



## Musical narration in the films by Luc Besson

Gérard Dastugue

### ► To cite this version:

Gérard Dastugue. Musical narration in the films by Luc Besson. Phil Powrie & Susan Hayward. Luc Besson, master of spectacle, Manchester University Press, pp. 43-55, 2006. <hal-03709700>

**HAL Id: hal-03709700**

**<https://hal.science/hal-03709700v1>**

Submitted on 10 Aug 2023

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 - Attribution - Non-commercial use - No Derivative Works - International License

## Musical narration in the films of Luc Besson

Gérard Dastugue

It is probably true to say that music plays a significant role in the success of Besson's films where audiences are concerned, despite the fact that reviewers have disparaged the films, and that reviewers have tended to make negative comments about the score as well. The only good thing about such negative comments is that they foreground the score, which rarely gets this level of attention. Part of the reason why music is frequently mentioned is no doubt that the collaboration between Besson and Eric Serra echoes significant film partnerships between directors and composers, to such an extent that the two are often discussed together: Sergio Leone and Ennio Morricone, Federico Fellini and Nino Rota, David Cronenberg and Howard Shore, Steven Spielberg and John Williams, Tim Burton and Danny Elfman all come to mind in the case of Besson and Serra. This is because Besson has consistently called upon Serra for his eight films, although we should perhaps note that Serra has not confined his work to the films of Besson, having scored Martin Campbell's *Goldeneye* (1995) John MacTiernan's *Rollerball* (2002), and Danielle Thompson's *Décalage Horaire* the same year (these last two films starred Jean Reno, which may be one reason why Serra agreed to do the score). The Besson-Serra collaboration was clearly successful, as the original soundtracks for many of the films have sold well in France: more than 100,000 copies of *Subway*, *Nikita*, *Atlantis* and *Léon*; more than 200,000 copies of *Le Cinquième élément*; more than one million copies of *Le Grand bleu* (which sold four million copies globally).<sup>1</sup>

The two men met in 1979, thanks to Pierre Jolivet, one of Besson's collaborators,<sup>2</sup> who, as a singer, had been looking for a guitar player; they have worked together since then. Today, the records sales, the awards,<sup>3</sup> and the importance given to the music by Besson and by audiences make Serra as much an auteur of Besson's films as Besson himself. For the public, the composer brings an immediately assimilable personal touch, which may explain why – a fact that is seldom emphasized – he is by the director's side for previews or promotional campaigns, functioning rather like an alter ego:

I think we complement each other. Luc's the eyes and I'm the ears. Our relationship was difficult in the beginning, because the director and musician are completely different persons. But as we've come to know more about each other, I've been able to tell what Luc's thinking from the way he moves the camera. He's a filmmaker who knows exactly what emotion he wants from the music, and relies on me to express them. So we have developed a musical language that makes our collaborations exciting. (Schweiger 1994: 13)

In what follows, I shall explore the use of musical material in Besson's films and its impact on the viewer. I shall focus on Besson the director rather than the producer,

---

<sup>1</sup> The commercial success of *Le Grand bleu*'s soundtrack is clearly linked to the success of the film. Reviews of the film have tended to stress the way in which psychological themes (the sea as the mother's womb) work with the new-age sounds of Serra's score (diving deeper into oneself).

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Jolivet later became the co-writer and protagonist of *Le Dernier combat*, and worked on the adaptation of *Subway*, before becoming a director in his own right, with rather more intimate films than those of Besson: *Strictelement personnel* (1985), *Force majeure* (1989), *Fred* (1997), *Ma petite entreprise* (1999), *Le Frère du guerrier* (2002), and *Filles uniques* (2003).

<sup>3</sup> Serra's score for *Le Grand bleu* was awarded a César (the French equivalent of the Oscar), the Victoire de la Musique, and Grand Prix de la S.A.C.E.M. for the best score. *Subway* and *Léon* were each awarded a Victoire. All the other films were given nominations.

considering the eight films from *Le Dernier combat* to *Jeanne d'Arc* which feature an original score by Eric Serra.<sup>4</sup>

### Music to be heard

Generally, the score is composed during the post-production phase when the composer has to write the music in a short space of time (five to six weeks). The average duration of a film score is 45 minutes. It tends to be longer in Besson's films (see Table 3.1). We might argue that this makes his cinema intrinsically musical, something which certain films - *Subway*, *Atlantis*, *Le Cinquième élément* - would confirm. But his films' intrinsic musicality is established well before the post-production phase, at the stage of writing: 'I can't remember a time when I didn't have a walkman on my head after the age of fourteen. I listen to music all the time and obviously, that influences me and speaks to me. I am unable to write without a walkman on my head, I need music to write' (Dastugue 1999).

The story is thus first written to a rhythm which is musical before being cinematic, this being a defining characteristic of the Besson style. On the assumption that music is affect-driven rather than programmatically narrative, listening to music creates emotions, and those emotions guide the scriptwriting. The shooting and the editing will then correspond to a *mise en scène*, a 'mise en image' of musical emotions and rhythm, the music preceding the image, as it does in a video clip.<sup>5</sup> If audiences hear this music as an integral part of the film, it is precisely because it is given to be heard, just as images are given to be watched. The music is very present throughout the film, and is mixed over the dialogues and the sound effects, whereas the norm is to seek balance: 'Luc gives priority to the music. For example, if there is a problem between the sound effects and the music, usually he will get rid of the sound effects' (Cavanagh 1994: 26).

This primacy of the music over the sound effects reveals the narrative choices made by Besson. A sound effect is the acoustic response of an event visualised on screen whose source belongs to the screen. A slamming door, a gunshot or an explosion, are visual events from which a particular sound emanates, belonging to the diegetic world as well as to its visual source. Film music is extra-diegetic, except in a few cases when the music specifically written for the film is played within the film diegesis, as is the case for *Subway* with the rock band's songs, or the diva sequence in *Le Cinquième élément*. The original score does not belong to the diegesis, it is a bridge between two universes: the universe of the film, and the universe of the spectator. Besson's privileging of extra-diegetic music can therefore be seen as a direct, appeal to the audience's emotions. It is also one of the factors leading to what has been called the clip effect.

Mario Litwin gives the following definition of the clip effect: 'The clip effect is caused by an excessive factor of presence and the absence of sound effects and sound environment. It can be accentuated by the intervention of the human voice and, sometimes, by the abundance of the percussion' (Litwin 1992: 64). There are a number of examples in Besson's films, where the interplay between the diegetic and the extra-diegetic plays a significant part.

*Le Dernier Combat* does not feature any dialogue, only a whispered 'hello', the music functioning as a palliative element for the lack of dialogue. The face-to-face between the Man (Pierre Jolivet) and the Brute (Jean Reno) is shot like a clip, the only soundtrack being Serra's

---

<sup>4</sup> Serra also collaborated on films produced by Besson: Didier Grousset's *Kamikaze* (1986), and Gérard Krawczyk's *Wasabi* (2001).

<sup>5</sup> Apart from his eight feature films, Besson has directed clips for artists such as Serge Gainsbourg ('Mon Légionnaire'), Mylène Farmer ('Que mon cœur lâche'), and Isabelle Adjani ('Pull Marine'). Indeed, it was after Besson's work with Adjani on this last clip that the actress accepted her role in *Subway*.

pop rock music. Many sequences of *Le Grand bleu* are shot like clips, such as the diving sequences, more particularly Jacques Mayol's first championship dive, where the only sound is the voice of the man counting. The score here is nominally extra-diegetic, not heard by any diegetic character. It does, however, incorporate sounds (whale songs) that belong to the film's diegetic universe, these displaced diegetic sounds (sounds which the protagonist might hear in such a situation) serving as a bridge between the diegetic and the extra-diegetic.

Given that *Subway* is about the creation of a band, there are many opportunities for the kind of effects we might associate with clips. The film opens with a car chase through Paris. Fred (Christophe Lambert) is looking for an audiocassette to play on the car radio when another car strikes him from behind. As soon as the music starts, the rhythm of the images accelerates with the vehicles. The sound effects we might expect from this kind of sequence – cars accelerating, the squealing of tyres – are present, but drowned out by the music. Some visual events are integrated into the score in a Mickey-Mouse effect (the term used to denote close synchronisation between sound and movement), such as the headlights of Fred's car flashing at the jogger before the car shoots over his head. The film also features two songs specifically written for the film, 'It's Only Mystery' (derived from Johnny Nash's 'I can see clearly'), and 'Guns and People', whose treatment within the film is also clip-like, as we shall now consider.

In the case of the first song, Fred has gathered his musicians together, and the singer (Arthur Simms) is introduced to them. The song 'It's Only Mystery' starts, and while listening to the music, Fred imagines himself sleeping at Héléna's side. In this sequence, the music serves to bring together two discrete spaces. The music starts in a particular place and time (the band playing in the room), and carries on in another time and another place (Fred's dream of Héléna's home).

There is a similar use of parallel editing in the final sequence, when the band gives a concert in the subway, singing 'Guns and People'. During the song several different actions occur: Héléna escapes from the police chief; one of Héléna's bodyguards is ready to shoot Fred; Héléna and Fred are rejoined; Fred is shot; Héléna has an argument with the bodyguards; Fred, lying on the ground, is singing. The music here is diegetic; its source (the band) is present onscreen, and all the characters in the sequence can hear it. But we have here an example of diegetic transgression, the passage from one universe to another, from the diegetic to the extra-diegetic. When Héléna is in the police chief's office (thus a different place than where the band is playing), the mixing of the music would logically have to mark the distance from the source. However, the song is heard everywhere and by everybody (the characters as well as the viewers). The music is therefore both diegetic (the band playing on screen), and extra-diegetic, creating an affective space for the audience, affective precisely because it is both diegetic and extra-diegetic, an 'impossible' space of fantasy, where opposites can coexist: this applies as much to the coexistence of the real and the fantasised, as Fred's apparent resurrection might suggest, as it does to the coexistence of love and hate in Fred and Héléna's relationship, underlined by the song's chorus – 'Guns don't kill people, People kill people'. The sequence thus appears as the clip of the song; its ambiguities and contradictions are explicable through the music. It is a fantasy which to some extent illustrates the preoccupations of the pre-existing song. While there are other sequences with extra-diegetic music and without dialogue – such as the presentation of the drummer and the roller, or the descent into the subway by the police chief and his men – which can also be compared to clip processes, the two pre-existing diegetic songs we have explored are the clearest example of the way in which Besson's style is musical, in this case anchored to a clip effect.

So far, I have concentrated on individual sequences to show how Besson's style is musical. Before moving on to an extended discussion of the scoring of *Léon*, I would like to explore briefly what we could call Besson's 'musical continuum', as part of the way in which

music in his films is there to be heard. Table 3.1 shows the approximate percentage proportion of screentime with musical accompaniment in each of his films.

Table 3.1 *Music and screentime in Besson's films*

<i>Le Dernier combat</i>	30%
<i>Subway</i>	50%
<i>Le Grand bleu</i>	70%
<i>Nikita</i>	50%
<i>Atlantis</i>	95%
<i>Léon</i>	90%
<i>Le Cinquième élément</i>	90%
<i>Jeanne d'Arc</i>	90%

As we can see, there is almost a doubling of the total time of music on screen from *Atlantis* onwards, with a wall-to-wall score in the subsequent films. *Atlantis* is a significant break. Presented as a tribute to the underwater world, the film has no dialogue, which explains to some extent the omnipresence of music. Indeed, music prevents *Atlantis* from being a mere documentary, for two reasons. First, music takes the place of a voice-over which might normally have introduced the undersea creatures, or given information about their behaviour, or about their geographical location. Second, the film is divided into themes - love, fear, grace, etc. – which the music supports dramatically, with the kind of redundancy one might expect: threatening music accompanies the shark attack; strings and brass are used to convey the ‘nobility’ of the dolphins’ games; an Arabian-sounding music with a solo flute introduction<sup>6</sup> follows each movement of a snake.

From *Atlantis* onwards, Serra chooses to synchronise his musical score with the events on screen, and to incorporate sound-musical effects in it,<sup>7</sup> creating a musical continuum which covers a significant part of the film, and which is unusual when compared with American cinema. I shall now turn to *Léon* for a more detailed case-study.

### ***Léon***

The first images of *Léon* open with a familiar trope, also found at the start of *Le Grand bleu*, *Nikita* and *Le Cinquième élément*: a high-angle forward tracking shot, which then tilts up to reveal the title. In this case it is a helicopter shot as we fly over water and trees towards the New York skyline, with the buildings emerging above the trees of Central Park, like the vestiges of a lost civilisation. A sequence of forward tracking shots take us through the streets of Little Italy, and finally to an Italian restaurant. The dynamic camerawork combined with the urban décor might have led us to expect percussive effects, perhaps rap music underlining the ‘urban jungle’ setting. Alternatively, the district of Little Italy might also have led us to expect a specific kind of music, associated with gangster films such as Nino Rota’s score for *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972), or the compiled pop score for *Goodfellas* (Martin Scorsese, 1990). Eric Serra chooses musical contrast, with faintly oriental music,

<sup>6</sup> Inspired from Claude Debussy’s *Syrinx for flute*. One of Debussy’s more famous orchestral pieces is *La Mer/ The Sea*, which is an obvious reference for the *Atlantis* score.

<sup>7</sup> I have already mentioned the headlights sound effect in *Subway*. In *Léon*, when Léon puts his glass of milk back onto the table, the score gets a sound-musical response, imparting extraordinary weight to the action, arguably to emphasise the character’s power.

dominated by chromatic flute music and floating strings, which he called Arabian in interview:

Every time you see a film that's shot in Manhattan, you hear rap songs. And though I love some rap, that musical relationship has become a cliché. I didn't want to pull that trick in *The Professional*, so I ended up using a lot of Arabian and African percussion ... I used that music because New York's skyscrapers struck me like Egyptian pyramids. They're very big and old. It's as if they represent an ancient civilization. So the Arabian melodies gave a weird and mysterious feeling. (Schweiger 1994: 13)

New York City is introduced as a jungle where everything is possible, where the strongest is the winner. Here, Léon can live without being noticed by anybody: a worm in the Big Apple.

Léon's first mission, in contrast, is accompanied by all-percussive music, which functions at several levels. First, it imposes a strong rhythm, suturing the rapid and numerous shots of the action sequence. Second, it combines the primitive and the precise, the tribal aspect of the city jungle on the one hand, with the ritual of the hit, and the precision of the professional hitman. There is a third function: the music stops when Léon puts a knife to the fat man's throat, as if the character were hearing these percussive rhythms, as if the rhythms were somehow linked to his body.

A similar contrast and a similar set of connotations occur later when Stansfield (Gary Oldman) visits Mathilda's family. The music we hear adopts the Arabian style (with its connotations of otherness and city-as-jungle), but Stansfield – as if it is music within his head – says that it reminds him of Beethoven. His passion for Beethoven, which as he says to the man he is about to kill, suits 'heavy' work, is a double reference: first to *A Clockwork Orange* (Stanley Kubrick, 1971), and its ultra-violence; second, to the biopic of Beethoven, *Immortal Beloved* (Bernard Rose, 1994), released the same year as *Léon*,<sup>8</sup> in which Oldman plays the role of the composer (and in which there are several references to *A Clockwork Orange*). As in Léon's first mission, the character stops the music (with a click of the finger in this case). Both of these examples again raise the question of the origin of the musical source. Nominally extra-diegetic, the music is manipulated by diegetic characters, creating a space of fantasy where borders are crossed, including the borders of the individual body, which is musicalised. This function of embodied musicality can be seen in my third example of multivalent music.

It is when Léon teaches Mathilda how to shoot, on the top of a tower overlooking Central Park. A right tracking shot reveals a splendid view of New York skyscrapers, to the accompaniment of synthetic strings, panpipes, and a multitude of singing and murmuring voices. This musical fusion functions in a variety of ways. First, it is visually an echo of the first shot, with its connotations of New York as a lost civilisation, where musically the panpipes suggest the past, and the primitive forest of the earlier helicopter shot. Second, the fusion of sounds echoes the collaboration of Mathilda and Léon, the lonely killer who becomes her teacher. Finally, the vocal element of the musical mix also serves to suggest what the audience cannot see beyond the cold and motionless aspect of the buildings. The voices, it could be argued, embody the spirits who guide the two killers in their practice; but we could equally well argue that they embody the people of New York, the crowd from which Mathilda selects targets. As we have already seen with *Subway*, the music is diegetised a posteriori; the music, which we hear first, subsequently creates possible sources in the visual track. The image is as much an illustration of the music as the other way round.

So far in *Léon*, I have considered individual sequences to pinpoint the features of the Besson-Serra musical system: the music is multivalent and frequently is as determining as the

---

<sup>8</sup> *Léon* was released 14 September (France) and 18 November (USA), and *Immortal Beloved* on 21 December (USA).

image. Let us now turn to a consideration of the way in which the score for the film as a whole functions.

Eric Serra does not make use of leitmotifs. However, *Léon*'s score is composed of recurring musical themes that build a meaningful network. Table 3.2 charts this network, based on the 108 minute version (rather than the 132 minute version released a few months later). The musical themes column lists only the themes that occur at least twice in the film:

Table 3.2 *Musical themes in Léon*

Sequences		Musical themes
1	Main titles	
2	Tony and Léon	M
3	Fat man mission	M
4	Léon back home	
5	Stansfield in family apartment	
6	Léon at home	L
7	Morning in the family apartment	D
8	Léon in the cinema	
9	Mathilda shops for Léon while Stansfield murders the family	D
10	Mathilda enters Léon's apartment, Stansfield and his men leave	L
11	Mathilda and Léon	Rm
12	Mathilda and Léon go to a hotel	L
13	Léon and Tony talk about training	
14	Mathilda and Léon on the rooftops	Rf
15	Daily life	
16	Disguise game	L
17	Léon and Tony talk about money	L
18	Mathilda tells Léon she loves him	L
19	Léon on a new mission, while Mathilda tells the hotel receptionist Léon is her lover	D
20	Mathilda enters the family apartment, Stansfield arrives	Rm
21	Mathilda follows Stansfield	M
22	Léon returns with a pink dress for Mathilda	
23	Mathilda and Léon find a new home	Rf
24	Léon tells Tony to give Mathilda his money if he dies	
25	Mathilda tries to kill Stansfield	M
26	Léon saves Mathilda	L, Rm
27	Stansfield at Tony's	
28	Mathilda and Léon shelter in the apartment	L
29	Mathilda leaves through a hole	D
30	Léon escapes wearing a SWAT suit	L, D
31	Léon is killed by Stansfield, followed by explosion	L
32	Mathilda and Tony	L
33	Mathilda goes back to her school	
34	End credits	

Key: L=Léon ; D=Death ; Rm=Romance ; M=Mission ; Rf=Rooftop

The 'Léon theme' comprises four ascending notes followed by four descending notes, and appears several times throughout the film in a variety of orchestrations. It is heard at the beginning of the film (no. 6 in Table 3.2), just after the 'fat man mission', creating an identification and relation between the character and his musical motive. After having been introduced with his warrior's skills, we discover a lonely man, performing his daily routine in his apartment. Léon's theme is first played by a bassoon, as he removes his coat and lets the audience see the weapons; it is then replaced by an oboe, as he is shown ironing, showering, drinking milk, and watering his plant. The shift from bassoon to oboe humanises and to some extent feminises the character, as the deeper and darker tones of the bassoon yield to the higher and lighter tones of the oboe. The theme is later reorchestrated in the film's Arabian style when Mathilda comes back from shopping, discovers the slaughter and shelters in Léon's apartment (no. 10), and when they both go to the hotel (no. 12). The oriental style we hear in the main titles influences the score as a whole, underlining not only the Egyptian pyramid-like setting, but also the character's feminine qualities of dissimulation, exemplified in the fat man mission.

The theme, like Léon himself, is Protean; it is played by a bandonion (with synthetic mandolina and rhythm), and thus 'Italianised', when Léon is at Tony's (no. 17). The piece, which Serra entitled 'Tony the IBM'<sup>9</sup> (suggesting that Tony is a kind of computer who controls Léon's missions and money) can be perceived in the sequence as an integral part of the setting, Tony's 'Supreme Macaroni' restaurant. The decorative function of the piece, allied to its title, is potentially misleading, however, in that the audience might hear it purely as Tony's theme. But as a reorchestration of Léon's theme, it constructs Tony as a part of Léon's life, the father-substitute, who welcomed him when he came to New York. A similar function is served when the bandonion solo picks up the theme, when Mathilda tells Léon she is falling in love with him (no. 18); the solo emphasizes not simply the intimacy of this moment, but the primacy of the moment for Léon as principal protagonist. The emotions generated by this version of the theme will carry over into the final sequences, helping audience identification with the trapped Léon.

What can be called the 'death theme' is mainly heard during the slaughter of the family (no. 9). After a long introduction with synthetic noises and percussions, the camera tracks forward in the corridor to Stansfield's arrival. Then the drums get louder, and the strings come when Stansfield shoots into the door. It is another Arabian-like melody that first appeared when Mathilda, on the phone, pretended to be her mother, and told her headmistress she was dead (no. 7). The final assault features this theme when Léon breaks through the wall with an axe (no. 29), allowing Mathilda, but not himself, to escape, and a little later when Stansfield sees Léon as a SWAT (no. 30), the death theme quite clearly prefiguring Léon's death at the hands of the corrupt cop.

The themes are closely related. If we compare the melodic lines of the Léon theme and the death theme, we find that they have a similar stepped ascending structure, which I have represented graphically rather than with musical notation in Figures 3.1 and 3.2 to help the non-musical reader visualise them:

---

<sup>9</sup> According to the credits of the soundtrack CD.



Figure 3.1 *Léon's theme*

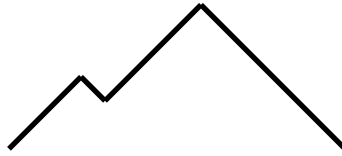
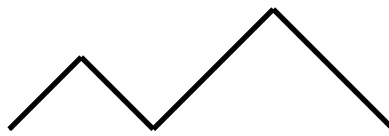


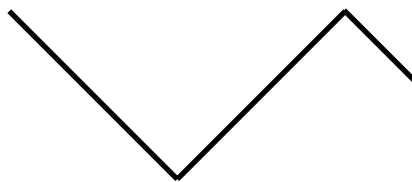
Figure 3.2 *Death theme*



The close parallelism between these two motives creates more than a mere association. On the one hand, Léon is a professional hitman, and so practises death as part of his job. On the other hand, he is also humanised by his relationship with Mathilda, and the musical parallelism marks the character with the burden of tragedy, signalling his end.

If we now compare these two motives with the melodic line of the ‘romantic theme’, we find that the structure is inverted (Figure 3.3):

Figure 3.3 *Romantic theme*



The romantic theme thus appears as the reverse value of the Léon and death themes. The romantic theme, embodied by Mathilda, symbolises life, hope, warmth, far from the dark coldness of the death theme. The values are reversed, and this opposition to the Léon theme shows his weakness, i.e. the little girl.

When Léon goes to D.E.A. in order to free Mathilda held by Stansfield's men, the sequence (no. 26) opens with the Léon theme during the action, and ends with the romantic theme as they embrace each other, signalling a turning point for Léon. Up to that point, he refuses Mathilda's love; as if to underline that, it is always the Léon theme that is heard. Now, having rescued her, he is ready for love (as he will tell before leaving her at the end of no. 28), and the romantic theme can appear.

As we can see, the musical score for *Léon* is far more complex than those written by Serra for Besson's previous films. By creating themes and a thematic network, it plays an influential role on the way audiences are likely to interpret the film. It might be objected that most listeners are unlikely to follow the musical structures so closely. But Serra's scores also use intertextual musical references, which audiences are likely to catch in a more obvious way. Thanks to Serra popular music, popular music forms part of the musical patchwork of Besson's films. We find songs by Sting (the end-credits 'Shape of My Heart') and Björk ('Venus as a Boy') in *Léon*; by the Raï singer Cheb Khaled in *Le Cinquième élément* and songs by Prince, Lionel Richie, Peter Gabriel are influences in the music of *Atlantis*. Such musical quotations function as recognisable anchors for audiences. Even in *Jeanne d'Arc*, where the choice of symphonic music with choirs is legitimised by the historical context of the subject, some musical quotations allow the viewer to find familiar reference points. Just to take the following example, when Jeanne, who has been hit by an arrow, comes back from the dead at dawn, she leads her sleeping army to fight. There begins a slow breath-like pulse, just like the snoring of the sleeping soldiers. Then a trumpet starts the tune which is repeated again and again, following a crescendo with strings, leading to audience anticipation, as described by Michel Chion: 'In an audiovisual sequence, the audio-viewer consciously or unconsciously recognizes the beginnings of a pattern (e.g., a crescendo or an accelerando) and then verifies whether it evolves as expected (Chion 1994: 56). The full perception of a piece is thus not possible without taking into account what has already been heard. In this sequence, Eric Serra was influenced by Ravel's *Bolero*. It is likely that most non-music-specialist members of the audience would recognise the reference, and thus anticipate not just the musical crescendo, but also the narrative crescendo to which the music is linked, because, as Chion says, 'one never gets tired of anticipating and of surprising anticipation - it is the very movement of desire' (ibid.). In this sequence, the music influences the perception the audience has of time; it vectorises the sequence towards an inexorable becoming: 'It is the principle of the repetitive construction which increases gradually, whose most beautiful example is indeed Ravel's *Bolero*. It is something inexorable which starts like that, it is a loop' (Dastugue 1999/2000: 19). The music, as we have already seen, is also an embodiment: the slow tempo embodies the awakening of the men both physically (it is dawn), and psychologically (they are convinced they will win as Jeanne has returned from the dead), the repeated trumpet theme functioning as the triumph of military will.

## Conclusion

I have tried to show the various types of musical narration in the films of Luc Besson from the point of view of the non-specialist audience, who might well be asking questions such as: why are these images so seductive? why do we feel empathy for this character? Part of the answer lies in the score. The well-known idea that film music is not made to be heard, affirmed by Adorno and Eisler in 1947 (Adorno and Eisler 1994), here collapses. Music in Besson's films is foregrounded, both quantitatively (there is more of it in the later films than in most people's films), and qualitatively, in that even a superficial awareness of its function will demonstrate that it is used playfully, cutting through the boundaries of the diegetic world, to construct spaces of audience fantasy.

## References

- Adorno, T. and H. Eisler (1994), *Composing for the Films* (London: The Athlone Press).  
 Cavanagh, D. (1994), 'Eric Serra: essential element', *Music From the Movies*, 16, p. 26.  
 Chion, M. (1994), *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, ed. and trans by C. Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press).

- Dastugue, G. (1999), 'Luc Besson ou le cinéma du mélodrame', *Traxzone.com* (<http://www.traxzone.com/textes/index.asp?id=1784>), 12 December 1999 (accessed 3 January 2005).
- Dastugue, G. (1999/2000), 'Eric Serra, le messenger de Jeanne d'Arc', *Soundtrack*, 72, p. 19.
- Litwin, M. (1992), *Le Film et sa musique: création, montage* (Paris, Romillat).
- Schweiger, D. (1994), 'Eric Serra, the professional', *Film Score Monthly*, 52, p. 13.