Phantoms of the Archives: Music for the Early Cinematic Supernatural and Other Tales

TITLE SLIDE Thank you to Susan Thomas, the American Music Research Center, and the Department of Musicology for inviting me to talk today. I am delighted to be back here to discuss my research. I began my research on music for the supernatural in silent film in 2016 and a large part of this work was supported by an AMRC Fellowship and an AMS Janet Levy Fellowship to do research here in the University’s special collections.

My talk today is in two parts: in the first half, I’ll talk about my work on this particular topic. In the second, I’ll discuss other kinds of phantoms that can be found in archival research on film music, and silent film music in particular.

Part 1

The silent film era, usually defined as 1895-1930, coincided with a revival of belief in spiritualism in America. The deaths caused by the Great War and the 1918 Spanish Flu epidemic drove the bereaved to seek contact with the dead and evidence of an afterlife. At the same time, the rapidly developing technology of the moving image appealed to spiritualists who, as Cathy Gutierrez documents, were “interested in machines that could legitimize their project.” (Gutierrez 2009, 65) Given this public fascination with spiritualism and the various effects that could be created on film, it is not surprising that the gothic and the supernatural quickly became a favorite topic for moviemakers. This confluence resulted in moving pictures that featured spirits, which in turn required musical accompaniment suited to the subject. [ebook cover] This paper is part of a book project on various aspects of this entertainment.
Music for Early Cinema

For those not familiar with music for silent film, I want to give a brief background; I’m happy to answer questions about this afterwards as well. Early films were accompanied by a variety of kinds of music and musicians. As scholars have documented, there were no standardized practices for supplying music for films. (Hubbert 2011; Marks 1997) Many cinemas employed a single pianist or organist to play for the pictures, while other establishments hired theatre ensembles that ranged in size from three to thirty players. Pianists and organists could and often did improvise their accompaniments, frequently using repeated, easily recognizable musical leitmotifs for each major character and, over time, developing complex scores. Early in her career, cinema organist Rosa Rio [Rosa Rio], for example, often had to accompany films without previewing them, so while she accompanied a movie for the first time, she worked to compose motifs or themes for the characters or events in the picture, making notes on scrap paper. She would then improvise and elaborate on these themes and motifs in following showings, ultimately creating a consistent score that she would play from memory each time she accompanied the picture. (NPR 2015) Such scores are mostly lost to history.

Accompanists could also compile a score using pre-existing music drawn from classical and popular repertoire. They could also use the newly emergent generic film music: short atmospheric or characteristic pieces sold as individual pieces or in books known as photoplay albums. [image: album] For bigger budget films, studios issued cue sheets, which suggested what piece to play for what scene, sometimes even including musical incipits of a few bars of the piece’s melody.) [image: cue sheet] For truly blockbuster
movies, studios commissioned full scores from composers and sent the score and parts out to exhibitors with the reels of film. [image: full score] But these were just suggestions and recommendations—there was no way for a studio to ensure that a pianist in Boise was playing the studio-issued score of a New York movie, or if accompanists in Boise and Miami who did play from the studio’s recommendations or music were playing the score the same way. It is rare to find documentation that tells us exactly what music a specific accompanist played at a specific showing of a film. Nonetheless, we can use the extant recommendations, reviews, and pieces of sheet music issued for individual genres to help inform us as to how certain kinds of films were likely accompanied.

Music for the Supernatural

In doing research on music for the Gothic in silent film, I found an unexpected number of pieces that were titled or given other taxonomic labels so as to indicate their suitability for use in accompanying ghosts and other supernatural elements. (Leonard 2018) [5 slides: titles ending with Hour of Ghosts] While these pieces exhibited the qualities that film music scholar Mario Bellano has identified in music for horror [Nosferatu slide]—ambiguity, chromaticism, irregular rhythms, and dissonance—many of them were nonetheless clearly not meant to convey gruesome body horror, gore, or grotesquerie. (Bellano 2011) [Nosferatu no box;] Instead, these pieces presented spirits as charming and benevolent [ghost slide], sometimes conflating ghosts and kindly fairies. [ghost yes box] Further research indicates that cinema musicians borrowed from the aural atmosphere of the Spiritualist Church, private and public séances, staged phantasmagoria, and other entertainments and experiences involving the supernatural to create two genres of supernatural film. The first of these is the precursor to the modern-day physical and
psychological horror films; the second is part of a genre I call “spirit films.” [image] The musical accompaniments for spirit films led not to highly dissonant or accompaniments for gore or shock, but to the many modern cinematic scores for ghost stories that indicate the welcome presence of spirits in everyday places and lives. These spirit films were fairly numerous. John T. Soister, who has indexed early American science fiction, fantasy, and horror films, has written, “While not quite a dime a dozen, pictures dealing with Spiritualism were fairly plentiful during the late 1910s and 1920s.” (Soister et al. 2012, 36) Soister identifies dozens of silent films that involve spiritualist séances, ghosts, and the trappings thereof.

Silent film accompaniments depicting real-life activities and events often referenced the existing music used for those events: parades were accompanied by marches; children were accompanied by nursery rhymes, and so on. Thus films involving ghosts required music that matched public expectations for what ghosts sounded like. What did ghosts sound like? How could music suggest their presence or anticipated presence? And how could we tell from the music if the spirits were—for lack of better terms—good or evil? Music libraries belonging to silent film accompanists, music journals and periodicals, trade magazines, and other archival materials are full of the noise and documentation for spectres.

The Sound of Spectres

The sounds of the live séance were well defined by the time ghosts began appearing on cinema screens. Music was an essential element of séances, helping to create an atmosphere of liminality. Mediums employed guitars, violins, tambourines, and other instruments, as well as technologically altered vocal sounds and songs, to signify the presence of the deceased
and their ability to materialize and affect the material world. [4 images ending with floating orchestra] Writing about sound, technology, and the séance, [blank slide] Steven Connor describes the séance as an event of amplified aurality, illustrating the importance of sound in these related areas of performance and deception:

As they sat in the darkness or semi-darkness, the members of the séance would see much less than they would touch, taste, smell, and, most importantly, hear. [...] The experience of heightened and attentive listening which is so central a part of the séance renders the participant at once passively exposed to and intimately enclosed within a shared space of audition which can perhaps be interpreted in the light of the infantile experience of the “sonorous envelope” or bath of sound analysed by Didier Anzieu. (Connor 1999: 208)

The “sonorous envelope” also aptly describes the early cinema. Like séance participants, cinema-goers relied not just on the images of the moving picture, but also sound to create a holistic experience; as film music scholar Anahid Kassabian writes, a film is not just seen or just heard; it is perceived through multiple senses. (Kassabian 2001, 5)

Music for Spiritualist Church services and séances came in various forms. Contemporary accounts describe mediums and leaders of church services often beginning séances with hymn singing or by singing, and mediums sometimes played a recording of a song liked by the spirit they were trying to contact. (Lawton 1930, 46) [image: hymnal] The Spiritualist Hymnal, published in 1911, included “Lead, Kindly Light,” “The Sweet By-and-By,” “The Land Beyond the River,” and even “Joy to the World,” albeit with different lyrics than the better-known Christian ones. (Kates et al. 1911) At both séances and in meetings of the Spiritualist Church, participants might play the piano, sing, or play other instruments. At
séances, once a spirit was present, it might communicate through rapping or tapping; spirits could also use drums and other surfaces and instruments. At séances held by Jonathan Koons [slide: Koons’s violin], his wife, and his children, spanning the 1850s-1910s, ghosts played accordions, guitars, and more. Ghosts spoke and sang through spirit trumpets—long cones that muted and distorted sound (Connor, in Buse and Stott 2002, 212) Spirits playing instruments—either themselves, through unseen means, or by taking control of a medium’s body and using it to play—was common. Violins emitted both pleasant and eerie sounds, the latter being created by playing tremolo and sul ponticello, or near the bridge of the instrument (Adorno and Eisler 1947). Strummed guitars and other stringed instruments signified ghostly appearances and interaction with technology. Mediums used glass harmonicas [slide: image] to signal the presence of spirits and to communicate their messages; sudden sounds, such as the breaking of glass or sudden low noises also contributed to the soundscape of the séance. (Mannoni and Crangle 2000, 141) Spirits also engaged with mechanical forms of musical reproduction, playing or interfering with phonographs and music boxes. [blank]

Music for spirit films was therefore relatively easy to source and replicate. There was a large body of preexisting music that could create the sound of the Spiritualist church and séance as well as new works. Preexisting music for spirit films including hymns or pastoral songs, indicating a Spiritualist service or individual. In addition to The Spiritualist Hymnal, accompanists could use such works as Messages from spirit land in song form, published in 1910 (Beebe and Legg 1910); The Spirit Minstrel (Packard and Loveland 1860); The Golden Echoes (Tucker 1897), and many more books of music used in séances or services or attributed to spirits.
Just as mediums performing in séances borrowed from the operatic and vaudeville stages, where tremolos and high pitches or harmonics on the strings had been used for a long time as signifiers of the otherworldly, so did cinema accompanists in playing for both spirit films and early horror movies. They used stingers to represent breaking glass and other sudden movements or appearances on the part of a spirit. They used organ stops and instruments that sounded like the instruments used in séances: by 1920, the timbres of certain instruments and organ stops, like the flute, clarinet, and horn, had come to represent the supernatural. (Lang and West 1920: 54-55) A spirit strumming the guitar or playing a run on the piano in the séance was transformed in the cinema into several quick grace notes; the coming and going of spirits at a séance represented by rapid and dramatic shifts in dynamics; and the sounds of muted brass suggested distant heralds from the afterlife. Because of widespread notions that black Americans were more susceptible than whites to believing in the supernatural, including “‘conjure’ men and ‘spiritualists’,” accompanists may also have used black spirituals to suggest a character’s belief in frightening ghosts. (Reed 2003, 98)

Short “character pieces” were popular among cinema musicians, and dozens of such works bearing ghost-related titles were published during the silent era. Between 1905 and 1927, more than 100 pieces with “ghost” in the title were published (not including references to the “Holy Ghost”), most of them for piano. In 1911, an article in The Etude suggested that for Halloween, piano students be encouraged to learn a variety of pieces referencing the supernatural or spooky that were widely available, including Horvath’s “Mystic Procession” (published in The Etude in 1910); “Ghosts” by Schutte; “By Lantern Light” by Rockwell (published in The Etude in 1911) and “Will-o-the-Wisp” by Behr. (The Etude October 1911, 699) Cinema accompanists often used music recommended by or published in The Etude as
part of their scores (there is one collection where it’s clear that the accompanist cut out and
taped together pieces from the Etude to create scores for movies), and these and other
recommended pieces fit with an emerging collection of attributes for cinematic ghosts. They
were designed to create suspense, and did so through the use of mimetic musical shapes and
gestures. These might imitate someone creeping along on tiptoes, creaking stairs, finding an
open window, the presence of a breeze or the wind, heartbeats, trembling, and other physical
elements.

Accompanists also used a new genre of music that developed during the silent era and
sought to recreate the sound of the séance specifically for cinema musicians: the mysterioso.

[Image: Misterioso No. 4] Music for any kind of suspenseful situation, be it a séance, an
unwanted haunting, or a non-supernatural mystery, often fell under the broad label of
“mysterioso.” As with music for horror, mysteriosos also used musical mimesis to signify a
suspenseful atmosphere, but also incorporated tonal ambiguity, irregular rhythms,
chromaticism, and dissonance. In contrast with music for graphic bodily horror or
psychological horror, however, many mysteriosos situated these elements in the larger
context of the séance, in which the presence of a ghost was a happy or bittersweet event,
rather than a frightening one. To this end, these pieces often included sections in major keys;
music that was nostalgic, either by referencing an actual older piece or the style thereof; and
repeated, moderate stingers, suggesting a mischievous spirit popping in and out of view.
Some mysteriosos appear to have been composed specifically for spirit films, while others
include information that indicates that they could also be used for burglaries, lurking, the
grotesque, and other scenarios.
In Ellsworth Stevenson’s 1920 “Phantom Visions” [slide: Phantom Visions sheet music] the composer marks the piece “misterioso” and calls for special instrumental effects, including the use of *col legno*, perhaps to replicate spirits rapping; mutes in the brass; muffled drums; “castanets or bones” in the percussion; and a “wind whistle” to create an especially eerie sound. (Many of these pieces mimic Saint-Saëns’s *Danse Macabre*.) Set in F minor, “Skeleton Dance” starts quietly with staccato quarter notes outlining the tonic, followed by weak beat eighths, often including minor seconds. A long, low horn line moves from scale degree 5 to 6 and back, not only providing additional emphasis on the key and key relationships but also a funeral march-like complement to the constant octaves and an aural echo of the spirit trumpet. The pianissimo of the beginning allows Stevenson to surprise the audience with carefully placed accents. Stevenson uses dotted rhythms to create a sense of movement and a chromatic line to help indicate that the piece represents an otherworldly scenario. Stevenson assigns the primary melody to the winds, starting with the bassoon before handing it off to the oboe, the clarinet, and flute. Swelling dynamics add to the effect of instability and unpredictability. [TURN UP SOUND slide: sound clip, c. 45 seconds]

“The Ghost in the Haunted Room” [slide: Ghost title] by Bert Anthony (published posthumously in 1924) is marked “Misterioso” and begins in A minor with a series of pianissimo staccato eighths outlining scale degrees 7-1-2, followed by stingers—forzando B-flats immediately followed by repeated staccato sixteenths in the strings and rolls in the timpani—close neighbors of the tremolo and a motif that would continue in film to represent tip-toeing and suspense. Throughout, quick changes of dynamic from loud to soft suggest surprises, rapid movement or camera cuts, and overall unpredictability. Chromaticism, a signifier of magic in works by Liszt, Berlioz, Bartok, and Stravinsky,
indicates here that normal conditions—those of the natural world—may not apply.
(Schneider 2006, 133) Close dissonances, like the seconds assigned to the violas and cornets or the tritones that support the chromatic passages, provide nearly constant harmonic tension. The use of low tessituras in many parts also suggests the uncertain or eerie and the spirit trumpet, while the unexpected especially high interjections of the flute in measures 23-24 mimic shrieks. In these first ten measures, Anthony establishes the character or mood of the piece and sets up the audience for a haunting in which supernatural elements may appear and disappear suddenly. The ascending and descending runs hint at ghosts playing with musical instruments and running phantom fingers up and down a piano keyboard or across strings. The obbligato first violin part provides additional indicia of the sound of the spirit film. Anthony sets the tessitura of the part at the bottom of the instrument’s range, and twice asks that the performer play on the violin’s lowest string in order to create a specific timbre. The rising and falling dynamics add to the atmosphere of liminality between the natural and supernatural worlds. In several places, the viola and flute are paired together in parallel minor thirds, a common marker of sadness—here perhaps redefined as ghostly melancholy—in music and even in speech. (Curtis and Bharucha 2010) Similarly, the violin and clarinet play in unison, creating a timbre that could be interpreted as an attempt to create an otherworldly voice.

But as you’ll experience, Anthony’s ghost can be a serious one or a mischievous one. Played without visuals, the music can seem indicative of a potentially dangerous spirit. [slide: audio music alone] Paired with the right film, however, the piece takes on altogether different attributes, offering accompaniment that suggests that the ghosts are simply playing around with their human guests. [film with music]
Part 2

In addition to containing this repertoire and its influencers, archives of silent film music also tell us about the lives and careers of accompanists, which have been overlooked in the larger narratives about silent film music.

I thought it would be appropriate to talk about the two women whose music libraries comprise the Silent Film Collection at the AMRC here: Claire H. Hamack and Adele V. Sullivan. The information given in the finding aid for this collection states that they were “Colorado organists.” I will spare you the very exciting work of combing through Ancestry.com, Newspapers.com, and similar online archives searching for references to these two musicians other than to say that it was not a swift task, given the variable spellings of “theater,” and “Claire,” but it was an amusing one, because theatre listings in papers from the 1910s and 1920s are almost always accompanied by advertisements for clothes and, in many papers, the baseball scores, so I could follow some of my favorite teams—some of which have ceased to exist—as I did this work.

That the accompanists I name here are all women is not unusual. In 1914, the manager of a thriving silent cinema wrote that having a successful theatre often depended on being able to provide ‘good music … furnished in the way of an accomplished [female] pianist’. The job of cinema accompanist was a respectable one for women, and was compared positively with secretarial work, teaching, and nursing. The presence of a female accompanist indicated that a cinema was intent on being an artistic and moral institution, especially as the film industry
worked to establish itself as a legitimate business producing respectable and creative works. Although no census of cinema accompanists was ever taken, reports from trade and industry publications suggest that while white male musicians were in the majority in the earliest days of cinema accompaniment soon outnumbered them. Women certainly comprised the majority of American cinema accompanists after the spring of 1918, when all-male cinema orchestras were dissolved so that their members could join the military. There is no question that such women were often at the center of cinematic music making, particularly in smaller towns and cities and communities. Nor should there be any doubt about the importance of the work these women did. Their performances for newsreels, animations, live-action shorts, and feature films frequently served in multiple ways: to suggest, shape, and help define the musical tastes of the time; to educate listeners; to show how music could serve as a creative, narrative, and interpretative force in the cinema.

Most research that has been done on silent film music has focused on male performers and composers active in New York and in Hollywood, in part because the trade magazines, house publications, and other necessary documents for study both were focused on activities in those places and were held by institutions there. These resources generally lack coverage of the activities of women in the profession. In addition, film music scholars have focused on the primarily male cadre of published composers of silent film music active first on the American East Coast and later in Hollywood. The lack of information and research on women in silent cinema music is also due to an overwhelmingly canonized music history narrative, in which successful women musicians were somehow “extraordinary.” Women working in cinema music came from a variety of ethnic, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds and were not, in general, members of the elite, male-mentored group of female
art-music composers and performers of the period, exemplified by Amy Beach and Maud Powell.

The highly gendered training of female pianists in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries clearly also played a role in this process. Women whose upbringing during this period had included traditional piano lessons and who had been taught song and opera repertoire and short, descriptive, characteristic pieces that worked well in cinematic accompaniment were especially well prepared for the work. [slide: Mendelssohn for “small hands”] Such pianists also often had a repertoire of popular songs at hand, as music publishers marketed these for playing at home by women. [slide: Mildred Fitzpatrick on sheet music] It is ironic that women accompanists, initially hired for their gender and the social signifiers it conveyed, were uniquely qualified as cinema pianists and, later, organists, partly because of the gendered treatment to which they had been subjected. The same gender essentialism that paradoxically helped create women as the ideal cinema accompanist carried over into their critical reception as musicians. Here women were hailed as indispensable to the success of moving pictures while simultaneously being labeled as “girls,” a highly revealing term that speaks to their relative place in the hierarchy of power and influence within most cinemas. [slide: MPM cover & clip] In an issue of Motion Picture Magazine from March 1914, Stanley Todd, a regular commentator on music for the cinema, described women as more emotional and passionate players, making them appropriate accompanists for film. Reporting from Denver, he noted that the “theatres are large, the entrances dazzlingly brilliant, and like as not you will find within a wonderful pipe-organ, ready in an instant to change its song of sadness to paeans of joy. It is in Denver, too, where a mere slip of a girl presides at the console of one of these great instruments, and
each night plays, with her heart and soul, to the finest of screen projections. . . In this way, music lends its valuable aid in interpreting the gamut of emotions, which only the picture can bring into play with that subtle power that has been one of its secrets of success.”

J. J. Raymond described a theater manager who noted that good playing could bring in audiences for even poor pictures: “I’ve got a little girl in front of that music box that can shake out more ragtime a minute than any two others. The way that girl can hammer the ivory is marvelous.” Some critics derided the “hammering” aspect of cinema players, but they could not deny the need for capable performers. Performers that were even better prepared, wrote Raymond, could do additional wonders: “Spend a few dollars more a week, get another violinist . . . make them look over the reels before they’re put on at a regular show, and have them pick out the music that is best fitted to the pictures.”

Many managers found that a thoughtful, competent female pianist would draw in bigger and (socially) better audiences than many male organists or ensembles who were more interested in displaying their technical skills and less interested in the art of playing to the picture.

Reporting on the success of the Madrid Theater in New York City in 1914, [slide: MPN] *Motion Picture News* noted that the “musical program of the Madrid is entrusted to Miss Lillian Greenberg, who is a graduate of a Leipsic [sic] conservatory of music. She has made the incidental music accompanying the pictures a matter of neighborhood comment.”

[slide: blank]

That women were “entrusted” with the musical accompaniments in a movie theater, including newsreels, shorts, and feature films, suggests that while they may have been looked upon as “girls” lacking in experience and wisdom, they were nonetheless responsible for
crafting the tone in which audiences received news, enjoyed humorous animations, and understood drama and action on the screen. The evidence—letters from female accompanists to the popular film magazines’ columns on photoplay music, published accounts of their scoring suggestions, reports on performance practice by critics, and reviews of accompanists across the United States—all testifies to the extent to which women were the arbiters of musical accompaniment in the cinema. Collections of cue sheets and other materials owned by professional female accompanists such as Claire H. Hamack and Adele V. Sullivan demonstrate the extent to which they were responsible for creating the sound of the cinema and developing the expectations of film-goers for film music as a whole.

I am still searching for more information on Adele V. (Delia) Sullivan. What I have found is that she was born in Missouri in 1883 or 1884 and died in 1964. [slide: 1920 census] The 1920 US Census shows her working as a musician in Longmont Ward 3; it also shows her married to a Herbert Sullivan, but her Colorado marriage license [slide: license] is dated 1929. She is listed in the Boulder City Directory [slide: listings] as the organist at the Longmont Theatre in 1926 and again in 1928. Sullivan is listed in the 1930 Census [slide: 1930 census] as a theater musician and in 1940 she has become a “pianist and teacher” doing “piano work.” Because I haven’t been able to find any information on the Longmont Theatre—not even doing business under other names, an address, or advertisements—I don’t know exactly when it stopped using live music. However, Sullivan’s music library has left various clues as to the kind of work she did there, as well as what kinds of music she found useful.
Sullivan’s is one of the few collections nationwide that includes not just [slide: album cover] albums of photoplay music (pieces written specifically for the cinema), sheet music, and [slide: Navy Blues cue sheet] traditional cue sheets, but also [slide: All at Sea cue sheet] cue sheets for phonograph records. Many of the materials in Sullivan’s library are unmarked; a few are marked with only the occasional date or whether the film for which the cue sheet was issued was a ‘talker’: *Halfway to Heaven* (directed by George Abbott), for example, was released in December of 1929 by Paramount with some sound dialogue, but was also [slide: Halfway] issued to exhibitors with a cue sheet of incipits compiled by Bradford. But Sullivan heavily edited other cue sheets. [slide: Modern] On the cue sheet for *Modern Matrimony* (directed by Lawrence C. Windom, 1923), Sullivan replaced almost every printed cue with a new title of her own, using the cue sheet as a cue list from which she created her own modular score. She even pasted the music for her preferred love theme for the movie – Carl Kiefert’s ‘Song Orientale’ – onto the cover of the cue sheet. (This is really hard to read, I apologize, but these pencil markings are titles of other pieces, including “Coquetterie” and “Dr Amarata Waltz.”) Similarly, Sullivan revamped the [slide: 10 Com] cue sheet for *The Ten Commandments* (directed by Cecil B. DeMille, 1923); rather than using the provided incipits, she wrote in page numbers and titles from an unknown photoplay album or albums or possibly page numbers from her own compiled score, replacing a number of the printed cues. She also used Homer Grunn’s *Desert Suite: Five Tone Pictures for the Piano* (1913) and selections from various Victor Herbert musicals as music for accompanying silent film. For pictures needing bugle calls, patriotic music, and military marches, she also ignored the provided cues from cue sheets, using instead ‘Reveille’ and short pieces from G. Martaine’s 1914 Academic Edition photoplay album; she replaced
other cues with generic pieces from albums published by Sam Fox, Walter Jacobs, and B.F. Wood.

As the phonograph cue sheets indicate, Sullivan was also responsible for synchronizing the playing of records with the projection of a number of films as well, and in these cases too she often substituted her own selected recordings for the studio-specified pieces. These films mostly date from 1928 and 1929. She appears to have replaced almost every piece indicated [slide: All at Sea 2] on a typewritten cue sheet for *All at Sea* (directed by Alfred J. Goulding, 1929) with other works, unfortunately indicated only by Sullivan’s own system of numbers and letters; it’s possible it refers to a theater’s own music library filing system. It is also very possible, based on the markings on some of the recording cue sheets, that Sullivan played a live accompaniment rather than using records, relying on the recording cues as timing and genre guides.

Claire—also called Clara—H. Hamack was born in Minnesota, in or around Minneapolis-St. Paul, in 1898, and died in 1977. In 1922, [slide: 1922 directory] she was listed as a “music supervisor” in the Minneapolis city directory; [slide: Homewood ad] she was the featured organist at the Homewood Theater in 1926; [slide: directory 1928] in 1928 her occupation in the city directory was “organist;” and by the time the 1930 census [slide: census] was taken, she was 32 years old and had become a church organist.

Materials owned by accompanist Claire H. Hamack included 58 cue sheets both with and without musical incipits by various compilers and from all of the major Hollywood studios, many of them annotated by Hamack. Hamack’s studio-issued cue sheet [slide: Stella] for
the 1925 United Artists film *Stella Dallas* (directed by Henry King), for example, lacks incipits but does list cue number, length of cue, title or dialogue cue, piece title and composer name, and color according to Ernst Luz’s ‘Symphonic Color Guide’ for organizing silent film scores, all useful information in finding an appropriate replacement from Hamack’s own music library. For some of the suggestions in *Stella Dallas*, such as using ‘Songs My Mother Taught Me’ (Dvorak, arr. Fischer), Hamack made a check mark near the title, indicating that she had or knew the music and found it suitable. At the top of the cue sheet, though, she listed a number of other pieces to use in accompanying the film, including ‘Somewhere a Voice is Calling’, ‘I’m Drifting Back to Dreamland’, Bruch’s Violin Concerto, and the Andante from Tchaikovsky’s Fifth Symphony. In a similar text-only cue sheet by Bradford for *When Knighthood was in Flower* (Robert G. Vignola, 1922), [slide Knighthood 1] Hamack replaced suggested themes by William F. Peters and Massenet with Franz Schubert’s ‘Moment Musical’, Edwin Lemare’s ‘Meditation’, and other selections. She specifically wrote over the printed titles for cue 5, ‘While Mary dreamed’, changing it from ‘Serenade Romantique’ by Gaston Borch to ‘Wakey Little Bird’, and changing the music for cue 11, ‘It is near to midnight’, from ‘Romance – German (The Conqueror)’ to Grieg’s ‘Dawn’ from *Peer Gynt*. The cue sheet for *The Dangerous Age*, a 1927 German film directed by Eugen Illés, is covered with Hamack’s notes, including notation for an alternate, possibly original, theme, and indications that suggestions were replaced with other works (‘In the Gloaming’ is preferred over Otto Langey’s ‘Dream Shadows’ for cue 23). Other cue sheets, [slide: Wife] including that for *My American Wife* (directed by Sam Wood, 1922), also bear short passages of handwritten notation for original themes and motifs.
Hamack clearly found some of the published cue suggestions useful, and her accompaniments were hybrids of published cues and her own selections, drawn primarily from photoplay albums and sheet music. She used several pieces from the Bosworth Loose Leaf Film Play Music Series vol. 2, Chas. L. Johnson’s Picture Show Music, and Emil Velazco’s Komedy Kartoons series. The cue sheets that show evidence of being the most highly used – judging by smudges, folds, and the need for taping pages back together – are those that Hamack edited the most, reusing material as appropriate. In one case of radical repurposing, it appears that Hamack used a heavily hand-edited cue sheet issued for Men of Steel (directed by George Archainbaud, 1926) to accompany the silent release of The Vagabond King (directed by Ludwig Berger, 1930). Here, in a double instance of ghosts and ghosting, [slide: Finlandia] Hamack replaced “The Hour of Ghosts,” indicated for the cue “Jan sneaks out of room” with “Finlandia;” later on, [slide: Erl King] Hamack replaces a cue for a piece called “Mob Rule” with Schubert’s “Erl King.”

Hamack’s audiences, like Sullivan’s, would have heard Hamack’s musical interpretation of the film rather than that of the studio compiler. While it is difficult to say with certainty that the scores that Hamack and Sullivan performed with films directly influenced any later film composers in particular, we do know that audiences of the time—including future film composers—would have heard their accompaniments, and those of other women cinema musicians, which were individual and unique. And so while Hamack, Sullivan, and other cinema accompanists are phantoms of the archive, we can still hear them in modern soundtracks. Only further research will help us determine the full extent of their hauntings.

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References


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i. While periodicals such as *Exhibitors Herald*, *Motion Picture Magazine*, *Moving Picture News*, *Moving Picture World*, *Universal Weekly*, and *Moving Picture Weekly* occasionally included news about, reviews of, and materials by female cinema organists, other forms of documentation suggest the wider scope of women’s activities in film music. *American Organist* ran a number of articles and reviews by and about female film accompanists. Music periodicals for more general audiences, such as the *Musical Courier*, and music magazines aimed directly at women, including *Melody*, which specifically marketed itself as “for the Photoplay Musician and the Musical Home,” frequently include mention of women cinema musicians. Advertisements in newspapers listing the musicians employed by various theaters attest to the numbers of women performing as film accompanists. For detailed indexing of these resources, see Kendra Preston Leonard, *Music for Silent Film: A Guide to North American Resources* (Madison, WI: Music Library Association and A-R Editions, 2016).


