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Musical Rebirth in Fearless and The Truman Show

Abstract

Films have long made use of pre-existing music, most notably by well-known composers such as Bach, Mozart, Beethoven. Director Peter Weir makes use of pre-existing music in nearly all of his films. In his two films from the 1990s, *Fearless* and *The Truman Show*, Weir uses music from two living (at the time) and largely unfamiliar Polish composers, Henryk Górecki and Wojciech Kilar, to accompany the climax of each film, coinciding with the rebirth of the central characters. The films show a parallel narrative, each with minor instances of renewals, until the respective characters are reborn, accompanied by music that is stylistically absent in any other portion of the film.

Keywords

Fearless, Truman Show, Weir, Gorecki, Kilar, Music

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Author Notes

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The themes of rebirth and renewal are common and have been used in films for decades. This article seeks to examine the use of the music in the climactic scenes of *Fearless* (1993) and *The Truman Show* (1998), and will attempt to connect the films, even though no narrative connection is present, nor is either film's composer the same. While most films' rebirth images are accompanied by music, usually original score, the scenes in *Fearless* and *The Truman Show* are accompanied by unfamiliar music by Polish composers Henryk Górecki and Wojciech Kilar, respectively. The music is asynchronous to the image and in both cases, the music is foregrounded, with dialogue and effects absent in some places. The asynchronous accompaniment forces the audience to acknowledge the music, and demonstrates the magnitude of the spiritual rebirth that both characters are undergoing. The connection between the two films is not a narrative one, but a musical connection through the style of the two composers. Additionally, the connection is established through a portion of Górecki's symphony not used in *Fearless*, the third movement, and its similarity to the music of Kilar.

While the majority of films use an original score, pre-existing music is often used, particularly those "classical music" works that are extremely familiar, such as music from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, Handel's *Messiah*, and Mozart's *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*. While this music can accompany scenes that run parallel to their respective meanings of celebration, or even of class and

privilege,¹ pre-existing music can also run counter to original meaning, in films such as *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) and *Die Hard* (1988).²

When less familiar or unfamiliar pre-existing music is used in film, it can be placed for several reasons, including trying to simulate underscore or for narrative considerations. The director Peter Weir consistently makes use of both pre-existing music and original underscore in his films.³ In some cases, the music is extremely well known, as in *Dead Poets Society* (1989), which uses, among other music, the finale from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and the opening *Allegro* movement from Handel's Third Suite from *Water Music*. In other cases, the music may not be as easily recognizable, as in *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1982), which uses Richard Strauss's "Beim Schlafengehn" from his *Vier letzte Lieder*, or Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, in *Master and Commander: Far Side of the World* (2003). In Weir's two films from the 1990s, *Fearless* and *The Truman Show*, the usual suspects of Beethoven and Mozart appear, as "Für Elise" and the "Alla Turca" movement from K. 331, respectively. However, the music used at the climax of both *Fearless* and *The Truman Show* is much less familiar. In both films, music by living Polish composers was used as the respective protagonists have an experience with God.

Peter Weir only directed two films in the 1990s: *Fearless* and *The Truman Show*. In both films, music by two Polish composers plays a significant role at

the respective conclusions. The music represents the experiences of the protagonists of each film, Max Klein, played by Jeff Bridges, in *Fearless*, and Truman Burbank, played by Jim Carrey in *The Truman Show*, as they are reborn through their experiences. In *Fearless*, Max survives a plane crash, the first event of the film. He then begins to lead his life without fear because he feels as though he has already been killed. His behavior leads him to become disconnected from his wife, his family, and the world. In order to begin to reconnect, he tries to aid another survivor, Carla, played by Rosie Perez, by showing her that the death of her infant child on the plane was not her fault, and she could not have prevented it. Following this, he asks his wife to save him. The conclusion of *Fearless* provides a complete flashback of the plane crash, the centerpiece of the film, which has only been seen in pieces throughout the film; this occurs while the character suffers an allergic reaction and stops breathing. Henryk Górecki's music, with its lyrics, underscores the climactic scene.

Fearless

Fearless is based on a novel by Rafael Yglesias and concerns an architect named Max Klein who survives a plane crash.⁴ After the crash, Max engages in some risky behavior, such as eating strawberries, to which he has a terrible allergy, and crossing interstate highways on foot because he believes that God cannot, or at least, will not, kill him, having already experienced his unrealized

death. The film begins with the plane having already crashed and Max leading a group of survivors out of the wreckage.⁵ Max has continued to believe that he is “immortal,” on par with God, because he accepted his fate of death in his near-death experience, but that fate was not realized. At one point in the film, he screams, “You can’t kill me!” into the sky, presumably addressing, or perhaps taunting, God. Therefore, in his mind, he could live his life without consequences because, from a certain perspective, he had already died once. Owen Gleiberman’s review of the film states this eloquently: “Yelling up at God in triumph, dancing on the ledge of an office building, he feels infused with power because he’s reliving that one, fearless moment over and over.”⁶

At the opening of the film, Weir provides the template for the musical sense of destruction, through the use of Penderecki’s *Polymorphia*,⁷ which is then reconciled at the end with the musical sense of transcendence.⁸ The opening scene and accompanying music of *Fearless* informs and previews the conclusion of *Fearless*, in that Max Klein’s near-death experience and subsequent risky and arrogant behavior is ultimately reconciled with his later near-death experience, his rebirth, and the words “I’m alive.” The significance of Górecki’s music is that it is a complete break in style from any other music heard during the film; it stands out from music in the rest of the film through its use of orchestration, the musical style of minimalism, the slow-moving lines, the exclusivity of the string timbre, and the slow and steady crescendo throughout the scene.

Max experiences multiple moments of renewal in the film; some are accompanied by Maurice Jarre's original score, others by pre-existing music. Shortly after the crash, Max rents a car. As he is driving, he scans the radio, first encountering two reports of the plane crash, and then finding a Spanish-language station. The song being played is the Gipsy Kings' "Sin Ella." As the music reaches the chorus, Max put his head out the window, like a dog would, and experiences a moment of joy.⁹ Since the song is not in English, and the singer is sometimes difficult to understand, the lyrics are far less important than the mood and feeling of the song. Deeper into the film, Max crosses a busy highway, and climbs onto the ledge of a building. In both cases, he runs from his beginning points, an impromptu media interview, and an interview with an attorney and the wife of his dead business partner, respectively. Jarre's music is highly dissonant and non-melodic, projecting a feeling of both confusion and anxiety. Once Max accomplishes his tasks, the music stops, and Max finds a momentary sense of happiness.

In the film's third act, Max crashes his car into a brick wall to show Carla that she could not have held onto her baby during the plane crash. The scene is accompanied by U2's "Where the Streets Have No Name," which is also used in 90 seconds of the 120-second film trailer.¹⁰ When the film was released in 1993, U2's song would have been about six years old, the opening song on the 1987 album "The Joshua Tree." Additionally, the song was released as a single, and

the band would have been one of the best-known groups in the US, if not the world, by 1993.¹¹ The song begins with a synthesized organ playing slowly moving chords, not unlike one might hear in a hymn. However, the synthesizer is modified enough that it is difficult to hear the precise moment when the chords actually change. After a full statement of the harmonic progression, the guitar riff enters, clarifying its status as not just popular music, but also as the specific song, as many audience members would recognize. While the hymn-like introduction conveys a similar sense of transcendence and spiritual renewal to Carla, it is simply another task to Max, as the music stops on impact, just as Jarre's score had in earlier examples in the film. But through this task of "saving" Carla, Max finally recognizes his desire, and more importantly, his need to be saved. The audience immediately recognizes the song, and in the hospital, Carla immediately recognizes that no one could tell her that she could not have saved her baby, but that Max had to physically take her through that experience for her to acknowledge it. The implication here is that the audience, through the familiarity of U2's song, identifies with Carla, and her experience. While Max's experience is a full rebirth, accompanied by unfamiliar classical music, Carla's experience allows her to forgive herself, accompanied by familiar popular music.

Henryk Górecki's *Symphony No. 3, "Symphony of Sorrowful Songs"*

Henryk Górecki (1933-2010) is often lumped together with composers Arvo Pärt (b. 1935) and John Tavener (b. 1944), the so-called "Holy Minimalist" composers.¹² He is also grouped with other Polish composers who write with similar aesthetics: Wojciech Kilar (b. 1932) and Krzysztof Penderecki (b. 1933); all three composers happened to be born about the same time. Not wanting to continue composing avant-garde music any longer, Górecki faced a compositional crisis in the mid-1960s, and began writing much more consonant music, often with religious lyrics, such as his *Amen* (1975) and *Totus Tuus* (1987).

Górecki's *Symphony No. 3, "Symphony of Sorrowful Songs,"* composed in 1976, is constructed in three slow movements, which is contrary to symphonic tradition, which consists of four movements. In addition, the formal scheme of the overall work is not based in the symphonic tradition. Typically, in a four-movement work, the first, and likely fourth movements would be in sonata form, one of the middle movements would be a minuet and trio, and the slow movement's form varies, and could be a modified sonata form, rondo, or large ternary, among other possible forms. The symphony's first movement is a large ternary, with a canon and reverse canon as the first and third parts of the movement, but the other two movements are formally ambiguous, and do not correspond to any sort of clearly codified form.

All three movements of the symphony feature a solo soprano vocalist, which is another way that this particular work deviates from the symphonic tradition; even Mahler did not use voice or choir in every movement of a symphony. The first and third movements concern a mother who is searching for her son who has been killed. The conclusion of the first movement's vocal passage leads to the climax of its movement. The mother in the first movement asks for pain and suffering not to be on her son, but on her instead, like most parents would. However, the mother in this instance is the Virgin Mary. Of course, changing the suffering is not possible, as she realizes while singing, "Although you are already leaving me, my cherished hope." This line, while not sounding musically anguished, leads to the loudest point of the movement, and the third section of the ternary form begins with the orchestra realizing the Virgin Mary's anguish, as opposed to that anguish being sung.

In the third movement, lyrics are used throughout the movement, rather than isolated, and some portions of the lyrics are repeated, as opposed to the first movement, which only uses the vocalist in the middle part of the ternary form in the first movement. In the third movement, the lyrics emphasize loss, not just emotional, but of the physical body, prolonging the grieving process. The mother does not have an opportunity for the type of closure one would expect, yet, the movement and the symphony do not end with this in mind. Instead, the music concludes with music similar to the last two stanzas, which sound much more

hopeful, and are in the major mode, as opposed to the rest of the movement that is in the minor mode. Although the mother has not gained physical closure by locating her son's body, she has gained emotional and spiritual closure by allowing God's world to comfort both herself and her son during the loss. The significance of the third movement of Górecki's symphony is demonstrated through the usage of an aurally similar work in *The Truman Show*.

The "Symphony of Sorrowful Songs" made Górecki a musical "superstar," though not immediately following its premiere. As a younger man, Górecki was a leading composer in the Polish avant-garde movement in the 1960s, along with composers Krzysztof Penderecki and Wojciech Kilar. Górecki's style started to shift in the mid-1960s, as he became more interested in what musicologist Bohdan Pocij refers to as the "slow, almost stubborn dragging from the depths" that is essential to his Third Symphony.¹³ *Symphony No. 3* was composed during the last three months of 1976. Initially, the work was poorly received when it was premiered at the International Festival of Contemporary Art in Royan, France in April 1977. Luke Howard writes, "Whatever the audience's expectations may have been for Górecki's music in Royan, they were certainly not fulfilled by the Third Symphony, and the work was almost unanimously derided."¹⁴ Howard provides a summary of reviews, stating that, "Six Western music journals—all of them German-language publications—reviewed the Royan Festival, and all of them condemned Górecki's Third Symphony,"¹⁵ and translates

selected passages from these reviews. One in particular, written by Hans-Klaus Jungheinreich, continues to be a criticism of Górecki's music today: "This non-composition has irrevocably paved the way down the wrong path to a childish 'new simplicity,' to an urgent warning for all who are interested in the development of real musicality."¹⁶

In 1992, Nonesuch records released a recording of the piece with David Zinman conducting the London Sinfonietta with Dawn Upshaw as the soprano soloist. Shortly after its release, it had reached the top of the classical charts in both the United States and Great Britain, and sold over 600,000 copies worldwide in its first year of release. Within the first three years of its release, this recording sold over one million copies,¹⁷ and is the recording used in *Fearless*.

After the release of the Nonesuch recording, opinions were varied across the spectrum. Howard writes,

The symphony's impact directly on its audience was so profound that the traditional role of the critic as intermediary and aesthetic judge (especially when dealing with the contemporary repertoire) was, in this case, rendered superfluous. Reviews often avoided discussion of the symphony's musical traits and instead addressed the work in terms of personal religion...[P]eople heard in Górecki's symphony the musical allusions they wanted to hear. Consequently, the Third Symphony occupied a surprising variety of stylistic niches in the minds of its listeners. For those antagonistic to the work, such relationships could show that Górecki's Third is facile and derivative. For apologists, on the other hand, it gave the symphony extra credence by association with established masterpieces.¹⁸

From Howard's summary, there seems to be little middle ground in terms of reactions and responses; only polar statements exist. Josiah Fisk, in his 1994 article entitled "The New Simplicity," states that Górecki's symphony, "has no inner life," is "music without dialogue," and that, with the canon in the first movement, he "fulfills the expectation of the naïve ear and calls it a day."¹⁹ Fisk's comments speak to the seeming lack of content in the music that has been argued since its premiere in 1977.

Regarding the strong negative critical reaction towards Górecki's symphony, the initial negative reaction was because of an expectation of the earlier avant-garde style, which is absent in the Third Symphony. With its explosion in popularity in the 1990s, the leap can be made that various critics may feel as though "popular classical music" is beneath classical music. If a CD of classical music can sell over one million copies, then surely the content has been so deeply diluted as to make it unworthy of his appreciation. This type of reaction is typical for fans of bands who were unknown at one point, sign a record contract with a major label, and then the band is accused of "selling out," whatever that means. The fan of that band then takes to making statements such as, "I was a fan *before* they were famous," giving the fan a perceived level of authenticity and credibility that other fans of that band do not have. I cannot possibly know what Simon believes, but I believe that this can explain one possible perspective on why his dislike of the piece is so strong.²⁰

Having spoken of the huge success of the recording, the likelihood of an average audience member recognizing Górecki's symphony within the film is extremely low. The recording of the Third Symphony was released in 1992, sold over 600,000 copies in that year, and over one million by the end of 1994, but the demographic that would purchase that CD is certainly not the same demographic that would be purchasing a U2 or Pearl Jam CD in 1992-1994. 1994 was also the year that the Benedictine Monks of Santo Domingo de Silos had a CD of chants on the Billboard charts in the United States. Well over one million copies of that CD were sold, but how many people who owned that CD would be able to tell the difference between the various chants, or between the same chant recorded by different vocal ensembles? In both cases, ownership and sales may equate to popularity, but do not necessarily equate to "knowing" the music.

Górecki's Music in *Fearless*

In the final scenes of *Fearless*, the audience gets to relive the plane crash, along with Max. Górecki's music begins as Max is about to take a second bite into the strawberry; his wife realizes what is about to happen, and senses the impending allergic reaction that will close his throat and kill him. Just before this scene occurs, Max says to his wife, "I want you to save me." As Max is dying from this reaction, he realizes that he is not immortal, and wants to live his life again, through reliving the crash, and his wife begins performing CPR on him.

The crash scene begins with Max internally saying, “This is it; this is the moment of my death,” as the audience has heard multiple times throughout the film. Max gets up from his seat, with the intention of sitting and dying with a boy who is a solo passenger on the flight. Max walks confidently down the aisle, telling other passengers that everything will be OK. The only sound heard in this portion of the scene is Górecki’s music; lips must be read in order to know what the characters are saying. When Max speaks to the boy, dialogue re-enters; Max tells the boy that it will all be over soon, and that “everything is wonderful.” As the plane crashes, the only sound is the music of Górecki, which creates a requiem-like effect. Max’s wife continues to try to revive him, and is ultimately successful. Richard Schickel, in his review for *Time*, states, “We discover that Max has literally seen the light, that blinding white light that features in so many out-of-body experiences. He has walked some way down the tunnel to the afterlife that is also a convention of these tales.”²¹ Górecki’s music continues directly into the end credits with no pause, and only stops when the credits are finished. Clearly, Weir is not using the music here to emphasize the lyrics present in the movement, as most of the audience would have left the theater by the time the vocals entered. So, why did Weir choose this piece? In an interview given in the September 1993 issue of *Movieline* magazine, Weir stated,

There's a curious Polish influence on this film. There's a director who has just struck me and inspired me, Krzysztof Kieslowski. I saw “The Decalogue” on TV in Australia and “The Double Life of Veronique.” I found myself playing

various Polish composers on the set, as I do, and at dailies. Most noticeably, Heinrich [sic] Górecki. (Symphony #3?) Yes, I tried to buy it for the film but they said, ‘Oh no, it’s become a hit, sold more copies than any contemporary classical record.’ They said they wouldn’t sell it to us without seeing the movie. And I’m certainly not going to audition for a record company at this stage of my life. And they said, ‘Would you mind if an executive went to the test screening?’ And I said, ‘As long as I don’t know he’s there.’ He came up to me after the film and said, ‘I think Mr. Górecki would be happy to hear you use his music in your film.’ So we bought it.²²

Weir, without overtly stating it, seemed to be influenced by Dawn Upshaw’s recording of Górecki’s Third Symphony, to the point where he could not divorce the film from the music to which he was listening. The music fits film appropriately, as Max is reborn with the words “I’m alive,” the first time he actually says this in the course of the film. Attempting to traverse a cylindrical corridor (plane wreckage) with blinding light at its end is symbolic of the birthing process, and the term “reborn” is appropriate for Max. Instead of the mother-child relationship shown in Górecki’s symphony, the end of *Fearless* focuses on the Father-child relationship between God and man. It is only through reliving the entire experience that Max can be reborn.

Of the reviews of *Fearless*, only four make mention of sound, and only two of those four explicitly mention Górecki’s Third Symphony.²³ Brian Johnson’s review in *Maclean’s* simply acknowledges the use of that piece of music: “Wisely, he [Weir] places the crash scene at the end of the film, as a flashback that unfolds to the ineffably sad and spiritual Symphony No. 3 by Henryk Górecki.”²⁴ John Simon’s review of the film is much more cynical, and

Fisk's representation of The "New Simplicity" is found here. Simon's first sentence of his review is, "Confronted with daily clinkers, a critic finds it hard to work up the passion to call a movie mendacious, detestable, and revolting, but *Fearless* provokes just such enthusiasm."²⁵ Simon reserves some vitriol for Górecki's music, after dishing out quite a bit to Weir.

Whenever the story runs out of steam, we get further partial flashbacks on, as it were, the installment plan, teasing us along with promises (and dread) of the climactic crash. When this finally comes, the horror is toned down (or, for me, intensified) with the minimalist music of the abominable Henryk Górecki's repellent Third Symphony, whose *lento sostenuto tranquillo ma cantabile* (get that?) movement descends on—*upon!*—the disaster like so much benignly all-enveloping soup.²⁶

Simon not only attacks the music, but also attacks the composer; even in film reviews, the criticism of Górecki's *Symphony No. 3* only lies on poles.

Despite the criticism, and the fact that most critics ignored the film's music altogether, the use of Górecki's music aids Max in his emotional and spiritual rebirth, as Max cannot continue living the way he has following the crash. The scene does not contain any synchronization points with the music, which is unexpected from what typically occurs in the climactic moments of films.²⁷ The first movement's lyrics clearly address spiritual issues through Mary's words, asking for Jesus's pain to be placed on her instead. Jesus, of course, is the Savior, and Max asks to be saved; this is the only point in the film where he makes this request. As Max relives the crash, he believes that his

allergic reaction is now “the moment of [his] death,” and begins to move toward the light. As he walks down the empty plane’s cabin to the light, he begins breathing again; his wife’s efforts have saved him. Max only speaks two words, which are repeated through laughter and tears, while embracing his wife: “I’m alive.” Górecki’s music, which is often foregrounded, continues throughout the film’s entire conclusion. As the film moves into the End Credits, the music continues, unaffected by the conclusion of the film’s narrative, and asking the audience to reflect on the event that just occurred. Once Max asks to be saved, he does, and is reborn, fully accompanied by Górecki’s music.

Rebirth in *The Truman Show*

The next film that Peter Weir made was 1998’s *The Truman Show*. From the outset of the film, Truman Burbank’s world, quite literally, begins to collapse, initially in the form of a stage light. He begins to realize that everyone and everything around him is fraudulent, and that even his wife is playing a role. After several attempts to escape in the form of organized vacations and sudden road trips, Truman dupes the television crew and sneaks out of his home to attempt to sail across the ocean to some far-off land. Near the conclusion of the film, Truman breaks out of his world, both figuratively and literally. The climactic scene, when Truman speaks to the television show’s creator, Christof, is in a parallel location to the climax in *Fearless*, and its musical accompaniment is

very similar to that in *Fearless*. The music for this scene in *The Truman Show* was composed by Wojciech Kilar, and like *Fearless*, this music is unlike anything else in the film.

In *The Truman Show*, Truman Burbank, played by Jim Carrey, is unaware that his life is a bit of a fraud, as he is the unwitting “star” of a television show that is broadcast twenty-four hours a day. He begins to suspect that not all is what it appears to be, and makes multiple attempts to escape his world. At the end of the film, during his final escape attempt, Truman is given the opportunity to speak to “The Creator,” a character named Christof, played by Ed Harris; this scene is set to music by Wojciech Kilar, and is musically and contextually similar to the parallel point in *Fearless*. The final scenes in *The Truman Show* are analogous to the climactic scene in *Fearless*; Truman’s speaking to “God” after crossing an “ocean” is analogous to Max’s reconciliation with God and acknowledgement of life as both characters are reborn.

Much has been written about *The Truman Show*, specifically with respect to the concepts of utopia/dystopia, the issue of meta-narrative, and the sci-fi/Twilight Zone-esque feel of the film.²⁸ In the final scenes of the film, Truman attempts to sail away from his home, in a ship named the Santa Maria. Christof cannot allow this, and attempts to kill Truman at sea, because if Christof cannot have him in his television show, no one should be allowed to enjoy him. Initially,

Christof thinks that he has killed Truman, and orders the storm to cease. Truman then rises with the ship, which had been underwater, entangled in the ropes in a crucifix-like pose. Truman then begins breathing again, and Christof's staff literally breathes a sigh of relief, except for Christof. Truman resumes his journey, and reaches the boundary of his world, quite literally breaking through it. He appears to walk on water, ascends a staircase, opens a door marked "Exit," and speaks with his "creator."

Christof's name clearly bears the root word "Christ," and is referred to in the film as the "conceiver and creator" of the television show. He watches over the town of Seahaven from his headquarters in the "moon," or "the heavens," and makes omnipotent statements such as, "Cue the sun!" But right away, a paradox exists, as God is the creator, the Holy Spirit is the conceiver, and Christ is the son; one cannot be the Trinity. As such, Christof is referred to as a "megalomaniac,"²⁹ "the lawless, deceiving Antichrist of the story,"³⁰ an analog to the Wizard of Oz,³¹ "the voice of the *deus ex machina* of the whole show,"³² and a "God-figure."³³

Truman, or the "True Man," as stated by Serena Formica, is initially attempting to find a lost love in Fiji. However, his escape from Seahaven becomes more closely aligned with escaping his "world." During the storm, Truman screams, "Is that the best you can do?" at the heavens, with the knowledge that someone or something is directly controlling the situation. After

the storm, the images of the crucifixion, resurrection, walking on water, and ascension can be taken in no other way than to see Truman as a Christ-figure, and if Truman is the Christ-figure, then Christof is the anti-Christ-figure. Truman must break free from this so-called deity. As Jennifer Hammett writes, “But while Truman’s battle with the sea ends in physical defeat, his battle with Christof does not. Though figuratively defeated by the ocean, Truman proves himself superior to the power of the media.”³⁴ With the overt visual references to Christ, the forsaking of Truman by the “Father,” and the final ascension, Truman, like Max Klein in Weir’s previous film *Fearless*, is reborn at the conclusion of the film.

Truman gets the opportunity that so many people long for, and speaks directly to his “creator.” Christof speaks to Truman from the heavens, disembodied, omnipotent and omnipresent. Christof’s response to Truman’s question of “Who are you?” is answered with, “I am the creator...of a television show.” The pause following the word “creator” is just long enough for Truman to recognize that Christof does not have Truman’s best interests at heart, that Christof is jealous and selfish. As Linda Mercadente writes,

Christof, in particular, is a self-deluded and obsessive god. He does not truly love Truman – even though he shows some affection for him. This is not a god who created out of overflowing love and is determined to work with humans until they can enjoy true partnership. He is not self-sacrificing and never tries to form a relationship with his creation...Rather than longing to be known,

this god needs to remain secret. Christof does not really fight evil or remove it from Truman's world. Instead, this god just keeps the prerogative for himself.³⁵

Christof then begins to use phrases that make him more tangible, as a parent, such as, "I have been watching you your whole life. I was watching when you were born, I was there when you took your first step." But then his words take a dark turn: "The episode when you lost your first tooth." By using the word "episode," it is clear that Christof only has his best interests at heart, not his "child's," Truman. Interestingly enough, a cut is made to a former love interest of Truman's, the one who supposedly moved to Fiji, but is watching the broadcast, praying "Please God," with the cross-cut showing Christof, the juxtaposition between true Creator and false Creator. Jeff Smith states, "Despite three decades of deceit, Truman is able to resurrect himself into the untidy world Christof warns him against."³⁶ Truman walks through the exit door into darkness, not knowing what his new world holds in store for him, after his initial rupture from the womb built by Christof. The music that accompanies these scenes is extremely important to be able to connect these two films.

Use of Music in *The Truman Show*

Only two moments exist in *The Truman Show* where Truman escapes Christof's control, and those moments are accompanied by the music of Chopin and Kilar, respectively. The second movement of Chopin's *Piano Concerto No. 1*

in E minor is used during a “flashback” to when Truman was in college. Truman fell in love with an actress who was supposed to be an extra, Lauren, played by Natasha McElhone rather than the woman that Christof wanted him to date, his future wife, played by Laura Linney. During this flashback, the audience sees how the two sneak out of the library and run to the beach. Lauren tries to tell Truman that his reality is unreal, but he doesn’t understand. He is simply in love with her, and the Romantic era lushness of the slow movement of Chopin’s work serves to heighten this emotion. While other “classical” music is used in the film, specifically Mozart’s “Alla Turca” movement from K. 331, works from the Romantic era do not abide by the “rules” of music from the Baroque and Classical eras, and as such, demonstrate Truman’s ability, however short and fleeting it is, to escape from Christof’s control. The second moment is the climax of the film, where Truman has his rebirth.

Wojciech Kilar, an exact contemporary of Górecki’s, is also known as both a concert music composer and a Hollywood film composer, having composed the score to *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (1992) and *The Pianist* (2002), among others. The music used during the final scene of *The Truman Show* comes from a piece entitled *Requiem Father Kolbe*, which, in and of itself, is a suite of music from a film entitled *A Life for a Life* (1991), which documents the history of Father Maximilien Kolbe.³⁷ Father Kolbe sacrificed his life for that of an unknown man in Auschwitz in 1941. According to one website, Kilar’s music

was a “temp track” that ultimately remained in the film,³⁸ however, this cannot be confirmed.

In the CD liner notes of the soundtrack to *The Truman Show*, Weir refers specifically to both Philip Glass’s music and Burkhard Dallwitz’s score, the major components of music in the film, but makes no mention of Kilar’s single musical appearance. Weir writes,

When making a film, I play music constantly during “dailies” – the nightly screenings of the previous day’s shooting. I test all kinds of music against the image, searching for the elusive “sound” of the picture. In the case of *The Truman Show*, since it is the story of a live television program, I was also determining the music that the show’s creator, Christof, would have chosen. The tracks that seemed to be drawing the most out of the images for me (and presumably Christof) were those of Philip Glass. Due to the round-the-clock nature of the show, I determined that Christof would play either pre-recorded music (as a DJ might do) or, if events called for it, improvise with one of the musicians who work in several shifts...The use of music in this film is as unusual as the concept of the movie itself. Sometimes the music is Christof’s choice, sometimes it’s mine!³⁹

Weir makes clear that he tries several types of music against the image, so, based on his familiarity with Górecki’s symphony, and the similarity of Kilar’s music to a portion of the third movement of Górecki’s symphony, Weir may have tried different sections and different movements of the symphony against the film.

Of the many national reviews of *The Truman Show*, only three make any mention of music. The review in *Sight and Sound* provides a list of the soundtrack album, but does not discuss the music.⁴⁰ Todd McCarthy’s review in

Variety writes, “Film’s musical elements are beautifully orchestrated from among Burkhard Dallwitz’s original score, rhapsodic elements contributed by Philip Glass and numerous classical excerpts.”⁴¹ The third mention of music comes from John Simon, the critic who hated *Fearless* as well as the Górecki symphony. His review, “Idle Idyll,” in the *National Review* states, “The score is fancy indeed: Mozart, Chopin, Brahms, Philip Glass, as well as some lesser lights (if anything can be lesser than Glass), plus some original music by Burkhard Dallwitz, who does rather better than some of the dull wits involved in the film. Is there anything more pitiful than a good idea fallen into the wrong hands?”⁴² It is clear from the reviews that music in this film certainly is subservient to the story, message, and serious acting ability of Jim Carrey. Only Simon provides any level of criticism of the music, and, once again, it is vitriolic and attacks the composers themselves rather than their music. What is most surprising is that neither Simon nor McCarthy make any mention of the Kilar music at the conclusion of the film, which could be due to a multitude of reasons: word count/space limitations, unfamiliarity with the excerpt, or an assumption that it was music of Glass or Dallwitz, to name a few. Whatever the case may be, the most significant musical excerpt in the entire film, the music that accompanies the climactic scene, is not acknowledged in any review at the time of the film’s release.

Mr. Simon once again demonstrates his strong dislike of the music of a popular living composer. In this instance, the composer is Philip Glass. Glass

was not only popular in 1998, but his face had been used in print ads to sell Cutty Sark whiskey in the early 1980s, so not only was Glass popular, he was already famous!⁴³ Simon refers to the soundtrack as “fancy,” naming Mozart, Chopin, and Brahms, three of the most famous and revered composers ever. It would seem as though music from any composer, other than the composer who wrote the newly-composed score for the film, is to be derided and chastised. Regarding audience reception of the music in this film, the most likely moments of recognition concern the “Alla Turca” of Mozart, movement III of his *Piano Sonata in A major*, K. 331, and the opening measures of the famous “Lullaby” by Brahms. Kilar’s music would likely have been known by less than 0.1% of the audience. The fact that Simon doesn’t even mention Kilar’s name in his review supports the total unfamiliarity of Kilar as composer. Despite the relative obscurity of the composer, anecdotally, several students in my classes have recognized the music as being used at the conclusion of *The Truman Show*. They don’t know who the composer is, but they remember the music, so its use was certainly impactful to some audience members.⁴⁴

Very little scholarly discussion and analysis of the music in *The Truman Show* exists, and even less of it relates to Kilar’s music at the end of the film. Only one source, Rebecca Doran Eaton’s doctoral dissertation, deals with the music in any significant way. Eaton notes that there are two types of music present in the film: the classical cues, which accompany the “everyday” actions of

Truman, and what she calls, “canned,” and the minimalistic cues, which accompany escape attempts, or Truman’s atypical actions, which she refers to as “live.”⁴⁵ Regarding the minimalist music, she also writes, “[P]erhaps Weir did not intend for minimalism to signify escape, but rather Truman’s impotence to escape. From this perspective, minimalism underlines Christof’s entrapment and control of Truman’s life.”⁴⁶ While these two categories are convenient, I believe that the use of the classical cues is much more nuanced. I would argue that the use of the “Alla Turca” movement from Mozart’s *Piano Sonata in A major*, K. 331, while accompanying Truman’s morning drive, and presenting a sense of complacency, also falls under the umbrella of the minimalistic music, since the excerpt is highly repetitive, particularly as used in the film, and also demonstrates Christof’s control by playing the same music every day; Mozart’s music is only sounded when Truman begins his day, encountering the same people, and performing the same actions. In contrast, the use of the second movement of Chopin’s *Piano Concerto No. 1 in E minor*, op. 11, another “classical” music excerpt, is used during a flashback of Truman’s lost love from college. This use is hardly “canned,” nor is it minimal, but Truman is alive when remembering her. Even the historical eras to which those works belong, Classical and Romantic, respectively, typify this difference. Mozart’s Classical music can convey the message of “following the rules,” or to Christof, controlling the rules, while Chopin’s Romantic music accompanies Truman’s breaking of Christof’s rules, as

he attempts to be with Lauren, sneaking out of the library, and almost evading the many on-set cameras. Kilar's musical style can be easily classified as minimalism, but is much slower and stylistically different from the minimalistic music of Glass and Dallwitz, which is often at a fast tempo, conveying the rapid heartbeat of Truman in his escape attempts.

Comparing the Music of Górecki and Kilar

A comparison of Kilar's music to that of a passage in the third movement of Górecki's Third Symphony shows multiple similarities. Górecki's music repeats the same chord, an A major triad, but in different inversions, and with passing tones to connect the voice leading. Kilar's music has a consistent pedal E, but the harmonies change above the pedal. In both cases, the music is intended to be somewhat static and makes the melodic line primary. Additionally, the tempos from each excerpt are similar, with the Górecki excerpt marked at 46 bpm and the Kilar excerpt at 40 bpm.⁴⁷ Eaton raises the issue of heart rate, stating that the average resting pulse is 60-80 bpm. With both musical excerpts significantly slower than that, Kilar's music could indicate rest or peace, or perhaps transcendence. Kilar's music is stylistically unlike anything previous heard in *The Truman Show*. When Truman's ship breaks through the studio's wall, Glass's music suddenly stops. Eaton writes, "The moment Christof loses control of music, he loses control of Truman. In this dramatic caesura, the scores of *The*

Truman Show and *Pleasantville* share a motif—the cessation of music at the moment of change toward free will...a change from entrapment within dystopia to freedom.”⁴⁸ The new musical style is indicative of a change in Truman, or a “rebirth.”

In the excerpt from the third movement of Górecki’s symphony that most closely aligns with Kilar’s music, the melody is in the soprano soloist with the translated words, “Oh sing for him, God’s little song-birds since his mother cannot find him. And you, God’s little flowers, may you blossom all around so that my son may sleep happily.”⁴⁹ The lyrics within this movement deal with a mother who has lost her son in battle, and does not know where his body lies. The analogous passage to Kilar’s music is the only section of the lyrics that are optimistic within the movement. Kilar’s music does not have lyrics, but the melody is constructed similarly to Górecki’s in that it emphasizes scale-degree 3. In the Górecki melody, the music begins on scale-degree 3, moves up to 5, and back down to 3 at its point of repose. In Kilar’s melody, the music begins on scale-degree 3, with its goal being to move down to 1; however, the motion to scale-degree 1 occurs in the second measure of the melody, while the end of the first phrase elides with the second on the downbeat of the fifth measure, returning the melody to scale-degree 3. Example 1 is an excerpt of the passage from Górecki’s Third Symphony, and can be viewed at <http://youtu.be/RQn2RUh0zvc>,

and Example 2 is an excerpt of Kilar's music used in *The Truman Show*, and can be viewed at <http://youtu.be/6OMLv1x8IIk>.

In the film, the musical cue is played first in its entirety, with no sound effects or dialogue, while Truman attempts to break out of his world, appears to walk on water, and ascends a staircase (to Heaven). The first sound effect that enters coincides with the end of the cue, and that is the Escape Door opening. The cue then plays again in its entirety while Truman is conversing with Christof. By the time the Escape Door opens, the music has already intimated to the audience that Truman will leave because of the uniqueness of the style of music within this film. If one has seen *Fearless*, one may recognize the similarities to the use of Górecki's music in *Fearless*. If *Fearless* is unfamiliar to a viewer, it is not a problem; it is not necessary to have seen one in order to understand the other. However, the similarities in the tempo, style, and mode connect the music between *Fearless* and *The Truman Show*, even though the composers, and the films, are independent and different. Additionally, the synchronization between the end of the music and the opening of the door emphasizes this return or rebirth of Truman. Truman has decided to leave before the conversation with Christof occurs, and the second playing of the cue serves to reinforce this.

Conclusion

The parallels between the music at the conclusions of *Fearless* and *The Truman Show* demonstrate the parallels between the conclusions of the two films, in that the respective protagonists are effectively reborn. Throughout *Fearless*, the use of pre-existing music allows for revelations by Max, particularly the use of the Gipsy Kings' "Sin Ella" while driving after the plane crash, and the rebirth of Carla following the car crash, which has a musical prelude of U2's "Where the Streets Have No Name." The portion of the U2 song that is used is the instrumental introduction, functionally a prelude to the actual song. In *Fearless*, the protagonist, Max Klein, is reborn through reliving his trauma of the plane crash and acknowledging that he actually survived. His rebirth is communicated to the audience through Górecki's music. Because *The Truman Show* is the next film that Weir made, a connection can be made between the two films. Weir stated that *Fearless* had a curious Polish influence on it, and this influence extended into *The Truman Show*, through its use of Kilar's music. Truman's rebirth occurs through his exiting of the television show, and is communicated through Kilar's music, informing the audience of what will happen before Truman's interaction with Christof actually occurs. Other music, such as the selections from Chopin and Mozart, display various levels of "control:" Chopin's music is used during a flashback to Truman's "true love," and shows that despite Christof's efforts, he cannot always control Truman. Mozart's "Alla Turca"

movement plays on the radio every morning at the same time, showing how Christof attempts to control and manipulate Truman into staying on the program. The two films reinforce each other through their similar climactic structure and musical choices at those parallel points; the choice of music in *Fearless* is confirmed by the director's statements. The use of music by composers in the "Holy Minimalist" aesthetic serves to confirm the visual and dialogue aspects of the films. Finally, music critics are divided on the quality and significance of Górecki's Third Symphony, while film critics seem divided on the use of music in this film. The critical complaint of the music is that it is "empty," containing little substance, while those that favor the symphony find additional spiritual meaning in it. While Górecki's music is only acknowledged by a couple of film reviewers, John Simon particularly hates the piece, presumably for the same reasons as music critics. However, the piece is one of the most well-known compositions of the past forty years, or, at least, one of the highest, if not, the highest selling classical CD. Simon is not impressed by the music in *The Truman Show*, either, but Kilar's music seems to have made a positive impact on audience members, at least anecdotally. The music used during the climactic final scenes in *Fearless* and *The Truman Show* connects the two films. Because of the specific choice of music, the audience recognizes the rebirth of the two protagonists through Górecki and Kilar's similar style of music and is given the opportunity to reflect upon his or her faith.

¹ In his article “Banality Triumphant: Iconographic Use of Beethoven’s Ninth in Recent Films,” James Wierzbicki writes, that many recent films’ “target audience, in other words, is not the sophisticate for whom Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony is obviously rich with meaning; rather, the target audience is the average moviegoer for whom an allusion to Beethoven might somehow—if anything—‘ring a bell.’” The article appears in *Beethoven Forum*, Volume 10, Number 2, Fall 2003: 128.

² In *Hearing the Movies*, page 204, the authors write, “When we hear a string quartet playing [the fourth movement of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony] at the Christmas party near the beginning of *Die Hard* (1988), we are not at all surprised to learn that those attending it are upper management of the company. Class is hardly an accidental part of the story...As Robynn Stilwell notes, classical music is also associated with the villain in this film, giving him an aristocratic air that darkens the association of the music in general.”

³ *Gallipoli* uses Albinoni’s *Adagio in G minor*, and additional works by Bizet, Johann Strauss Jr., and Paganini. *Dead Poets Society* also uses music from the second movement of Beethoven’s *Piano Concerto No. 5*. *Master and Commander* uses Vaughan Williams’s “Tallis Fantasia” and additional works by Mozart, Corelli, Boccherini, and J. S. Bach.

⁴ Yglesias also wrote the screenplay for the film.

⁵ Several reviews of the film are available, and these reviews can provide more details concerning the film’s narrative. These reviews include Peter Travers’s “Flying Blind” in *Rolling Stone*, Richard Schickel’s “A Question of Mortality” in *Time*, David Ansen’s “Altered States and Demoman” in *Newsweek*, and John Simon’s “Believe it Who Will” in *The National Review*. These reviews all come from October-November, 1993, when the film was initially released. The meta-critic website *Rotten Tomatoes* rates *Fearless* as 86% fresh, with 24 positive reviews and 4 negative reviews. <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1046151-fearless/> (accessed 29 August, 2012)

⁶ Owen Gleiberman, “Crash of Symbols,” *Entertainment Weekly*, Oct. 15, 1993: 49.

⁷ This specific piece has been used in horror films, most notably *The Exorcist* (1973) and *The Shining* (1980).

⁸ I would like to thank Zon Bennett and Stephen Schloesser for their comments after my paper at the 2012 Forum on Music and Christian Scholarship.

⁹ The lyrics are “Como podrias tu vivir, Como podrias tu vivir, Sin ella, Si no la quieres, dejala, Si no la quieres, dejala, Vivir en paz.” Translated, the lyrics are, “And how would you live without her? If you don’t love her, let me go, and live in peace.”

¹⁰ I would like to thank one of the anonymous article reviewers for reminding me that the U2 song was used in the trailer. The first 30 seconds use Penderecki’s *Polymorphia*. The trailer can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tm5jBa4LzxQ>

¹¹ The performance of the song “Where the Streets Have No Name” is the point in the concert/documentary film *Rattle and Hum* where the film changes from black-and-white to color.

¹² Paul Griffiths, *Modern Music and After*, 3d ed., New York: Oxford University Press, 257, 260. The term “Holy Minimalist” is not one that Pärt, nor Górecki, when he was alive, accepts or enjoys.

¹³ Pociąg is quoted in Michael Steinberg’s *The Symphony: A Listener’s Guide*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 173.

¹⁴ Luke Howard, “Motherhood, ‘Billboard,’ and the Holocaust: Perceptions and Receptions of Górecki’s Symphony No. 3,” *The Musical Quarterly* 82:1 (1998): 135.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 136.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* Howard provides the original German text and the source: *Hifi-Stereophonie* 16 (July 1977): 810.

¹⁷ Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Late Twentieth Century*, The Oxford History of Western Music, Volume 5, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 408.

¹⁸ Howard, 148-150.

¹⁹ Josiah Fisk, “The New Simplicity: The Music of Górecki, Tavener, and Pärt,” *The Hudson Review* 47, no. 3 (1994): 399, 401.

²⁰ When I’ve taught this piece in a Twentieth-Century Music Theory course, the responses that I’ve received range from “greatly enjoy” to “largely indifferent.” It is rare for a student to dislike this piece as strongly as Simon, or some of Górecki’s other critics.

²¹ Richard Schickel, “A Question of Mortality,” *Time* 142, no. 16, Oct. 18, 1993: 98.

²² Interview given by Peter Weir to Virginia Campbell and published in the September 1993 edition *Movieline* magazine as “Love, Fear, and Peter Weir.” <http://www.peterweircave.com/articles/articleb.html> (accessed 29 August, 2012).

²³ The reviews that mention the symphony are by John Simon and Brian Johnson. The other two that mention sound are by Vincent Canby and Richard Schickel.

²⁴ Brian D. Johnson, “Never Say Die,” *Maclean’s* 106, no. 43 (October 25, 1993): 60. Once again, a review of Górecki’s music fails to discuss the music and instead turns to personal religion, as Howard states.

²⁵ John Simon, “Believe It Who Will,” *The National Review*, (November, 29, 1993): 69.

²⁶ Simon, 70-71.

²⁷ Since most film's climaxes contain music specifically composed for the scene, sync points are common in these types of scenes.

²⁸ The writings include, among many others, Jennifer Hammett's "'You Never Had a Camera Inside My Head': The Masculine Subject of the Postmodern Sublime," Tony E. Jackson's "Televisual Realism: *The Truman Show*," Simone Knox's "Reading *The Truman Show* Inside Out," and Maurice Yacowar's "Thirteen Ways of Looking at *The Truman Show*."

²⁹ Rebecca Doran Eaton, "Unheard Minimalisms: The Function of the Minimalism Technique in Film Scores," PhD diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 2008.

³⁰ Jeffrey A. Smith, "Hollywood Theology: The Commodification of Religion in Twentieth-Century Films," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Summer 2001): 222.

³¹ Dusty Lavoie, "Escaping the Panopticon: Utopia, Hegemony, and Performance in Peter Weir's *The Truman Show*," *Utopian Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (2011): 64.

³² Serena Formica, *Peter Weir: A Creative Journey from Australia to Hollywood*, Chicago: Intellect Ltd., 2012, 135.

³³ Linda A. Mercadante, "The God Behind the Screen: *Pleasantville* & *The Truman Show*," *Journal of Religion and Film*, Vol. 5, No. 2, (October 2001).
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³⁴ Jennifer Hammett, "'You Never Had a Camera Inside My Head': The Masculine Subject of the Postmodern Sublime," *Criticism*, Vol. 45, No. 1, (Winter 2003): 79.

³⁵ Mercadante.

³⁶ Smith, 222.

³⁷ The film was only released in Europe. In Poland, its title is *Zycie za zycie*, and in Germany, it is known as *Leben für Leben – Maximilian Kolbe*.

³⁸ The website that lists this is <http://filmmusicnl.webs.com/tempscore.htm> (Accessed July 17, 2012). I emailed the owner of the website, Joep de Bruijn, to ask what his source was for this, but never received a response.

³⁹ Peter Weir, Liner Notes, Burkhard Dallwitz and Philip Glass, *The Truman Show: Music from the Motion Picture*, Milan Records 35850-2.

⁴⁰ The review by Leslie Felperin, "How's it Going to End?," *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 8, No. 10, (Oct. 1998): 36-37, does not mention music at all. A separate synopsis that provides a cast list and list of music on the soundtrack appears on pp. 58-9 in the same issue.

⁴¹ Todd McCarthy, "Weir looks through a glass, lightly," *Variety*, April 27-May 3, 1998: 62.

⁴² John Simon, "Idle Idyll," *National Review*, July 6, 1998: 57. The use of Brahms's music is limited to a five second extract of his famous "Lullaby" while Baby Truman is in a crib.

⁴³ The print ad can be seen here:

<http://photos1.blogger.com/x/blogger/8164/1603/400/904684/Philip%20Glass%20enjoys%20Cutty%20Sark.jpg>

⁴⁴ Again, this statement is anecdotal, but when I play music before class, I have played piece; at least 2-3 students in every class recognize it as being used at the end of *The Truman Show*.

⁴⁵ Eaton, 195.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 205.

⁴⁷ The abbreviation bpm stands for "beats per minute." Since no printed score exists of Kilar's work, this tempo marking is as close of an approximation as I can make, based on aural analysis.

⁴⁸ Eaton, 212.

⁴⁹ The translation comes from the score to the symphony.

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