

Representations of Early Music on Stage and Screen 2
Parallel Histories: Musical Pasts as Historical Presents
8th April 2016, Birmingham Conservatoire

Welcome: 10:45-11:00

Dr James Cook (Bangor University and the Society for Renaissance Studies)

Dr Adam Whittaker (Birmingham Conservatoire)

Dr Alex Kolassa (University of Nottingham)

Session 1: 11:00-12:30

The unearthly other: plainchant in *Black Death*

Dr Adam Whittaker (Birmingham Conservatoire, Birmingham City University)

Christopher Smith's 2010 *Black Death* tells the tale of an isolated village that has escaped the spread of the plague. Set in 1348, this film falls squarely within the medieval period as popularly understood, and plays upon many typical stereotypes including sword fights, torture equipment, and religious primitivism. Throughout the film, which is rather grim story that challenges the faith of a young monk played by Eddie Redmayne, plainchant appears frequently in the otherwise unnervingly sparse score composed by Christian Henson.

In my paper at the inaugural REMOSS study day in Nottingham last year, I examined instances where plainchant (and vocal music more generally) was used to musically identify sacred spaces within the context of films based on *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Moving forward from this, I seek to explore the manifestations of plainchant more broadly in films set in medieval times. *Black Death* offers an ideal case study in this regard given its frequent use of plainchant, or more specifically, music that is stylistically similar to plainchant, to communicate something of sacred identity, even when placed outside of the familiar church context.

In this paper I will examine the ways that music in the style of plainchant is deployed throughout *Black Death*, considering the effect that it has on the on-screen action and its power to situate the film solidly within the historical period at hand. In a sense, this music symbolises the struggle in the film between the 'good' of the Christian church, and the 'evil' of the supposed witchcraft that this isolated village has turned to in order to protect them from the plague.

Medieval Music at the Cinema: A 20th Century Representation

Dr Vasco Zara (Univesité de Bourgogne)

The starting point for my speech is Robert Rosenstone's statement that most people «increasingly receive their ideas about the past from motion pictures and television [...]». Today the chief source of historical knowledge for the majority of population must surely be the visual media» («History in Images / History in Words», *American Historical Review*, 93, 1988, pp. 1173-1185: 1174). What is the consequence for the music of early period, in

particular Middle Ages? If studies on medievalism have been consolidated in academic field, there are not so many researches focused on music and, in particular, on early music. It is not just a question of how a film director re-creates or looks for the authenticity of the past, but the point is to understand which musical elements our culture chooses for identifying the past, and why. In this way, the Bakhtin's notion of chronotope («the intrinsic connectedness of time and space») is useful to investigate the musical signs of «medievalness», and to mark out the musical boundaries from Renaissance time. A large range of film is taken in count, with particular attention to film like Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*, Eric Rohmer's *Perceval le Gallois* and John Boorman's *Excalibur*, as the latest super-hero movie production.

Playing with the Past in the Imaginary Middle Ages: Sonic Medievalism in *The Witcher III*
Dr James Cook (Bangor University and The Society for Renaissance Studies)

Freed though they have been from the historiographical pit of the Dark Ages, it is a condition of history that the Middle Ages slip ever further into the past. Nonetheless, in a sense, they have never been easier to visit. The vehicles for this time travel sit at home. We have but to open our computers or turn on our televisions to be transported into the past. Nonetheless, as any good Sci-fi show will tell you, we must be careful when we travel into the past; we can change things.

The medium on which I wish to focus – videogame – relies precisely upon on this ability to affect change. It takes aspects of filmic medievalism but must also confront an intrinsic interactivity. This interactive capacity may seem to authenticate further the experience of the past by creating a rich and responsive world but it also frees aspects of narrative agency from the control of game designers, composers, and sound engineers. In this paper, I will demonstrate some of the ways in which issues of space/place, identity, orientalism/otherness, and the norms of the medium itself can play out. In recomposing the past – be that with a nod to authenticity, within the realms of historical metafiction, or even the imagined (neo-)medievalism of the fantasy genre – videogames create something that sits between the past and present that nonetheless has a profound effect on the public conception of the medieval soundscape. My focus here is on CD Projekt Red's high-fantasy game *The Witcher III: Wild Hunt*, addressing not only the musical score but also wider aspects of soundscape such as vocal accent, foley, and manipulation of the aural field.

Lunch (not provided): 12:30-13:30

Session 2: 13:30-14:30

Sacrificing the past, creating a timeless present: Music in *The Wicker Man* (1973)
Dr Lisa Colton (University of Huddersfield)

The community of Summerisle is characterised by contradiction and ambiguity. The villagers are framed as medieval peasants who, under the control of their feudal Lord, are responsible for the sacrificial murder of policeman Sergeant Howie. Their paradoxical combination of knowing and naivety helps to craft the viewer's disorientation. Music—both in terms of underscore and the prominence of diegetic, participatory music-making at key points in the narrative—strengthens the sense of helplessness the policeman feels, dislocated as he is from the Christian mainland and its values. It also disconnects the protagonist, and by extension the audience, from the concept of a logical, chronological development from historical past to present day.

In this paper, I will examine the significance of medievalism found in *The Wicker Man's* score, showing that it serves not only to underpin the narrative, but to lend meaning, drama, and even a sense of legitimacy to the brutal local rite that occurs at the final climax of events. Furthermore, I will demonstrate the impact that the doubly synthetic score (old presented as new, new presented as old) has in terms of its creation of out-of-time Summerisle, through the manipulation of musical signifiers of 'now' and 'then'.

'The Past is a Different Planet: Film Sound and the Medieval Soundscape in Aleksei German's *Hard to Be a God*'
Dr Alex Kolassa (University of Nottingham)

Based on the novel of the same name by soviet-era authors Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, Aleksei German's *Hard to Be a God* (2013) is as uncompromising a film as they come. Set in the kingdom of Arkanar on a planet where the Renaissance never happened, a human scientist called Don Rumata—sent as an observer and disguised as a nobleman—watches, powerless, as a regressive regime murders the kingdom's intellectuals and artists. The novel, despite some admirably lofty philosophical ambitions, is something of a swashbuckling adventure piece – the film, however, is a whole different beast.

German's interpretation of the novel is an archetypical 'art' film: challenging and, for many, impenetrable. The critical response has been one of superlative and universal acclaim ('one of the greatest movies to be released this year, and perhaps any other' the Telegraph, 6 August 2015); audience reactions, by contrast, have seen a strange mixture of awe and repulsion. This is a nihilistic and carnivalesque film of filth, with long and lingering shots and little to no dialogue, depicting a peasantry's panorama of imaged medieval muck.

Six of the twelve years *Hard to Be a God* took to make were spent in postproduction, creating, by foley, all the sound heard in the film. There is no score, however; no non-diegetic music to analyse. And yet, music, in its absence, seems to be at the film's heart. Indeed, there

are several key scenes in which instruments (performed diegetically) feature. In *Hard to Be a God*, the visual spectacle is spectacularly matched by its sound design. I propose an examination of music and sound alike, to explore the parallel histories of a hyperreal medieval soundscape.

Break: 14:30-15:00

Keynote: 15:00-16:30

Beyond the halo: Chant in video game soundtracks

Dr Karen Cook (University of Hertford)

Plenary: 16:30-18:00

Conference Dinner: