowej", *Kwartalnik Filmowy* 1964, no. 1-2, pp. 72-85.

⁶ Z. Lissa, *Estetyka muzyki filmowej*, Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, Kraków 1964.

- ⁷ A. Helman, *Rola muzyki w filmie*, Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, Warszawa 1964.
- ⁸ Z. Lissa, "Muzyka w polskich filmach eksperymentalnych", *Kwartalnik Filmowy* 1961, no. 2, pp. 3-24; A. Helman, "Literatura muzyki filmowej", *ibidem*, pp. 58-72.
- ⁹ Z. Lissa, *Muzyka i film. Studium z pogranicza ontologii, estetyki i psychologii muzyki filmowej*, Księgarnia Lwowska, Lwów 1937.
- ¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 8.
- ¹¹ Z. Lissa, *Estetyka muzyki filmowej*, op. cit., p. 8.
- ¹² Zofia Kułakowska offers an extensive and detailed comparison of both approaches in terms of their differences. As a musicologist, she paradoxically considers Helman's book to be a much more difficult read. See: Z. Kułakowska, "Dwa spojrzenia (Na marginesie książek Zofii Lissy *Estetyka muzyki filmowej* i Alicji Helman *Rola muzyki w filmie*)", *Kwartalnik Filmowy* 1965, no. 3, pp. 15-22.
- ¹³ A. Helman, *Rola muzyki w filmie*, op. cit., p. 31.
- ¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 18.
- ¹⁵ *Ibidem*.
- ¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 11.
- ¹⁷ The GPO Film Unit collaborated not only with British composers (such as Benjamin Britten), but also French ones (such as Maurice Jaubert, Darius Milhaud and François Gaillard).
- ¹⁸ A. Helman, *Rola muzyki w filmie*, op. cit., p. 46.
- ¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 144.
- ²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 152.
- ²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 210.
- ²² A. Helman, *Na ścieżce dźwiękowej. O muzyce w filmie*, Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, Kraków 1968.
- ²³ A. Helman, *Dźwięczący ekran*, Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, Warszawa 1968.
- ²⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 85-93.
- ²⁵ A. Helman, *O dziele filmowym*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1970 (2nd edition, expanded and corrected 1981).
- ²⁶ A. Helman, *Miłosierdzie szatana. Adaptacje audiowizualne powieści i nowel Tomasza Manna*, Wydawnictwo Centrum Studiów Niemieckich i Europejskich im. Willy'ego Brandta Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2022.
- ²⁷ See: I. Sowińska, *Dźwięki i obrazy. O sluchaniu filmów*, Śląsk, Katowice 2001; eadem, *Polska muzyka filmowa 1945-1968*, Uniwersytet Śląski, Katowice 2006; eadem, *Chopin idzie do kina*, Universitas, Kraków 2013.
- ²⁸ See: M. Wilczek-Krupa, *Poetyka muzyki filmowej Wojciecha Kilara*, Akademia Muzyczna im. Krzysztofa Pendereckiego, Kraków 2021; I. Lindstedt, "Chopin, taniec i piosenka, czyli o muzyce filmowej Andrzeja Panufnika z lat międzywojennych", *Muzyka* 2023, no. 2, pp. 3-23; M. Hendrykowski, *Komeda*, Wydawnictwo Miejskie, Poznań 2009; A. G. Piotrowska, *Muzyka w serialu telewizyjnym. Szkic analityczno-teoretyczny na przykładzie "Dekalogu"*, Musica Iagellonica, Kraków 2018; M. Kempna-Pieniążek, *Formy duchowości w kinie najnowszym*, Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2013.

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Słowa kluczowe:

Alicja Helman;
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Muzycznych 1949;
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muzyka autonomiczna

Abstrakt

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Film i muzyka w procesie integracji

Autorka opisuje pierwszy etap kariery naukowej Alicji Helman, przypadający na lata 60., związany z refleksją nad muzyką filmową. Wykształcenie muzykologiczne i filmoznawcze pozwoliło badaczce na wyjątkowe ujęcie zagadnień, które lokowały się na pograniczu tych dwóch dziedzin. Helman była uczennicą Zofii Lissy, która zajmowała się estetyką muzyki filmowej. Była jednak przede wszystkim pasjonatką filmu i, choć ceniła dokonania swojej mentorki, poszła własną drogą. Pierwsze przemyślenia zawarła w kilku tekstach napisanych dla pierwszej edycji „Kwartalnika Filmowego”. Koncepcje te rozwinęła następnie w trzech książkach: *Rola muzyki w filmie* (1964), *Na ścieżce dźwiękowej* (1968) i *Dźwięczący ekran* (1969). W okresie późniejszym zainteresowania Helman znacznie się poszerzyły i badaczka zajęła się teorią filmu. Jego aspekt muzyczny zawsze pozostał jej jednak bliski. **(Material nierecenzowany).**