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Vampires: What Music They Make!

James Wierzbicki
University of Sydney, Australia

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Cover Page Footnote

James Wierzbicki teaches musicology at the University of Sydney; along with exploring questions of modernity and the postmodern, his research focuses on twentieth-century music in general and film music in particular. Articles by him have appeared in such publications as the *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, *The Musical Quarterly*, *Perspectives of New Music*, *Beethoven Forum*, and *Music and the Moving Image*. His books include *Film Music: A History* (2009), *Elliott Carter* (2011), and *Music in the Age of Anxiety: American Music in The Fifties* (2016).

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Those whose interests include music as well as vampire lore will find a vexing puzzle in the notes that Bram Stoker made as he prepared for *Dracula*.

Stoker on several occasions made lists of vampire characteristics, most of which are indeed worked into his novel, either in the form of action by the title character or in the form of the after-dinner dissertation that Van Helsing delivers to Mina Harker and the others in Chapter XVIII. Most of these characteristics, too, have become so much perpetuated in post-*Dracula* treatments that even the newcomer to vampire culture likely takes them for granted. As everyone knows (or as the young teenager Sam, in Joel Schumacher's 1987 film *The Lost Boys*, comes soon enough to know after perusing a few comic books), the vampire casts neither shadow nor reflection; it can enter a dwelling only if invited; it possesses superhuman physical strength yet is severely weakened by exposure to garlic and various symbols of Roman Catholicism; it prowls by night and during daytime hours seeks shelter in coffins filled with the soil

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of its homeland; it has the ability to transform itself into a bat or a wolf, or into mist; it can be destroyed, once and for all, if it is decapitated or if a stake is driven through its heart; etc.

But Stoker's notes for *Dracula* suggest another characteristic that did not find its way into the novel. According to the lists reproduced in Robert Eighteen-Bisang's and Elizabeth Miller's 2008 facsimile edition of the notes, the vampire is "insensible to music" (24–25).¹

However one defines "insensible"—e.g., as unconscious or unaware, as emotionally unresponsive or apathetic—why should this adjective apply to a vampire's relationship with music? On what did Stoker base this strange idea? If we accept *Dracula* not as the foundation of vampire lore but simply as "the vampire Ur-text that exerts a powerful gravitational attraction and around which all vampire texts—literary, cinematic and otherwise—necessarily orbit" (Weinstock 17), why is it that pre-*Dracula* texts make almost no mention of music and so many post-*Dracula* texts fairly drip with it?

Lack of evidence is proof of nothing, yet it seems worth noting that, with one exception, music figures not at all in the plots of the canonic vampire treatments that precede *Dracula*. Some of these are theatrical works, and so naturally their stage directions include instructions for music to be played as overtures and entr'actes, as songs and accompaniments for on-stage dancing, as mood-generating interjections and background materials, or, in the case of operas, as the constant medium through which the entire story is told.

¹ Elsewhere, Stoker wrote that a characteristic of the vampire is an "insensibility to music" (21–22). Paraphrasing inaccurately, Eighteen-Bisang and Miller note that the vampire is "insensitive to music" (319).

But neither the operas (one by Heinrich Marschner and the other by Peter Josef von Lindpaintner, both titled *Der Vampyr* and both dating from 1828) nor the melodramas (Charles Nodier's *Le Vampire* and James Robinson Planché's *The Vampire; or, The Bride of the Isles*, both from 1820) involve music as a plot element that in any way concerns the titular vampire.² Likewise for Alexandre Dumas's 1865 five-act drama *Le Vampire*. And likewise for the 1819 short story by John William Polidori—*The Vampyre; A Tale*, featuring as its main character the horrible Lord Ruthven, Earl of Marsden—on which all of the just-mentioned dramatizations are based.

Instances of the word 'music,' or variations thereof, appear often in *Varney the Vampire; or, The Feast of Blood*, the voluminous serialized novel by James Malcolm Rymer (with contributions from Thomas Peckett Prest) that titillated Londoners from 1845 to 1847 and which stands as a prime example of the tawdry Victorian genre known as the "penny dreadful." In most of these, however, the usage is metaphorical, and it has nothing to do with music *per se*. Near the beginning of the story, for example, a young man, upon hearing the object of his hitherto unrequited love finally speak his name, exclaims: "Oh, say that word again! It is the first time such music has met my ears" (45); later, after a pause in an amorous conversation between Charles and Flora, "to her it seemed as if some music had suddenly left off in its most exquisite passage" (75). Later still,

² For details on the Marschner and Lindpaintner operas, see Pamela C. White, "Two Vampires of 1828," *Opera Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (1987): 22–57. For details on the Nodier and Planché melodramas, see Ryan Douglas Whittington, "Resurrecting Two Melodramatic Vampires of 1820" (M.M. thesis, Florida State University, 2016).

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when an elderly sea captain consoles Flora by singing the praises of the now absent Charles, “her ears drank in the words of commendation of him she loved,” for “what sweeter music could there be to her than the voice of that old weather-beaten rough-spoken man” (142). As for Varney, his voice is described as something that “sounded like music itself,” so charismatic that Flora, “despite her trembling horror,” feels “an irresistible urge to hear him speak on” (94); after Varney sets his lustful sights on Flora, he mutters to himself: “I love no one, expect no love from any one, but I will make humanity a slave to me; and the lip-service of them who hate me in their hearts, shall be as pleasant jingling music to my ear” (154).

In sharp contrast to *Varney*’s metaphorical mentions of music, the 1872 novella *Carmilla*, by Bram Stoker’s Irish compatriot Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, contains a ‘musical moment’ that involves both real sound and, significantly, the title character’s reaction to it. Early in the story the narrator, unaware of his new friend’s true identity, admits to being attracted to her yet at the same time unnerved by certain things that she says and does. In Chapter IV—tellingly titled “Her Habits”—he recalls an instance when the two of them witnessed a funeral procession:

As we sat thus one afternoon under the trees a funeral passed us by. It was that of a pretty young girl, whom I had often seen, the daughter of one of the rangers of the forest. The poor man was walking behind the coffin of his darling; she was his only child, and he looked quite heartbroken.

Peasants walking two-and-two came behind, they were singing a funeral hymn.

I rose to mark my respect as they passed, and joined in the hymn they were very sweetly singing.

My companion shook me a little roughly, and I turned surprised. She said brusquely, “Don’t you perceive how discordant that is?”

“I think it very sweet, on the contrary,” I answered, vexed at the interruption, and very uncomfortable, lest the people who composed the little procession should observe and resent what was passing.

I resumed, therefore, instantly, and was again interrupted. “You pierce my ears,” said Carmilla, almost angrily, and stopping her ears with her tiny fingers.

After the procession has gone out of earshot, the narrator and Carmilla briefly discuss the nature of funerals in general, and the specific facts that the funeral of the forest ranger’s daughter came just a week after the funeral of a swineherd’s young wife. The narrator, a physician, muses aloud that it seems odd that the ranger’s daughter succumbed to a fever shortly after reporting that she had seen a ghost, and that the otherwise healthy swineherd’s wife died within a week of her nightmarish account about how “something seized her by the throat as she lay in her bed, and nearly strangled her.” Commenting bitterly on the swineherd’s wife, Carmilla says:

“Well, *her* funeral is over, I hope, and *her* hymn sung; and our ears shan’t be tortured with that discord and jargon. It has made me nervous. Sit down here, beside me; sit close; hold my hand; press it hard—hard—harder.”

“We had moved a little back,” the narrator says, “and had come to another seat.” He goes on:

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She sat down. Her face underwent a change that alarmed and even terrified me for a moment. It darkened, and became horribly livid; her teeth and hands were clenched, and she frowned and compressed her lips, while she stared down upon the ground at her feet, and trembled all over with a continued shudder as irrepressible as ague. All her energies seemed strained to suppress a fit, with which she was then breathlessly tugging; and at length a low convulsive cry of suffering broke from her, and gradually the hysteria subsided. “There! That comes of strangling people with hymns!” she said at last. “Hold me, hold me still” (16–17).

This chilling yet erotically heated account of how the title character of Le Fanu’s novella responds so negatively to funeral hymns is perhaps the source of Stoker’s notion that vampires are somehow “insensible” to music.

If it is indeed the source of Stoker’s idea, then it seems that Stoker was guilty of misinterpretation, for it is obvious that Carmilla’s almost allergic reaction to the hymns had to do not with the hymns’ melodies or harmonies but with their religious connotations. If it is *not* the source, then one has little choice but to conclude that Stoker invented the idea, just as he appears to have invented the idea—included in his lists of vampire characteristics but not incorporated into his novel—that vampires could not be painted or photographed.

That vampires should be “insensible to music” is not, as Mathias Clasen has recently suggested, “too bizarre” a concept to retain “its mnemonic advantage” in a work of fiction (387). But neither is it based on vampire ‘fact’ of the sort reported, in mind-numbing depth and detail, in the two landmark books that appeared at around the same time that *Dracula* was

being resurrected as a stage drama. One will search in vain for references to music in Dudley Wright's 1924 *The Book of Vampires* and Montague Summers's 1928 *The Vampire: His Kith and Kin*; for Wright and Summers, about music and *real* vampires there was simply nothing to be said.

Perhaps the most resonant lines in Stoker's *Dracula* are a trio of short sentences spoken by the Count when he is still playing gracious host to the English solicitor who visits the castle in Transylvania for the sake of sealing a real estate deal. Jonathan Harker has had time to refresh himself after his long journey, and Dracula keeps him company as he enjoys a sumptuous dinner. After the meal, in which Dracula does not partake, Harker is startled to hear through an open window a chorus of howling wolves. Noting his guest's discomfort, Dracula says: "Listen to them!—the children of the night. What music they make!" (22).

Stoker apparently liked these lines so much that he repeated them verbatim—not just by quoting them exactly but by snipping them out of his published novel and pasting them into pages filled otherwise with handwriting—in the script of a never-performed theatrical effort titled *Dracula; or, The Undead* that he prepared for the sake of copyright protection.³ The lines were not incorporated into either of the two dramatizations of the novel that were very much performed in England and the United States during the 1920s, but probably that is because both of these

³ Images of several pages of Stoker's 1897 theatrical treatment, including the page that contains the "children of the night" lines, are available on a website hosted by the British Library. See <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/bram-stokers-stage-adaptation-of-dracula>.

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(Hamilton Deane's 1924 *Dracula* and the 1927 *Dracula: The Vampire Play* by Deane and John Balderston) are set entirely in England; the stage directions for both plays indeed call for plenty of off-stage howls, but in neither play does the character of Dracula, or anyone else, comment on them.⁴ Unlike these two popular plays, the version of *Dracula* that Tod Browning directed for Universal Studios begins, as does Stoker's novel, in Transylvania, where wolf howls are apparently the norm, and where an aesthetic appreciation of such howls is perhaps not out of the ordinary. In any case, it seems that screenwriter Garrett Fort liked the lines in question as much as Stoker did, and so he included them—*almost* verbatim—in the first reel of their landmark 1931 film.⁵

Thanks largely to the deliberate yet mellifluous way in which they are spoken in the 1931 film by the Hungarian actor Bela Lugosi, these lines have become a standard feature of *Dracula* treatments, and to note how

⁴ The scripts for both plays are reproduced in *Dracula: The Ultimate, Illustrated Edition of the World-Famous Vampire Play*, edited by David J. Skal (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993).

⁵ In the film, Dracula speaks the lines not after the meal but almost immediately upon first welcoming his guest. The only difference between Stoker's lines and the lines in the 1931 screenplay involves the lack of the definite article "the" before the phrase "children of the night." In the original version of the screenplay, submitted to Universal by Louis Bromfield in August 1930, the article is retained but the exclamation marks are missing. In the 32-page novella-like 'treatment' of the story that Firzt Stephani prepared two months earlier, there is no allusion to the lines in question. The Stephani and Bromfield texts, as well as the final version of Fort's screenplay, are reproduced in *Dracula: The Original Shooting Script* (Absecon, N.J.: MagicImage Filmbooks, 1990).

over the years they have been varied is at the very least interesting.

The lines are not altered at all, except to be made ineffectively casual by actor Louis Jordan, in the three-part *Count Dracula* that Philip Saville directed for BBC television in 1977. In Werner Herzog's 1979 *Nosferatu the Vampyre* (or *Nosferatu: Phantom der Nacht*) the lines are altered only in a grammatical sense; as played by Klaus Kinski, the title character says: "Hören sie. Hören sie. Die Kinder der Nacht wie sie Musik machen" ("Listen. Listen to how the children of the night make their music").⁶ But in the Spanish-language version of *Dracula* that Universal made simultaneous with its Lugosi film, the vampire (played by Carlos Villarias) adds a significant adjective: "Escúchalos! ¡Son los hijos de la noche; hermosa música componen!" ("Listen. They are the children of the night. They make *beautiful* music!"). An altogether different adjective is added as the lines are wooingly spoken (by Frank Langella) to Lucy Seward in John Badham's 1979 *Dracula*: "Listen to them. The children of the night. What *sad* music they make."⁷ And still another adjective is added when Gary

⁶ Herzog's film is strongly based on F.W. Murnau's 1922 *Nosferatu*, an unauthorized adaptation of the Stoker novel that features numerous scenes that are in effect duplicated in the authorized 1931 Universal Studios film. Neither Murnau's silent film nor E. Elias Merhige's 2000 *Shadow of the Vampire*, which is a tongue-in-cheek telling of 'the story' of the making of Murnau's film, involve a scene in which the vampire likens the howling of wolves to music.

⁷ In response, Lucy asks: "Do you think it's sad?" After a pause, Dracula says: "So lonely. Like weeping." And then the by this time love-struck Lucy says: "I think it's a *wonderful* sound."

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Oldman speaks the lines, in a sadistic and near-maniacal tone of voice, in Francis Ford Coppola's preposterously titled 1992 *Bram Stoker's Dracula*: "Listen to them. The children of the night. What *sweet* music they make."⁸

In her edition of Stoker's *Dracula*, Eleanor Bourg Nicholson attaches a footnote to the lines that have here been under discussion. Without citing the source of the information, she reminds readers that "Dracula purportedly displayed a personal insensibility to music," and then she adds that this quality was "classically believed to be demonstrative of a metaphysical and physical disharmony (cf. Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*: 'The man that hath no music in himself, / Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds, / Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils')" (38). To make her point, Nicholson might also have quoted a line that Edward Bulwer-Lytton in his 1872 novel *The Parisians* assigned to a character named Signora Venosta: "He who loves not music would have a dull time of it in heaven" (66). She might have used Goethe's opinion, from an 1822 letter, that "he who loves not music

It should be noted that Badham's highly eroticized plot strays very far from that of Stoker's story, and that this particular scene takes place in England, where presumably there are no wolves.

⁸ One could hardly end a paragraph such as this without mentioning the phrase spoken by Leslie Nielsen in Mel Brooks's 1995 parody of Coppola's film. Just as he does in the 1931 film, the Count in *Dracula: Dead and Loving It* delivers the lines almost immediately upon welcoming his guest. In this case, the distraction is not a chorus of wolves but, rather, the flight overhead of a large bat. "Children of the night," Dracula says. "What a mess they make!" And then he steps into a fresh pile of guano.

deserves not the name of man” (Ludwig: 82).⁹ Reaching back further, she might have mentioned Martin Luther’s similar idea, perhaps the inspiration for Goethe’s aphorism, about how someone who “does not regard music as a marvelous creation of God must be a clodhopper indeed and does not deserve to be called a human being” (Buszin 83).¹⁰

Nicholson could have used these and numerous other quips to make her point about how the ability to appreciate music is somehow connected with being fully human and morally fit. But she would have been making the wrong point. And in doing so she certainly would have been missing Stoker’s point, which is that Dracula is not only *highly* ‘sensible’ to music but also to the subtleties of language.

The metaphoric use of ‘music’ was commonplace in the Victorian period; examples from *Varney the Vampire*

⁹ The full ‘aphorism,’ included at the end of a letter to Josef Pleyel, is: “Wer Musik nicht liebt, verdient nicht, ein Mensch genannt zu werden; wer sie nur liebt, ist erst ein halber Mensch; wer sie aber treibt, ist ein ganzer Mensch.” The most common translation is: “He who loves not music deserves not the name of man; he who loves it is yet but half a man; but he who devotes himself to it is a whole man.”

¹⁰ The complete sentence, from Luther’s foreword to Georg Rhau’s 1538 *Symphoniae iucundae*, is: “Wer aber dazu kein Luft noch Liebe hat, und durch solch lieblich Wunderwerck nicht bewegt wird, das muß warlich ein grober Klotz sein, der nicht wert ist, daß er solche liebliche Musica, sondern indessen einen Dreckpoeten oder der Hunde und Säue Gesang und Musica höre.” Buszin’s shortened translation is: “A person who gives this some thought and yet does not regard it [music] as a marvelous creation of God, must be a clodhopper indeed and does not deserve to be called a human being; he should be permitted to hear nothing but the braying of asses and the grunting of hogs.”

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were given above, and there are many to be found in Stoker's fiction. Early in *Dracula*, for example, Jonathan Harker describes the sensuous giggles of three female vampires as "a silvery, musical laugh," like "the intolerable, tingling sweetness of water-glasses when played on by a cunning hand" (42); later, Mina Harker records in her diary how wonderful it was to feel the touch of her husband's hand, for "a brave man's hand can speak for itself" and "does not even need a woman's love to hear its music" (210); as the novel pushes toward its horrific conclusion, Dr. Seward notes in his diary that as the defiant Mina spoke Jonathan's name "the word sounded like music on her lips, it was so full of love and tenderness" (268). Beyond *Dracula*, one finds in Stoker's 1902 *The Mystery of the Sea* a lover overjoyed to hear "the delicate cooing music" of his paramour's voice (121), in the 1904 *The Jewel of Seven Stars* a likening of dreams that "change yet keep the same" to "the soul of a musician in a fugue" (8), and in the 1909 *The Lady of the Shroud* a narrator who says not only that the title character's whisper is "as faint and sweet as the music of a distant Æolian harp" (139) but also that, after trials and tribulations, "her murmured happiness was music to my ears" (171).

The idiom "music to my ears" dates back at least to Shakespeare's time and since then has appeared often in English literature. In most cases the idiom is attached to a spoken phrase, but the object of comparison is not so much the sound of the speaker's voice as the meaning of the speaker's words. In most cases, too, the meaning of the words—as in the example from *The Lady of the Shroud* quoted above—is something that not only the fictional source of the idiom but also most real-life consumers take to be generally positive. And thus in most cases the idiom is a tautology, that is, it in effect tells us that something 'nice' is 'nice.'

The idiom rises above the level of cliché only when it is attached to an idea that is *not* so positive. The result is a form of irony, a rhetorical device that, when used sparingly and with good timing, can be very powerful. Theater-goers sit up and take notice, for example, when the title character in Shakespeare's *Richard III* responds to Tyrell's promise to kill his enemies by saying: "That's music to my ears" (IV, ii). Readers notice, and perhaps shudder, when the creature in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, commenting on his brutal murder of Victor Frankenstein's lifelong friend, rhetorically asks the sea captain: "Think you that the groans of Clerval were music to my ears?" (182). Likewise, audiences of the novel as well as the 1931 film notice, and remember, when Dracula uses the word "music" to describe the howling of savage wolves.

A person cannot effectively use irony, or any of the other standard figures of speech that involve contrast and comparison (simile, metaphor, oxymoron, litotes, metonymy, synecdoche), unless he or she knows the meanings of the terms on both sides of the equation. In other words, one cannot effectively compare a sonic or verbal non-musical phenomenon to music unless one understands full well what music is. Dracula, as he muses aloud on the beastly noises coming from beyond the castle walls, seems to know exactly what he is talking about.

Do vampires suck at music? *Should* they? One would answer those questions in the positive only if one regarded as litanies of incontrovertible truths the lists of vampire characteristics that Bram Stoker included in his preparatory notes for *Dracula*. But Stoker changed his mind about at least a few of these characteristics, and in his novel he provided us with no reason whatsoever to

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think that creatures of the night are “insensible to music.”

Today’s world, we know, teems with vampires who appreciate music as much as do their victims. The leathery thugs in *The Lost Boys* and John Carpenter’s 1998 *Vampires* enjoy their hard rock. The down-home ‘good old boy’ Bill Compton in the 2008–2014 HBO series *True Blood* likes his barroom ballads. The main character in Tim Burton’s 2012 film adaptation of the old *Dark Shadows* television show is more than a little captivated by the psychedelic ‘hippy’ music of the world into which, after almost two centuries in a coffin, he awakens. The prepubescent vampire girl in both the Swedish and the American adaptations of John Ajvide Lindqvist’s 2004 *Låt den rätte komma in* thinks it’s cool—but no big deal, really—to listen to cheesy pop songs. And so on.

Modern readers and filmgoers are also acquainted with vampires whose involvement with music, or whose musicianship, goes somewhat beyond the ordinary. Probably the best known of these, because in both his literary and cinematic incarnations he proved to be the heartthrob of so many adolescent girls, is Edward Cullen, who early in the 2005 novel by Stephenie Meyer that launched the long-running *Twilight* series discovers that he and a young woman share not just a mutual physical attraction but also an interest in the music of Debussy (104–105) and who later entertains his girlfriend by playing on the piano an original composition, inspired by her, that the girlfriend says is “unbearably sweet” (326). Less saccharine but no less popular are the accounts of relationships between vampires and music that permeate the various novels, and film treatments thereof, in Anne Rice’s *Vampire Chronicles* series; the second novel in the series, the 1985 *The Vampire Lestat*, tells the story of a veteran

revenant who after decades in a decrepit coffin decides to be re-born as—of all things—a rock star, and who tells himself that the genre that attracted him was “so eloquent of dread” that “it must have sounded supernatural even to those who don’t believe in the supernatural” (12).

In fact, there is nothing at all supernatural about rock music in general or about the rock music in particular that Lestat makes. Nor is there anything supernatural about the violin and piano playing of the morally innocent vampire Louis and his protégée Claudia that resounds throughout the Rice novels, or the keyboard noodling of Edward Cullen, or the classical music performed by the vampire and her partner in Tony Scott’s 1983 film *The Hunger*, or the moody “anti-virtuoso ambient drone music” (Joyce) produced in guarded privacy by the male vampire in Jim Jarmusch’s 2013 film *Only Lovers Left Alive*.

These and many other examples of vampire music may indeed be exquisitely elegant, or visceral and compelling, or even—as cliché-mongers might put it—hauntingly beautiful. These same descriptions, however, might also apply to music made by mortals. Long-lived vampires of course have had a great deal of time in which to cultivate their tastes and in which to practice their skills, so it is almost to be expected that over the years at least some of them should have become quite good at music. But with few exceptions the music they make, like the music they listen to just for the fun of it, is quite of this earth.

One of the exceptions can be found in “The True Story of a Vampire,” written by Eric Stenbock and included in his 1894 collection *Studies of Death: Romantic Tales*. The story’s narrator is an aging baroness who tells how, many years before, she lost her

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brother to a strange houseguest—"rather tall, with fair wavy hair, ... a graceful mouth, and an attractive smile, which belied the intense sadness of the expression of the eyes"—named Count Vardalek. After dinner on his first visit to the family castle, she recalls, Vardalek went to the piano and played "a Hungarian *csardas*—wild, wonderful, rhapsodic," an example of "the music which makes men mad." Her younger brother, precociously talented but unschooled at music, was captivated by the performance:

Gabriel stood stock still by the piano, his eyes dilated and fixed, his form quivering. At last he said very slowly, at one particular motive—for want of a better word you may call it the *relâche* of a *csardas*, by which I mean that point where the original quasi-slow movement begins again—"Yes, I think I could play that."

Then he quickly fetched his fiddle and self-made xylophone, and did actually, alternating the instruments, render the same very well indeed

Vardalek looked at him, and said in a very sad voice, "Poor child! You have the soul of music within you" 174).

Time passed. Vardalek came and went. Each time he arrived at the castle he looked "much older, wan, and weary," but after he spent time with Gabriel "he began to look quite young again." The narrator reports how late one night, shortly before Gabriel contracted a "strange illness" that eventually claimed his life, she went downstairs to fetch something from the drawing room:

As I was going up again I passed Vardalek's room. He was playing on a piano, which had been specially put there for him, one of Chopin's nocturnes, very beautifully; I stopped, leaning on the banisters to listen.

Something white appeared on the dark staircase. We believed in ghosts in our part. I was transfixed with terror, and clung to the banisters. What was my astonishment to see Gabriel walking slowly down the staircase, his eyes fixed as though in a trance! Could I believe my senses? Could that be Gabriel?

I simply could not move. Gabriel, clad in his long white night-shirt, came downstairs and opened the door. He left it open. Vardalek still continued playing, but talked as he played.

Vardalek spoke, the narrator says, about how now Gabriel's life had become his *own* life, and "here he struck one agonized and strange chord, then continued playing softly." After sighs and groans, she says, Vardalek dismissed the boy.

And Gabriel went out of the room and ascended the staircase at the same slow pace, with the same unconscious stare. Vardalek struck at the piano, and although he did not play loudly, it seemed as though the strings would break. You never heard music so strange and so heart-rending! (175–76).

Stenbock's *Studies of Death* was published in London three years before the emergence of *Dracula*, and so Stoker probably was familiar with it. One can only wonder, though, if "The True Story of a Vampire" was known to Garrett Fort, the screenwriter who penned the adaptation of Stoker's novel for Universal's 1931 *Dracula* film. In any case, Fort, in his completely original screenplay for Universal's 1936 *Dracula's Daughter*, did as Stenbock had done and put into the hands of a piano-playing vampire a nocturne by Chopin.

She calls it a "cradle song," but the piece that the Countess Marya Zaleska performs early in the film is in fact Chopin's Nocturne No. 5 in F-Sharp, Op. 15, No. 2.

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At least, the piece starts out as that. Relieved that she has destroyed the body of Dracula, she rejoices in her conviction that she “can live a normal life now. Think normal things. Even play normal music again. Listen.” As she starts to play she recalls pleasant things she once knew, but the tall and swarthy servant who stands at her side repeatedly contradicts her. When the Countess mentions twilights filled with “long shadows on the hillsides,” Sandor says that those are “evil shadows.” When she speaks of birds and their peaceful “flutter of wings in the treetops,” he says that those are “the wings of bats.” When she remembers hearing “from far off” the friendly “barking of a dog,” Sandor suggests that she remembers barking only “because there [were] wolves about.” The Countess orders Sandor to cease with his comments, and she insists that with this ‘normal’ music she has at last “found release.”

But then the music changes into something that, by Chopinesque standards, is not ‘normal’ at all. The piano piece becomes more and more urgent, with ever-thicker textures and harmonies that sound increasingly bitter.¹¹ Apparently an astute analyst of musical semiotics, Sandor says to his mistress: “*That* music doesn’t speak of release. ... *That* music tells of the dark. Evil things. Shadowy places.” Realizing that her minion is correct, the Countess breaks off the performance.

A comparable transmogrification of a piece of classical music takes place in Universal’s 1945 *House of Dracula*. In this case, the music that undergoes change is not officially a nocturne—“the idea of” which, writes Michael Hannan, “is perhaps emblematic of vampirism”

¹¹ The on-screen credits for *Dracula’s Daughter* do not include the name of a composer. The film’s uncredited musical director, and presumably the composer of the ‘strange’ music, was Heinz Roemhold.

(64)—but the nocturne-like slow opening movement that gave rise to the apt nickname (“Moonlight”) of Beethoven’s Piano Sonata No. 14 in C-sharp Minor, Op. 27, No. 2. Also in this case, the performer of the music is not a vampire but a human being who is under a vampire’s influence. The pianist is Miliza, a nurse at the clinic to which Dracula, disguised and calling himself Baron Latos, has come for help. She is playing the piece as Dracula arrives for his treatment, and he reminds her that the “Moonlight” Sonata had been on the program of the recital they attended when, years before, they first met. As Dracula and Miliza stare deeply into one another’s eyes, the music starts to move far beyond anything that Beethoven might have conceived:

Miliza: “I’ve never heard this music before. Yet I’m playing it.”

Dracula: “You’re creating it, for me.”

Miliza: “It frightens me.”

Dracula: “It’s beautiful. It’s the music of the world from which I come.”

Miliza: “It makes me see strange things, People who are dead, yet they’re alive.”

Dracula: “Mine is a world without material needs.”

Miliza: “It calls to me. But I’m afraid.”¹²

Dracula: “The fear will pass as the music becomes fixed in your mind. It will make you long to be there.”

¹² The screenplay for *House of Dracula* is by Edward T. Lowe. In Universal’s 1944 *House of Frankenstein*, the screenplay for which is also by Lowe, almost the same words are assigned to a woman who is being hypnotized by Dracula’s ring. She says: “When I look at it I see glimpses of a strange world, a world of people who are dead and yet alive. ... It frightens me.”

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The music veers into a jangly mesh of filigrees for right hand alone.¹³ As Miliza plays, the camera offers a close-up of her left hand, lifting a necklace from inside her blouse and fingering its now-visible crucifix. After Dracula cringes and looks away, the music is once again that of Beethoven. When it cuts off in mid-phrase, Dracula says: “Why do you stop? Create this music again.” But Miliza, almost in a trance, leaves the piano mumbling about something that the clinic’s director had told her to do. After Miliza has drawn the blood sample from Dracula’s arm, the two of them walk out onto the terrace. In between cut-away scenes that show the clinic’s director and another nurse frantically trying to find the presumably kidnapped Miliza, Dracula almost in a whisper says: “The music is bringing my world closer, closer.” Then later: “Cast away the cross so that you may join me there.” Then still later: “Go to your room. When you hear the music, I will come for you.”

No less compelling on screen, but less interesting from a musicological perspective, is the scene in the Hammer Studios’ 1963 *The Kiss of the Vampire* during which a younger member of a vampire clan entertains his father’s hapless guests. Before dinner he plays the almost requisite Chopin nocturne (in this case, the Nocturne No. 8 in D-flat, Op. 27, No. 2); after dinner, and after his father has targeted the female guest, he plays, at his father’s urging, one of his own compositions, and this has the desired effect of putting

¹³ As with *Dracula’s Daughter*, *House of Dracula* has no on-screen credit for a composer. The film’s uncredited musical director, and presumably the composer of the piano music, was William Lava.

the woman completely in his father's control.¹⁴ Although no musical transformation is involved here, the effect is just as potent as the above-described episodes from *House of Dracula*, *Dracula's Daughter*, and "The True Story of a Vampire," and the implied message seems just as clear; as the dutiful son plays his hypnotizing piece, writes David Huckvale, "the apparently civilizing nature of music (as suggested by his previous playing of a Chopin Nocturne) is ... inverted and corrupted" (109).

The Kiss of the Vampire is arguably unique in the Hammer Studios' extensive output of vampire films (more than a dozen of them, produced between 1958 and 1974) in that it features music as a plot element, but otherwise it is just another shocker whose plot is predictable and whose full-color imagery, calculated to appeal mostly to teenage boys, is as rich in bosoms as it is in blood. Universal's *House of Dracula* and *Dracula's Daughter* are films of an altogether different nature, and not just because their budgets were small and they were filmed in humble black and white.

Quite unlike the vampires in the Hammer films, and also quite unlike the title character in both Universal's 1931 *Dracula* and the Bram Stoker novel on which it is based, the vampires in *House of Dracula* and *Dracula's Daughter* are not at all content with their lots. In *House of Dracula*, the Baron approaches Dr. Edlemann because he desperately hopes that his "vampirism is not an

¹⁴ The composer for *The Kiss of the Vampire* is James Bernard, who provided the music for many of the Hammer Studios' vampire films. In an expanded version of the film that was made for American television and titled *Kiss of Evil*, the melody of what Bernard called his "Vampire Rhapsody" is sounded by a music box that the young vampire gives to an unsuspecting teenage girl.

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existential condition but a disease, an aberration that will respond to treatment” (Leitch 12); in *Dracula’s Daughter*, the Countess truly believes that with her burning of Dracula’s corpse she is at last freed from a curse. These films might not be full-fledged examples of what some modern theorists call “deep horror,” but neither are they films that present themselves as “merely shocking or terrifying” (Schlobin 26). Indeed, both of them, and especially *Dracula’s Daughter*, depend for much of their plot content not so much on horror as on “the psychological aspects of vampirism” (Kane 38). And thus both of them offer early manifestations of the now popular “sympathetic vampire” who, in addition to being a predator, is a victim of circumstances (Gordon 227).

Kristopher Woofter is focusing on the non-vampire Miliza character when he writes that the piano scene in *House of Dracula* is “a *tour de force* psychic staging of the anxieties of the potential victim,” a victim who is haunted by “both the possibility of another world and the fear of choosing her own path,” who worries that “she might be falling under an evil spell ... or opening up to her own repressed desires for pleasures beyond the physical and the everyday” (11–12). But the observations apply as well to the piano scene in *Dracula’s Daughter*, which takes place long before the film’s audience is made aware of the Countess’s true identity. And they arguably could apply to the piano scene in the Stenbock story, the central character of which is labeled a vampire only because the narrator *supposes* that he is a vampire.

That classical music might be a battleground for the forces of darkness and light is likely not something that often occurs nowadays to professional concert reviewers or adjudicators of student recitals at conservatories. But, as the Van Helsing character reminds the audience at the

very end of both the 1931 *Dracula* film and the 1927 *Dracula: The Vampire Play*, “there are such things!” And that is perhaps something to think about the next time we hear an earnest pianist, especially one addressing a Chopin nocturne, play wrong notes.

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