

Goldmark, Daniel. 2005. *Tunes for 'Toons: Music and the Hollywood Cartoon*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

**Reviewed by Kate McQuiston**

Daniel Goldmark's monograph, the first on music in cartoons, will interest both a popular and scholarly readership. *Tunes for 'Toons* offers lively description, analysis, and history, and it makes a tremendous contribution to the scholarly literature by illuminating the working processes and creative tendencies of composers, as well as by unpacking the codes and systems behind cartoons that use familiar classical music and others that use jazz. Goldmark's attention to the industry of animation, his effective use of documentary materials, and his evident enthusiasm for the subject all enhance his work. Useful to anyone interested in the hows and whys of cartoon scoring (especially fans of *Merrie Melodies* and *Tom and Jerry*), the book provides rich analyses of individual cartoons, and these interpretations serve as models for understanding other undiscussed cartoons.

Goldmark's case studies reveal diversity from one studio to another far surpassing that of classic Hollywood films, which suggests that "the Hollywood Cartoon" may be too narrow a label for the whole group. Goldmark focuses on the cartoons produced during the classic Hollywood era by Hollywood studios, but he also includes cartoons produced by New York studios with parent companies in Los Angeles. He organizes the book into five chapters, each focusing on a composer, musical style, or studio. Each chapter has a well-calibrated, unique scope, which Goldmark consistently supports through evidence from sources such as interviews, detail sheets (blueprints for the action, dialogue, sound effects, and music in a cartoon), and other documents. Instead of following a continuous thread, the chapters stand as independent case studies in which a composer's music or the musical style in a particular cartoon or collection of cartoons is explored on its own terms. The first two chapters contrast the styles and techniques of Carl Stalling and Scott Bradley, composers who defined the sound of Warner Bros.'s *Merrie Melodies* and MGM's *Tom and Jerry*, respectively. The third chapter addresses cartoons from Fleischer Studios reflecting the jazz scene in New York in the 1930s and 1940s, featuring not only the music, but also the likenesses of known jazz performers such as Cab Calloway and Louis Armstrong. The fourth and fifth chapters discuss the use of classical music in Warner Bros. cartoons: one primarily through an analysis of classical music within and across a selection of cartoons, and the other with an outstanding,

## Current Musicology

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detailed discussion of the studio's 1957 homage to Wagner, *What's Opera Doc?* I will discuss the first four chapters in turn as they convey the variety of topics represented in the book and are likely to serve as models for further work in cartoon music analysis.

Goldmark's first chapter describes the cartoon music of Carl Stalling, whose approach to scoring cartoons grew out of his experience as a silent film accompanist. In addition to using resources such as Erno Rapée's *Motion Picture Moods for Pianists and Organists* (1924)—a collection of musical examples for silent film accompanists organized by mood and introduced with a few words to indicate settings, objects, or events—Stalling incorporated popular songs of the day into his work for Warner Bros. Since the studio had controlling interest in many music publishing houses, Warner Bros. viewed cartoons as vehicles to plug the songs they owned. As Goldmark explains, each cartoon required an onscreen performance of at least a verse and chorus from one of the tunes from the Warner Bros. library (18). Stalling employed these familiar tunes, many of which came from Tin Pan Alley, and he filled in the rest of the soundtrack with original music. The tunes he borrowed invariably had words in their titles that related to something on screen so as to “illustrate the onscreen humor on an entirely separate narrative level from the animation” (11). Goldmark quotes cartoon director and producer Chuck Jones regarding Stalling's techniques:

He was a brilliant musician. But the quickest way for him to write a musical score—and he did one six-minute score a week—was to simply look up some music that had the proper name. If there was a lady dressed in red, he'd always play “The Lady in Red.” If somebody went into a cave, he'd play “Fingal's Cave.” If we were doing anything about eating, he'd do “A Cup of Coffee, a Sandwich, and You.” (22)

In this way, rather than allowing the required tunes to interrupt the narrative, Stalling used them as opportunities for humor.

Goldmark also focuses attention on the power of the composer to determine the meaning and effect of a cartoon in spite of the director's intentions; composers attained this element of control because they typically added the music after the animation had been finished, and they were not bound to the same narrative rules for cartoons as they would have been when scoring other kinds of films. Stalling's original audiences, if they were paying attention, could connect the name of the tune they were hearing with the images in the frame. Instead of straightforwardly matching a song title to an onscreen image, a composer could produce unexpected meanings involving the song lyrics. Goldmark describes the use of “A Cup of Coffee, a Sandwich, and You” in *Along Came Daffy* as one such “secondary gag” (25)

in a scene in which one character attempts to eat another. The words of the song, never heard in the cartoon but likely familiar to Stalling's audience, conclude,

I don't need music, lobster or wine,  
Whenever your eyes look into mine.  
The things I long for are simple and few;  
A cup of coffee, a sandwich, and you!

Stalling's audience would have known the song and recognized that the original ardor of the singer for his sweetheart has here been transformed into the ravenous onscreen desire of one character literally about to eat another. Goldmark shows how these musical associations afford the composer a chance to inject a joke into the narrative that operates on a level separate from the visual drama, and he raises compelling questions concerning how Stalling's musical puns actually work and how they figure into an aesthetics of cartoon spectatorship.

In connection with Stalling's creative use of preexisting music, Goldmark devotes a few pages to the music of bandleader and composer Raymond Scott, whose music Stalling introduced into cartoon scores. Unfortunately, this brief section understates Scott's importance to the genre and does not sufficiently guide the reader to other commentary on Scott. Although Scott did not compose his music for cartoon soundtracks, it appears in over forty cartoons. Scott's music, particularly the tune, "Powerhouse," which has served as the Cartoon Network's sonic signature since the late 1990s, has arguably become as emblematic of cartoon music as the song "Merrily We Roll Along." "Powerhouse" is the frenzied music of fantastic, hare-brained (or pig-brained, duck-brained, etc.) plans destined to go awry; it is cartoon music's jazzy answer to Dukas's *Sorcerer's Apprentice*. The importance of Scott's familiar, widely loved, and inimitable music to the world of Hollywood cartoons remains unrecognized in Goldmark's study.

In the second chapter, "You Really Do Beat the Shit out of That Cat': Scott Bradley's (Violent) Music for MGM," Goldmark draws fruitful comparisons between Bradley's musical style for *Tom and Jerry* and Carl Stalling's music for *Merrie Melodies*. While Stalling's creative world involved loquacious characters and required the audience to recognize a song, recall the song's lyrics, and connect all of that information to the image before them, *Tom and Jerry* has little or no dialogue, and its music does not typically have a lyrical component connecting it to the action. Warner Bros. cartoons proceed from one gag to the next without any larger structural plan (characteristic also of many early live action short films), but *Tom and Jerry* cartoons present a series of increasingly violent incidents that lead to

## Current Musicology

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an explosive climax. Goldmark shows how Bradley conceived of musical structures that accompanied these crescendos of violence, for example with “musical hits”—the conjunction of physical events with sonic or musical high points. He notes, “Bradley usually anticipated an impact or reaction by at least a second or two, so that the audience would *hear* the action before seeing it” (64).

In connection with *Tom and Jerry*'s trademark enmity, Goldmark raises questions about violence and audience perception. He presents an array of thought-provoking quotations from cartoon directors, producers, critics, and scholars concerning the violence in cartoons, but a clear connection between these quotations and his discussion of Bradley's *Tom and Jerry* music is missing. The interplay of musical sounds, pure sound effects, and narrative (a trademark distinction in *Tom and Jerry* soundtracks) demands more investigation. This portion of Goldmark's work only hints at the complexity of issues of violence and spectatorship, violence in cartoons, and how music relates to perceptions of violence—areas that might comprise a separate monograph altogether.

The third chapter, “*Jungle Jive: Animation, Jazz Music, and Swing Culture*,” analyzes the visual and musical vocabularies most strongly associated with Fleischer Studios in New York, where the Harlem jazz scene provided inspiration for Fleischer. Goldmark's description of the music as a driving, synchronizing force behind the action even when no performance is visible recommends the jazz cartoon as its own genre—one that prefigures the music video. Also unique to the jazz cartoon are the well-known musicians, such as Cab Calloway and Louis Armstrong, who mingle onscreen with their animated counterparts.

Through a number of descriptive examples, Goldmark exposes the pointed, codified visual systems and narrative principles at work in jazz cartoons. The formulae in which (white) racial fantasy plays out in these cartoons are more clearly articulated in the visual and narrative registers than they are in the music, and Goldmark's analyses reveal the multiple layers of a white conception of exoticized blacks. Both the cartoons themselves and contemporary commentary associate jazz with the primitive: musicians are often placed in the jungle and portrayed as animals living uninhibited and free. The jazz characters in these cartoons therefore appeal to the white viewer, yet also represent a threat, and Goldmark is sensitive to this point. He demonstrates that jazz's ambiguous moral standing in popular culture is an ongoing and nuanced topic in jazz cartoons. Through several examples, this chapter explores the fascinating idea that jazz was alternatively figured as the music of sin or redemption, and could even change from one to the other within the same cartoon. For example, Goldmark offers a careful

analysis of the embattled *Clean Pastures* (1937), directed by Friz Freleng. The cartoon violated the Production Code (a set of guidelines of morally acceptable content for motion pictures) because it depicted a heaven that was problematically “filled with people who were, according to the cartoon, gamblers, dancers, drinkers, and, above all else, jazz fans,” and because it cast jazz in both good and evil roles at different moments in the story (97). In another example, Goldmark perceives a mixed message about the moral choices presented in *Tin Pan Alley Cats* (1943) because the cartoon “endors[es] the high life over a righteous one,” even as it stakes out the opposite position: Fats Waller rejects the surreal world of jazz fantasy for a morally upright and familiar one. Though Goldmark’s reading fits into the notion of the morally unstable status of jazz in these cartoons, I believe it also offers a familiar pattern of spectator identification (99). The cartoon offers a chance for the viewer to identify with the animated Fats Waller through his (mis)behaviors and then be absolved of any guilt by Fats’s salvation in the end. Although Goldmark’s reading focuses only on the cartoons themselves, his conclusions suggest that studies of audiences and reception might be a useful complement to his approach.

While I agree with Goldmark that views held by the predominantly white audience help explain the highly exoticized view of black musician-ship and society as portrayed in cartoons, I would add that real-life whites rendered as cartoons didn’t fare much better. For instance, in *Hollywood Steps Out* (Warner Bros., 1941), Hollywood’s leading stars of the 1930s and 1940s—Clark Gable, Bing Crosby, Greta Garbo, and the Marx Brothers, to name a few—are portrayed as cynical, carnivalesque caricatures schmoozing in the creepy, booze-laden haze of Ciro’s Bar. Whether black or white, it would seem that cartoon renderings of celebrities were universally unflattering.

Goldmark’s fourth chapter, on classical music in cartoons, contains his most assiduous and elegant analysis. Here Goldmark takes on the idea of the canon of classical music used in cartoons in order to lay the groundwork for compelling and lively interpretations of a number of cartoons in which he addresses concert hall culture, stereotypes of musicians’ behavior, the sanctity of the concert hall, and the music itself. The rules governing this canon—especially those concerning high art and popularity—are debatable and are, at times, problematic in Goldmark’s discussion. Goldmark begins by noting that the canon of classical music in film at large “was reduced by cartoons to an even more limited set of works” by Wagner, Rossini, Mendelssohn, and others. He further explains the winnowing of the classical repertoire for cartoon appropriation on the grounds of what he calls “gestural immediacy.” Music with gestural immediacy is instantly recognizable,

## Current Musicology

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and easily excerpted. The concept seems to hit upon an essential quality of the pieces in the canon, and it explains the relative absence of music by avant-garde composers or by Mahler, Bruckner, and Brahms (with the exceptions of the latter's famous lullaby and Hungarian Dance, no. 2). Goldmark argues that in cartoon scores the classical canon was destabilized:

In mentioning the "canon," I do not mean to imply that these cartoons use the music of high art. On the contrary, I believe these films subvert traditional ideas of the canon by often featuring more popular (and thus more commercial) works, both of concert music and of opera. (108)

Though he is not as clear about what the "traditional ideas" might have been, Goldmark explains the choices of music for cartoons partly as a reflection of the popular side of contemporary symphonic programming—such as summer pops concerts—as opposed to "serious" programming during the regular season. This is only one line along which high art and popular culture can be divided, and some of his characterizations are puzzling, such as his classification of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* as "popular" without explanation (130).

Goldmark is at his best, in this chapter as in others, when he addresses specific examples. For his discussion of *Long-Haired Hare* (1949), Goldmark takes on cartoon representations of classical music as at once a sacrosanct collection of art music and yet also as an unstable collection of power relationships and aesthetic hierarchies. This portion of the chapter succeeds marvelously since Goldmark allows the oppositions of musical styles in the cartoon to create their own power dynamics, unstable and fleeting though they may be. This strategy is necessary since this cartoon demonstrates the uncertainty of precisely these musical categories: *Long-Haired Hare* shows the shifting power relations between art music and popular music, and between popular music fans, conductors, and opera singers. Bugs Bunny antagonizes the opera singer, Giovanni Jones, using music as his weapon. While Jones practices Rossini's "Largo al Factotum," Bugs unintentionally disrupts him with his own outdoor banjo playing, singing songs including "What Do They Do in Mississippi When Skies Are Drizzly?" and "When Yuba Plays the Rhumba on the Tuba." The conflict reaches its climax later when Bugs poses as Leopold Stokowski and takes the conductor's podium in the opera house where Jones is performing. In this final scene, Bugs pushes Jones to the limits of his vocal abilities; in the context of the opera house, the conductor is all powerful. Practicing at home, Jones is comfortable and in control, but he relinquishes this control under "Leopold's" baton, and classical music becomes difficult and dangerous.

Opera's status as high art or popular entertainment remains particularly unclear in Goldmark's study. He states that both of Disney's *Fantasia* films (1940 and 1999) left opera "untouched," but this is not entirely true (131). Though opera is not the basis for any of the animated sequences in *Fantasia 2000*, the film is not silent on opera—it explicitly rejects it. In a film with so few spoken words, Bette Midler's onscreen address to the audience during the film stands out. The relevant passage from the screenplay demonstrates her exaggerated irreverence for opera:

Over the years, the Disney artists have cooked up dozens of ideas for new "Fantasia" segments. Some made it to the big screen this time . . . But others, lots of others . . . How could I put this politely? . . . didn't. For example, Danish illustrator Kay Nielsen drew these sketches for a segment inspired by Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries." Here they are. And there they go.<sup>1</sup>

The sketches drift out of the frame, with the humorous implication that this segment was rejected as an inherently bad idea. Midler implies that Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" simply was not appropriate for *Fantasia 2000*, and her words cast opera—at least Wagner's—as the stuffy antithesis to *Fantasia 2000*'s supposedly light, fun fare. Opera's status in cartoons is complex, and, one feels, too important to be left unexplored.

The only precedent for *Tunes for 'Toons* is *The Cartoon Music Book* (2002), a collection of articles Goldmark edited with Yuval Taylor. Thus, despite some weaknesses, *Tunes for 'Toons* fills an important gap in the literature on film music, and it will be extremely valuable to scholars and of great interest to a general readership. In a few places, references to existing scholarship (scant as it may be) would have been helpful to the reader. For example, Jake Austen's "Hidey Hidey Hidey Ho . . . Boop-Boop-A Doop!" (2002), an article which deals capably with the portrayal of ethnicity and the hypersexuality of the characters in jazz cartoons, deserves mention. Similarly, an outline of Roy Prendergast's study of Scott Bradley's music ([1977] 1992:180–209) would have been pertinent, since Prendergast, like Bradley, was interested in elevating and legitimizing cartoon music (167–68).

Goldmark's strong case studies of the cartoons and their music as texts are rich in information, however, and serve as useful models for further research in the field. As cartoon music studies develop, it is likely that investigations of different kinds of viewing behavior will also grow. A comparison, for example, of an adult's one-time experience of seeing a cartoon before a full-length, live action feature in 1938, on one hand, with the repetitive viewings of the television audience, begun in youth in the 1970s or 1980s and continued at least through young adulthood, on the other, would mark an important contribution to the field of spectator studies. Since the

## Current Musicology

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cartoon's move from the theater to television is arguably one of the most significant developments in the history of the cartoon, cartoons' impact on their television audience, and the habits, demographics, and knowledge of television audiences demand scholarly attention. Above all, Goldmark's work demonstrates that cartoons are a rich and worthy topic of study, inspiring one to further research in a fledgling area of study.

### Notes

1. A transcript of this dialogue is available at [www.awesomefilm.com/script/fantasia\\_2000\\_dialogue.doc](http://www.awesomefilm.com/script/fantasia_2000_dialogue.doc). See Rafter (2002) for an exploration of this narrative patten and the implications for viewer identification.

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