Chapter 11
The Use of Early Modern Music in Film
Scoring for Elizabeth I

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In The Shakespeare Trade: Performances and Appropriations, Barbara Hodgdon writes of Elizabeth I that she “is and has been a construction—certainly one whose time has come round again but nonetheless one who had to wait for a critical practice that could re-produce her.”¹ This argument is true for much of the English Renaissance itself: that it is a construction of the past, recreated time and again by theatrical, textual, performative, and other practices that both reify and create what it is we “know” of the era. What Hodgdon calls a “fantasy”² in terms of correlating the actual to the perceived is what Umberto Eco describes as the “fictional world”³ of the novel, stage, and film: not one that is created out of whole cloth, but one that is “parasitic on the real world. A fictional possible world is one in which everything is similar to our so-called real world, except for the variations explicitly introduced by the text.”³

In films about Elizabeth, music plays an important and often prominent role in this process of construction. In the films and television mini-series I will discuss here, Elizabeth R (1971), Orlando (1992), and Elizabeth (1998), the music used can be categorized in one of three ways, all of which contribute to the fictional world being created: preexisting period music, preexisting non-period music, and original music composed specifically for the film. Original music is sometimes, but not always, composed in a period style. Broadly speaking, period and period-style music is equally diegetic and non-diegetic, while non-period scoring, whether preexisting or original, is almost always located outside of the diegesis.

In considering the role of music in films set in the early modern period (which I will refer to here as “early modern film”), it is important to understand that music is one of many elements that, separate from the screenplay, are nonetheless part of the filmic “text.” While a soundtrack alone, heard without visual or other reference to the film it is intended to accompany, functions as what Richard Burt calls the “paratext”⁴—that is, as defined by Gérard Genette, everything associated

² Hodgdon, Shakespeare Trade, 159.
⁴ Richard Burt, Medieval and Early Modern Film and Media (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 8.
with a particular text that is “marginal or supplementary data around the text”⁵—
the hybrid medium created by the production of the visual medium of the film with
its music is itself received as a single text or cinematic entity. Music can function
for inexperienced audiences as Genette’s threshold (seuil), in that it may serve as
the “in between” of a film’s status, bridging the inside—the director’s vision—and
the outside—the audience’s experience and/or reception of the work. Indeed,
works previously known to audiences can create “ghost” resonances, in which
the original context of the music bleeds through into the new use.⁶ For example,
viewers with previous musical knowledge of Mozart or those who have seen
Amadeus will recognize Mozart’s Requiem in D minor at the end of Elizabeth,
signifying the end of one period of Elizabeth’s life. Music can guide an audience
through the space that separates creator and consumer, mapping the multitudes of
musical/visual relationships in what Burt dubs the “cinematographosphere.”⁷

The consideration of the “cinematographosphere” in its entirety, however, helps
shift the location of music from a paratextual space and function to one recognized
as inherently necessary to understanding a film. As Anahid Kassabian writes:

There is no more sense in calling an object of visual analysis a “film” than there
is in calling a screenplay a “film.” A film as perceived by any kind of audience—
public or scholarly—has words, sounds, images, and music. It is not merely
seen, as in “I saw the greatest film the other day,” nor is it simply viewed by
“film viewers.” Music and film-goers engage each other in bonds that intersect
other tracks of films in complicated ways.⁸

Kassabian calls for critics and scholars of film to become familiar and comfortable
with the discourse of film music in order to be able to analyze “a film” in its
entirety, noting that while

film scholars do not generally feel a need to professionalize themselves in art
history or linguistics before talking about “a film,” the strong hold of the “expert
discourse ideology” of music has kept a tight lid on the production of studies
of film music, and an even tighter lid on their routine inclusion in courses,
theorizing, and criticism.⁹

By examining the nature of music in film and the individual elements of
any given film’s score, experiants (to create a term more appropriate for film

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⁷ Burt, Medieval and Early Modern Film, 24.


⁹ Kassabian, Hearing Film, 10.
than the traditional literary reader) are engaged more fully in a film’s complete
cinematographic existence. While Burt and other film scholars studying the
depiction and replication of the early modern on film have not yet crossed this
threshold, studies of music and film such as Kassabian’s make it clear that it is
impossible to understand the cinematographosphere without also having at least a
basic knowledge of the function and uses of music as an integral part of it.

The scholarly act of isolating and examining the period musical works
used in Elizabeth R, Orlando, and Elizabeth brings into relief the multivalent
cinematographosphere of the early modern film; this interdisciplinary approach,
combining traditional film studies and a musicological perspective, is necessarily
a more comprehensive view than the typical method that relegates the music to
the status of paratext. In this essay, I will examine the interplay between early
modern music and gender in the three films cited, focusing specifically on the
ways in which music serves to register Elizabeth’s often contradictory roles as a
female ruler, lover, and Englishwoman. Close readings of the musical genres and
individual period works—as well as their gendering qualities and interactions with
the other elements of the film—used in films concerned with presenting some kind
of accurate historical account of Elizabeth I offer new insight into the creative
tension between modern day and historicized views of the queen as expressed
through cinematic soundscapes.

Reconstructing Elizabeth I on Stage and Screen

Playwrights began historicizing the Elizabethan period almost before it had ended,
igniting a long history of fictional portrayals of Elizabeth I herself on stage. In 1605
and 1606, Anne McLaren has noted, Thomas Heywood’s play If You Know Not Me
You Know Nobody made Elizabeth “more martial in her chastity, more manly and
more heroic.” In 1704, John Banks’s The Albion Queens held up Elizabeth as an
iconic Englishwoman, a model for women of the empire to emulate. This persona
assigned to Elizabeth has endured, as McLaren observes: “Elizabeth soldiered on
in her Britomart garb—a trajectory that made sense of the decision to cast Quentin
Crisp as Elizabeth in Sally Potter’s film adaptation of Virginia Woolf’s Orlando
(1992).” At the same time, a tradition of speculating on Elizabeth’s private life
and (real or imagined) love affairs also took root; this, too, has continued as a
part of cinematic works beginning with The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex
(1939) and continuing to the present.

After the Restoration, the issue of continuity became critical for playwrights
and directors seeking to (re)present the Elizabethan period through the use
of music known to have originated at Elizabeth’s court or in the style of such,
including instrumentation and form, staging, and acting practices. However,
interest in continuity did not necessarily inhibit innovation and the fictionalizing
of early modern methods, what Susan Bennett, citing Jonathan Dollimore, refers

to as “creative vandalism,” in which “nostalgia performs as the representation of
the past’s ‘imagined and mythical qualities’ so as to effect some corrective to the
present.”11 William Davenant, for example, gathered and dispersed information
on original practices even as he created new scenes for and significantly adapted
Shakespeare’s plays. At the same time, an increased interest in opera, initiated by
Davenant’s 1656 opera The Siege of Rhodes, led to the creation of new musical
works based on the plays. The Siege score (now lost), written mostly by Henry
Lawes, Matthew Locke, and Henry Cooke, may well have been composed in the
style of the late Tudor and Elizabethan periods.12 This practice spilled over into the
incidental music for “straight” plays, and was supported in the eighteenth century by
David Garrick, who commissioned composers Charles Didbin and Thomas Arne to
write music appropriate for Shakespearean productions in that they recalled older
music in form, forces, and text; and in the late nineteenth century by William Poel,
whose Elizabethan Stage Society was a major force in the Elizabethan revival.13

In more recent theatrical and cinematic history, the lives of the Tudors and the
literature of the period have been popular fodder for the cinema. Elizabeth’s life
has been the topic of several detailed biopics, including The Virgin Queen (1923),
The Virgin Queen (1955), Elizabeth R (1971), Elizabeth I: The Virgin Queen
(BBC, 2005), and Elizabeth I (HBO, 2005), in addition to Shekhar Kapur’s two
also made notable cameo appearances in Orlando (1992) and Shakespeare in Love
(1998). Films about Elizabeth date from 1912, when Sarah Bernhardt played the
queen in the silent Les Amours de la reine Elisabeth. Since then, Elizabeth has
been played by actors as diverse as Bette Davis, Jean Simmons, Glenda Jackson,
Helen Mirren, Cate Blanchett, Judi Dench, and Quentin Crisp. While some of
the cinematic portrayals of Elizabeth’s life have drawn criticism for historical
inaccuracy, it is also true that these works are heavily invested in capturing the
atmosphere of the early modern period in England, paying special attention to
details in set design, props, and costuming. For a number of films, mini-series, and
television shows, the music has also been a key element in recreating the Tudor
and Elizabethan periods and Elizabeth’s court in particular.

Elizabeth R

Perhaps one of the most original approaches to scoring Elizabeth takes place in
the BBC’s 1971 mini-series Elizabeth R.14 Starring Glenda Jackson as Elizabeth,
this series was popular in both the UK and the US, where it was shown on

11 Susan Bennett, Performing Nostalgia: Shifting Shakespeare and the Contemporary
13 William Poel, Shakespeare in the Theatre (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1913),
11–12.
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Masterpiece Theatre. The series’ composer, David Munrow, an early music specialist and the founder of the Early Music Consort of London, who went on to score The Devils (1971), Henry VIII and His Six Wives (1972), and Zardoz (1974), wrote original music or arranged pieces for the series using period instruments and genres. Each episode opens with Munrow’s arrangement of William Byrd’s “The Leaves Be Green” (one of a set of variations on the tune, composed by Byrd for viol consort and collected as a work of approximate 20 pieces known as the Browning), performed by a broken consort of bowed strings and flute. The same ensemble is frequently used to provide non-diegetic music throughout the series, providing continuous aural geo- and chronolocation.

Almost all of the music in Elizabeth R is used to denote the time and place of the setting and events. The most frequently used texture is that of the broken consort, including both winds and bowed strings. Music for this ensemble is constant throughout the series as both the diegetic and non-diegetic accompaniment for aristocracy and royalty: it provides a soundscape for Mary’s final illness, meetings of Elizabeth’s Privy Council, state receptions, and scenes of court audiences and other events. Similarly, dances are scored for authentic instruments and use preexisting tunes to capture the sound of aristocratic merriment. However, two genres in particular, plucked strings and keyboard music, are assigned to individual characters, and Elizabeth’s own performances foreground connections between gender and music, ultimately creating a gendered soundscape for the queen.

Throughout Elizabeth R, plucked strings, particularly the lute, are identified with Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. Elizabeth herself played the lute and, considering the series’ interest in authenticity and detail, it is probably not chance that her would-be lover is assigned one of her own instruments as a musical signifier. The lute provides the background when Dudley greets Elizabeth at Mary’s death, as well as in scenes showing his exile from court and his eventual return. When Elizabeth dies, it is Dudley’s music, composed by Munrow in a style highly reminiscent of Dowland, which accompanies her last scenes.

Elizabeth herself is shown playing the virginal several times; the connection between woman and instrument is established in the first episode and continues throughout the series. As Hodgdon has written,

Like other accounts of her myth, Elizabeth R is a fantasy, one considered less as an unconscious structure than as a historical account of gendered imagination, a form of narrative that selectively appropriates and incorporates social meanings, structures, and subjectivities and is open to political analysis and negotiation. The musical construction of the queen’s gender through the use of the virginal, its very name, again, mirroring her chosen and created identity, is deliberate. To provide this construction—and indeed the production overall—with as much verisimilitude as possible, Jackson learned to play the virginal for the series.

Hodgdon, Shakespeare Trade, 159.

Showing Elizabeth as a performer connects her historiographically with the visual and material evidence of her identity as a musician: a miniature by Nicholas Hilliard from c. 1576 depicts her playing the lute, indicating the “well-tuned” status of her state, and one of her keyboards, a richly decorated spinet, is held by the Victoria and Albert Museum. Although there are no extant accounts of Elizabeth singing, it is possible that she accompanied herself on the lute as a vocalist; songs about her abound, but there is only one text set to music that is attributed to her—a prayer of thanksgiving following the defeat of the Spanish Armada, set to music by Byrd. The representation of Elizabeth as a musician, however, is an important one. As Linda Austern has written, such representations were signifiers of gender, and “united music with womanhood on allegorical and practical levels.” Indeed, as Austern argues, Elizabeth’s identification as female through visual and practical connections to music led to criticism by John Knox and others, for whom music “was often perceived by theoretical writers as a vain sensual delight and enemy to masculine rationality.” Elizabeth’s reputation as a highly competent performer arguably threatened her identity as the “Virgin Queen,” as extraordinary talent in music-making was considered inappropriate in a virtuous woman: only courtesans displayed this kind of proficiency. Ironically, such adeptness was said to make them “too masculine and too professional for a proper member of the weaker sex.” In allowing herself to be seen and heard as a musician, even after her ascension to the throne, Elizabeth both protested against these views and put on display her ability to think rationally and rule while remaining unavoidably female.

The producers of Elizabeth R mine this connection and material in creating their own character of Elizabeth. In each instance in which Elizabeth herself is playing, she is also shown engaged in political discussions with one or more men, indicating that she has been schooled not only in the traditional womanly arts for someone of her status and time but also in the traditionally masculine areas of diplomacy, tactics, and leadership. In addition, a number of Elizabeth’s achievements, both modest and significant, are accompanied by the non-diegetic sound of the virginal: it is present when she outshoots her companions at archery, recovers from smallpox and returns to court life, and is fêted after political and military victories. The first episode, which portrays Elizabeth’s life before the death of Queen Mary, introduces the concept of Elizabeth as a musician. In the presence of her waiting women, Elizabeth is shown playing a small, highly decorated virginal while she discusses politics with William Cecil. As they speak, Cecil turns the pages of her music for her. Elizabeth’s ability to concentrate on multiple tasks at hand speaks to her intellectual capabilities, while the presence of her chaperones and the fact that she is playing to pass the time remind audiences that she is also limited by her gender and social expectations regarding her behavior and competencies.

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18 Austern, “Alluring the Auditorie,” 347.
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In the series’ second episode, the writers dramatize an event for which there is a contemporary source, the well-known story in which James Melville hears the queen playing the virginal in her chambers while he is hidden behind a curtain. After Elizabeth realizes that he is present, she invites him into the room and continues playing. Even while she plays, she makes the claim, based on one made in 1564, that she never plays for men. This is clearly not true, either in the film or in Elizabeth’s actual life: historical records indicate that she performed “for the ambassadors who had come to England to ratify the Treaty of Blois,” and that “she gave a recital on the lute and virginals to another set of French ambassadors” nine years later. However, in stating that her performance is for personal pleasure or private female audiences only, Elizabeth is making it clear that her reception of men while she is playing is a privilege and not something allowed for other members of her court. Indeed, while the queen’s gender requires that she generally adhere to societal rules for such performance, her ultimately superior social status allows her to suspend them in appropriate circumstances. That she continues playing as they discuss political matters—in this case, a potential spouse for Elizabeth—furthers the first episode’s implication that she is capable of handling several tasks and interests at once, an intellectual quality some of her councilors would deny her as a woman. The complexity of the pieces she plays also lends weight, albeit subtle, to their signification of her abilities, education, and status as a well-rounded and accomplished woman and leader.

Orlando

While it is Elizabeth’s own instruments that signify her gender in Elizabeth R, it is the performance of others that offers musical commentary on the characterization of the queen in Sally Potter’s 1992 adaptation of Virginia Woolf’s Orlando. The majority of the film’s highly atmospheric music is original and was co-composed by Potter, music supervisor Bob Last, and David Motion. However, Potter and Last also use Edward Johnson’s (fl. 1572–1601) “Eliza is the fairest Queen” and Handel’s “Where’er You Walk,” and base a third work, “Pavane,” on the melody from the medieval French song “La belle qui tiens ma vie.” The use of vocal music in the film’s sonic foreground contrasts with the often silent Orlando and the ambient electronica that envelopes other sections of the film. By making the songs part of the film’s diegesis, Potter focuses the experiant’s attention on the performer(s), performance, and the texts, where applicable, of the works. “Eliza,” which I will discuss in depth below, is performed by Jimmy Somerville, a queer Scottish musical icon recognized for his falsetto singing voice. Somerville’s role as a performer in the film is one of many early hints that one of Potter’s interests in adapting Orlando is the gender play that it enables: partway through the course of his seemingly unending life, Orlando, born a man, becomes a woman. Both the

male and female incarnations of Orlando are played by Tilda Swinton, and in an equally gender-switching move, Elizabeth is played by Quentin Crisp. Somerville’s vocal performance is not limited to simply heralding gender reassignments and the issue of gender in the film. It also marks the importance of Elizabeth’s arrival in the film: it is she who bestows upon Orlando the gift of unfading youth, even as she recognizes the disappearance of her own physical beauty. The departure from the more usual hum of electronic music or ambient sound here also suggests to the experiant that Elizabeth is stuck in time, the time period represented by the song about her youth and beauty, whereas Orlando, generally accompanied by non-period-specific sound, will be released from the bonds of time to live through many centuries. The two other pieces of art music used—the aria by Handel and the arrangement of the French song—also point to the fixed chronolocation of Orlando’s friends and lovers; they accompany peripheral characters who move in and out of Orlando’s life, not Orlando him/herself. Although, as Ryan Trimm notes, Orlando “problematic[s] time and space through a host of devices marking gaps, fractures, and chronotopic complexity, thus resisting the tutelage of singularity,” these three pieces of music also decisively identify the chronolocation of the scenes in which they are used. They are performed in manners appropriate to the time period and settings in which they are employed, and further function as carefully selected aural commentaries on the situations in which they are experienced.

The first and most prominent of these is “Eliza is the fairest Queen,” which is used at the beginning of the film and partially accompanies the opening titles. Originally the Fairy Queen’s song from an entertainment given for the queen at Elvetham in September 1591, the work was scored for that event for “lute, bandore, bass viol, cithern, treble-viol, and flute.” Somerville, singing in his trademark falsetto and accompanied here only by a subtle electronic hum that appears to be an emotional signifier of Orlando’s anticipation and excitement rather than part of the music itself, begins the piece just before Orlando, who has been sleeping outdoors, wakes with a start. As Orlando runs across his family’s estate, the audience is treated to a visual display of lanterns and torches spread across its quadrangles, through gardens, and alongside a lake. As Orlando runs, so do servants holding the torches, creating a scene reminiscent of fireflies in a summer night. The mania of the running servants and Orlando is contrasted with Somerville’s languid performance, which is slow and metrically flexible. The Foley, or everyday sounds, for these scenes, including the movement of oars on the lake, servants’ footfalls in the gardens, and Orlando’s breathing, are all privileged over the music. Only when Elizabeth’s barge comes into view does this hierarchy subtly shift: as the barge enters from the right, the music comes into the aural foreground, increasing in dynamic and clarity until at last we see Elizabeth, and Somerville’s voice covers almost all other sound. At this point it is clear that

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The music is diegetic, as after Elizabeth comes into view the camera moves to show Somerville himself perched on the back of the barge, singing and gesturing grandly to his royal companion. This explains the audio layering of non-musical sound over the singing: the audience is to understand that it is experiencing the sound of the event just as Orlando is, with the song gradually becoming louder and easier to understand as the barge approaches and as Orlando himself gets closer to the barge.

“Eliza” prepares the audience for its introduction to Elizabeth through the first stanza while the queen herself remains unseen:

Eliza is the fairest Queen
That ever trod upon the green.
Eliza’s eyes are blessed stars,
Inducing peace, subduing wars.
O blessed be each day and hour
Where sweet Eliza builds her bower.

The text is carefully aligned with the visuals: “trod upon the green” is synchronized with Orlando’s flight through formal gardens, and “blessed stars” falls in line with the myriad of burning torches seen against the backdrop of night and alongside the river to guide the barge. The music hints at the arrival of a young and beautiful Elizabeth, and because the film has not yet provided a firm date for the scene, this is entirely plausible. However, the camera focuses on Elizabeth as Somerville repeats the first couplet of the first stanza and goes on to the second couplet of the second stanza, conflating the two and omitting the lines, “Eliza’s hand is crystal bright / Her words are balm, her looks are bright”:

Eliza is the fairest Queen
That ever trod upon the green.
Eliza’s breast is that fair hill,
Where virtue dwells, and sacred skill.
O blessed be each day and hour
Where sweet Eliza builds her bower.

At this point we see that it is the aged Elizabeth who arrives to be fêted by Orlando’s family. Potter synchronizes the music to the image so that as the audience sees the elderly monarch, the song text no longer focuses on her physical beauty, but on her virtue and experience. This subtle arrangement of music and cinematography is deliberate, synchronizing the text about beauty with a far glimpse of the queen’s splendor and shifting to praise of her experience as she is suddenly shown in a closeup to be aged. As Somerville sings the final couplet of the stanza, a mix of electronic sounds, representing Orlando’s reaction at seeing the queen, covers Somerville’s voice.

24 The common interpolation of “Come Away” between stanzas, which further praises the queen, goes unused in this performance.
This juxtaposition of sound and image is subtle but effective. It musically signifies the latter half of Elizabeth’s reign and, like the scenes that follow, in which Elizabeth herself disdains flattery over beauty, locates the action in time: the film later specifies in a title that the year of Elizabeth’s visit is 1600. The distortion of Somerville’s voice, meant to lend a kind of aural authenticity to his approach from a distance over water as well as to signal the ambiguity of the queen’s gender, also presages the bulk of the score, both in terms of the way music is generally backgrounded to the action and spoken word and in that there is very little music that does not receive some kind of twentieth-century electronic treatment. The melody, however, remains true to contemporary documentation of the song, a meaningful interpretive decision by Potter and Last. Elizabeth is first musically identified as the “fairest Queen,” and only later is further identified so through her actions in bestowing grace upon Orlando and removing him from the traditional boundaries of time and geography. She herself remains entirely fixed in time and place, in part by “Eliza”; she cannot escape the historical location of the music that tethers her to the occasion of her visit with Orlando. The music also conforms to the historical record in that songs were always about Elizabeth—none by her survive, if they ever existed—and from the point of view of the outsider, rather than being audacious enough to place words in the mouth of the queen herself. This adherence to fact in a film that is unequivocally fantastical is suggestive of the kind of variation Eco cites in explaining the fictional world. Perhaps most important, Potter’s foregrounding and diegeticizing of the film’s two performances of song, in contrast to the rest of the score, which remains primarily in the background, implies that the songs are more important than other music, and should be heard and recognized as such. Whereas the period-style background music of Elizabeth R broadly sets the scene and contributes to character development, “Eliza” signifies a crucial point in the film: everyone stops to listen, and the experient should take this as a cue to pay the same attention to the performance.

The use of “Eliza” also situates Orlando’s natural youth firmly in the early modern period, although it is clear from early in the film that he is not fixed in it as Elizabeth is. The majority of the film’s music is composed in a late-twentieth-century idiom, using electronic instruments, feedback, pitch and timbre manipulation, unresolved dissonances, and other techniques and approaches that would normally gesture toward a modern setting. The use or adaptation of the three preexisting works that are for the most part unchanged from their earlier forms in Orlando marks them as anomalies and signifiers of difference within the film. “Eliza” is not the only such work performed within the film. The dance based on “La belle qui tiens ma vie,” played on strings and accompanied by a drum, is used as diegetic music for a dance on the frozen Thames during which Orlando falls in love with Sasha, and Handel’s “Where’er You Walk” is performed (albeit in the background) in a scene set at a salon where Orlando makes her first appearance after changing from male to female. In contrast to the performative prominence of “Eliza is the fairest Queen,” the dance is used to establish atmosphere and is clearly subordinate to the dialogue and visuals of the scenes in which it is heard.
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"Where'er You Walk," while outside the scope of this essay, is not only an indicator of the passage of time and the era in which Orlando finds herself after the existential crisis that causes her change of sex, but also a signifier of gender norms and practices within Orlando’s seemingly limitless journey through time. These works both contribute to the film by creating overtones of drama through the minor key and relentless drumming of “Pavane” and indicating the further exploration of gender ambiguity: the Handel is sung by a countertenor, who is unseen and thus, at least for many audiences, of unknown sex until late in the performance.

Elizabeth’s arrival is perhaps the most important event in the film: it is during her visit that she commands Orlando to be forever young, never aging. This command, Potter explains, was a necessary creation for the film, not drawn from the book:

The narrative also needed to be driven. Whereas the novel could withstand abstraction and arbitrariness (such as Orlando’s change of sex) cinema is more pragmatic. There had to be reasons—however flimsy—to propel us along a journey based itself on a kind of suspension of disbelief. Thus, Queen Elizabeth bestows Orlando’s long life upon him (“Do not fade, do not wither, do not grow old …”) whereas in the book it remains unexplained.

Original music, somewhat mimicking a concertina, accompanies Elizabeth and Orlando out of doors the following day, where she names him her new favorite. The timbre of this music, although not its organ-grinder texture, continues into Elizabeth’s bedchamber that night, where she holds Orlando in her lap and states her conditions for his unfading youth. This music, emphasizing electronic sound manipulation and artificial timbres, is one of many aural signifiers that Orlando will not remain fixed in the time period located by the performance of “Eliza is the fairest Queen,” but rather will experience time and its alterations to cultural artifacts in an altogether unusual manner. Orlando is already himself marked by a very different kind of music than Elizabeth, and is soaurally designated as part of the future instead of the present of the scene or the past it will soon become.

Gender identification also plays a large role in the assignment of this music to Elizabeth. In a film about gender difference, it is important to recognize the significance of casting Quentin Crisp as Elizabeth. Potter said of her choice that Crisp was ideal for the role, being the “Queen of Queens” and having experience with acting in drag, including playing Lady Bracknell in The Importance of Being Earnest. Publicity for the film noted that “Potter’s research has shown that Crisp’s portrayal of Queen Elizabeth may be more than simply an interesting political or comic move: the aging monarch was once quoted as saying, ‘I have the mind of a man and the body of a woman.’” Crisp turns this description upside down: as a queen, he is biologically male while performing an exaggerated evocation

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26 *Orlando* Press Kit.
of a woman; as the queen, his gender performativity can become even more flamboyant though dress and music as he engages in the stereotypically feminine gestures and in the diva-like behavior of entitlement (or faux entitlement) that often accompanies that evocation. Just recognizing Crisp’s participation in the film, much less as Elizabeth, prepares the audience for the atypical gender mapping that is present throughout the rest of the film. Queering (or queening) Elizabeth through the casting of Crisp, the gender ambiguity of Somerville’s performance, and the choices made in Somerville’s performance and Potter’s presentation of “Eliza is the fairest Queen” all emphasize from the start of the film the concept of gender fluidity that is its raison d’être.

### Elizabeth

Shekhar Kapur’s 1998 feature film biopic of Elizabeth covers her life from approximately 1555 through the end of the Ridolfi Plot in 1571. The music for Elizabeth was written by Australian composer David Hirschfelder and contains a mixture of period pieces and original works. Unlike Elizabeth R, whose score was newly composed but strictly period in style, and distinct from the director-created and chronolocation-driven score for Orlando, Elizabeth freely mixes early modern music with famous works from other time periods to create a soundtrack that is broadly familiar to and comfortable for experiants. It makes few intellectual demands, but rewards careful or experienced listeners with connections and significations others might not hear. As Melanie Lowe has noted, Elizabeth contains “some musical anachronisms: for example, Elgar’s ‘Nimrod’ from the Enigma Variations accompanies Elizabeth’s denial of her individual existence and any personal identity beyond ‘England’” in addition to “[t]he most striking musical anachronism [that is] the lengthy incorporation of Mozart’s Requiem to track the film’s conclusion.” The elegiac “Nimrod” and the Requiem signify Elizabeth’s 28 decision to end her private life and become a fully public figure, as well as her choice to present herself as a perpetual virgin, white-faced and unemotional. However, early modern music is used early in the film both to situate Elizabeth historically and to underscore her emotions regarding the actions and decisions she makes as the reigning monarch. In many cases, these works are blended into the soundtrack’s original composition, which, although not slavish in replicating the music of the period, are often at least somewhat in the same style melodically or rhythmically, or otherwise provide continuity between the old and the new through instrumentation or other factors. Most of the works used to accompany Elizabeth are sacred choral works. Unlike the relatively small music budgets of the BBC for Elizabeth R and the art-house Orlando, Kapur’s film had an overall budget of $25 million and the backing of three production companies. These resources allowed

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Kapur and his producers to hire a large music department for the film, including a choirmaster, the choir of St. John’s College, Cambridge, and personnel from the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. Kapur deliberately sought a rich, dense musical texture for the film, asking music editors for thick choral music and the use of “sub-frequencies” to create an often dark sonic landscape. The result is a complex score frequently referencing the sacred music of the period for dramatic sequences. The richer texture also owes something to the film’s projected audience: unlike a BBC series, which requires long-term viewing commitment, or an art film, which generally caters to a highly literate audience well educated in the arts, the feature film must speak to a wider, more general audience. Experiants may have been drawn to Elizabeth for a number of reasons outside of historical or literary interest, including the action-film elements and intrigue, the costuming, the casting of Cate Blanchett and Joseph Fiennes, and the “English heritage film”-patina commercials and previews attached to the film. Thus the experiant attending the film would likely expect some of the sounds of “Elizabethan England,” including period or period-style music, but also the large, sweeping musical gestures of most film scores featuring action and romance, particularly in the context that Kapur created with Elizabeth—connecting modern viewers with the past by representing the past as just like the present, with fancier clothes and more horses.

Sacred music during the Tudor period was of a particularly high quality, although composers and performers both had to be highly conscious of the frequent changes of religious policy dictated by the crown. Thomas Tallis, a Catholic initially appointed to the Chapel Royal under Henry VIII’s reign, composed for four Tudor monarchs: Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary, and Elizabeth. As Anne Somerset notes, music “not only played an essential part in the religious life of the Court, but featured largely in its day-to-day existence,” and it was due to Tallis’s (and later William Byrd’s) extraordinary talents that Elizabeth “kept them in her service and protected them from the full rigor of the recusancy laws.” With its focus on Catholic-Protestant strife, it is not surprising that Elizabeth uses sacred vocal works by both composers to represent its promotion of the concept of Elizabeth’s tolerance of religious dissenters, reluctance to harm them, and anguish when she must. Elizabeth granted Tallis and Byrd exclusive rights to compose, print, and publish polyphonic music in England, and they dedicated their joint publication Cantiones que ab argumento sacrae vocantur (1575) to her. In addition, both men composed for the Chapel Royal as part of their careers. The two major events of the film, Elizabeth’s coronation and the suppression of the Ridolfi Plot, are accompanied by sacred song.

Tallis’s Te Deum accompanies Elizabeth’s coronation. In a scene immediately following Elizabeth’s hearing of Queen Mary’s death, Elizabeth is shown

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30 Somerset, Elizabeth I, 371.
31 Peter Holman, Dowland: Lachrimae (1604) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 209.
processing down the aisle at Westminster Abbey, surrounded by her advisors and court. The *Te Deum*, which emphasizes the glory and righteousness of God and may have been composed for Henry VIII, impresses upon the experiant the importance of Elizabeth’s comment in the preceding scene that her ascension to the throne not only takes place through the divine right of succession, but is an act of God in preferring her over the Catholic Mary. Later in the film she will use the same reasoning as she transforms herself into the Virgin Queen, establishing her right to rule without marrying or producing a male heir. This sentiment is repeated often throughout the film, starting with these scenes and continuing through Elizabeth’s verbal duel with the bishopric over the Act of Settlement, in which Elizabeth emphasizes her gender, stating, “I am only a woman” as a means of ameliorating the bishops’ concerns. As an accompaniment to Elizabeth’s coronation, the work also signifies Elizabeth’s power as an individual in a traditionally masculine position, and as a female ruler who will refuse to be governed by a consort or give in to the demands of men to submit herself to marriage: direct shots of her face, particularly as she accepts the throne, crown, and scepter, are aligned with passages featuring lower male voices and/or lower tessituras in general. Elizabeth is singled out in these sections by the camera focus and the more prominent or solo lines of music that surround her; when the choir returns in full, it is with a cut to the men of state who serve her at this moment, handing her the emblems of accepted rule and the power of the state. Byrd’s music—titled “Night of the Long Knives (after Byrd)” in the soundtrack—is used as the musical narrative that accompanies Walsingham’s purge of Catholics involved in the Ridolfi Plot. Byrd’s six-part motet *Domine secundum actum meum* begins when Elizabeth gives the order to arrest and execute those plotting against her; the following montage cuts back and forth between the arrests and Elizabeth praying in her chapel. Part of the *Cantiones* (6a) written for Elizabeth, *Domine secundum actum meum* serves, with the Tallis, as a contemporary musical bookend for the film. The work is carefully chosen, its text implying that Elizabeth prays for absolution even as Walsingham executes Norfolk and his coconspirators on her orders: *Lord do not judge me after my deeds; I have done nothing worthy in your eyes. Therefore I beseech You in Your majesty to deliver me from my sins.* The construction of the motet lends itself well to the scene and may well have dictated the ordering of the sequence. It begins with an alto solo—similar to Elizabeth’s own voice—as Elizabeth gives Walsingham her approval to end the plot, signifying that she is acting alone in this matter without consulting the men of her cabinet. As the sopranos enter, the camera cuts to Norfolk’s mistress, who listens to her lover trying to accept and rationalize his martyrdom. Each subsequent alto solo, no matter how brief, cuts back to Elizabeth at prayer. As the rest of the ensemble fills in, the camera cuts to the various conspirators, indicating the position of Elizabeth against her enemies as one against many. When the scene cuts to a man flagellating himself with a leather whip, chant is layered beneath the motet. The alto solo here is clearly heard in juxtaposition with the chant: the old rite is aurally subjugated by the new, and in particular by music written for and now representing Elizabeth. As
Elizabeth prays, she is accompanied more and more by the ensemble, although the alto remains prominent: the music narrates the trope that she has dominated the heretics. Following the reprisals, Elizabeth begins her transformation into the mythic Virgin Queen and the music is drawn from non-period sources, marking her as one not rooted in a particular time but, as the film industry likes to say, “for all time.”

Conclusion

These brief case studies of contemporary film scoring to accompany and identify Elizabeth I demonstrate the means by which Elizabeth can be musically gendered, through song directly addressing her sex or through works that contribute more subtly to our understanding of her “man’s heart in a woman’s body.” They also function as aural chronolocators, textual artifacts of Elizabeth’s reign that signal an atmosphere of authenticity, however superficial or short-lived. The importance of music in Elizabeth R, Orlando, and Elizabeth in defining Elizabeth’s person and personas, as well as signifying her emotions and even policies, should not be underestimated.

The use of music in these ways also indicates an interest on the behalf of music directors, if not film directors, in the methods of signification that take place through the score and the privileging of the score as an integral aspect of the film. Clearly, the composers and music directors or coordinators of these films were well aware of Elizabeth’s own involvement with music as a performer and patron and the various genres of music and instruments associated with her. In the scenes featuring Elizabeth and period music, the experiant hears a different kind of scoring from what is used elsewhere in the films and in general in film, creating multiple variations on what has become the trope of “Elizabeth I” and representing what is, for many, the sound of the early modern. For the attentive experiant, these variations provide a window into contemporary and modern uses of early modern song in fictional recreations of Elizabeth I and, ultimately, into the gendering of musical practices, spaces, and bodies across disciplines and areas of study.