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In memory and dedicated to Pamela Vincent

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Emily Anna Nathan

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1. Introduction

1.1 Ker Goat Education Centre

Ker Goat, a small, subsidized private education centre was established in 1940 near Dinan in Brittany.¹ Anne-Marie de la Morlais opened the centre to accommodate children who would otherwise be subject to detention – in other words it was a correctional facility for minors established during the Second World War.² In 1942 Paul Lelièvre became an educator at the Ker Goat centre. Together with his colleague Jacques Dietz, who had successfully introduced music and choral singing to the institute, he developed the musical and choral tradition of Ker Goat into a core activity of the centre in 1946 and 1947.³

Unfortunately, the Ker Goat facility was subject to constant financial difficulties and struggled to maintain an adequate environment for rehabilitating the delinquent boys.⁴ It was to be future performances by the choir that would eventually assist in raising funds to purchase the Ker Goat property. Nonetheless, the grounds appeared miserable, several cases of scabies were reported, and numerous cases of children runaways and thefts prevented the center from reaching a favourable reputation. The boys were regarded as mentally unstable and subject to close observation in this regard. As part of their regime, they were expected to carry out rigorous manual chores and were subject to a strictly organized timetable that also included religious instruction – the latter considered an essential component of the rehabilitation programme.⁵

In 1947, the general secretary Jacques Guyomarc'h reported that he had carried out a tour with the Ker-Goat Choir in response to the 1945 film, *La Cage aux Rossignols*.⁶ In addition to the many performances, Jacques Guyomarc'h gave lectures that were released to the press

¹ Gardet, "Centre de Ker Goat durant la Seconde Guerre mondiale (WWII)" in *Anonymes, Justes et Persécutés durant la période Nazie dans les communes de France*, <http://www.ajpn.org/sauvetage-Centre-de-Ker-Goat-9.html>, 05.08.11, last accessed: 20.06.17.

² Cid, "La Morlais, Anne-Marie de (1893-1967)", in: *Enfants en justice XIX-XX eme siècles*, <http://enfantsenjustice.fr/spip.php?article77>, 2002, last accessed: 29.7.17.

³ Blanchard, Véronique & Gardet, Mathias: "Lelièvre, Paul (1922-2007)", *Enfants en justice XIX-XX eme siècles* <http://enfantsenjustice.fr/spip.php?article78>, last accessed: 29.07.17.

⁴ For further information see: Mathias Gardet & Alain Vilbrod, "Chapitre II. L'ARSEA bretonne, une tentative de fédération (1941-1951)" in: *L'éducation spécialisée en Bretagne, 1944-1984*, Presses universitaires de Rennes; 2008, Paragraph 28-36, p. 47-76.

⁵ Boussion, Samuel, "Vie d'internat", in: *Enfants en justice XIX-XX eme siècles*, <http://enfantsenjustice.fr/spip.php?article174>, last accessed: 29.07.17.

⁶ Mathias Gardet & Alain Vilbrod 2008, paragraph 60.

and radio stations. In 1951, Ker-Goat moved fifteen kilometres north to the Château-de-Phily property in Pleurtuit. Paul Lelièvre headed the Georges Bessis education centre in Ker Goat until 1963. Lelièvre continued leading and training educators, while organising meetings with social workers and counsellors. Until the early 1980s, the correctional facility continued running, but by 1982 the first group of boys left to settle in a town near Saint-Malo. The last group left Pleurtuit in 1987.⁷

1.2 *La Cage aux Rossignol*

It was the Ker Goat center that inspired the 1945 film *La Cage aux Rossignols*.⁸ The film is set in the 1930s.⁹ The main character is Clément Mathieu who seeks to publish his novel *La Cage aux Rossignols* without success. With the help of a friend Raymond, who is a journalist, his story about 'A Cage of Nightingales' is slipped into a newspaper. Micheline, his love interest, reads the first excerpts of the story in the newspaper. She becomes the narrator of Mathieu's story which tells of how he, Mathieu, becomes supervisor at a rehabilitation house¹⁰ and how, despite the director's skepticism, he discovers the difficult children's inner musical tendencies by forming a choir. At the end of the film, which now takes place in real time, Clément and Micheline marry in a church, with the children from the choir singing.¹¹

⁷ Gardet, "La chorale (années 1940)", in: *Enfants en justice XIX-XX eme siècles*, http://enfantsenjustice.fr/spip.php?page=images-popup&id_document=566&id_article=167, last accessed: 29.07.17.

⁸ Maas, "Die Kinder des Monsieur Mathieu (Originaltitel: Les Choristes; Vorlage: La Cage aux rossignols von 1945) ", in: *Chöre im Spielfilm: eine Untersuchung zur Darstellung von Bildung durch Chorsingen im fiktionalen Film*, Berlin, 2014, p.134.

⁹ Sangria, "A Cage of Nightingales" in: *Internet Movie Database*, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0039234/>, last accessed: 05.03.17.

¹⁰ Maas 2014, p.161-163.

¹¹ Ibid 2014, p.164.

1.2.1 Film details of *La Cage aux Rossignol*

Film Title: *La Cage aux Rossignols*

Year: 1945

Duration: 89 Mins.

Genre: Drama, Music

Original Language: French

Director: Jean Dréville

Screenplay: Georges Chaperot, Noël-Noël,

René Wheeler

Original music: René Cloërec

Cast: Noël-Noël (Clément Mathieu),

Micheline Francey (Micheline),

René Blancard (Rachin)¹²

1.3 *Les Choristes*, the inspiration

Almost sixty years later French director Christophe Barratier, inspired by the 1945 film *La Cage aux Rossignols*, directed *Les Choristes*, one of the most successful French films of all time. This thesis intends to analyse and discuss the function of the music in collaboration with the dramaturgy of this 2004 French film.

The original music score was written by Barratier and Bruno Coulais. Barratier comments that when he was young he watched *La Cage aux Rossignols* and that the film stayed with him because of “the emotion produced by the children's voices, and the inspiration of a failed musician who tries, in spite of everything, to transform the world around him.”¹³ The same outcome can be said of *Les Choristes*. The emotion created by the beautiful voices is that more noticeable because they completely contradict the way the children are portrayed by the teachers at the school. Many of the characters from *La Cage aux Rossignols* are identical in *Les Choristes*.¹⁴ Clément Mathieu, for example, is the new teacher who introduces the

¹²Sangria, “A Cage of Nightingales”, *Internet Movie Database*, last accessed: 05.07.17.

¹³ Abeel’s article about *Les Choristes* included an interview with Barratier. “Conducting “The Chorus”: Christophe Barratier's Boys' School Tale Gets Tuneful Reception”, in: *Film Journal International*, Jan 2005, Vol.108(1), p.24-25.

¹⁴ Maas 2014, p.163.

children to singing and the inspiring character who turns failure into success through his musical abilities.

1.3.1 Film details of *Les Choristes*

Film Title: *Les Choristes*

Year: 2004

Country: France, Switzerland, Germany

Duration: 1hr, 37 min

Genre: Drama, Music

Original language: French

Director: Christophe Barratier

Screenplay: Christophe Barratier and Philippe Lopes-Curval

Adaptation: Georges Chaperot and René Wheeler (1945 story "La Cage aux rossignols"),
Christophe Barratier

Original music: Bruno Coulais and Christophe Barratier

Cast: Gérard Jugnot (Clément Mathieu), François Berléand (Headmaster Rachin), Jean-Baptiste Maunier (Pierre Morhange), Maxence Perrin (Pépinot), Kad Merad (Chabert), Jean-Paul Bonnaire (La Père Maxence), Marie Bunel (Violette Morhange), Grégory Gatignol (Mondain), Philippe du Janerand (Monsieur Langlois), Thomas Blumenthal (Corbin) Jacques Perrin (adult Morhange), Didier Flamand (adult Pépinot).¹⁵

©Galatée Films/

Danvalley Film AG/Pathé

Renn Production/

France 2 Cinéma/Novo

Arturo Films/CP Medien¹⁶

Les Choristes is set in 1949, a period still much affected the Second World War. The official English trailer captures the intention of *Les Choristes*, with text titles on the screen and

¹⁵ See information about *Les Choristes* http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0372824/fullcredits?ref_=tt_cl_sm#cast, last accessed: 05.03.17.

¹⁶ Harris, "The Chorus", British Film Institute, March 2005.

excerpts of the film music in the background throughout the trailer. The text reads as follows: “They were the orphans of World War II forgotten by society. He was a composer who had given up on music. They had no future. Until he found a way to reach them. The movie that has captivated audiences the world over.”¹⁷ In the official French trailer, spoken quotations from film dialogue of several characters portray a mixture of people from different circumstances. Both trailers however create the same intention of the story: when the children sing, there is only one voice, and all differences and difficult circumstances are, at least temporarily, forgotten.

Shortly after its release, the film critic Erica Abeel reviewed *Les Choristes* and conducted an interview with Barratier. In the interview with Barratier she asked him if there was a message he hoped that the audience would take away from *Les Choristes*. He replied “No, no message. [...] I just wanted to tell a story with three themes: childhood, music, and the passing of the torch.”¹⁸ By analysing this film it is apparent that the music is one of the key devices through which the story is communicated. Barratier explained that this film was a story inspired by aspects of his own life. Abeel writes that Barratier is an accomplished musician who once studied classical guitar and composition. Barratier also explained to Abeel that he was in a boys’ chorus, and as the child of divorced parents raised by his grandmother, he was “a solitary, rather depressed boy. Music transformed me, gave me confidence. So the film I saw when I was a child was the same story that I myself lived [...] And, most of all, this story gave me a chance to talk about the mysterious power of music, which remains my life's passion. Like Mathieu, I had given music up completely at one time, and this film was a chance to return to something I love.”¹⁹

Les Choristes was an international box-office success,²⁰ indicating that the aural and visual stimuli used in the film can be identifiable and accepted by many non-French-speaking audiences and the film clearly reached across many cultures. Between March 17, 2004 and December 2, 2005, the film was released in forty countries including Egypt, Russia,

¹⁷ See official trailer in English: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhYtVMoWFNQ>, compare with French trailer <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tyavwG8jQMA>, last accessed: 01.2.17.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Gross sales \$83,580,170 (worldwide) See Box office information about *Les Choristes*, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0372824/business?ref_=tt_dt_bus, last accessed: 04.03.17.

Argentina, Japan, Greece, Poland, Israel, Philippines, Iceland and Turkey.²¹ The success of *Les Choristes* also impacted on French choral communities in that there was a substantial increase in choral singing in France after *Les Choristes* was released.²²

The combination of music as an essential part of the visual aspect of the film allowed people from an extensive range of communities to identify or reflect on their childhood, their relationship with music and those role models who played an important part in their lives. It is also, however, a story simply to be enjoyed and appreciated. Although all of the lyrics are in French, the songs have been published and distributed internationally for children's choirs.²³ This suggests that the pleasure of film music is conscious. The fact that numerous copies of the soundtrack and also sheet music were sold to the general public, including those who do not speak French, indicates that the audience also enjoyed the music on a subconscious level.

1.4 *Les Choristes* Synopsis

Les Choristes is a double framed story. It begins in current time, signaled by a film shot of New York accompanied by the sound of car sirens. It opens with an obviously well-known conductor, Pierre Morhange, learning of his mother's death and then conducting the Johann Strauss II's *Künstlerleben*. He returns to France for the funeral and, while at his mother's old house, is visited by Pépinot, a former classmate from their boarding school, *Fond de l'Etang*. Pépinot hands Morhange a diary of the school's supervisor, Clement Mathieu. They reminisce looking at an old class photo, Morhange having forgotten Mathieu. Pépinot, who was in possession of the diary believes that it was intended for Morhange, the very student who took Mathieu's original gift of musical training and changed his life with it. Morhange, as narrator, reads from the diary and his voice then becomes Mathieu's, thus morphing the film into its second framing and the story of *Les Choristes* begins.

²¹ See release sales information about *Les Choristes* <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0372824/releaseinfo>, last accessed: 02.02.17.

²² Gentleman, "Naughty boys with angel voices inspire France", Thursday 9 September 2004, in: *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/sep/09/film.france>, last accessed: 18.07.17.

²³ See for example You-Tube performances of *Vois sur ton chemin* from children's choirs in Hong Kong, USA, Spain, UK, Austria, Poland, Slovenia, Latvia, Greece and Indonesia, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Yop-2caskw>, last accessed: 04.02.17.

Clement Mathieu's diary begins the day he arrives at *Fond de l'Etang*. The story paints a picture of misery at the boarding school. The director, Rachin resents his occupation, and therefore displays a domineering cruelty that he inflicts on the boys and the staff. Mathieu, refuses to play by Rachin's rules and quickly wins favour with the boys in various ways: he turns their own pranks on them, laughs with them and, most importantly, respects them.

By forming and directing a choir, Mathieu establishes a bond with the boys, in particular with the student Morhange, whose natural singing ability he soon recognises. Mathieu's relationship with him, and that with Morhange's mother Violette, becomes one of the main focusses of the film. Unlike Rachin, Mathieu displays empathy for the boys, even for the troubled student Mondain who is (falsely) accused of stealing money from the school and therefore physically abused by Rachin. Mathieu's persistence and dedication to providing some form of music education, leads directly to an improved quality of life for the boys. When the school is burnt down by Mondain, Rachin dismisses Mathieu from the school, but the positive effects of Mathieu on the students can not be reversed. The original frame of the elderly Morhange and Pépinot returns and the film ends with the revealing of the positive effect of Mathieu on their lives after their time at *Fond de l'Etang*.

1.5 Contents and purpose of the thesis

Chapter 2 discusses several pieces of diegetic and non-diegetic music of *Les Choristes* as are examples of how the main characters' emotions are represented through the music. In particular, the non-diegetic tracks associated with Pépinot and Morhange are looked at and how these tracks develop into the choral pieces *Caresse sur l'océan* and *Vois sur ton chemin*, that, in the film, are composed and conducted by Mathieu and sung by the boys. The film's function of reminiscing on the past is also reiterated by the music being repeated and functioning as a way in which to recall certain events, emotions and characters. Throughout this thesis, musical notation has been inserted and referred to where possible. However, access to these scores has been limited.

Chapter 3 concentrates on the auditory effect of the music in conjunction with the visual aspect. The art of singing itself is appreciated on a visual and auditory level within the film as it not only influences the audience's perception of the film's music, but also their perception of the act of singing, which is a main focus of the storyline. The variety of the songs that are

sung also provides an insight into the variety of characters. The various film angles are also considered and the diegetic and non-diegetic musical numbers are analysed with a view to establishing how this further contributes to the dramaturgy of *Les Choristes*.

Chapter 4 highlights the use of melodic leitmotifs. There are several strong musical associations between the characters, which develop throughout the film. Non-diegetic instrumental melodies turn into songs where the text represents the development of the children. There are also several characters whose melodic representation does not alter and hence, their personalities also remain the same.

Chapter 5 discusses vocal registers, in particular, the boy treble voices and how this impacts the audience's perception of the children singing. Whether a portrayal of innocence or lack of sympathy is created, is dependent on the particular vocal pitches and timbres heard.

Chapter 6 presents an analysis of the tonalities used and the compositional attributes of the music. The tonality of the music in *Les Choristes* is mostly minor however this enhances the significance of the visual moments of happiness. French choral compositional attributes will be considered and other historical and cultural features portrayed through the music.

Except for the traditional children's song *Compère Guilleri* and *La Nuit* by Rameau, all the music was originally composed for *Les Choristes*. *La Nuit* is performed by the students for the one public performance, this piece also being used in *La Cage aux Rossignols*. The chapter also looks at the related stylistic credibility of Coulais' and Barratier's (Mathieu's) compositions will also be considered. The French idiom of vocal music is discussed as is the way in which the songs contributed to the success of *Les Choristes*.

Chapter 7 looks at choral singing as an activity and its function within society. The choir singing in *Les Choristes* is used as a tool to show the development of the characters' personalities and their relationships throughout the film.

Les Choristes is a film where music plays a dominant role. This film has been analysed not only to determine the role and effect of non-diegetic film music on the audience, but also the role of music and effect on people in society as portrayed by the characters in the film. Although *Les Choristes* is a fictional story, the music that is used suggests the real-life

situations of musicians and of people who are struggling with life. Maas mentions this in her introduction to ‚Chöre im Spielfilm: eine Untersuchung zur Darstellung von Bildung durch Chorsingen im fiktionalen Film‘: *“Eng verwandt mit den Musikerbiografien sind Filme über fiktive Musikercharaktere. Auch in diesen Fällen ist die Musik von erheblicher Relevanz für die Handlung und wird deshalb für die Zuschauer dramaturgisch auffällig präsentiert.”*²⁴

Les Choristes continues to be a relevant film in contemporary life because the subject matter is still identifiable even in an economically stable society.²⁵ The benefits of music for each individual in any community is well argued and stimulates the audience to consider these benefits in their own reality. It is no coincidence that choir participation greatly increased in France after the film was released.²⁶ Indeed, Lang comments that the successful roll of music itself is dependant on the teacher;

*“nur das Fach Musik mit seinen besonderen Sozial- und Kommunikationsformen die starre Ordnung der Schule aufbrechen könne; und dass es im Wesentlichen an der Persönlichkeit des Musiklehrers hänge, ob der Konflikt zwischen erzwungenem Schulalltag und freien Schüler-interessen gelöst wird.”*²⁷

Although it is a somewhat cliché idea of “a teacher inspiring children through music”, it is the music itself from *Les Choristes* that sets this film apart from many others. It is the (subconscious) assimilating identifications²⁸ that will be pinpointed and discussed throughout this thesis.

²⁴ Maas 2014, p.14.

²⁵ For further discussion see Claus Spahn’s article in *Die Zeit* „Musik hilft immer, In Zeiten von Hartz IV soll Kunst als Salbe gegen den großen Krisenschmerz wirken. Aber taugt sie auch dafür?“, 21.04.05, p.47.

²⁶ Gentleman, *Naughty boys with angel voices inspire France*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/sep/09/film.france>, last accessed: 18.07.17.

²⁷ Lang, „Musikleherer im Spielfilm“ in: *Diskussion Musikpädagogik*, Musikfilme edition Magazine 47, 2010, p.25.

²⁸ For further discussion about assimilating identifications see Kassabian’s *Hearing Film: tracking identifications in contemporary Hollywood film music*, New York: Routledge, 2001, p.2.

1.6 Sequence list of *Les Choristes*

No.	Time.	Scene description	Use of music	Style/function of filming
1.	0:01:00	Pierre Morhange conducts an orchestral concert in New York directly after being told his mother has passed away.	Audio of traffic and instruments warming up. Use of diegetic music: the orchestra plays Johann Strauss' <i>Künstlerleben-Walzer</i> , op. 316.	Film zoom in on Morhange's face-expression of sadness when told the news but then of complete joy and focus while conducting.
2.	0:03:19	Pépinot reunites with Morhange in France and they reminisce about their music teacher Monsieur Mathieu.	Non-diegetic music begins to play: <i>Pépinot</i> (theme from <i>Caresse sur l'océan</i>) as soon as the past is discussed.	Characters and class photo close ups-nostalgic atmosphere created.
3.	0:04:18	Pépinot and Morhange flashback to Mathieu telling his story from 50 years ago. Mathieu meets young Pépinot and then Maxence, the caretaker, followed by Rachin, the school headmaster. Rachin brings all students together to find out who is responsible for the trick that caused Maxence's injury.	Non-diegetic music <i>L'arrivée a l'école</i> in a minor tonality with low tessitura scoring with vocalise singing creates a sinister mood. Diegetic ringing of the school bell brings the scene into the present time.	The scene is narrated and appears uninviting as Mathieu arrives at his new home and workplace. Dialogue between the characters follow. The school children are presented as puppet-like – to follow orders to clean, be punctual, be disciplined and obedient.
4.	0:10:23	Mathieu speaks with the prefect he is replacing and the students' behaviour (specifically Mouton's, Le Querrec's and Morhange's) is discussed. Matthieu enters the classroom and introduces himself.	Non-diegetic music: <i>L'arrivée a l'école</i> ; an eerie sinister mood is created.	Dialogue about children who are described as dangerous; the music creates the atmosphere.
5.	0:15:30	Mathieu knows that Le Querrec is responsible for Maxence's injury but after seeing and	Non-diegetic music: <i>Morhange</i> (theme from <i>Vois sur ton chemin</i>) is heard while the students are	Student and teacher interaction is the focus; the instrumental music accompanies the

		hearing the usual treatment the students receive as discipline, Mathieu makes a deal with Le Querrec that he will care for Maxence instead.	described as dangerous.	dialogue.
6.	0:17:00	The students realise that Mathieu's personality is not like the other teachers – he does not react with harsh discipline. The students write down their dream occupations.	Mathieu narrates the story again and <i>Pépinot</i> is heard, creating an atmosphere of sadness and hope.	Students are filmed as regular boys who misbehave – empathy for the students is also created through the music and through Mathieu's reading of the students' dream jobs.
7.	0:19:19	As Maxence is being cared for, he mentions the suicide of the former student and orphan Mouton.	<i>Morhange</i> (motif from <i>Vois sur ton chemin</i>) is heard as Mouton is mentioned.	Dialogue between Mathieu and Maxence with Le Querrec filmed as obedient and appearing guilty as Maxence tells the doctor of his willingness to care for him.
8.	0:21:15	Mathieu sees that his folder has been taken from his cupboard and has been emptied. Three students are looking at his sheet music, discussing what it is until Mathieu finds them and takes it away. Chabert accuses him of a sinister act with the boys in the toilets.	<i>Les Partitions</i> (theme from <i>Vois sur ton chemin</i>) with accented low notes symbolizing that something sinister has taken place. Music continues in the background until Mathieu approaches the boys and takes the manuscripts away.	Camera focus of Mathieu's shocked face, followed by camera shot of the opened cupboard and the empty folder.
9.	0:22:44	Boys are chanting a mocking song, Corbin is playing the harmonica, Mathieu is pleased to hear the students singing then tells the boys to go to bed.	Diegetic music scene followed by non-diegetic music <i>Pépinot</i> as students go to bed.	Mathieu narrates while he is filmed considering that the students could sing and he could write music again. Sense of hope as camera zoom in on writing music followed by a closing of the scene with a two second black screen-editing.

				dissolve (passing of time)
10.	0:25:16	Maxence is sent to hospital, Mathieu and Le Querrec look on.	Non-diegetic: <i>Morhange</i>	Sadness portrayed through the music
11. & 12.	0:25:28	Classroom scene – Rachin tests Pépinot- Mathieu attempts to help, Rachin punishes Morhange for his unpleasant drawing with a lock up. Dining room scene – Chabert demonstrates to Mathieu the concept of the ‘Action-Reaction’ punishment for misbehaviour.	No music; suggests no inspiration.	Shots of characters – dialogue.
13.	0:29:47	Mathieu meets Violette, Morhange’s mother, and tell her that she cannot visit her son because he is at the dentist’s.	Non-diegetic: <i>Pépinot</i> accompanies the scene as Mathieu tells Violette the lie. There is a crescendo in the theme as Mathieu narrates about what Violette told him as to why Morhange was sent to the school.	Mathieu’s facial expression is one of kindness and Violette has a sense of hope from Mathieu’s friendliness – Mathieu’s narration and the music are the focus of the scene. The closing of the scene is with a two second black screen- editing dissolve (passing of time).
14.	0:30:34	“January 30 the experiment begins” Mathieu narrates and then the students sing individually for him.	Diegetic music including folksongs, nationalistic songs such as <i>Maréchal</i> , <i>nous voilà</i> and <i>Habanera</i> from Bizet’s <i>Carmen</i> .	Zoom in on each student as they sing – individual representation.
15. & 16.	0:32:54	Students are tapping the beat on their desks, Mathieu leads the choral rehearsal which includes scales. The evening scene follows and the boys sing for the first time as a unit following Mathieu’s direction	Diegetic music: <i>Nous sommes de Fond de l’étang</i> is sung by the boys in the evening.	Filming alternates between the conductor’s view and the chorister’s view; narration by Mathieu.

17.	0:35:24	Mathieu has informed Rachin of his plan for the choir, Rachin thinks it's a joke but agrees.	<i>Les Partitions</i> (theme from <i>Vois sur ton chemin</i>): the music suggests Rachin's lack of support.	Mathieu and Rachin's dialogue is filmed and then Mathieu's narration over the music and picture of Morhange doing chores.
18.	0:35:38	Morhange is cleaning and overhears the other students singing. Later Morhange enters the classroom and sings a scale on the board.	Diegetic music: <i>Compère Guilleri</i> .	The camera follows Morhange's reaction of interest in hearing, and later singing music.
19.	0:38:26	Mondain has arrived at the school and the teachers have been informed of his difficult personality; Mathieu tries to present authority.	Non-diegetic music: theme from <i>L'arrivée à l'école</i> ; Mondain's first and threatening dialogue with Mathieu.	Scene switches from Mathieu's narration and dialogue between the teachers, with close-ups of facial expression. Filming shots reveals no height difference between student and teacher.
20.	0:39:12	Mondain sings a dirty song in class in response to Mathieu asking him to sing something; Morhange returns to classes and refuses to sing.	Diegetic music: dirty song.	Dialogue between students and Mathieu.
21. & 22.	0:41:42	Morhange is heard singing in the laundry room, Mondain scares and insults him causing a fight and Mondain to go into lockdown. Morhange goes into town to see that his mother is working in a café (not as a whore like Mondain suggests).	Diegetic music: <i>Compère Guilleri</i> . Non-diegetic music: <i>L'arrivée à l'école</i> accompanies Mondain's threatening manner. Non-diegetic: <i>Sous la pluie</i> (theme from <i>Vois sur ton chemin</i>).	Dialogue followed by narration from Mathieu about Morhange, accompanied by theme music.
23.	0:44:00	Pépinot is on the stairs and explains to Mathieu that he cannot go to bed because Mondain demands money. Mondain and Corbin in the kitchen discuss	Non-diegetic: <i>L'arrivée à l'école</i> is played at the mention of Mondain's name. Music continues as the scene changes to Mondain and Corbin and stops when	Close-up filming of dialogue between Pépinot and Mathieu and of Mondain and Corbin. Close-ups of Mondain and Mathieu with no music – focus on the dialogue.

		Mondain's previous mischievousness. Mathieu enters and warns Mondain not to speak to Pépinot.	Mathieu enters.	
24.	0:45:22	Morhange is heard singing. Mathieu is impressed but orders Morhange to sing in the choir and take private music lessons as a punishment for all of his recent bad behaviour.	Diegetic music: Morhange singing <i>Vois sur ton chemin</i> .	Camera on Mathieu as he overhears Morhange; dialogue between them.
25.	0:46:46	Mathieu writes about Morhange's talent and then gives singing lessons. Langlois, the maths teacher, enters and visibly enjoys hearing the music.	Non-diegetic music: <i>Vois sur ton chemin</i> , becomes diegetic as the children sing the song. Langlois sings a couple of phrases from <i>Qu'est-ce qu'on attend pour faire la fête</i> (1938).	Narration from Mathieu; scene alternates between scene of Mathieu teaching Morhange and scenes in the present time of children singing.
26.	0:50:07	Mathieu meets with Violette and tells her of Morhange's singing talent. Morhange and his mother go to the dining room. As she hugs him, the next song begins. Montage of various scenes: Rachin looking out of a window, Mathieu composing in the evening. The choir sings with Morhange as soloist followed by extended moment of silence. Mathieu is visibly moved.	Non-diegetic music: <i>Morhange</i> plays as Morhange enters the scene. This is followed by <i>Caresse Sur L'Océan</i> which becomes a diegetic performance.	Dialogue followed by music in the background as Mathieu composes and narrates what it means to him to have found purpose again. Montage of scenes showing various school activities followed by scenes of the choir singing – focus alternates between Morhange and Mathieu's focus on each other singing and conducting, respectively.
27.	0:54:13	Rachin is accidentally hit by a soccer ball. His reaction is unexpected: he begins playing with the other teachers and students. The students appear generally happier thanks to the singing.	Non-diegetic music: <i>Lueur D'Été</i> begins as Rachin kicks the ball. It becomes diegetic as Mathieu conducts the song and then alternates again between a non-diegetic and diegetic	Dialogue between Mathieu and Rachin followed by narration by Mathieu that the atmosphere in the school has changed; scenes of boys in the ablution room and in the classroom writing

		Maxence returns and the children happily welcome him back; the scene ends with a photo of the children with teachers.	version of <i>Lueur D'Été</i> as the narration continues.	and singing, followed by narration. Scene of Rachin making a paper plane.
28.	0:56:55	Chabert is counting the students outside and realises Mondain is missing (he was released from lock-up). Rachin informs the teachers that a lot of money is missing. The boys sing insultingly and Rachin tells Mathieu there will be no more choir or warm showers. Chabert shows Mathieu the private wood stack.	Non-diegetic: <i>L'incendie</i> at the mention of Mondain's name; diegetic: three boys sing a lyric insulting Rachin from outside.	The teachers inform Rachin that Mondain is missing; dialogue partially accompanied by music; a dialogue between teachers; Mathieu's narration re-assessing Chabert's character.
29.	0:58:50	Students singing in the dormitory.	Diegetic music: <i>In Memoriam A cappella</i> .	Mathieu narrates that the singing is in secret.
30.	1:01:36	Mondain has been found and Rachin assaults him. Mondain attacks him in return, the police are called to take him away.	Non-diegetic: <i>L'incendie</i> enters when the police arrive to take Mondain away.	One way dialogue- Mondain doesn't respond when Chabert speaks to him. Mathieu later narrates that the children will not be told where Mondain is really taken.
31.	1:02:47	Morhange looks out the classroom window and sees his mother with Mathieu. During their conversation ink lands on Mathieu's head and Morhange is to blame. The other students are angry at him, however Mathieu is understanding and suggests to Violette that Morhange goes to a music school.	Short non-diegetic instrumental theme of <i>Vois sur ton chemin</i> .	Dialogue between Mathieu and Violette: close up of her beautiful face (Mathieu's perspective) and her eyes are closed (indicating she doesn't notice him).
32.	1:05:05	Violette is on the bus driving away from the	Non-diegetic music <i>La Nuit</i> by Rameau,	Mathieu waves good bye to Violette. Then

		school. Morhange stands during the choir rehearsal for his solo but he is unpleasantly surprised that it has been removed, (due to his behaviour) and he walks out of the classroom. Rachin enters- resulting in an abrupt end to singing. The boys leave the room and Rachin informs Mathieu unenthusiastically that the boys will perform for some visitors, whom Maxence informed about the choir.	becomes diegetic in the following scene as the students sing with Mathieu conducting.	there is a scene change to a close-up of Morhange sitting while the choir sings. The screen shot of choir singing after Morhange has walked out represents the focus on the group; not the individual.
33.	1:08:16	Mathieu opens a letter addressed to him. He meets with Violette at a café and she tells him she has met someone. As she leaves Mathieu sits alone.	Non-diegetic music: string version of <i>Vois sur ton chemin</i> plays softly in the background.	Narration of what the letter says from Violette, next scene follows with dialogue between Violette and Mathieu followed by a screen shot of Mathieu alone surrounded by many people.
34.	1:10:41	Mathieu arrives home. This is a scene of loneliness. At the end of the scene Morhange is lying awake in bed.	Non-diegetic music: slower instrumental version with clarinet melody <i>La Désillusion</i> of <i>Caresse sur L'Océan</i> , played throughout the scene.	No dialogue, observation of Mathieu in the evening alone and checking on the children asleep, followed by a black screen- editing dissolve (passing of time).
35.	1:13:18	The countess has arrived and the students are ready to perform. While students sing Morhange stands slumped disheartened on the side, until Mathieu indicates that he should sing his solo. He stands up	Diegetic music: <i>La Nuit</i> by Rameau.	Dialogue between Rachin, Mathieu and the Countess. The boys faces are filmed while singing, as are the audience from the boys perspective and Mathieu's perspective. There is a slow zoom in on Morhange as he sings his solo.

		straight and becomes a chorister. He smiles and is proud to have sung.		Narration from Mathieu overlaps at the end of the song-describing how Morhange follows him and the meaning from the look in his eyes.
36.	1:15:56	Summer has begun and choir rehearsal continues with Langlois joining as the piano accompanist. While students are at their desks Maxence arrives to inform Mathieu that he found the missing money with Corbin's harmonica. Mathieu informs Rachin of Mondain's innocence but he doesn't care and leaves with Langlois for the holidays.	A new song, non-diegetic music: <i>Cerf-Volant</i> , which becomes diegetic as children sing in the classroom and then again non-diegetic as Mathieu continues narration.	Narration is heard as Mathieu writes in his diary. This is followed by dialogue and singing at choir rehearsal, which is then followed again by narration.
37.	1:19:48	While Rachin is at a meeting in Lyon, he is told that there is a phone call for him. Rachin leaves and drives back to the school where a fire has taken place. After the children are seen the camera shot changes to Mondain observing the school from a distance on a hill.	Non-diegetic music: <i>In Memoriam</i> -suggests something sinister has happened. The music ends as students are seen returning to the school from the field. Non-diegetic music, <i>L'Arrivée À L'École</i> begins when Mondain is filmed and again a sinister atmosphere is created.	Short dialogue is followed by music as Rachin and drives back to the school, music continues as Mathieu narrates about the fire going through the children's dormitories and then are seen alive. Next Mondain blows out his cigarette, indicated he has accomplished what he set out to achieve-destroying the school.
38.	1:21:22	Mathieu and Maxence are in Rachin's office. Maxence explains how happy the children were to be outside. Mathieu is blamed for the fire and is fired. He is to	No music suggests no hope.	Dialogue between Mathieu, Maxence and Rachin.

		leave immediately without saying goodbye to the students, but first he tells Rachin how horrible he thinks he is.		
39.	1:24:18	Mathieu is walking out of the school for the last time. As he sees paper planes on the ground the singing begins and Mathieu is happy and emotional reading the letters. At the gate, Mathieu narrates that he is merely a failed musician and an unemployed prefect. The narration continues into present time with Morhange reading Mathieu's journal (the narration).	The diegetic singing of <i>Les Avions En Papier</i> (same tune as <i>Cerf-Volant</i>), becomes non-diegetic as Mathieu leaves the front school gate, creating a joyful atmosphere until the music ends.	Mathieu is filmed while he narrates the scene of him leaving the school. He describes how he recognised the writing on the paper planes letters. The children's hands are seen waving through the window. Rachin can't enter the classroom when he hears the boys singing because the children have locked the door. The narration continues followed by a scene change of dialogue between elderly Morhange and elderly Pépinot.
40.	1:26:16	Elderly Morhange is driving the car, thinking back on the past again. When Mathieu is about to leave in the car from <i>Fond de l'Étang</i> Pépinot runs up asking to go with him. Mathieu refuses and the car drives away then shortly afterwards it stops and Mathieu does allow Pépinot come with him.	Non-diegetic music: <i>L'Évocation</i> -solo oboe and horn orchestral version of <i>Caresse sur l'océan</i> . After brief dialogue the non-diegetic music intro of <i>Vois sur ton chemin</i> is heard and the lyrics of the song begins when Mathieu takes Pépinot with him.	Morhange narrates and explains what happened to him with his mother and the other teachers after Mathieu left the school, of which there is a scene flashback. The short dialogue between Mathieu and Pépinot is followed again by the final dialogue of the film, Morhange stating that Pépinot was picked up on a Saturday after all.
41.	1:30:57	Credits	Non-diegetic music <i>In Memoriam Kyrie</i>	

CHAPTER 2

Returning to the past

“Toute son histoire et la notre aussi.”²⁹

2.1 The concept of nostalgia represented through the music

This chapter looks at several diegetic and non-diegetic pieces of music and how they achieve the feeling of nostalgia in combination with scenes that focus on certain events and characters. Music forms a bridge between the past and the present. From Kalinak’s list of what film music can achieve, the following concepts, which are addressed in this chapter, are most relevant to the film music in *Les Choristes*: “Contribute to the creation of emotions, sometimes only dimly realized in the images, both for characters to emote and for audiences to feel” and “Reinforce or foreshadow narrative developments and contribute to the way we respond to them.”³⁰

Les Choristes begins in the present time. An elderly, famous conductor Pierre Morhange is informed that his mother has passed away. Immediately after receiving the news he still nonetheless conducts Johann Strauss’ *Künstlerleben Walzer* Op. 316 in a concert hall in New York. Morhange is absorbed by the music and smiling despite the news of his mother. He returns home to France for the funeral. In his mother’s house, there are memorabilia bearing his name and photos, that suggest to the audience that he is a renowned conductor.

Morhange receives a visit from Pépinot who was a former classmate of his from their boarding school *Fond de l’Étang*. Pépinot shows Morhange the diary of their school music teacher Clément Mathieu. The diary recounts events that took place in 1949 when he taught at the school. The first photo in the diary shows the gate of the school with the name *Fond de l’Étang*, and from this point on the film returns to the time at which the diary was written. The narration now continues with the voice of Mr. Mathieu.

Les Choristes is a film that constantly shifts from the past to the present. The nostalgic element of this film is what the audience can identify with. This is also achieved through the music as the various melodies appear and reappear directing the audience’s attention to

²⁹ English subtitles: “That’s his story. Ours too.” 00:04:01.

³⁰ Kalinak, “FILM MUSIC. A Very Short Introduction”, Oxford 2010, p.1.

events as they occur and then again as elements of these events or characters transpire again. Apart from the orchestral performance in the opening scene, the first twenty-two minutes of *Les Choristes* comprises only non-diegetic music. Right from the beginning, the music already includes themes associated with the innocence of young Pépinot³¹ and the unruly state of the boarding school.³² There are two aspects that suggest the conditions of the school environment. One is the narrative comments by Mathieu such as, “*C’était un internat de rééducation réservé aux enfants en difficulté. C’était du moins ce que disait l’annonce.*”³³ The other is the music, which creates an atmosphere in the school where the children are in need of help. Through the music, empathy from the audience for the children is also enhanced.

2.2 The introduction of *Pépinot*, *L’arrivée à l’école* and *Morhange*

The *Pépinot* theme is one of the two main motivic compositions in the film. It returns several times, also arranged as the choral piece *Caresse sur l’océan*. As the title *Pépinot* suggests, it has reference to the character Pépinot, but also a strong connection to Mathieu and the other children. As a musical symbol, it indicates hope, but also at times, sadness.

The director of the school Rachin has a very authoritarian approach to the students, which he displays through his hard principle of “Action-Reaction”.³⁴ As soon as something goes wrong at the school, somebody must be punished, even if he himself is not the culprit. Mathieu observes an example of this within minutes of arriving at *Fond de l’Étang*. He himself makes an early impact on the students by conversely not punishing them as soon as they misbehave in the classroom. Instead Mathieu displays tolerance for the boys who want to defy rules and asks each of them to write down what they want to be when they grow up.

³¹ The *Pépinot* piece is played as soon as the past is discussed, sequence list No.2.

³² *L’arrivée à l’école* is played to create the gloomy atmosphere at the school, sequence list No.3.

³³ English translation: “It was a boarding school where troubled children were rehabilitated. That's what the advertisement said.”

³⁴ “Action, Reaction” is an attempt to apply a principle of the physical sciences to disciplinary procedures in a school. “Isaac Newton's Third Law of Motion states that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. As a disciplinary tool this means that any harm or disorder will be followed by an equal measure of punishment and enforced order.” Frieden & RedClay, “Learning Guide to *Les Choristes*”, in: *Teach with Movies*, 2009, <http://www.teachwithmovies.org/guides/les-choristes.html>, last accessed: 24.06.17.

Mathieu narrates the film as the camera zooms in on several students while they write. The *Pépinot* theme accompanies this scene.³⁵ This creates pathos for the individual students as they write, as does the dialogue between Mathieu and Pépinot who does not know what to write. The solo high tessitura piano melody of the *Pépinot* theme might be seen to represent the loneliness felt by the boys living at the school without their families. A sense of helplessness from being treated like prisoners is also suggested. This creates a juxtaposition to the idea of writing about hopes and dreams to be realized outside of the school.³⁶

The *Pépinot* piece continues as the students go to bed while Mathieu is filmed locking up his briefcase in this room. He continues narrating that he is afraid to be at the school and then reads the students' dreams, which the audience then hears in Mathieu's narration. The *Pépinot* piece acts as background music and while it might not impact on the visual, it does act emotively through the form of the melody.

The theme is predominantly stepwise and this lends a feeling of forward motion. The melody is punctuated with larger intervallic leaps: leaps of a 4th, 5th and 6th occur upward; the descending octave leap occurs once in the scheme of the melody. The leaps themselves and their relative rarity tend to draw attention to these points in the music. Metaphorically the stepwise motion within the opening melody might signify resigned acceptance at the general routine of their lives. The leaps signify moments of hope and optimism.

The melody is mainly in 6/4 interspersed with 4/4. The 4/4 phrases tend to add impetus to the melodic flow. The longing to move forward (both symbolically and musically) is suggested, but the return of the 6/4 again slows the music down.

The unpleasant school environment as portrayed by the other teachers and the students' interaction with them, is highlighted through the *Pépinot* theme. The composition has a direct impact on the audience's empathy for the children. Kramer, in the chapter "Classical Music, Virtual Bodies, Narrative Film" remarks, "The sonic environment provides the image with a sense of location, this is, of being in a place – a condition that, phenomenologically speaking, is as much auditory (lived space) as it is visual (mapped space)."³⁷

³⁵ Sequence list No.6.

³⁶ This is suggested in the following scene where Mr. Mathieu reads the students' work.

³⁷ Neumeyer, *The Oxford Handbook of Film Music Studies*, New York 2014, p.354.

In contrast to *Pépinot*, the piece *L'arrivée à l'école* (*Arrival at school*) is used to describe the school as a sinister place where no one wants to be. When the teacher who is leaving the school speaks to Mathieu about the children's awful behaviour and warns him of certain students, the scene is emphasized through the minor tonality and low tessitura orchestral scoring of *L'arrivée à l'école*. The vocalized high pitched singing is ghost-like and eerie.³⁸ The piece is not heard again until towards the end of the film when a student, Mondain, who is not positively assisted through singing while attending the school, attempts to burn it down. The school is portrayed through this piece as a dark and mysterious place. The improved school environment, due to Mathieu, is highlighted through the more optimistic music such as *Cerf-Volant* which contrasts with that of *L'arrivée à l'école*. Jessica Green suggests that films which successfully involve the audience “embrace music as a tool that can expose the inner feelings and thoughts of characters and can shape the way that viewers feel about what's happening on screen.”³⁹ The music of *Les Choristes*, is surely a fitting example of how the main characters' emotions are exposed through the music.

An important point in the film and one which introduces what is one of the arguably main themes of the film – namely the positive effects of singing – is where Mathieu overhears the boys chanting a mocking song in their dormitory. He is not interested in what they are singing, but the fact that they are singing at all. It is here that Mathieu discovers that the boys can positively express themselves through singing and that they enjoy singing. It is specifically this single experience that inspires him to write music again. Indeed, Mathieu narrates that he heard some good voices and writes in his diary, “*Ne jamais dire jamais. Il y a toujours quelque chose à tenter.*”⁴⁰ The *Pépinot* tune is again heard in the background and the sense of hope is felt through the music accompanying the close-up zoom of him writing music. Parallel with the visual, the stepwise ascending quavers in bars 12-16 particularly highlight the sense of optimism for the future.⁴¹

The *Pépinot* theme appears a few scenes later (see sequence 13) in which Violette, Morhange's mother meets Mathieu. Violette has come to visit her son, not knowing that he is

³⁸ Sequence list No.4.

³⁹ Green, “Understanding the Score: Film Music Communicating to and Influencing the Audience”, in: *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, University of Illinois Press: 2010, p.81.

⁴⁰ English translation: “Nothing is ever truly lost...never say never.” See film 00:24:56.

⁴¹ Sequence list No.9. Refer to score excerpt No.1.

in detention and Mathieu, who finds her endearing and not wanting to distress her, tells her that Morhange has gone to the dentist. The music, combined with the visual imagery creates simultaneous feelings of hope and sadness. The scene continues with Mathieu's narration about meeting with Violette, while the visual filming of their meeting is accompanied in the background by the track *Pépinot*. Again, the piece enhances the feeling of empathy for these characters. In this instance, the music accompanies Mathieu's narration about Violette and Morhange, a mother and son who cannot live together. As Violette explains to Mathieu, the school is a better alternative because at least her son "will get a hot meal twice a day".⁴²

By the time Violette returns to the school again to visit Morhange, the choir has been formed and Mathieu has discovered Morhange's natural singing ability. Mathieu is clearly excited to see Violette again, not only to inform her of Morhange's talent but out of a personal interest in her. However, when Morhange enters the scene, it is apparent from his attitude towards his mother that their relationship is strained – he certainly expresses no sense of joy to see her. The track *Morhange* accompanies this scene⁴³. Like the *Pépinot* theme, that develops into *Caresse Sur L'Océan*, *Morhange* also develops into a choral piece, *Vois sur ton chemin*, later in the film. At the end of the short dialogue between Violette and Morhange, (he says very little or has nothing to say in answer to her questions), it is evident that Morhange is unhappy. Violette takes him in her arms and a non-diegetic performance of *Caresse Sur L'Océan* begins.

2.3 The transformation of the theme *Pépinot*: musical analysis

Caresse Sur L'Océan is a choral development of the *Pépinot* theme. In the scene described below, Mathieu's narration (diary entry) continues and the camera zooms in on him composing. Mathieu narrates: "*Avril. Ces enfants m'inspirent. J'étais sûr qu'un jour viendrait où on jouerait ma musique.*"⁴⁴ The music continues, the lyrics adding to the effect particularly for a French speaking audience. In this montage, the camera films Mondain being physically punished by Rachin, Morhange cleaning windows, Corbain playing harmonica, and Rachin observing from his office as the children play outside. The music dynamically builds as the film shot returns to Mathieu writing page after page in the lamp lit dark of the

⁴² Sequence list No.13.

⁴³ Sequence list No.26.

⁴⁴ English translation: "April! These kids inspire me. I knew some day my music would be played." Film scene 00:51:19.

night. Although there is no dialogue, this key scene may be viewed as one of the most moving due to the collaboration of the visual imagery and musical accompaniment. Green comments, “When using the music to help determine the meaning, the audience becomes less questioning, and more accepting, of what is happening on screen”.⁴⁵

The climax of *Caresse Sur L'Océan* takes place when the scene in the classroom becomes a diegetic performance. Morhange is singing the solo line while the other students accompanying him and Mathieu conducts.

The text is as follows:

<i>Caresse sur l'océan</i>	“Touch the ocean gently
<i>Porte l'oiseau si léger</i>	Carry a bird so light
<i>Revenant des terres enneigées</i>	Returning from places covered in snow
<i>Air éphémère de l'hiver</i>	Fleeting air of winter
<i>Au loin ton echo s'éloigne</i>	Far away your echo is leaving
<i>Châteaux en Espagne</i>	Castle in the air
<i>Vire au vent tournoie déploie tes ailes</i>	Turn with the wind, swirl around, use your wings
<i>Dans l'aube grise du levant</i>	In the grey dawn of the rising sun
<i>Trouve un chemin vers l'arc-en-ciel</i>	Find your way towards the rainbow
<i>Se découvrira le printemps</i>	Spring will unfold
<i>Caresse sur l'océan</i>	Touch the ocean gently
<i>Pose l'oiseau si léger</i>	Put down the bird so light
<i>Sur la pierre d'une île immergée</i>	On a stone on an island inundated
<i>Air éphémère de l'hiver</i>	Fleeting air of winter
<i>Enfin ton souffle s'éloigne</i>	Finally your breath is leaving
<i>Loin dans les montagnes</i>	Far away into the mountains
<i>Vire au vent tournoie déploie tes ailes</i>	Turn with the wind, swirl around, use your wings
<i>Dans l'aube grise du levant</i>	In the grey dawn of the rising sun
<i>Trouve un chemin vers l'arc-en-ciel</i>	Find your way towards the rainbow
<i>Se découvrira le printemps</i>	Spring will unfold
<i>Calme sur l'océan</i>	Come to rest on the ocean” ⁴⁶

⁴⁵Green 2010, p.84.

⁴⁶ Imp, Alpine, *Caresse sur L'Océan* Version #1, translation: <http://lyricstranslate.com/en/caresse-sur-1039ocean-caress-ocean.html>, submitted on 01.12.09, last accessed 05.10.17.

The change of time signature gives the impression of an acceleration in tempo in *Caresse Sur L'Océan*. The first four lines of text are sung by all voices in the quaver pattern, described earlier in bars 8-12 in the *Pépinot* piece.

The following score excerpt is from a transposed edition for piano. The melody of *Caresse Sur L'Océan* sung by the choir is represented on the treble clef staff.

The musical score excerpt consists of four systems of music, each with a treble and bass staff. The first system begins with a tempo marking of quarter note = 98 and a dynamic marking of *mf*. The melody in the treble staff is marked with a slur and includes fingerings (3, 5, 4, 5, 2, 1) and a breath mark. The bass staff accompaniment includes fingerings (5, 3, 1) and a breath mark. The second system continues the melody with fingerings (3, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1) and the bass staff with fingerings (4, 2, 5, 2, 4, 1). The third system shows the melody with fingerings (3, 5, 4, 5, 2, 1) and the bass staff with fingerings (5, 3, 1). The fourth system concludes the excerpt with the melody having fingerings (5, 1, 1, 3, 4, 3) and the bass staff with fingerings (3, 4, 5, 4, 2). The time signature changes from 6/4 to 4/4 in the third system.

Musical score excerpt No. 1: Opening bars 1-11 from “Caresse Sur L’Océan”, composed by Christophe Barratier and Bruno Coulais, 2003. Piano adaptation © 2005 by Éditions Galatée Films, Passerelle et Logline Studios

The text appears symbolic of the children's wishes to be free and a hope for calmness within their lives. The last phrase of the song *Caresse Sur L'Océan*, a descending octave scale in the piece's tonic key, is sung by Morhnage as a solo (see bar 31-33).

The musical score excerpt shows two systems of music in 6/4 time. The first system (bars 28-30) features a treble clef with a descending octave scale and a bass clef with a descending octave scale. The second system (bars 31-33) continues the descending octave scale in both staves. The score includes fingerings, dynamics (cresc., rall.), and articulation (Ped.) markings.

Musical score excerpt No.2: Closing bars from “Caresse Sur L’Océan”, Piano adaptation © 2005 by Éditions Galatée Films, Passerelle et Logline Studios

There is complete silence from Mathieu after the children finish singing so that one of them is prompted to ask him if the singing was not good enough. Mathieu's silence is attributed, however, to his being overwhelmed by the quality of singing and the appreciation of what both he and the students have achieved.

The development of the original *Pépinot* theme as heard in the first few minutes of the film into the choral composition with an orchestral accompaniment may be seen to highlight the positive journey of the students that has taken place through their involvement in singing since Mathieu's arrival at the school. The increase of emotion is all the more affective when the singing of the piece becomes a diegetic performance. The visual and aural experience for the viewer and the non-diegetic orchestral accompaniment intensifies the overall impact on the audience. The metaphorical element of having an idea and developing it into reality is also indicated through this transformation.

Unfortunately, life doesn't always remain encouraging, as with the scene where Mathieu hopes that Violette will declare her romantic feelings towards him, but instead discloses that she has begun a relationship with another man. *La Désillusion* is another instrumental and slower arrangement of *Caresse Sur L'Océan* that accompanies the following scene in which Mathieu is portrayed as lonely as he returns to the school. The clarinet and horn share the melody line, producing a mellower instrumental timbre which may be seen to represent Mathieu. This lies in contrast to the high tessitura melody of the piano that represents the children during the equivalent passage in the *Pépinot* arrangement. It is however not only Mathieu who is filled with disappointment at this stage of the film. The screen shot of Morhange lying in bed awake at the end of the scene highlights this.⁴⁷ Again the *Pépinot* theme returns symbolically to represent the yearning for more value within life.

At the end of the film it is Morhange who narrates the end of the story that is not written in Mathieu's diary. The arrangement of the *Pépinot* theme played here as Morhange recalls the past again is appropriately entitled *L'Évocation*. In this sequence, Morhange tells how after Mathieu left the boarding school, he (Morhange) moved to Lyon with his mother where he studied music. He also tells of how when her partner suggested that Morhange be sent again to boarding school and his mother refused, her partner left her. He further narrates that Chabert, Langlois and Maxence all testified against Rachin's brutality towards the children and that Rachin was consequently fired and that Clement Mathieu continued giving music lessons for the rest of his life.⁴⁸

L'Évocation ends with the scene where Mathieu, who is leaving the school for good, is about to board the bus and Pépinot runs up the path towards him. He begs Mathieu to take him with him, but he refuses. The camera focusses on Pépinot's disappointed expression as he hears the bus drive away. The audience is then given a hint as to what will happen through the *Vois sur ton chemin* musical introduction. The camera shot is on Pépinot, while the audience hears the bus stopping and the door opening. Pépinot runs to the bus and jumps in. This positive end to the film is enhanced by the *Vois sur ton chemin* introduction. Present time older Morhange narrates, "*Pépinot avait eu raison d'y croire. Le jour du renvoi de Mathieu, c'était*

⁴⁷ Sequence list No.34.

⁴⁸ Sequence list No.40.

un samedi.”⁴⁹ The chorus is then heard singing the second leitmotif of *Vois sur ton chemin*, again symbolizing how difficulties are easier to bear together than alone.

<i>Sens au coeur de la nuit</i>	“Feel, in the middle of the night,
<i>L'onde d'espoir</i>	the wave of hope,
<i>Ardeur de la vie</i>	the ardor of life,
<i>Sentier de gloire.</i>	the pathway to glory.” ⁵⁰

The film then concludes, with Pépinot and Mathieu driving away together. The music is the final closing element of the story even after the spoken dialogue and visual is complete. The sung text describes the crux of the film, the pathway to hope in life.

The repetition of musical motifs in the *Pépinot* and *Morhange* themes, which will be discussed in the following chapters, are developed simultaneously with the characters and events which develop throughout the film. The repetition and various versions of these themes are perhaps subconscious to the viewer. On the other hand, Green argues that for the composer it is a conscious decision, saying that, “In order to create these themes or meanings, composers repeat the same or slightly altered themes, which the audience learns to associate with characters, places, or emotions.” Furthermore, Green quotes Gorbman’s view that. “The theme can be assigned a fixed function, constantly signalling the same character, locale, or situation each time it appears, or it can vary, nuance, play a part in the film’s dynamic evolution.”⁵¹ The identification of the contribution of these themes is therefore significant in the overall outcome and effect of the film.

In conclusion, it is important to reiterate the idea of the use of music to represent the nostalgic notion of time in *Les Choristes*. This includes reoccurrences of the past and the narrative development of the film through to the present time. There are several musical themes that are heard towards the beginning of the film and again at the end and also musical tracks that appear only once to signify new developments and to communicate new ideas within the film.

⁴⁹ English translation: “Pépinot’s dream came true. The day he left was a Saturday.” See film Sequence list No.40, 01:28:00.

⁵⁰ *Vois sur ton chemin* Version #2 translation <http://lyricstranslate.com/en/vois-sur-ton-chemin-see-your-way.html-0#songtranslation>, anonymous submission on 11.01.11, last accessed: 08.10.17.

⁵¹ Green, p.87 in: Gorbman *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music*, Indiana University Press: 1987, p.27.

Chapter 3

The auditory effect of the music in conjunction with the visual

*“Nous sommes de Fond de l'Etang, C'est pour le moins déconcertant
Nous sommes de Fond de l'Etang, Et c'est bien ça qu'est embêtant!”*

“Ce n'était pas du grand art mais je captais leur attention.”⁵²

3.1 Building character through the music

The personalities of the main characters are brought to the forefront of *Les Choristes* depending on their involvement in the choir. The audience's opinion of each character is influenced by whether that character is a participant, supporter or non-supporter of the choir. The first part of this chapter, however, discusses the students' desire to sing.

Mathieu overhears the boys chanting in their dormitory in the evening: “*Crâne d'obus, d'obus t'es foutu, ici c'est pas toi qui feras la loi.*”⁵³ He walks into the room and the boys end their singing and pillow fights as they see Mathieu, all except for Corbin who is facing in the other direction, singing and playing the harmonica. Corbin eventually also stops, embarrassed as he sees Mathieu. Mathieu asks him to keep singing and Corbin obeys because the other option given to him is to sing for the headmaster, Rachin. Although he cannot sing in tune and Mathieu points this out to him, it seems that Corbin shows no hesitation or lack of confidence in singing, as generally do all the boys. Gorbman refers to this as ‘artless singing’⁵⁴: “At its simplest and most impoverished, artless singing is an easy way to ‘reveal’ or suggest the inner life, motivations, or identifications of a character, to forge a connection between two characters or a common bond in a group.”⁵⁵

This is an important moment for Mathieu as he has found an activity that the boys enjoy and it is fittingly a subject area with which he, as a chorus composer, is very familiar. The boys interest in music is perhaps also displayed in their curiosity regarding Mathieu's sheet music

⁵² English translation: Students singing “Fond de l'Etang is where we're stuck. Just our luck! Fond de l'Etang is where we'll be for all eternity!”

Mr. Mathieu “It wasn't art but I had their attention” 00:34:03.

⁵³ English translation: “Baldy, you are through, the rules won't be made by you.” Sequence list No.9.

⁵⁴ Gorbman, “Artless Singing”, in: *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image*, Liverpool 2011, p.157-171.

⁵⁵ Ibid. p.158.

that one of the boys had stolen. When the boys ask about it, Mathieu refuses to answer, possibly because he does not wish to share this part of his private life: it is for good reasons his compositions are kept locked up in his cupboard.

Although there is a negative sociological issue with the students singing at this point because of the mocking nature of the text, the audience is given an insight into the students' personalities by seeing them sing. Gorbman also suggests the importance of 'artless singing' in films:

"Artless singing embodies an in-between status of the actor's voice. This singing affords the greatest impression of authenticity of a voice, matching bodily gestures and lips with sound; indeed, it is impossible to imagine dubbing these moments, as against the routine practice in musicals of lipsynching and post-dubbing, or the more extreme treatments of the voice produced by vocoders and AutoTune. In many cases, it is the imperfections in the voice – breathiness, faltering and quavering, false notes, singing out of comfortable range, pauses, forgotten or mistaken lyrics – that equate amateurishness with authenticity, and that make of the singing a natural and sincere expression of the character."

The use of 'artless singing' is introduced and can be associated with the main theme of the film as Barratier sees it, namely the power of music⁵⁶. Through the boys' singing, Mathieu is inspired to begin composing again – something he had thought he would never again do. Indeed, we see him writing in his diary; "*Ne jamais dire jamais. Il y a toujours quelque chose à tenter.*"⁵⁷

In the next scene, we see the beginnings of Mathieu's singing experiment. He narrates: "*30 janvier, début de l'expérience.*"⁵⁸ Mathieu asks each boy to sing something of their choice. This is one of the few scenes in the film where the focus is on two students other than Morhange, namely Pépinot and Mondain. The variety of songs the boys perform indicates the diverse range of sociocultural upbringings the boys had experienced before attending *Fond-*

⁵⁶ The 'power of music' is discussed in Annabelle Robertson's article and interview with Christophe Barratier. *The Catharsis of The Chorus*, February 1, 2005, <https://www.pastemagazine.com/articles/2005/02/christophe-barratier.html>, last accessed: 29.3.17.

⁵⁷ English translation "Nothing is ever truly lost, never say never." 00:24:26.

⁵⁸ English translation "January 30 the experiment begins."

de-l'Étang. The songs, mainly folksongs, also include religious songs, children's and adult's rhymes, political and nationalistic songs such as *Maréchal, nous voilà!*⁵⁹, and even the *Habanera* from Bizet's *Carmen*.⁶⁰ The scene also illustrates how willing the boys are to sing and that they clearly want to demonstrate what they can do.

After hearing each boy sing, Mathieu classifies their voice type. The students may not even realise what 'voice type' refers to (as is shown later in the film by Mondain who is insulted by the term 'baritone'⁶¹). However, Mathieu succeeds in establishing an element of self-worth through these auditions and, as the film progresses, through singing in general. Each example of diegetic singing within *Les Choristes* functions to enhance the viewers' perception of the boys' genuine characteristics, the text content also highlighting their adolescence.

The next scene of the boys singing is introduced by Mathieu's narration: "*Tous les soirs je leur faisais travailler un air simple de ma composition.*"⁶² This is the first time the boys are heard 'singing' as a choir.⁶³ *Nous sommes de fond de l'Étang* is a short piece, but many of the students are unable to correctly sing the intervals of the simple melody. The intention of the scene, however, is not to highlight the boys' lack of ability in singing. The boys are zoomed in on, all of them focussing on the same person, Mathieu. They all follow his beat and cut off at the end of the song. This music-making scene demonstrates the progress the boys are making in being able to work together with their teacher – an authority figure – without disobeying authoritative instruction as has been the case up till now in the film.

Nine days later (as indicated by Mathieu's diary narration) the choir is heard singing another short unison piece, *Compère Guilleri*. Their singing ability has clearly improved and Morhange, who is outside the classroom doing cleaning chores, is zoomed in on. His expression is one of fascination as he overhears the choir singing and he walks up to the door to hear and perhaps also see them more clearly. In the following scene, Morhange walks into the empty classroom. He sings the scale on the board and, although he is in fact disobeying

⁵⁹ Lyrics written by André Montagnard and composed by Charles Courtioux, see film credits 01:31:19.

⁶⁰ Sequence list No.14.

⁶¹ Sequence list No.19.

⁶² English translation: "Every night they rehearse a song I wrote for them."

⁶³ Sequence list No.16.

authority by being in the classroom, his interest in singing and a hint at his ability at singing are the main focus of this scene.

A week later Morhange has completed his punishment and returns to classes. Like the other students, Morhange is asked by Mathieu to sing. His refusal to do so indicates to the audience the complicated nature of his character. In the laundry room, Morhange is again heard singing alone, this time *Compère Guilleri*. He sings in perfect tune and is then startled by Mondain who suddenly appears from behind the hung-up bed sheets.

Burt asserts in the chapter *Emphasizing the Dramatic Line* that: “The marriage between music and film, both temporal art forms, demand that inherent aspects of accent (and pacing) in each medium are brought into correspondence within a dramatic context.”⁶⁴ This scene is an example of a dramatic scene as the two art forms converge. The flawless singing and treble voice of Morhange as he obediently hangs up the washing contradicts his personality as is portrayed previously in the film. Mondain also makes a Dracula-like sound when he suddenly appears from behind the sheets, highlighting a contrast in their voices and perhaps temperament.

3.2 Morhange and Langlois: characters as symbolised through music

The first time *Vois sur ton chemin* is heard, it is sung by Morhange. An instrumental version of the melody has already been heard several times. That Morhange is to be associated with the theme is indicated by the title of the instrumental track, *Morhange*. In this scene, the audience’s visual point of view is that of Mathieu. It is evening and we can as yet only hear Morhange, but not yet see him. The purity of his voice is highlighted with this cinematic approach.

The song’s text appears suitably apt at describing the living conditions the boys experience at the school: “*Vois sur ton chemin. Gamins oubliés égarés. Donne-leur la main. Pour les mener. Vers d'autres lendemains. Sens au coeur de la nuit, L'onde d'espoir, Ardeur de la vie,*

⁶⁴ Burt, *The Art of Film Music*, Northeastern University Press, Boston 1994, p.79-80.

Sentier de gloire”⁶⁵ On the word “hope” The camera tracks Mathieu’s view of Morhange in the classroom. At the end of the song he enters the classroom and tells him that he will be joining the choir and having music lessons every day. “*Tout se paye ici.*”⁶⁶ This quote is humorous as it implies that Mathieu intends this as a punishment for Morhange. Punishment is, however, not Mathieu’s intention, as he writes in his diary: “*3 mars. Il ne peut pas s’en douter, mais moi j’en suis sûr. Sa voix est un miracle. La promesse rare d’un don exceptionnel.*” Mathieu is now focussed on his choir and the musical possibilities of Morhange as an individual. “*Et peu à peu, alor que ma chorale progresse, j’apprivoise mon élève.*”⁶⁷

The following montage is composed of several scenes, switching between Mathieu giving Morhange private coaching and the boys singing as a choir and then concluding with a diegetic performance of *Vois sur ton chemin*. The musical nature of this montage ends as the students finish the song and the maths teacher Mr. Langlois enters the classroom. The montage is all the more effective because of the combination of music and film as the song takes place in real time, while several scenes visually flash by before the viewers’ eyes.

The diegetic nature of the singing is also enhanced by the development of coinciding non-diegetic piano and orchestral accompaniment until the end of the song. The film audience thus becomes a participant of an intimate concert, with the filming taking place from both the perspective of Mathieu as the conductor and from the students’ point of view shots of Mathieu. Maas indeed comments on the multidimensional effect of the song.

“Vois sur ton chemin kommentiert, wie auch die anderen Chorlieder im Film, die Situation der Jungen. Es handelt sich um eingängige mehrstimmige Chormusik, die „ans Herz geht“, somit auch für den musikalischen Laien unter den Zuhörern ansprechend ist. Die Nähe zum typischen „Filmmusiksound“ ist unüberhörbar, zumal

⁶⁵ English translation: “See on your way. Forgotten kids who’ve strayed. Give them a helping hand. Lead them to new horizons. Help them understand. Feel, in the depths of despair, a surging wave of hope. The fervour of life. The glorious life.” Sequence list No.24.

⁶⁶ English translation: Mathieu: “You pay for everything here.”

⁶⁷ English translation: Mathieu: “March 3rd. He can’t possibly know but I do. His voice is a miracle. The rare promise of an exceptional gift.” Sequence list No.25.

“Gradually as my chorus takes shape, I bring my new singer out of his shell.” Sequence list No.25.

*durch das schrittweise Hinzukommen von immer mehr Instrumenten auch der symphonische Bereich einbezogen wird.”*⁶⁸

Langlois is surprised when he hears the students singing, “*C’est vous qui faites chanter les enfants?*”⁶⁹ Mathieu asks if Langlois is thus criticizing the fact that the students are singing, but Langlois replies with enthusiasm, “*Non, pas du tout. Au contraire, j’adore la musique. Il m’arrive parfois moi même de pousser la chansonnette.*”⁷⁰ Langlois begins to sing the French song, *Qu’est ce qu’on attend pour être heureux*.⁷¹ This song appears to be a delight for Langlois to sing. Indeed, Langlois’ support for the choir and passion for music is also re-established later in the film as he accompanies the choir on piano.

It is noteworthy though, that, as with Boniface who sang *Maréchal, nous voilà* for the voice placement in the choir, this song has patriotic and political ramifications. As the film is set in 1949, it is a post war environment and songs that Langlois and the students sing perhaps indicate that the military style of the school is not so different to what they are already accustomed to. The military environment can also be identified with as emotionless, which contrasts greatly from the music Mathieu composes for the students.

In *Music as a source of emotion in film*, Cohen argues that the emotional contribution of music in film has been neglected in discussion. Cohen adds that psychologist Münsterberg was the first psychologist “to direct attention to the new phenomena of film.”⁷² Münsterberg states that music in film “relieved tension, maintained interest (‘keeps the attention awake’), provided comfort, reinforced emotion, and contributed to the aesthetic experience.”⁷³ The past is barely discussed in the film which, set in 1949, takes place in a period directly after the second world war where the effects of the war may well have contributed to these boys being sent by their families to a boarding school. Therefore, it is important to highlight the use of music in *Les Choristes* in the sense that it contributes to indicating psychological

⁶⁸ Maas 2014, p.141.

⁶⁹ English translation: “You’re the one making them sing?”

⁷⁰ English translation: “No, I adore music- occasionally I even sing a little bit.” Sequence list No.25.

⁷¹ Written by André Horney, composed by Paul Misraki, see film credits 01:31:19.

⁷² Cohen, “Music as a source of Emotion in Film” in: Juslin, P.N., & Sloboda, J., (eds.), *Handbook of Music and Emotion, Theory, Research, Applications*, Oxford University Press: New York 2001, p. 251-255. See Münsterberg’s ‘The Photoplay. A psychological study’, p.204-5.

⁷³ Ibid, Cohen, 2001, p.252.

aspects of the characters that in turn influence their behaviour and demeanour as the film takes place.

3.3 Cinematic combination of music and film in *Caresse Sur L'Océan*

As with *Vois sur ton chemin*, the same cinematic combination of music and film takes place with the first diegetic choral performance of *Caresse Sur L'Océan*. The scene shows Mathieu composing and the children playing, while the non-diegetic piece is heard followed by the diegetic transformation of the rehearsal performance, again filmed from the perspective of the conductor and the choristers and musically enriched by non-diegetic orchestral accompaniment. The rehearsal of *Caresse Sur L'Océan* enhances the audience's perception of Morhange's singing progress through his performance of the solo sections when the song becomes a diegetic performance, while the other students sing an accompanying line.⁷⁴

At the end of this rehearsal of *Caresse Sur L'Océan*, there is a long pause of silence. Through the combination of the filming, narration and the music, this scene demonstrates that the music has an effect on all of the children in the room. This scene is perhaps one of the most climactic moments of *Les Choristes*. Burt discusses the way in which musical climax can be effectively achieved in film: "The lyrical quality of music can be used to establish a sense of motion that leads up to an action functioning as a climactic moment."⁷⁵ *Caresse Sur L'Océan* is distinctly melodic in character, and has a lyrical quality. In conjunction with the cinematic qualities of the scene, it undoubtedly provides an example of the lyrical quality of music resulting in this climactic moment.

When Corbin, who can't sing in tune and is subsequently delegated as a human 'music stand,' asks Mathieu if the singing was no good, this acts as a kind of dénouement to the climactic moment.

3.4 *Lueur D'Été*, musical analysis

Lueur D'Été (Summer Glow) is the next song the choir is heard singing. It signifies a new chapter in the film – one which is notably more cheerful in mood. *Lueur D'Été* begins as a

⁷⁴ Sequence list No.26, 0:51:21.

⁷⁵ Burt 1994, p.116.

non-diegetic performance. The emphasis of the montage of scenes shown here is on the children's more positive interaction with one another. Rachin also appears to 'loosen up' and he is even shown making a paper plane that he flies in his office. The lighter mood is also added too by the return of Maxence from hospital, with the children all giving him a warm welcome.

Maas describes the end of the non-diegetic segment of the scene as follows: "*Festgehalten wird die neue Zeit in dem Gruppenfoto, das in der Rahmenhandlung zum Ausgangspunkt der Erinnerungen wird*"⁷⁶ The *Lueur D'Été* scene alternates from being non-diegetic and diegetic. In the diegetic segments of the scene the children rehearse, not only concentrating on singing and following their conductor's gestures, but also smiling or being encouraged by Mathieu to smile.⁷⁷ This particular scene of the children rehearsing *Lueur D'Été* is described by Maas as important for various reasons. She writes that *Lueur D'Été*,

"wirkt schwungvoll und fröhlich in seiner stark polyphonen Struktur und ungewöhnlichen Harmonik und thematisiert die Leichtigkeit, den Glanz und die Freiheit des nahenden Sommers. Gleichzeitig vermittelt es vom musikalischen Anspruch her die Leistungssteigerung des Chores. Auch hier ist die zeitraffende Funktion der Musik wichtig für die narrative Struktur, da mehrere Wochen in weniger als drei Minuten Erzählzeit "abgehandelt" werden."⁷⁸

The lyrics of the song themselves reflect this new, optimistic atmosphere. Indeed, the entire effect is one of redemption for the children from the suffering they have been experiencing at *Fond de l'Étang*.

Lueur d'été
Rêve animé
Mon coeur s'enflamme
Et soudain s'envole
Si loin du sol
Et les larmes s'effacent
Loin des murs

Licht des Sommers
Traum belebt
Mein Herz entflammt sich
und plötzlich fliegt es fort
so weit entfernt
und die Tränen verschwinden
weit entfernt von den Mauern

⁷⁶ Maas 2014, p.142.

⁷⁷ Sequence list No.27, 00:54:37.

⁷⁸ Maas 2014, p.142.

*Je m'abandonne
Et tout rayonne*

Ich lasse mich gehen
Und alles strahlt

*Voiles au vent
Rivages au loin
C'est le temps de l'été
Et son chant de liberté
Les nuages effacés
Premiers émois
Frissons de joie
Tout s'anime
Tout devient si léger
Vivre apaisé
Sur les chemins en fleurs
J'oublie la honte et les peurs
Loin des tourments*

Segel im Wind
Das Ufer weit entfernt
Das ist die Zeit des Sommers
Und sein Gesang der Freiheit
Die Wolken ausgelöscht
Erste Aufregungen
Gänsehaut vor Freude
Leben rundherum
Alles wird so leicht
beruhigt leben
Auf den Pfaden in Blüte
Ich vergesse Schande und Ängste
Weit entfernt von den Qualen

*Terreurs d'enfants
Les tristes murmures
Si loin des murs
Lueur d'été
Rêve animé
Mon coeur s'enflamme
Et soudain s'envole
Si loin du sol
Et les larmes s'effacent
Loin des murs
Je m'abandonne
Et tout rayonne*

Schrecken von Kindern
traurige Murmeln
so weit entfernt von den Mauern
Licht des Sommers
Traum belebt
Mein Herz entflammt sich
und plötzlich fliegt es fort
so weit entfernt
und die Tränen verschwinden
weit entfernt von den Mauern
Ich lasse mich gehen
Und alles strahlt⁷⁹

The piece begins with relentless bass quaver notes in the piano part that continue throughout the piece without any respite in tempo. There is a sense of urgency created through jumps of up to more than two octaves. In addition to the major tonality of *Lueur D'Été*, the occasional non-diatonic jumps enhance the students' motivation. The vocal line constantly alternates from legato phrases to quick quaver notes of text, perhaps capturing the easier and more

⁷⁹ Christophe Barratier and Bruno Coulais, original lyrics for *Lueur d'été* <https://www.golyr.de/les-choristes/songtext-lueur-d-ete-386885.html>, last accessed: 06.10.17. Christina Riek German translation for *Lueur d'été*, 2017.

enjoyable conditions developing for everyone at *Fond de l'Etang*. The polyphonic nature of the piece lends it a certain complexity and this in turn communicates to the audience the boys' independent progress within a group environment. Although there is melodic consistency, the time signature changes several times as does the texture, which alternates between polyphonic measures with moments of syncopation and homophonic passages with up to three part-harmony.

The music is at times contrapuntal in certain measures because of the contrasting directions of the melodic phrases. The vocal range is also very demanding, ranging two octaves up from the A below middle C. The modulation into F major at bar 41 is also significant as it enhances the message of the text, which at that point, concerns forgetting past horrors.

The opening melody is repeated from bar 41, bringing the piece to a close with the optimistic idea that “everything radiates”. The legato phrases in bars 20 to 30 with their lush harmonies might even resemble a church chorus, an effect enhanced by the angelic quality of the boys' voices.

The piece is very effective at persuading the viewer of the students' essentially good nature. The polyphonic musical texture might even be seen to metaphorically represent the individuality of each child, while the harmonic coherence of these contrasting melodic lines represents their ability to nonetheless work as a group. The persistence of the piano accompaniment may be seen to suggest the perseverance of Mathieu with this project and also that of the children themselves as they are given the chance, for the first time in their lives, to look for and strive together for personal meaning and a better quality of life. Although the background of each child is different and although their future paths might diverge, the aspect of working in a choir emphasises a unity in their search for whatever destination lies in front of them.

The following score excerpt is from an edition for piano. The melody of *Lueur D'Été* sung by the choir is represented on the treble clef stave.



Musical score excerpt No. 3: Closing bars from “Lueur D’Été”, composed by Christophe Barratier and Bruno Coulais, 2003. Piano adaptation © 2005 by Éditions Galatée Films, Passerelle et Logline Studios

3.5 Character and scene contrasts through the use of various cinematic techniques

This section looks at various cinematic procedures apart from the music that contribute to the narrative. An important tool of filmmaking is the lighting. The lighting and music act to support each other so that the contrasting nature of the choral compositions used throughout are supported by dramatic changes in the lighting. The chronological progression of the film from winter through to summer lends the opportunity to create contrasting atmospheres through different lighting of the school. Two scenes which offer a good example for comparison are the scene where the boys line up outside in the courtyard on the orders of Rachin at the beginning of the film (winter) and the later scene (also in the courtyard but in

summer) of the boys playing soccer where Rachin joins them in the game. In the earlier scene, dark blue filters are used to give a colder and bleaker look. In the later scene, the children's and teachers faces are radiant and the lighting is bright in all scenes, the outdoor scenes enhanced with blue sky and indoor scenes highlighted by sunshine pouring through the windows.⁸⁰

In Abeel's article based on the interview with Barratier, she writes, "The film also abounds in close-ups, shot with expressionistic lighting, of the otherworldly Morhange and his schoolmates' less-than-cherubic faces." Barratier informs her that he "asked them to work a lot of grey tints into the colour for the beginning and then progress to orange for the end."⁸¹ The change of colour on the children's faces is particularly noticeable from the close-ups during the choir rehearsals and performances.

Buhler discusses the combination of soundtrack and imagetrack in films.⁸² He expands on Chion's view that 'there is no soundtrack' and that the aural content of a film is immediately analysed perceptually according "to what the spectator sees at the time".⁸³ Buhler writes:

"We relate the sounds to the image", he (Chion) suggests, "through a process of 'perceptual triage', where the sounds are attributed to either the physical space implied by the image or to an imaginary place, akin to the proscenium in the theatre. Moreover, 'it is the image that governs this triage, not the nature of the recorded elements themselves.' Because the visual field thus determines the aural, the soundtrack is always in some sense supplemental to the imagetrack."⁸⁴

One of the main visual cinematic contrasts revealed is between the characters Rachin and Mathieu. The camera angle from the higher perspective of Rachin highlights him looking down on Mathieu from the top of the staircase when they first meet. This no doubt represents his authority over Mathieu or his authoritarian nature. Again, when Rachin comes outside and is hit by a soccer ball, the camera angle highlights that he is standing up at the top of the stairs in a 'higher position' than Mathieu and Chabert who are playing with the students

⁸⁰ Sequence list No.3 and No.27.

⁸¹ Abeel, 'Conducting "The Chorus": Christophe Barratier's Boys' School Tale Gets Tuneful Reception', 2005.

⁸² See Buhler's chapter *Analytical and Interpretive Approaches to Film Music (II): Analysing Interactions of music and film*, in: Donnelly, *Film Music, Critical Approaches*, 2001, p.39-61.

⁸³ Ibid p.53, See Chion, *The Voice in the Cinema*, 1999, p.3.

⁸⁴ Ibid p.53.

outside. The camera is then positioned from Rachin's point of view, suggesting that his colleagues and students are all concerned about how he will react to being hit by a ball. On this one and only occasion he 'comes down to their level' and plays soccer with them. Posture is another aspect that contributes to the contrast. Mathieu's, who takes the role of protector of the children, is far less rigid than Rachin's. Rachin's rigid manner can also be identified through his stern tone of voice, in comparison to Mathieu, who speaks more casually and without pressure on the vocal chords.

The way Mathieu and Rachin are dressed is also worth comparing. Throughout the film, Rachin wears a smart black suit with bow tie whereas Mathieu, despite also generally wearing a smart shirt, suit jacket, trousers and tie, appears less authoritative and sophisticated than Rachin. In the short scene where Mathieu informs Rachin that he would like to start a choir (in fact he already has), the camera angles highlight that while Rachin speaks, Mathieu physically has to look up at him while Rachin looks down at Mathieu, both physically and metaphorically.⁸⁵ Even the use of props highlights the nature of Rachin's authoritarian attitude: the skeleton in the classroom seems to represent Rachin's old fashioned manner of teaching and his rigid manner of ruling everyone below him.

The music also supports the visual portrayal of Mathieu in that the majority of the choral pieces do not contain any great musical tension. The choral piece *In Memoriam*, that is played during the scene in which Rachin discovers the boarding school is on fire and which may be associated with the character Rachin, has many dissonant chords that create a high degree of tension. The piece may be seen to symbolize Rachin's personality.

3.6 *Cerf-Volant*, musical analysis

As with *Caresse Sur L'Océan* and *Lueur D'Été*, *Cerf-Volant* (*Kite flying*) musically enhances the narrative and the visual presentation of *Les Choristes*. The song *Cerf-Volant* is first heard as Mathieu narrates that it is the beginning of summer. The children have successfully performed for the Countess, an event that portrays Rachin in a positive light, and the school holidays have arrived. Langlois is now so enthusiastic to accompany the choir that he announces he will spend his holidays practicing his piano playing.

⁸⁵ Sequence list No.17.

Cerf-Volant alternates between a diegetic performance as the choir rehearses and as background music as Mathieu narrates that he sees the children's desire for freedom. This is the first piece in the film that is in triple metre. The steady emphasis on the downbeat renders the piece immediately recognizable as a waltz, a dance that is characteristically fluid in nature and also symbolic of festivity. The three-part harmonies are constantly diatonic and the melody moves in a stepwise motion and large intervallic jumps are few (for example, bars 5 and 15). A sense of calmness is created by this piece, although the circumstances for the students and teachers at *Fond de l'Etang* are still far from ideal.⁸⁶

The following score excerpt is from an edition for piano. The melody of *Cerf-Volant* sung by the choir is represented on the treble clef staff.

The musical score excerpt for *Cerf-Volant* is presented in a piano edition. It consists of four systems of music, each with a treble clef staff for the melody and a bass clef staff for the accompaniment. The time signature is 3/4, and the tempo is marked as ♩ = 128. The dynamics are mezzo-forte (mf) for the first system and forte (f) for the last system. The melody is a simple, stepwise waltz tune. The accompaniment consists of chords and single notes. The score includes bar numbers 1, 5, 10, and 15. The melody is a simple, stepwise waltz tune. The accompaniment consists of chords and single notes. The score ends with the word 'céder' (to yield) above the final measure.

⁸⁶ Sequence list No.36.

Musical score excerpt No. 4: Taken from the opening of “Cerf-Volant”, composed by Christophe Barratier and Bruno Coulais, 2003. Piano adaptation © 2005 by Éditions Galatée Films, Passerelle et Logline Studios.

The lyrics of *Cerf-Volant* reflect the sentiment of the narrative, which is the pursuit of a sense of belonging and success at realizing dreams and ambitions. It is also the only song that perhaps indicates Rachin’s desire to change for the better during the film. Maas describes the symbolism of *Cerf-Volant* in relation to the children and Rachin: “*Als selbst Rachin versucht, flugfähige Papierflieger zu basteln, mag dies als Hinweis („cue“) auf seine zerrissene Gefühlslage (vgl. Sequenz 42) zu verstehen sein.*”⁸⁷

The song is repeated at the end of the film as Mathieu departs and the children throw notes addressed to him that are folded into paper airplanes out of the window from the classroom up above. With the addition of a solo vocal line, the song’s soundtrack title is *Les Avions En Papier* (Paper Airplanes).⁸⁸ The solo, undoubtedly sung by Morhange, is also a personal message of gratitude from Morhange himself – the student on whom Mathieu has had the greatest influence, both personally and, as we know from the film’s opening and final scenes, professionally as well. Maas also mentions the symbolism of the kite in the song and the children’s longing to escape the school grounds. Such desires are embodied for instance in Corbin’s desire to buy a hot-air balloon with the money he stole from the school. Maas writes, “*Dies liefert das Stichwort für das letzte im Film auftauchende Chorstück Cerf-volant (“Drachen”), eine Metapher für die Sehnsucht der Jungen nach Freiheit.*”⁸⁹

The visual imagery of fluid movement created by reference to kites and planes or other flying objects such as birds is also musically expressed through the waltz metre and legato nature of *Cerf-Volant*.

<i>Cerf-volant</i>	“Kite
<i>Volant au vent</i>	Flying in the wind
<i>Ne t'arrête pas</i>	Don't stop
<i>Vers la mer</i>	On the way to the sea
<i>Haut dans les airs</i>	High up in the sky
<i>Un enfant te voit</i>	A child sees you
<i>Voyage insolent</i>	Fearless voyage
<i>Troubles enivrants</i>	Exhilarating commotion

⁸⁷ Maas 2014, p.149.

⁸⁸ Sequence list No.39.

⁸⁹ Maas 2014, p.145.

Amours innocentes
Suivent ta voie
Suivent ta voie
En volant

Innocent love
Follow your route
Follow your route
Flying

Cerf-volant
Volant au vent
Ne t'arrête pas
Vers la mer
Haut dans les airs
Un enfant te voit
Et dans la tourmente
Tes ailes triomphantes
N'oublie pas de revenir
Vers moi.

Kite
Flying in the wind
Don't stop
On the way to the sea
High up in the sky
A child sees you
And in the storm
Your wings will be victorious
Don't forget to come back
To me.”⁹⁰

Although this scene, accompanied by the singing of *Cerf-Volant*, is not the final scene of the film, it brings an end to the story and relationship between Mathieu and the students at *Fond de l'Etang*. It fittingly comprises many methods of combining the music and visual, which Gorbman describes as follows:

“Film music is at once a gel, a space, a language, a cradle, a beat, a signifier of internal depth and emotion as well as a provider of emphasis on visual movement and spectacle. It bonds: shot to shot, narrative event to meaning, spectator to narrative, spectator to audience.”⁹¹

Gorbman continues by describing the role of background music as being “characterized as semiotic (as *ancrage*) and psychological (as *suture* or *bonding*).”⁹² *Cerf-Volant* is played in the background, the focus being on Mathieu’s departure from the school and his reaction to the boys’ paper plane letters. Here the purpose of the music is to enrich the audience’s pleasure of watching the scene. Gorbman describes such pleasurable background music as being “programmed to match the mood or feelings of the narrative scene of which it is a part, to bathe it in affect.”⁹³ In addition, although *Les Choristes* is partly fictional, it’s believably enhanced by “the manipulation of the background score.”⁹⁴

⁹⁰ *Cerf-Volant* English Translation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=El7A6CZmppQ>, published on 28.07.17 by Lyrix, last accessed: 05.10.17.

⁹¹ Gorbman, “Why Music? The sound film and its spectator” in: *Movie Music The Film Reader*, 2003, p.39.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Gorbman 1987, p.57.

⁹⁴ Ibid. p.64.

This chapter has striven to support the claim that the visual and auditory elements of *Les Choristes* complement each other. The music functions not only as accompaniment, but also takes on a symbolic role and works as an aural representation of the visual. Maas describes this function of the music:

*“Die Besonderheit der Symbolik in Les Choristes ist ihre Umsetzung in der diegetischen wie der nicht-diegetischen Musik. Damit wird die Musik selbst zum Symbol für bestimmte Bedeutungen wie die Sehnsucht nach Freiheit oder die durch das Chorsingen aufgehellte Grundstimmung im Internat.”*⁹⁵

Gorbman supports this idea, writing that film music “interprets the image, pinpoints and channels the ‘correct’ meaning of the narrative events depicted. It supplies information to complement the potentially ambiguous diegetic images and sounds.”⁹⁶ Furthermore, Gorbman discusses Barthes’ view of the “primary semiotic functioning of music”⁹⁷ as functioning similarly to a caption to a photo. Gorbman comments that “Music, like the caption, anchors the image in meaning, throws a net around the floating visual signifier, assures the viewer of a safely channelled signified.”⁹⁸ The symbolism of the music in *Les Choristes*, specifically the use of leitmotifs, will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

⁹⁵ Maas 2014, p.149.

⁹⁶ Gorbman 2003, p.40.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

Chapter 4

The association between leitmotifs and the characters and events in *Les Choristes*

*“Après, il deviendra ce qu’il doit devenir. Seul on ne peut rien.”*⁹⁹

Throughout *Les Choristes*, there are many leitmotifs that can be recognised and identified as serving a variety of purposes. The term is most often associated with the operas of Wagner, but instances do occur in the works of other composers such as Berlioz and Weber. The term leitmotif (from the German meaning leading motif) had been established by the time of Wagner’s operas and Liszt’s symphonic poems. Whittall defines the leitmotif as “[...] a theme, or other coherent musical idea, clearly defined so as to retain its identity if modified on subsequent appearances, whose purpose is to represent or symbolize a person, object, place, idea, state of mind, supernatural force or any other ingredient in a dramatic work.”¹⁰⁰

This definition works equally well to define the use of a leitmotif in film, as it does to describe leitmotif in opera. Gorbman defines the leitmotif as “a theme in a film (that) becomes associated with a character, a place, a situation, or an emotion.”¹⁰¹

London describes three ways in which leitmotifs function in films:

“a leitmotif can (1) underscore the obvious presence of a character, place, and so forth that is clearly visible on screen; (2) indicate the presence of someone/something that is otherwise obscure (out of the frame, hidden in the scene, in disguise, and so forth); and (3) indicate the ‘psychological presence’ of a character or idea, as when character A is contemplating the absent character B – we see A while hearing B’s leitmotif.”¹⁰²

The third category is frequently pertinent in *Les Choristes* as recurrent musical thematic elements often allude to the concept of remembering and reminiscing about something previously heard. This is precisely the narrative construction used in *Les Choristes*. Within five minutes of the film beginning, two elderly men are portrayed reminiscing about the past. The film continues in this format with the voiceover narration as though Morhange is reading the diary, while the scenes are viewed as they are imagined or remembered.

⁹⁹ English translation: “Then he’ll become what he has to become. Alone one gets nowhere.” Sequence list No.31, 01:04:51.

¹⁰⁰ See Arnold Whittall’s article “Leitmotif”, in: *Grove Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/16360>, last accessed 25.01.17.

¹⁰¹ Gorbman 1987, p.3.

¹⁰² London, “Leitmotifs and Musical Reference in the Classical Film Score” in: *Music and Cinema*, 2000, p.89.

It is the experience of the senses – the re-occurrence of seeing, feeling, tasting, smelling or hearing something – that is therefore more likely to remain in our memory and have significance. Consequently, a relationship with that experience is produced and developed for the individual when it reoccurs. The musical leitmotifs in *Les Choristes*, and in any successful film, help signal an emotion or reaction from the audience members that contributes to their experience of the film. The leitmotifs can be as memorable as the text and the visual aspect of the film. They also help create the narrative and control the way that the audience interprets a film.¹⁰³ London also states that usually the introduction of leitmotifs “involves the simultaneous presentation of the character and his or her leitmotif, especially when we are given a striking presentation of both early on in the film.”¹⁰⁴

4.1 The Pépinot theme

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, several of the leitmotifs in *Les Choristes* clearly reference characters as is suggested also by the character titles of the pieces on the *Les Choristes* soundtrack. The *Pépinot* theme comprises the first series of leitmotifs heard. The elderly Morhange is sitting in his mother’s home and he hears the doorbell ring. He opens the door to a man of similar age who is, at first unbeknown to him, his former classmate Pépinot. As soon as he jogs Morhange’s memory by reciting the sentence “*Mon père va venir me chercher samedi. Pépinot*”,¹⁰⁵ Morhange recalls who he is and the *Pépinot* track begins to play. The leitmotif is ten crotchet beats in total and in its original form contains all five notes from the tonic to the dominant of the major tonality.¹⁰⁶ This first non-diegetic musical theme lasts for less than forty seconds and accompanies Pépinot showing Morhange a photo of them at the school *Fond de l’Étang* with their supervisor Clement Mathieu. Morhange asks Pépinot what happened to him and Pépinot hands Morhange Mr. Mathieu’s diary from 1949 that he wrote while working at the school.

The second leitmotif from *Pépinot* is five bars in total and is harmonically denser than the opening motif that has a lonelier solo character. This leitmotif begins precisely as Morhange asks Pépinot what happened to Mathieu. The leitmotif seems to answer this question by beginning to tell the story before Pépinot even answers him verbally. These two leitmotifs not

¹⁰³Green 2010, p.82.

¹⁰⁴London 2000, p.87.

¹⁰⁵English translation; “My dad is picking me up on Saturday. Pépinot.” Sequence list No.2.

¹⁰⁶See Musical score excerpt No.1, p.30.

only represent one character, but all of the students who are a part of the story that will be retold. This is reflected in the fact that the instrumental non-diegetic piece *Pépinot* later becomes the choral piece *Caresse Sur L'Océan*, composed in the film's context by Mathieu sung by the children with Mathieu conducting. The second leitmotif is undoubtedly one with more than one possible connotation. For the film audience, it represents the older Pépinot and Morhange remembering their childhood. For them the *Pépinot* tune would also symbolise identifying the song *Caresse Sur L'Océan* that they sang as children. London describes this musical association as a 'semiotic equation' as the link is made between a linguistic name or musical leitmotif and its referent.

Leitmotifs must also be musically distinctive and reasonably stable so that they do not lose their designative function. London suggests that the primary parameters of music (melody, harmony, and rhythm) constituting a leitmotif should therefore not be significantly altered, but that secondary parameters (timbre, texture, orchestration, and dynamics) can be altered, thus changing the character and mood of a leitmotif, while allowing the leitmotif to retain its identity.¹⁰⁷

The following score excerpt is a transposed edition for piano of *Caresse Sur L'Océan*. The second leitmotif of *Pépinot* is demonstrated in this excerpt.

Musical score excerpt No. 5: Second motif from “Pépinot” bars 12-16, composed by Bruno Coulais, 2003.
Piano adaptation of “Caresse Sur L'Océan” © 2005 by Éditions Galatée Films, Passerelle et Logline Studios

¹⁰⁷ London 2000, p.88-89.

Within the first twenty minutes of *Les Choristes*, we hear the *Pépinot* theme for the third time, while Mathieu narrates that he is surprised the students followed his instructions to write down their dream occupation.¹⁰⁸ By this stage the viewer is familiar with these leitmotifs, which are used as a tool to encourage empathy towards the students, perhaps in particular, for *Pépinot* who does not know what to write about or even, when Mathieu asks him, how long he has been at the school. Gorbman discusses the economic value of a theme as is the case with the *Pépinot* leitmotifs. After the diegetic associations of its first occurrence is absorbed, “its very repetition can subsequently recall that filmic context [...] the repeated occurrence of a musical motif in conjunction with representational elements in a film (images, speech) can cause the music to carry representational meaning as well.”¹⁰⁹

The two *Pépinot* leitmotifs are again used to create empathy from the audience towards the children in a scene where they are getting ready for bed. Mathieu’s compassion towards the children, as he reflects on their situation, is also enhanced through these leitmotifs. “*Est-ce qu’il n’y a vraiment rien à en faire de ces gosses? Moi qui m’étais juré d’enterrer à jamais mes notes de musique. Ne jamais dire jamais. Il y a toujours quelque chose à tenter.*”¹¹⁰ There is a sense of optimism created by Mathieu’s narration as it is accompanied by the *Pépinot* theme.

Immediately the next scene begins and without pause the music changes into the *Morhange* theme. Mathieu and Le Querrec stand by and watch on in sadness as Maxence’s poor health worsens and he is sent to hospital. The *Pépinot* leitmotifs and *Morhange* leitmotifs are heard directly one after each other to highlight the contrast of mood in the film.¹¹¹ Gorbman also discusses the variety of influence the meaning of themes can have within a film. “The theme can be assigned a fixed function, constantly signalling the same character, locale, or situation each time it appears, or it can vary, nuance, play a part in the film’s dynamic evolution.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Sequence list No.6.

¹⁰⁹ Gorbman 1987, p.26-27.

¹¹⁰ English translation: “Are those kids really a lost cause? And I had sworn never to touch my music again. Never say never, nothing is ever truly lost.” Sequence list No.9, 00:24:47.

¹¹¹ Sequence list No.10.

¹¹² Gorbman 1987, p.27.

4.2 The Morhange theme

The second most prominent orchestral track has also been heard on two former occasions before this point in the film. The track title is either *Morhange* or *Sous la pluie*, depending on its purpose within the film. The first time it is heard, it accompanies a brief conversation between Mathieu and Le Querrec, the student who is responsible for Maxence's injuries. In the background, Rachin is heard physically punishing another student. Mathieu is about to send Le Querrec to Rachin as well, but Le Querrec pleads with Mathieu not to and they make a deal that instead he will care for Maxence.¹¹³ At this point the *Morhange* theme begins to play, signalling the 'saviour' music for Le Querrec. The piece is in D minor and the five-bar leitmotif is diatonic and does not modulate (see bars 3-7, Musical score excerpt No.6). The first part of the *Morhange* leitmotif functions in dialogue to the second, beginning on the dominant and with small intervals ending on the tonic. A two-bar motif that functions as a response to the dialogue follows (see bars 7-8). A second five-bar leitmotif then replies to the two-bar motif (see bars 9-13). The motifs are played delicately and quietly on string instruments. The same *Morhange* leitmotifs are used as Le Querrec and Mathieu visit Maxence who mentions the death of the student Mouton.¹¹⁴

The following score excerpt is an edition for piano for *Vois sur ton chemin*. The leitmotifs of *Morhange* are represented on the treble clef stave.

The image displays a musical score excerpt for piano, consisting of two systems. The first system begins with a tempo marking of a quarter note equal to 96. It features a treble clef staff with a melodic line and a bass clef staff with a chordal accompaniment. The second system continues the piece with similar notation. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and fingerings.

¹¹³ Sequence list No.5.

¹¹⁴ Sequence list No.7.



Musical score excerpt No.6: *Motifs from “Morhange”*, composed by Bruno Coulais, 2003. Piano adaptation of “*Vois sur ton chemin*” © 2005 by Éditions Galatée Films, Passerelle et Logline Studios

The *Morhange* theme has a sad connotation. In this instance and many others, the audience is becoming accustomed to the music signalling a particular atmosphere, which is created in conjunction with the dialogue and visual. Amongst London’s discussion of the various ways in which musical leitmotifs are used in film, this third alternative handling of the leitmotif description, the “psychological presence” of a character or idea, certainly fits with the use of the *Morhange* and *Pépinot* motifs. *Morhange* and *Pépinot* are filmed on several occasions in a way that indicates they are thinking about their families and missing them. Therefore, the leitmotifs can also be used as associating their memories with those who are not physically with them.

In addition to musically accompanying a film, leitmotifs “couple a capacity to refer with a sense of emotional expression [...] a powerful combination that allows the soundtrack to ‘comment’ on the dramatic action of a film [...]”¹¹⁵ The *Pépinot* leitmotifs continue to be used as a means of commentary and at this point in the film Mathieu again displays empathy for a student, this time for *Morhange*.¹¹⁶

Violette, *Morhange*’s mother, visits him again and as he sees her, the *Morhange* motif is heard. This motif creates a feeling of uncertainty through the use of staccato plucked strings,

¹¹⁵ London 2000, p.89-90.

¹¹⁶ Sequence list No.13.

the minor tonality of the piece which is accompanied by sustained chords on the strings.¹¹⁷ Mathieu senses the tension between mother and son and exits the room, leaving them to themselves. In context, the motif seems to appear unexpectedly, perhaps to signify that Morhange was not expecting the visit, and it is played for less than thirty seconds.

At the end of the short scene in which Violette hugs Morhange, a montage of scenes follow. Simultaneously, Mathieu narrates that the children inspire him and the children are heard singing *Caresse Sur L'Océan*. The montage of scenes comprises the following: Pépinot looking out from behind a gate, other children cleaning and playing outside, Rachin physically punishing the student Morhange, Mathieu composing in the evening, and finally the choir singing with Mathieu conducting and Morhange singing the solo melody.¹¹⁸

4.3 Motivic implications for the narrative within the following pieces

4.3.1 *L'Évocation* and *La Désillusion*: Pépinot

The two *Pépinot* leitmotifs have become integral parts of the sound film and can be understood by the audience through their adaptability and temporal value within the narrative film experience. Gorbman describes each leitmotif as “a signifier of internal depth and emotion as well as a provider of emphasis on visual movement and spectacle. It bonds: shot to shot, narrative event to meaning, spectator to narrative, spectator to audience”.¹¹⁹ The meaning of the *Pépinot* theme is now further developed and articulated through the song *Caresse Sur L'Océan*.

As discussed in chapter 1, the *Pépinot* theme is also recognisable in two other instrumental track arrangements: *La Désillusion* and *L'Évocation*. *La Désillusion*, which as the title suggests, emphasises a scene displaying Mathieu's disappointment that Violette is not romantically interested in him, as he is with her.¹²⁰ The melodies and rhythms of the *Pépinot* leitmotif are still distinctive, although the tempo and instrumentation have been altered. The final reiteration of the *Pépinot* leitmotifs do indeed coincide with the last five minutes of *Les Choristes*. The *Pépinot* leitmotifs have been heard throughout the film in association with

¹¹⁷ Sequence list No.26.

¹¹⁸ Sequence list No.26, 00:51:21.

¹¹⁹ Gorbman, “Why Music? The sound film and its spectator”, in: Dickinson's *Movie Music, The Film Reader*, 2003, p.39.

¹²⁰ Sequence list No.34.

Pépinot and also with the children's search for acceptance and belonging. Mathieu arrives at *Fond de l'étang* alone, miserable and without hope and leaves with Pépinot with regained hope and as a father figure. Kalinak describes the developed and varied nature of leitmotifs in film, which can reinforce associations and become increasingly powerful as a film progresses. In addition, the final reiteration of a leitmotif can have an enormous emotional impact, especially when it coincides with the end of a film.¹²¹

L'Évocation accompanies the scene while the elderly Morhange narrates, recounting what happened to Mathieu, himself and Rachin after Mathieu left the school.¹²² Again the repetitive function of a leitmotif symbolises the act of reminiscing on the past and reliving the events that have taken place before. *L'Évocation* is subtly different from the *Pépinot* and *La Désillusion* tracks, implying there is a purpose for incorporating a new arrangement in this scene. The oboe plays the melody, perhaps signifying a different person or event to that in *Pépinot* where the melody is played on the piano and to *La Désillusion* where the melody is played on the clarinet. However, the leitmotif is still distinctively recognisable and there is no musical development. This can be seen to indicate that change has taken place, but also leaves possibilities open to the audience as to which emotions might be associated with the various characters and their attributes.

Maas also describes *Caresse Sur L'Océan* as the general longing motif and leitmotif for Pépinot and *Vois sur ton chemin* as the leitmotif for Morhange. Both are described as omnipresent¹²³, again verifying their importance in the film.

4.3.2 *Les Partitions: Morhange*

Les Partitions is a second arrangement of the leitmotifs from *Vois sur ton chemin*. It acts as a commentary on events taking place through the use of accented low notes before the actual leitmotif is heard, symbolizing that something sinister has taken place. The first scene in which *Les Partitions* is heard, is that where Mathieu's music folder has been stolen and the dense orchestral texture informs the audience, without knowing what exactly has been stolen,

¹²¹ Kalinak, "FILM MUSIC. A Very Short Introduction", 2010, p.11-12.

¹²² Sequence list No.40.

¹²³ Maas 2014, p.150-51.

that it is something of importance to Mathieu.¹²⁴ The second time that *Les Partitions* is heard is after Mathieu has informed Rachin of his plan to form a choir, which he thinks is a laughable idea, but to which he agrees.¹²⁵ Here the *Les Partitions* motif has a negative connotation and represents the lack of support by Rachin.

Les Partitions has also been described as a theme implying rebellion and oppression:

“Es wirkt bedrohlich, dunkel und suggeriert dem Zuschauer, dass hier etwas Verbotenes passiert. Durch diese Gründung des Chors widersetzt sich Mathieu erstmals der Autorität des Internats. Diese Handlung kann auch als Ausbruch gegen die Unterdrückung durch Rachin, welche nicht nur die Kinder, sondern auch die Lehrer zu spüren bekommen. Mathieu handelt nach seinem eigenen Gewissen und für das Wohl der Kinder.”¹²⁶

4.3.3 *Vois sur ton Chemin*

The first time *Vois sur ton chemin* is heard, Morhange is singing alone in the classroom.¹²⁷ The non-diegetic choral version becomes diegetic as the children, conducted by Mathieu, sing the piece in the classroom with Morhange singing the solo line.¹²⁸ The two-bar solo piano introduction motif creates a bright mood that is in contrast to the gloomier atmosphere created by the string introductions in *Les Partitions* and *Morhange*. The timbre of voices, particularly boy sopranos, as opposed to a solo oboe or clarinet, also creates a more optimistic atmosphere for the leitmotif. The tempo in *Vois sur ton chemin* is faster than in the other arrangements and could symbolize that one’s own fate, symbolized through the instrumental leitmotifs, is much more difficult to bear than a communal destiny, symbolized through the collaborative nature of choral singing.¹²⁹

Vois sur ton chemin is sung in two parts and the melodically contrasting leitmotifs in each part appear to act as a conversation between one another. Between bar 9 and 13, the leitmotifs overlap and then the musical dialogue between the two parts continues. Both leitmotifs are short and use a limited number of tones making them subconsciously easily

¹²⁴ Sequence list No.3.

¹²⁵ Sequence list No.17.

¹²⁶ See Petzold und Tecles’ report summary of “Die Kinder des Monsieur Mathieu („*Les Choristes* “)”, Stuttgart, 2008, p.16.

¹²⁷ Sequence list No.24.

¹²⁸ Sequence list No.25.

¹²⁹ Petzold und Tecles, 2008, p.18.

recognizable to the audience. The choral singing of *Vois sur ton chemin* is even more enthralling for the audience as it is accompanied by orchestral instruments, the rising dynamic of the clarinets and strings increasing the piece's impact.

A short non-diegetic instrumental version of the *Vois sur ton chemin* leitmotif appears again as Morhange looks out the classroom window and sees his mother, Violette, with Mathieu.¹³⁰ On this occasion, the leitmotif has a romantic context for Mathieu, (and later again when he meets with Violette at a cafe¹³¹), but simultaneously symbolizes Morhange's feelings of anger and jealousy at his mother spending time with Mathieu, while he himself cannot live with her.¹³²

Jack M. Stein's summary of Wagner's ideas on motifs in *Opera and Drama* (1850-51) could be applied to this when discussing the use of leitmotifs functioning as encouraging reminiscence and the variety of emotions felt by characters in films:

“...There often occur moments when the immediate expression is influenced by the thought of something lying in the past which continues to have an emotional effect on the speaker. The presence and consequently the influence of this reminiscence can be communicated by the repetition of the characteristic musical line which was part of the original musical expression. The melodic line alone, originally the musical counterpart of the idea contained in the verse, is sufficient to inject this idea as a conditioning element of reminiscence into the new situation. It thus appears as a realization and representation of what was just thought of by the character on the stage. Even when such a reminiscence occurs against the will of the character, the fact of its having conditioned his present reaction can be communicated in this way.”¹³³

The last time *Vois sur ton chemin* is heard, there is no connection with the character Morhange, but between Mathieu and Pépinot. The introduction has again been altered, the

¹³⁰ Sequence list No.31.

¹³¹ Sequence list No.33.

¹³² The *Morhange* motif also plays in the scene where Morhange goes into town to check that his mother is working in the Café, again a sense of jealousy and longing from Morhange is created, sequence list No. 22.

¹³³ Gorbman, 1987, p.28 in: Stein, *Richard Wagner and the Synthesis of the Arts* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press: 1960), p.75.

plucked strings creating a similar bright atmosphere as did the above-mentioned piano introduction.¹³⁴

4.3.4 *L'arrivée à l'école*

The leitmotifs in the track *L'arrivée à l'école*, do not undergo any development or change in the film. It is an eerie instrumental track with a minor tonality and low tessitura orchestral scoring overlapping with ghostly childish-sounding “oo” high pitched tones. Unfortunately, without access to the orchestral score, this piece has only been analysed from audio recordings. The second motif consists of staccato notes performed by high pitched woodwind, accompanied by low sustained strings. Together with the dark forest and gate images, *L'arrivée à l'école* is used to introduce the gloomy atmosphere at the school, *Fond de l'étang*, (Bottom of the pond)¹³⁵ and in later scenes, to highlight the children's mischievous behaviour. Leitmotifs from *L'arrivée à l'école* are also used in Mondain scenes.

In contrast with the two main adolescent characters Morhange and Pépinot, the leitmotif that accompanies scenes with Mondain, does not undergo any transformation because his character does not develop. Although the audience may feel empathy towards him when Rachin physically punishes him, his actions and dialogue are always unpleasant. The second leitmotif from the track *L'arrivée à l'école* features staccato notes performed by high pitched woodwind that are accompanied by low sustained strings and chimes and it is heard during the first dialogue between Mathieu and Mondain, as he informs him of the ban on smoking.¹³⁶ In this scene, the leitmotif is played on low pitched woodwinds to distinguish its association with Mondain. Maas describes Mondain as;

“verbunden mit einem über düsterem Streichtremolo liegendem Bläsermotiv, das beim ersten Aneinandergeraten von Mathieu mit Mondain erklingt und fortan zum Leitmotiv für Mondain wird, wird die unheimliche Stimmung im Zusammenhang mit der Figur unterstrichen.”¹³⁷

¹³⁴ See p.32 for a description of the final scene and final performance of *Vois sur ton chemin*.

¹³⁵ Sequence list No.3.

¹³⁶ Sequence list No.19.

¹³⁷ Maas 2014, p.140.

The short leitmotif is heard twice again within the next six minutes as Mondain causes trouble with Morhange and Pépinot.¹³⁸ The leitmotif is heard on two more occasions: as Mondain leaves the school with the police¹³⁹ and again towards the end of the film with the vocal high pitched “oo” tones where Mondain is filmed on a hill watching the school burning down. The leitmotif again creating a sinister atmosphere.¹⁴⁰

4.3.5 *In Memoriam and L’Incendie*

Although Rachin informs Mathieu that the choir experiment is over, he and the children continue rehearsals in the boys’ dormitory without Rachin’s knowledge. They sing a new piece called *In Memoriam* that, stylistically, is similar to church music.¹⁴¹ This is relevant to Kassabian’s argument that “all music always refers to other music.” In addition, he adds that “people subconsciously acquire socio-historically specific musical languages that function for them and for those who address them musically.”¹⁴² The text is the Greek *Kyrie* (used in various Christian liturgies since the 6th century) from the Latin mass (of which there are many documented musical settings from the 10th century onwards).¹⁴³ The text seems to reflect the teachers’ and students’ desire to be freed from the unpleasant living conditions that they endure under Rachin’s authority.

<i>Kyrie eleison</i>	“Lord have mercy
<i>Christe eleison</i>	Christ have mercy
<i>Requiem aeternam</i>	Eternal rest grant unto them,
<i>Dona eis domine</i>	O Lord,
<i>Eis domine</i>	O Lord
<i>Et lux perpetua</i>	and may everlasting light
<i>Luceat cis</i>	shine upon them
<i>Te decet hymnus deus</i>	A hymn becometh thee,
<i>In sion et tibi reddetur</i>	O God, in Zion and unto thee a vow shall be
<i>Votum in Jerusalem</i>	repaid in Jerusalem
<i>Jerusalem</i>	Jerusalem” ¹⁴⁴

¹³⁸ Sequence list No.22 & 23.

¹³⁹ Sequence list No.30.

¹⁴⁰ Sequence list No.37, 01:21.09.

¹⁴¹ Sequence list No.29.

¹⁴² Kassabian 2001, p.49.

¹⁴³ See Richard L. Crocker’s article “Kyrie eleison.”

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.uaccess.univie.ac.at/subscriber/article/grove/music/15736>, in *Grove Music Online*.

¹⁴⁴ English translation of *In Memoriam*, LyricWikia, anonymous translator, http://lyrics.wikia.com/wiki/Bruno_Coulais:In_Memoriam/en, last accessed: 07.10.17.

The track entitled *L'Incendie*, (*The fire*) accompanies the scene where Rachin is at a board meeting in Lyon and he receives a phone call.¹⁴⁵ The reaction on his face and the performance of this non-diegetic piece of music inform the audience that something dreadful has happened. There has in fact been a fire at the school. *L'Incendie* is an orchestral version of *In Memoriam* and similarly, is used to communicate an event where the image of praying for mercy is envisaged. The persistent crotchet beat accompanying chords played by full orchestra fuel the image of something sinister happening, while the contrasting woodwind high tessitura motifs move in an arpeggio fashion, signifying the chaos and uncertainty created in such a situation. The additional timpani beat and the two-beat crescendo minim notes heard on the 2nd and 3rd beats of the bar intensify the piece.

L'Incendie continues to play as Rachin drives fast back to the school. He arrives surrounded by smoke with anxious mothers approaching him. The non-diegetic chorus is then heard singing the *Kyrie Eleison* text. The firemen are filmed working while Mathieu narrates, describing the rooms on fire where the children were last seen and that Rachin's hope for success as a school director would now also be up in flames. Unexpectedly though, Mathieu stops narrating while all the onlookers look over to and the camera pans over to the field. The smoke makes it impossible to see at first, but as the smoke dissipates, the track *L'Incendie* also fades and the children are seen casually walking towards the school.¹⁴⁶

The audience later learns that Rachin was purely concerned about his school, his work and his own life and not the well-being of the children at all. He in fact blames Mathieu for the fire and believes that had the teachers and students not been outside, the fire would not have taken place. This event ultimately leads to Mathieu's dismissal and eventually also to Rachin's as the other teachers report him. *In Memoriam* is therefore significant as it represents the moment in which the children are in fact rescued from the "Action-Réaction" authority of Rachin.

In Memoriam is heard in its full form as the end credits role.¹⁴⁷ Immediately, the second soprano and alto vocal lines are familiar to the viewer, as are the persistent crotchet beat

¹⁴⁵ Sequence list No.37.

¹⁴⁶ Sequence list No.37, 01:20:45.

¹⁴⁷ Sequence list No.41.

notes from *L'Incendie*, this time in the form of text accompanying the melody line sung by the first sopranos. The leitmotifs in *L'Incendie* and *In Memoriam* represent two different situations, both, however, embodying the idea that having hope is necessary for new positive conditions to arise.

4.3.6 *La Nuit, Lueur D'Été* and *Cerf-Volant*

The following pieces also contain leitmotifs, but will be discussed in depth in relation to other visual and musical aspects: *La Nuit*, *Lueur D'Été* and *Cerf-Volant*.

The children begin rehearsing *La Nuit*, a choral piece written by French composer Rameau (1683-1764)¹⁴⁸. Mathieu is clearly not pleased with how they are singing in this rehearsal¹⁴⁹, perhaps because it is a well-known work and his expectations are higher than for his own compositions. This piece will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

The choral piece *Lueur D'Été* has already been described in detail in Chapter 3, so it will not be further discussed here in this chapter except to note that the fast four bar piano introduction motif with broken arpeggio semi-quaver chords¹⁵⁰ immediately creates a joyous atmosphere as Rachin surprises everyone by playing soccer with the students and teachers instead of penalizing anyone for being hit on the head with the ball. The motif continues throughout *Lueur D'Été*, and symbolizes joyousness for everyone at *Fond de l'étang*.¹⁵¹ As with *Lueur D'Été*, the analysis of *Cerf-Volant* has been given in Chapter 3.

In *Les Choristes*, each of the characters is strongly portrayed and they as well as the places and visually defined scenes are successfully underscored by leitmotifs. However, it is not the music alone that achieves this. The realization of communicating what the musical motifs should mean to the audience is dependent on aspects of framing, for example the close-up, so that we can identify the reference to which the music will be associated.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ See Sadler's article on "Rameau, Jean-Philippe.", <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.uaccess.univie.ac.at/subscriber/article/grove/music/O904247>>, in *Grove Music Online*.

¹⁴⁹ Sequence list No.32.

¹⁵⁰ See Thesis Chapter 3, p.43.

¹⁵¹ Sequence list No.27.

¹⁵² Gorbman 1987, p.29.

Chapter 5

Various effects of the use of voice within *Les Choristes*

*“Et peu à peu, alors que ma chorale progresse, j’apprivoise mon élève.”*¹⁵³

Les Choristes, as the title suggests, is about a chorus. Unlike in other films where the choir is already formed, such as in *As it is in heaven* and *Sister Act*, none of the staff at *Fond de L’Étang* are music teachers or see music as a necessary part of the school curriculum. When Mathieu, a former music teacher, arrives at the school, he discovers that the children enjoy singing. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the scenes incorporating natural unrehearsed singing helps the audience to identify with the characters’ lives and motivations, individually or as a common bond within a group.¹⁵⁴

In *The Voice in Cinema*, Chion describes the importance of discussing the voice instead of merely ‘the soundtrack’: “A film’s aural elements are not received as an autonomous unit. They are immediately analyzed and distributed in the spectator’s perceptual apparatus according to the relation each bears to what the spectator sees at the time.”¹⁵⁵ Therefore, in addition to the act of singing, the tone of voice for dialogue and casting of characters within *Les Choristes*, based on their individual tone of voice, will also be discussed in this chapter.

5.1 The speaking voice

Sarah Kozloff states that the conveying of emotion is achieved through the combination of pace, intonation, and volume.¹⁵⁶ She continues by suggesting that performed dialogue “not only conveys semantic meaning but also the emotional state of the speaker, even the beat-by-beat fluctuation of his or her feelings.”¹⁵⁷ There has also been psychological research that “[t]he ability to judge emotions through vocal features develops earlier than the ability to judge emotions through facial expressions and body movements and may even be innate.”¹⁵⁸ It is therefore necessary to discuss the many aspects of the voice when considering the

¹⁵³ English translation: “Gradually, as my chorus takes shape, I bring my new singer out of his shell.” Sequence list No.25.

¹⁵⁴ Gorbman 2011, p.158.

¹⁵⁵ Chion 1999, p.3.

¹⁵⁶ Kozloff 2000, p.95.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, quotation from Gary Collier, *Emotional Expression* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Earlbaum, 1985), p.141.

emotional impact on the viewer. This is especially so in *Les Choristes* where it is the use of the voice in the story that makes the impossible, seem possible.

Pépinot is the first character that Mathieu meets when he arrives at *Fond de L'Étang*. Pépinot is very reluctant to speak and when he does he speaks softly and looks occasionally down at the ground, indicating to the audience that he is unhappy and shy. Maxence, the caretaker opens the gate to Mathieu and he has a similar kind tone of voice as Mathieu. The three of them then walk through the grounds and into the building where Rachin, the school Headmaster, is waiting for Mathieu. Not only is Rachin standing at the top of the staircase and filmed from the perspective of Mathieu looking up at him, but his tone of voice is deep and serious. He is not welcoming and is annoyed that Mathieu has arrived later than expected. Maxence attempts to open the office door and then there is the sound of glass breaking and he cries out in pain. The students have set up a trap and Maxence holds his hand to his bloody face. In an angry tone of voice Rachin says, "*Qu'est-ce qui vous prend? Et bien, répondez.*" Mathieu suggests they call a doctor, but Rachin replies in a louder tone of voice, "*Vous connaissez le prix des visites! Qu'est-ce que je vous ai dit. La cloche! Rassemblement!*"¹⁵⁹ Rachin begins yelling when Mathieu doesn't see where the bell is and then continues yelling and blowing his whistle to order the children to come outside for assembly. Mr. Chabert, one of the teachers, comes down the stairs with the students, also yelling at them like Rachin.

Shortly afterwards, in the first classroom scene with Mathieu and the students, the audience hears Mathieu's calm tone of voice – a clear contrast with that of Rachin's. It seems he is physically unable to yell as loud as Rachin even when the students throw his briefcase around the classroom and he can barely be heard over the top of their yelling and laughing. Once the class is settled Mathieu's calm persona and tone of voice is highlighted as being to his advantage and he asks who Morhange is by saying the name in an amusing way that catches the students' attention. Morhange answers him with an angelic pure toned voice.¹⁶⁰

Again, in a calm tone of voice, Mathieu speaks to the student Le Querrec about his punishment for the violent prank on Maxence and he agrees to Mathieu's suggestion to look

¹⁵⁹ English translation: Rachin: "What are you doing? Answer me." Shortly followed by; "Do you know how much they charge? What did I tell you. The bell! Assembly!" Sequence list No. 3.

¹⁶⁰ Sequence list No.4, 00:14:18.

after him until he has recovered, instead of being sent to Rachin for punishment. In contrast, Rachin is overheard by Mathieu and Le Querrec shouting at a student who himself is yelling in pain in reaction to the physical punishment Rachin is inflicting on him.¹⁶¹ Rachin also, however, displays an ability to speak in a friendly tone of voice, such as in the scene when he rewards Boniface with a cookie for doing good quality school work.

It is the sincerity in Mathieu's voice in both dialogue and narration that the listener may notice. For example; "*Rachin me fait peur. Cette bâtisse me fait peur. Même les enfants me font peur.*"¹⁶² The many occasions in which Mathieu's voice-over narration appears also contribute to the film audience's experience. Mathieu's narration comprises his diary entries which are spoken as though he is speaking to whoever is listening personally. Chion describes the function of the voice-over as greater than the person writing a personal account in a novel, as it is "framed and recorded in a certain manner." Chion explains that close miking is that which creates "a feeling of intimacy with the voice" and the "absence of reverb in the voice" so that the voice is in no identifiable space and can resonate with the audience on its own.¹⁶³

The actors' voices are fundamental in expressing the character the director intends to be portrayed. For example, Pépinot is conveyed as a young helpless boy as he says in a soft babyish voice "*Ma couverture*" (my blanket) when other students take it from him while he is lying in bed. Violette, Morhange's mother, also has a sweet and calm feminine speaking voice which evokes likability and an empathy from the audience towards her as a mother who can't afford to look after her son at home.¹⁶⁴

5.2 Character identification through song

The first occasion the boys are heard singing is in a completely unrehearsed manner when they sing a song they have just made up, making fun of their new supervisor, Mathieu: "*Crâne d'obus, d'obus t'es foutu, ici c'est pas toi qui feras la loi. Crâne d'obus, d'obus t'es*

¹⁶¹ Sequence list No.5.

¹⁶² English translation: "Rachin scares me, the building scares me, even the children scare me." Sequence list No.6.

¹⁶³ Chion 1999, p.51.

¹⁶⁴ Sequence list No.12.

foutu, ici c'est pas toi qui feras la loi.”¹⁶⁵ There is no defined melody, but the students sing at a variety of pitches. As the students stop singing, Corbin’s deep voice is heard alone as he has not noticed that Mathieu has entered the room. Indeed, in this scene, the audience gains an insight into the students’ characters through use of the voice. Again, as previously mentioned in Chapter 2, it is important to highlight the value of singing in film. Gorbman discusses this, commenting that “[...] singing helps define the character’s body – as young, sedentary, strong, old, ghostly, and so on, through these markers of breath, rhythm and pacing, timbre, pitch, and accent [...] artless singing is understood as close to the way and close to the occasions on which people sing in real life.”¹⁶⁶ Corbin’s speaking voice, as he asks the others why they have stopped singing, is identical to his ‘singing’ voice. Mathieu then asks him if he is Corbin. In a much higher pitched voice Corbin answers him, “*Oui Monsieur.*” This contrasting higher pitched tone of voice portrays Corbin’s intention of appearing innocent and friendly.

Mathieu has realised that from hearing the students sing, he will also gain an insight into their personalities. Several of the students sing short songs of their choice so that Mathieu can hear their voice types and form a choir.¹⁶⁷ The variety of vocal timbres and registers personalise the boys’ individuality for the audience and what they choose to sing may also influence our degree of empathy towards them and perception of their childhood experiences.

Ragoush, who sings about Brittany, is the first boy to sing. He stumbles on the words, but then continues singing. This is perhaps filmed to signify that children might make mistakes, but still have the chance to improve themselves. Leclerc sings a short religious song about Jesus. Delaire sings a children’s song, *Un kilomètre à pied*. His voice, however, has already broken, indicating to the audience that he is most likely around 13 years of age. He still, nonetheless, chooses to sing a children’s song, one which may perhaps bring back memories from when he was younger. Riqueur sings another children’s French folksong about tobacco, again stumbling on the words but enjoying the singing. Illouse, an older boy, but still with a boy soprano voice, sings *L'amour est enfant de Bohême* from the opera Carmen. He demonstrates a sense of pride when Mathieu identifies him as a soprano. Pépinot again

¹⁶⁵ English translation: “Baldy you are through, the rules won’t be made by you. Baldy you are through, the rules won’t be made by you.” Sequence list No.9.

¹⁶⁶ Gorbman 2011, p.159.

¹⁶⁷ Sequence list No.14.

speaks in a soft timid voice saying that he doesn't know any songs, subsequently encouraging the audience to have empathy for him as an orphan who has not been taught any songs.

Boniface sings the political song *Maréchal, nous voila* in an immodest and confident voice. It was one of the most popular hymns to Vichy leader Marshal Philippe Pétain and Mathieu asks Boniface where he heard it from, exclaiming that it is somewhat outdated. Clément, the next student to sing, also sings, with a strong sense of pride, the beginning of a political song which Mathieu then almost instantly instructs him to stop singing. The text “*Aux armes citoyens, tête de chien. Formez vos bataillons, bande de couillons*” is from the chorus of the French National Anthem, *La Marseillaise*. Political singing had developed in France since the revolution and especially in the 1940s, members of the French resistance sang many tunes to display patriotism and individuality without fearing being punished. Singing *La Marseillaise* had also been banned at the time of the German occupation and there are many records of singing in German prisons and concentration camps.¹⁶⁸ Assuming Boniface and Clément understood the symbolic nature of these songs, then their choice might be seen as a demonstration against Mathieu and *Fond de L'Étang*.

This also leads to the idea that Mathieu has found a positive method of helping the students build morale, while also being defiant of Rachin's old-fashioned curriculum and control over the students. Jakes discusses that the French prisoners in German camps and prisons sang so that they could still feel like they were home and that despite religious, political and social differences they could reinforce their solidarity.¹⁶⁹ Like many of the prisoners who found a way to feel connected and communicate in a time of loneliness and despair, so did the children at *Fond de L'Étang* under the guidance of Mathieu. The audience of *Les Choristes* also acquires an insight into the individual upbringings the children have had until now.

The next boy sings a text; “*Les monos, c'est de la racaille. Ça fume, ça boit, pour c'que ça travaille.*”¹⁷⁰ Similar to Boniface and Clément, he also sings with self-assurance but without demonstrating any understanding of the lyrics. The last boy to sing chooses the chorus from the French children's song *Coucou hibou Coucou hibou*. Mathieu begins to conduct while the

¹⁶⁸ See Jakes' article *La France en Chantant: The Rhetorical Construction of French Identity in Songs of the Resistance Movement*, in: “Quarterly Journal of Speech”, 2013 Aug, Vol.99 (3), p.317-340.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, p.324.

¹⁷⁰ English translation: “My camp counsellor's a jerk. He doesn't do any work.”

boy sings, thus demonstrating that he can build a relationship with the children through the music.

Morhange misses this voice placement because of his detention. He has, however, overheard the students singing and later comes into the classroom when no one is around and sings a scale that is written on the blackboard.¹⁷¹ The scene changes as we hear Morhange continuing to sing the scales, giving the impression that, undisturbed, he would quite happily continue singing. Although he clearly sings well and in tune, one could describe Morhange's singing in this scene as a form of artless singing, in particular as Gorbman describes it: as a method in which the audience is exposed to something intimate and truthful as a character is externalised. She expands on this idea, stating that the purpose of artful singing is to contribute to the performance which becomes more real and authentic, but is tactfully also incorporated with "[...] significant narrative functions in the film where it appears."¹⁷² This is a private moment for Morhange that is shared with the audience, which highlights his vulnerability and therefore likeability.

5.3 Mondain's speaking voice in contrast to that of the other characters

The first dialogue between Mathieu and Mondain is also significant as one may notice that Mondain, although an adolescent, is physically almost as big as Mathieu and his voice has also broken. These visual and aural cues assist in the audiences' ability to notice Mondain's feeling of power and lack of intimidation by an adult who should in fact have authority over him.¹⁷³ In the scene discussed here, Mathieu asks Mondain to sing something. The song he chooses to sing is rude and inappropriate and Mathieu insists that Mondain stop, but he does so only after some time.¹⁷⁴ Mondain's choice of song also demonstrates that he seeks attention, as in fact do all the boys in some way. Mondain is, however, not at all interested in being voice placed and is insulted by being told he is a baritone, not knowing what it means and then curses when told to stand with the basses. When Mathieu tells him to "leave the swearing out of it," the boys laugh at Mondain who consequently feels very uncomfortable at this attention. Morhange joins the class and refuses to sing and makes a face, poking out his tongue and making an impolite sound. His speaking tone of voice is much lower than in the

¹⁷¹ Sequence list No.18.

¹⁷² Gorbman 2011, p.159.

¹⁷³ Sequence list No.19.

¹⁷⁴ Sequence list No.20.

first scene when he is portraying is ‘angelic side’ and delegated by Mathieu to oversee the classroom while he is gone.

Morhange had been on detention because of the rude sketches he had made of Mathieu and he therefore blames Mathieu for his punishment. The contrast between his lower pitched speaking voice and more angelic singing voice demonstrates how a person’s voice may alter depending on the circumstances. Mathieu comments that this behaviour does not suit Morhange like it does Mondain, and subsequently Mondain walks out of the classroom. In fact, similarities between Morhange’s and Mondain’s personalities can be identified in this scene, in contrast with the other boys who have been given a sense of self validation by being told what voice type they have and therefore contribute willingly in the choir.

Kozloff discusses the many ways in which speech effects the audience, saying that through speech, issues such as power, dominance, empathy, intimacy, class, ethnicity, and gender are repeatedly reflected every time someone speaks. Kozloff also suggests that how the filmgoer is influenced depends on what the characters say and how they say it. She also remarks that it is crucial to consider this, commenting that “how much the speech patterns of the stereotyped character contribute to the viewer’s conception of his or her worth [...]” is often overlooked.¹⁷⁵ Kozloff also notes that films with subtitles only translate a portion of the spoken text. Vocal characteristics such as repetitions, interruptions, slang, curses and regional accents that may be unique to the film may be lost in subtitles. Thus, an analysis of the spoken text of *Les Choristes* loses many subtleties when, as is the case here, it is analysed by a non-French speaking person.

5.4 Morhange and his classmates’ singing and the subsequent effect on the audience’s perspective of their personalities

While hanging up the washing, Morhange is singing the song *Compère Guilleri*, which he has overheard the choir singing and the audience is reminded of his angelic soprano singing voice. Mondain creeps up on him, and displays his scaring tone voiced laugh, demonstrating to the audience that these boys’ personalities do in fact differ.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Kozloff 2000, p.26.

¹⁷⁶ Sequence list No. 21.

According to several scholars, a film soundtrack is divided into three subsets: musical scoring, sound effects, and dialogue. Kozloff uses the example of *Somewhere over the Rainbow* as a song that plays the role of a monologue and allows us privileged access to the character's heart.¹⁷⁷ Similarly, the first time Morhange sings *Vois sur ton chemin*, the audience is also drawn into his beautiful singing and the message that is communicated through the lyrics.

<i>Vois sur ton chemin</i>	“See on your way
<i>Gamins oubliés égarés</i>	Children forgotten and lost
<i>Donne leur la main</i>	give them a hand
<i>Pour les mener</i>	To lead them
<i>Vers d'autres lendemains</i>	Towards other tomorrows
<i>Sens au coeur de la nuit</i>	Feel in the middle of the night
<i>L'onde d'espoir</i>	The wave of hope
<i>Ardeur de la vie</i>	The ardor of life
<i>Sentier de gloire</i>	The path to glory” ¹⁷⁸

In the scene discussed here, Morhange sings *Vois sur ton chemin*, this time with his classmates, the lyrics of the song thus allowing the students to express themselves. Klein discusses the many purposes and effects of using the voice. For example, the singer who from history has been known in the context of being a slave, such as African Americans who have fought for their rights in the USA, and initiated the genre of blues singing.¹⁷⁹ With a similar intention, the students singing at *Fond de L'Étang* allows them to express how they feel in an environment that resembles a prison more than a boarding school.

Mathieu's final recollection of Morhange, is documented in his diary. It encapsulates the complexity of Morhange's reactions and educational success: “*Stolz über die eigene Leistung, Freude über die Versöhnung mit dem Lehrer und – Dankbarkeit.*” Vogt reflects on Morhange's development as a person as a result of Mathieu's discovery of his singing voice. „*Das erzieherische Geschäft ist vollendet, weil der »Teufel im Leib« bei Morhange ganz und gar verschwunden ist; was bleibt, ist die de-sexualisierte Stimme, zumindest bis zum*

¹⁷⁷ Kozloff 2000, p.117-118.

¹⁷⁸ *Vois sur ton chemin* Version #2 anonymous translation <http://lyricstranslate.com/en/vois-sur-ton-chemin-see-your-way.html-0#songtranslation>, posted on 11.01.11, last accessed: 08.10.17.

¹⁷⁹ Klein, “Stimme verstehen mit und gegen Roland Barthes” in: *Musik & Ästhetik*, Stuttgart, 2009, p.6.

Stimbruch, und danach die Koppelung von individuellem Stolz und Dankbarkeit gegenüber dem Lehrer. “¹⁸⁰

5.5 General expression identified through the use of the voice

The teacher Langlois enters the classroom when the students finish singing *Vois sur ton chemin*. The short scene that follows has the greatest impact on the audience’s view of Langlois’s personality. Langlois, who until this point has displayed a reserved personality, is pleasantly surprised at hearing the children sing and demonstrates to Mathieu that he himself in fact loves to sing. He suddenly begins singing: “*Qu'est-c' qu'on attend pour être heureux? Qu'est-c' qu'on attend pour fair' la fête?*”¹⁸¹ and then the next two phrases on ‘la’. The lyrics indicate that Langlois enjoys happy and bright music. Singing is most probably an outlet he has been unable to enjoy since starting work at *Fond de L'Étang*. Langlois immediately comes alive with his singing, as does Mathieu in reaction to Langlois’ surprise response to the boys’ singing and as a result, the two, unusually, wish each other a lovely day. Langlois then, however, transforms back to the monotonous arithmetic teacher that he is, his tone of voice and expression changing immediately as he instructs the boys to open their books.

There are many examples in *Les Choristes* where a character’s singing expresses their personality in a way that cannot simply be expressed through speaking. Kozloff describes music in film as the signifier of emotion: “Music speaks the love the characters cannot express, or the pain they are trying to hide.”¹⁸² Although she is referring to music accompanying dialogue, it could be argued that the same can be said for singing that takes the place of spoken dialogue.

Morhange’s speaking voice lowers in pitch again in the dialogue conversation when Violette, his mother, visits him. This signifies a contrast in his mood between when he is singing and when he is talking to the woman for whom he has such mixed emotions: he loves her as his

¹⁸⁰ Vogt, “Monsieur Mathieu und seine Brüder. Anmerkungen zur Inszenierung von Musiklehrern im populären Film” from *Lehr-Performances, Filmische Inszenierungen des Lehrens*, 2011, p.139.

¹⁸¹ English translation: “What are we waiting for to be happy? What are we waiting for to party?” Sequence list No. 25.

¹⁸² Kozloff 2000, p.246.

mother, but is angry at her for sending him to the boarding school.¹⁸³ Violette's soft and delicate speaking voice is again also brought to attention.¹⁸⁴ At no point in the film does Violette sing and thus no comparison can be made between her singing and speaking voice when it comes to the audience judging her character. Throughout the film, she is considered the loving mother who simply did what was best for her son.

Another observation to make in addition to the comparison of speaking voice and singing voices are the moments of silence. On several occasions, Mondain, Morhange and Pépinot do not speak or make any sound when they are expected to.¹⁸⁵ These moments of silence are essentially also a form of communication that cannot be put into words, but the expressions displayed on the boys' faces do. There are also scenes accompanied by non-diegetic music, where characters such as Rachin are looking on in silence, again his face painting a picture of the possible thoughts he is having as he watches on.¹⁸⁶

The effect of a difference in vocal pitch is also displayed by three boys who sing outside Rachin's office.¹⁸⁷ They sing a song they have made up that insults the headmaster, singing in a similar tessitura to that of their speaking voices. This highlights the contrast to the boys' impressive treble voice choral singing that Mathieu is responsible for. Rachin therefore blames Mathieu for the boys' insulting singing behaviour. He remarks sarcastically: "*Je vois que le chant les rend intelligents Mathieu. Ils sont en net progrès.*"¹⁸⁸ Rachin then also says that there will be no more choir.

It is also significant to compare the children's performance of Rameau's *Hymne à la Nuit* with adult choir performances of *Hymne à la Nuit*. This piece is effective in *Les Choristes* because of the lyrics, which relate to the children's situation in the film.

¹⁸³ Morhange also has a lower speaking voice when he is angry at Mathieu for cutting his solo, Sequence list No.32, 01:06:09. Compare with Morhange's higher speaking pitch while rehearsing *In Memoriam* Sequence list No.29.

¹⁸⁴ Sequence list No.26 and No.31.

¹⁸⁵ See for example when Rachin is punishing Mondain and hitting him and when Chabert tells him that he can come out of the detention cell, Sequence list No.26, No.30 (limited speaking).

Chion discusses the bodiless voice and voiceless body in "The voice in cinema", 1999, p.100.

¹⁸⁶ Sequence list No.26.

¹⁸⁷ Sequence list No.28.

¹⁸⁸ English translation: "Singing is really developing their minds, Mathieu. Very impressive." 00:57:48.

<i>O nuit, viens apporter à la terre</i>	“O night, come and bring the earth
<i>Le calme enchantement de ton mystère</i>	The calm spell of your mystery
<i>L'ombre qui t'escorte est si douce</i>	It's ushering shadow is so sweet
<i>Si doux est le concert de tes voix chantant l'espérance</i>	So sweet is the concert of your fingers singing hope
<i>Si grand est ton pouvoir transformant tout en rêve heureux</i>	So grand is your power changing everything into a happy dream

<i>O nuit, ô laisse encore à la terre</i>	O night, leave the earth a little longer
<i>Le calme enchantement de ton mystère</i>	The calm spell of your mystery
<i>L'ombre qui t'escorte est si douce</i>	its ushering shadow is so sweet
<i>Est-il une beauté aussi belle que le rêve?</i>	Is there beauty as beautiful as the dream?
<i>Est-il de vérité plus douce que l'espérance?</i>	Is there a truth sweeter than hope?” ¹⁸⁹

It is the narrative context of this piece that makes it memorable. The adult performances available on Youtube, for example, may not generate the same effect on the audience because these are isolated performances and because it is likely that an audience will always have increased empathy for children who are faced with adversity.¹⁹⁰ Vogt also discusses the multifaceted ways in which the voice can communicate with an audience. “*Festzuhalten ist, dass die Stimme sehr viel mehr und anderes ist als nur neutrales Medium für den musikalischen Transport sprachlichen Sinns.*” Vogt also discusses the use of the boy soprano as an important vocal aspect to consider in *Les Choristes*. “*Dabei zeigt ein kurzer Blick auf die Musikgeschichte, dass gerade der Knabensopran als besondere Form der menschlichen Stimme immer auch in besonderer Weise konnotiert war, nämlich als Gesang der Engel, und als »Engelsgesicht« wurde Morhange von Anfang an gekennzeichnet – allerdings mit dem »Teufel im Leib«.*”¹⁹¹

The choral singing of the students encourages the audience to perceive their innocence. Regardless of their disobedient behaviour, their boy-soprano voices persuade the audience of their angelic nature. Vogt discusses the historical view of the boy-soprano: “*Die Knabenstimme vor dem physiologischen Stimmbruch ist musikhistorisch das Gegenstück zur »reinen«, zugleich vor-sexuellen wie sexuell mehrdeutigen Stimme (vgl. dazu Fuhrmann*

¹⁸⁹Kathleen Boorman, *Hymne à la Nuit* English translation: <https://www.musixmatch.com/lyrics/Les-Choristes/La-Nuit/translation/english>, uploaded on 01.02.17, last accessed: 08.10.17.

¹⁹⁰ Compare with Chorales La Palanquette et Vocalieg's performance of *Hymne à la nuit*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6TfViZfov2Q>, last accessed: 06.03.17.

¹⁹¹ Vogt 2011, p. 138.

2009), die den Engeln zugeschrieben wird. Kunsthistorisch lässt sich das recht gut an der Wandlung in der Ikonographie der Engel darstellen.”¹⁹² In particular, Vogt describes how Morhange’s character development (metaphorically the change from a ‘devil’ to ‘angel’) is impacted by his solo singing and by the musical education he receives from Mathieu. Morhange has an “angelic face” and develops from a stubborn and neglected boy into the student soloist, a boy-soprano, who then makes a career as a conductor. “Aus disziplinarischen Gründen entfernt Mathieu seinen Lieblingsschüler zwischendurch aus dem Chor, um ihn dann dramaturgisch wirkungsvoll als Solisten wieder einzusetzen.”¹⁹³

The last time the audience hears the choir’s high soaring notes diegetically is during the piece *Les Avions En Papier*. Rachin is infuriated that the children are singing and he cannot make them stop because they have locked themselves inside the classroom. Mathieu has been dismissed from the school premises and is not allowed to bid farewell to the children. Rachin possibly knows that Mathieu has had a marked positive effect on the boys. By comparison, Rachin has only ever been able to react to the students’ actions, but is incapable of teaching them or helping them in their development as adolescents. He most likely envies Mathieu and his communication abilities. It was Mathieu who was able to determine who hurt Maxence and who stole the school’s money. It was also through his idea of forming a choir that the Countess visited and hence, praised the school. Through hearing the students sing, Rachin is reminded of his failures and their success.

It is important to consider the vocal qualities in *Les Choristes*, not only in a musical sense even if for most people the term ‘soundtrack’ refers solely to a film’s musical score. However, as Stilwell explains, in addition to music, speech (dialogue) and sound effects are also constituents of the film soundtrack. Stilwell uses the term ‘Soundscape’ in which one considers all aspects that form it: image, dialogue, sound effect and music.¹⁹⁴ An audience is adept at interpreting a cinematic soundtrack” They learn to not merely receive (hear) sound passively, but to listen to and comprehend sound. The audience subsequently learns to distinguish and place the sounds in a format of hierarchy.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² Ibid. Vogt refers to Fuhrmann’s article “Stimmbruch. Zum Wandel der Stimmästhetik zwischen Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit” in: *Musik & Ästhetik*, p.112, Heft 51 p.107-116, 2009.

¹⁹³ Vogt, 2011, p. 139.

¹⁹⁴ Stilwell, “Sound and Empathy: Subjectivity, Gender and the Cinematic Soundscape”, in: Donnelley’s *Film Music, Critical Approaches*, 2001, p.167.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid p.169.

Chapter 6

Tonality, French choral music, historical and cultural considerations

*“Chabert m’a étonné. Lui que je prenais pour un double zélé de Rachin, était en fait un brave type qui considère le sport et la musique comme des moteurs essentiels de la cohésion nationale. Avec son aide, j’organise la résistance. Notre chorale devient clandestine.”*¹⁹⁶

Les Choristes represents a time in which France was recovering from the effects of the war. Barratier and Coulais portray the historical nature of this film in every possible way. The set, the costumes, the cast and the music all contribute to the authentic nature of this French film.¹⁹⁷ In particular, the expressive dimension of music composed by Mathieu may be viewed as a reaction against Rachin and the atmosphere created from the effects of the Second World War.¹⁹⁸ French composers such as Francis Poulenc were also known to compose choral works as spiritual resistance at a time where France was occupied by Germany. The choral work *Figure Humaine* (1943) is an example of this output of work¹⁹⁹ and compositional similarities such as the treatment of short melodic phrases and rich harmonies can be heard between this work and the choral works in *Les Choristes*, also written with the purpose of resistance within the context of the narrative.

Like most music from the west, the music of *Les Choristes* can be described as tonal. Within the music there is always movement away from and back to the tonal centre and this departure and return are fundamental to this system.²⁰⁰ The audience is affected by the tonality of the diegetic and non-diegetic music in films. Brown states that “Psychologically and aesthetically speaking, tonality sets up a certain order, creates a sense of loss and anxiety in its various departures from that order, and then reassures the listener by periodically returning to that order, which will generally have the final word”.²⁰¹ There are many examples in *Les Choristes* where the audience receives signals about which mood or

¹⁹⁶ English translation: Mathieu: “Chabert surprised me. I used to think he was Rachin's zealous double, but I discovered that he was a nice guy for whom sports and music were the key elements of national unity.” Sequence list No.28.

¹⁹⁷ See the DVD Film extra *The Making of Les Choristes* where Barratier discusses his intention that every element of the film was to be historically authentic.

¹⁹⁸ Potter, “French Music and the Second World War”, in: *French Music since Berlioz*, 2006, p.337.

¹⁹⁹ Strimple, “Choral music in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries”, in: *The Cambridge companion to choral music*, 2012, p.55-56.

²⁰⁰ Brown. Alan, *Overtones and Undertones, Reading Film Music*, University of California Press: 1994, p.3.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

atmosphere is being expressed that result from the choice of tonalities in the musical score. The “major-mode minor-mode dialectic”²⁰² constantly exploited in film music is also noticeable as adhering to the narrative throughout *Les Choristes*.

6.1 Tonality and emotional affect

The analysis of the music of *Les Choristes* reveals that a large portion of the music soundtrack is in minor keys and even in pieces with major keys, the minor scale degrees are frequently applied. On the other hand, Neumeyer and Buhler argue that unlike in absolute music, the explanation of “the dramatic functions or the psychological power of music”²⁰³ in programmatic music and music in films should not be measured from tonality alone. Neumeyer and Buhler suggest that the music scholar should also consider the “conventional interplay of stage action, mood and musical *topoi* in the nineteenth century”.²⁰⁴

It is, however, necessary to discuss tonality in *Les Choristes* as there are recognisable indications of pathos and nostalgia that are created through the tonality selected. Most of the music, as already discussed, stems from the choral pieces that Mathieu composes for the choir. These pieces, both musically and metaphorically, signify the respect that Mathieu gains from the boys as the choir develops.

Throughout *Les Choristes*, the concept of nostalgia is featured. In a musical sense, this is underscored by themes, leitmotifs and various musical elements repeated during the musical soundtrack, many of which have already been discussed in previous chapters. It is a cliché to suggest that all music composed in a minor key should be associated with sadness. Although there are many sad and dreary scenes within *Les Choristes*, this film can be identified as a ‘feel-good’ film.²⁰⁵ A building sense of optimism is generated up until the conclusion of the film, which is narrated by the adult Morhange. The music of *Les Choristes* composed by Coulais and Barratier effectively moves the audience, especially perhaps through the use of the minor tonalities, which intrinsically allow for a great variety of harmonic possibilities and therefore emotional variability.

²⁰² Ibid p.5.

²⁰³ Neumeyer and Buhler, “Analytical and Interpretive Approaches (I)”, in: *Film Music Critical Approaches*, 2001, p.19.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ See interview with the producer of *Les Choristes*, Arthur Cohen, *Les Choristes* DVD extras (00:05:28).

When Pépinot reunites with Morhange, it is apparent that Morhange has almost forgotten about Mathieu, the very man who introduced him to music, singing and thus indirectly also to conducting. It is no coincidence that the piece the adult Morhange conducts at the beginning of the film is the well-known Johan Strauss II waltz, *Künstlerleben* (*An Artist's Life*).

Among the many songs Mathieu teaches Morhange, Pépinot and the other boys at *Fond de L'Étang* is the song *Les Avions En papier*, which is the final song they sing while Mathieu leaves the school grounds for the last time. As with *Künstlerleben*, *Les Avions En papier* also has a major tonality and a three-four time signature. Perhaps subconsciously, Morhange remembers the songs he learnt from Mathieu and which most certainly influenced his future musical endeavours. Mathieu has passed, so-to-speak, the baton to Morhange, which is represented musically and visually in the opening minutes of *Les Choristes*.

In contrast to these rather joyful pieces that are in a major tonality, there are, as mentioned, many pieces in *Les Choristes* that are in minor tonalities and that act, no doubt, as a reminder to the audience of the negative environment in which the children live in and of the uninspiring and almost sinister characters such as Rachin and Mondain. The most obvious examples of these are *Vois sur ton Chemin*, *L'Arrivée À L'École*, *L'Incendie*, *In Memoriam*, *Sous La Pluie*, *Les Partitions*, and *Morhange*.

Although *Caresse Sur L'Océan* has a major tonality, this choral piece and the three instrumental arrangements of it, *Pépinot*, *L'Incendie* and *L'Évocation*, all sound melancholic and contribute to enhancing scenes of pathos and unhappiness. This is achieved through the chords characteristic of the minor such as the median, supertonic and submediant chords.

There is however some sense of optimism created by the lyrics in *Caresse Sur L'Océan*. Indeed, throughout the film, there is what one might describe as a 'parallel sensation' that the audience experience: empathy for the children living at the boarding school, but at the same time a feeling of hope that is created by the arrival of Mathieu at the school whose methods of interaction with the students are far more positive than those of the other teachers. A good example occurs in one of the earlier scenes in which the children are going to bed and the *Pépinot* theme is heard. The theme represents both sadness and hope with Mathieu narrating that, on the one hand, he is afraid of the children, the teachers and the school, but that on the other, he has perhaps discovered that the children enjoy singing. As already discussed in Chapter 2, Mathieu realises that he has the potential to help these children. The many non-

diegetic musical accompaniments to the scenes in *Les Choristes* can also be viewed as metaphorical representations of the support Mathieu displays towards the children.

The first song that Mathieu teaches the students, *Nous sommes de Fond de l'Étang*, has a major tonality. As previously discussed, the children are singing about being stuck in the school *Fond de l'Étang*. As with many of the songs in a major tonality, however, a happy atmosphere is suggested and the singing is used as an outlet for the boys to enjoy themselves while allowing them to comment on their situation. The second piece the students sing, *Compère Guilleri*, also has a major tonality and the topic of the text is not the focus of the song. It is common in French musical history that such children's songs would have deeper social meanings, reflecting the time of their creation.²⁰⁶

An obvious use of major tonality is when the song *Lueur D'Été* is heard non-diegetically to signify a positive change in *Les Choristes*. Rachin surprises the staff and students by playing soccer with them outside. This is the first and one of very few scenes in the whole film where Rachin is associated with optimism both visually and aurally. Unfortunately, within two minutes of film play time, the Mondain theme *L'Incendie* is heard signalling that Rachin is again opposed to the other teachers and students, by banning both the coal supply for hot showers and the choir because not only Mondain, but also money belonging to the school has disappeared.

6.2 Text and stylistic musical conventions

Apart from the tonality of the music heard in *Les Choristes*, the text itself and the way in which it is musically arranged highlights the musical nature of French speech and musical style typical of French songs and choral music. For example, Brendel discusses the distinguishing expressive relationship between French text and melody in comparison with Italian text and melody. Within Italian melody, the text is only the basis element and then the melody freely develops. “*Die französische Melodie im Gegensatz schließt sich eng an das Wort, an den Wortaccent, den declamatorischen Ausdruck, sie verschmährt jenes freie melodische Sich-Ergehen, und die Singstimme ist mehr als anderwärts Dienerin des Wortes;*

²⁰⁶ Neal, “The Choral Chansons of Vincent d'Indy”, in: *The Choral Journal*, Jun/Jul 2011, p.11.

dort herrscht der allgemeine, hier der besondere Ausdruck vor.”²⁰⁷ French text is syllabic and each syllable generally correlates to the rhythm of the text and music.²⁰⁸ Coulais states that for *Les Choristes* he “had to write music that was simple, not simplistic”.²⁰⁹ This correlates to the important feature of easiness which composers such as Canteloube considered important when identifying French music. The vocal melody of Canteloube’s *Chants' d'Auvergne: Bailèro*, is not complexly written, but the piece is still captivating and memorable.

Although the majority of songs in *Les Choristes* are original compositions, they are not dissimilar to the French folk songs that have been incorporated into classical music in the twentieth century to highlight the earlier features of French music.²¹⁰ In Canteloube’s tribute to his friend and fellow composer Séverac, he summed up his beliefs about the composers he admired at the beginning of the twentieth century: “At times when intellectualism is overdeveloped, [...] it is a real joy to meet a truly independent artist who is free from the prejudices of any school[...], giving feeling a superior place to intellect and loving with a real love of the earth, his own race and his own country.”²¹¹

The melodies within the choral pieces are made up of short motifs, each constituting a small range of intervals that, when combined, flourish into songs with a range of at least an octave. These compositional techniques were common in French repertoire.²¹² It is apparent that Barratier and Coulais also intended to achieve this authentic sense of local French music, through simple, but lyrical melodies, while at the same time using a text where many ideas could be expressed. For a French-speaking audience, the style of French music is likely to be familiar and therefore the notion of nostalgia is enhanced. However, for a non-French-speaking audience, the music still enhances their experience of nostalgia because of the repetition and continuity of the compositional style throughout the film.

²⁰⁷ Brendel, “Einleitung”, in: *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. 01.01.1845, p. 7.

²⁰⁸ Marcel-Dubois & Laborde, “France (II) General Characteristics”, in: *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, London, 2001, p.161.

²⁰⁹ See Coulais’s official website, biography written by Stéphane Lerouge, <http://www.brunocoulais.com/biographie.php> last accessed: 04.06.17.

²¹⁰ Langham, “Canteloube, Joseph”, in: *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.uaccess.univie.ac.at/subscriber/article/grove/music/04763>. last accessed: 07.06.17.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Marcel-Dubois & Laborde, “France (II) General Characteristics”, in: *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, p.164.

An example of the rich tonal harmonies provided through various textures is evident when analyzing the phrases in *Vois sur ton chemin* alternating from monophonic text with homophonic accompaniment and polyphonic phrases that are doubly enhanced by a counter melody in the oboe.²¹³

The melodies of *Les avions en papier* and *Lueur d'été* are clearly recognisable, but are also accompanied by the other vocal parts in a lively homophonic nature with a sense of call and response between the melody and the other vocal lines. The instrumentation, such as the use of the horn in the last measures of *Lueur d'été* suggests the feeling of a romantic-era style of music.

Caresse sur L'Océan is similar to the vocal repertoire of Gabriel Fauré. In fact, much of the music of *Les Choristes* shares stylistic tendencies of one of Fauré's other works, namely the *Pavane* Op.50, written in 1887. Originally a piece for piano, the latter was later re-written for orchestra and optional chorus. Fauré's *Pavane*, as with the music of *Les Choristes* consists of a short and concise melody, which is melodically and rhythmically repeated in other lines of instrumentation, again the tranquil atmosphere achieved by the strings and harp plucking accompaniment. The vocal line also has moments of call and response between the treble and bass clef vocal lines, where the orchestral harmonies are rich in accompaniment and then again take over the melody. Such as in Fauré's *Pavane*, the text in *Les Choristes* is not always the primary focus, but the overall atmosphere is achieved by the stylistically musical conventions applied and maintained.

Compère Guilleri, is a traditional French children's song in strophic form. It is the second song sung by the boys as a choir and is sung in unison (in comparison to the more complex polyphonic songs with more than one voice part that they later learn).²¹⁴ Although the children only sing a short version of this song in the film, the fast tempo is immediately established. The rhythms within the phrases are not difficult and the melody is short and concise. Except for the variety of tempos, *Compère Guilleri*, as with all of the choral pieces

²¹³ Ibid p.161. Certain instruments were also associated regionally in France, such as flutes in the south, nasal sounding Pyrenean oboes and Corsican jew's harps.

²¹⁴ Sequence list No.18.

in the film, has a memorable melody made up of short rhythmic phrases and captures the character of the French chansons.²¹⁵

In contrast to the lyrical and gentle lightness created in the choral music of *Les Choristes*, an intense atmosphere is generated by the minor tonality and insistent three crotchet beats per bar heard throughout *In Memoriam*. Although the stylistic conventions; repetition of rhythm and melody employed throughout *Les Choristes*, are present, the text is in Latin and the instrumentation is dense throughout the piece. Musically, Coulais may have been inspired to compose *In Memoriam* as an authentic representation of an earlier style of French sacred music which comprised of Latin texts. In particular, polyphonic choral music, can be found as far back as the fifteenth.²¹⁶ As discussed in Chapter 4, the students sing this song a capella in their dormitory, with Mathieu conducting, despite Rachin's ban of the choir. It is, however a difficult piece for the students, especially unaccompanied as can be construed from Mathieu's dissatisfaction in the boys' quality of singing.²¹⁷

In Memoriam is heard again, this time non-diegetically, as Rachin is informed of the fire at the school. The bass orchestral accompaniment is particularly important in enhancing the dramatic nature of the piece as sung by the children in their relatively pure voices.²¹⁸ Compositions for the Mass that use the *Kyrie Eleison* text have been dated as far back as the 10th century²¹⁹ and the text is still used in the Mass today with composers such as Mozart, Fauré and Britten all contributing to the genre.

Although written more than 200 years apart, one can identify similarities between the *Kyrie* in Mozart's *Mass in C Minor* (1785) and *In Memoriam*. In both compositions, the tempo remains constant and the minor key tonalities support the intended atmosphere. The instrumental lines alternate between polyphonic and homophonic textures with the vocal lines. In both pieces, the lower ranging strings and timpani also widen the harmonic texture

²¹⁵ Lang, „Musiklehrer im Spielfilm“, in: *Diskussion Musikpädagogik*, 2010, p.28.

²¹⁶ For further information see the chapters by Fitch, “The Renaissance and Haines, Manuscript sources and calligraphy” in: *The Cambridge Companion to French Music*, 2015, p.62 and p.293.

²¹⁷ Sequence list No.29.

²¹⁸ Sequence list No.37.

²¹⁹ See Richard L. Crocker's article “Kyrie eleison”, in: *Grove Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.uaccess.univie.ac.at/subscriber/article/grove/music/15736>, last accessed: 07.02.17.

of the pieces and provide the atmospheric deep sounding tones required for dramatic repertoire.²²⁰

Music and nostalgia are closely intertwined in France. For example, in the 1970s there was a revival of traditional music in Brittany, where the film is set. It seems therefore fitting to include music in scenes of *Les Choristes* from the past. This is demonstrated through Langlois' joyful singing of *Qu'est-ce qu'on attend pour faire la fête* (1938), and the vast range of traditional songs sung by the boys during their choir auditions.²²¹

6.3 Rameau and choral music characteristics in France

Hymne à la Nuit is based on a theme originally written by Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764) for his *Tragédie en musique, Hippolyte et Aricie* (1733).²²² Here it is a duo of the Priestesses of Diana, 'Rendons un éternel hommage' (Act I, Scene III) in a different key (G major) and a faster tempo to the version arranged for the film.²²³ The homophonic texture is stylistically Baroque with basso continuo. Julien Tiersot described Rameau as "the theorist of vertical harmony."²²⁴ Rameau was delighted by the principle of harmony because of its ability to have a quality of simplicity, lovely melodies and diversity from only a few small intervals.²²⁵

The melody used by Coulais is clearly recognisable as is the prominence on the melody in the soprano line. The choristers sing *Hymne à la Nuit* a Capella in four-part harmony. The first time they are heard rehearsing it is towards the end of the film, so one can assume it is of a higher level of difficulty as their choral training has progressed. The students then perform this song to the countess and dignitaries who have visited the school to hear the choir sing,

²²⁰ Coulais' *In Memoriam* and Mozart's *Kyrie* from *Mass in C Minor* have been compared aurally. Youtube recordings: *In Memoriam* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VHCX1oXrlpQ> and *Mass in C minor* KV. 427: *Kyrie* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SGWYbkXCcGU>, last accessed: 23.07.17.

²²¹ Sequence list No.25 and No.14.

²²² See Graham Sadler's article *Hippolyte et Aricie* in: "The New Grove Dictionary of Opera. Grove Music Online." <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.uaccess.univie.ac.at/subscriber/article/grove/music/O009340>, last accessed: 16.02.17.

²²³ Information and score available online at Petrucci music library, [http://imslp.org/wiki/Hymne_%C3%A0_la_nuit_\(Noyon,_Joseph\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/Hymne_%C3%A0_la_nuit_(Noyon,_Joseph)), last accessed 23.7.17. Comparison with Rameau, *Hippolyte et Aricie* recording, Disc 1, track 16 *Deuxième Air des Prêtresses*: "Rendons un éternel hommage", 1997.

²²⁴ Tiersot, "Rameau" in: *The Musical Quarterly*, 1928, p.85.

²²⁵ Ibid. p.87.

after being informed by Maxence of the choir's existence.²²⁶ *Hymne à la Nuit* is in strophic form, performed in *Les Choristes* with two verses. The text of the second verse is performed as a soprano solo by Morhange, with a hummed accompaniment by students on the other parts, and then concluded with all students vocalising on "oo" the last few bars of the verse. *Hymne à la Nuit*, was sung at the same point and for the same occasion in *La cage aux rossignols*. Its addition in *Les Choristes* may be seen as a dedication to the film that inspired it.²²⁷

Hymne à la Nuit consists of diatonic harmony throughout and the text is set syllabically. The melody is concise and the rhythmic phrases are simple, thus not deterring from the sense of three beats per bar. The soprano line has the largest range, expanding from a middle C to an E a tenth above. Apart from one octave jump, the melody remains mostly stepwise, thus rendering it easily memorable. Although *Hymne à la Nuit* was composed in a different era to the other compositions in *Les Choristes*, the piece creates feeling of emotion and has a memorable melody, as with the rest of the choral works within the film.

At the end of the film when Mathieu leaves the school he narrates that he was a failed musician and a fired prefect. Mathieu did not believe his compositions were as worthy as those of the great composer Rameau, who he would have with no doubt studied and admired. Perhaps therefore *Hymne à la Nuit*, and not a work not of his own, was performed in public. However, as proven in this chapter, *Hymne à la Nuit* is no more stylistically French as any of the original pieces composed for the film. All of the repertoire on the soundtrack can be considered as stylistically French and contributing to the success of *Les Choristes*.

²²⁶ Sequence list No.32 and No.35.

²²⁷ Maas 2014, p.144.

Chapter 7

Choral participation in the film and its function within society

“Enfin vous remarquerez Monsieur le directeur que la musique ne dessert pas la discipline. Depuis quelques temps, il y a quand même moins de problèmes.”

“Hasard.”

“Je ne crois pas beaucoup au hasard, Monsieur le directeur.”²²⁸

The benefits of choral participation are multifaceted. As displayed in *Les Choristes*, not only does the children’s behaviour improve, but also their development as individuals within a community. They are not extrinsically motivated to behave with Rachin’s method of disciplinary “Action, Reaction”. It is through Mathieu’s different approach to discipline and also through the introduction of the choir that the students are inspired and thus intrinsically motivated to behave. In contrast to the children’s behaviour in formal classes, which is usually unruly, the children are focused and disciplined during choir rehearsals. As a consequence of participation in the choir, the majority of the students no longer look to cause trouble, but rather enjoy their time interacting with one another. Rachin imposed fear into the children with cruel penalties. Subsequently, the students also reacted to his inhumane violence with more violence. In contrast, Mathieu protects the students as much as possible from violent punishment and is a positive role model for them. He gives them hope, demonstrates that he cares for them and praises them for their achievements, such as singing.

Within a short time, the ritual of singing together at *Fond de L’Étang* is achieved. It is the function of rhythm and song in human groups, the sense of a common destiny and group identity through ‘one voice’ that is recognised as valuable and that is “exploited for producing emotion and pleasure”,²²⁹ as demonstrated in *Les Choristes*.

²²⁸ English translation: Mathieu: “Still, sir, music has helped with discipline. We’ve had fewer problems.”

Rachin: “Coincidence.” Mathieu: “I don’t believe in coincidences.” Sequence list No.32, (1:07:35).

²²⁹ See Gorbman’s discussion of the anthropological analysis of music as ritual in: “Unheard melodies: narrative film music”, 1987, p.81.

7.1 A historical overview of choral participation worldwide

Up to and including the present time, choirs continue to function as a form of communication within secular or spiritual choral environments. Maas acknowledges the long and important existence of choirs, dating back to the time of Greek theatre for narrative purposes.

*“Bereits im antiken griechischen Theater hatte der Chor zuerst als Träger der Handlung, dann als kommentierende ‘Stimme des Volkes’ eine wichtige Rolle. In der christlichen Vorstellungswelt wurde zunächst unter Chorgesang der Gesang der Himmlischen Heerscharen verstanden.”*²³⁰

In France, the use of traditional choral singing for musical educational purposes has been recorded from as early as 796 and choirs formed in specific cathedrals can be dated from the end of the ninth century. A choir was established at the renowned Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris in 1127 and at the Ste-Chapelle in Paris in 1305.²³¹ By 1845 it was acknowledged that teaching singing to children could contribute to moral and intellectual improvement. In addition, a book of *chants populaires pour les écoles* was created by Julien Tiersot and poet Maurice Bouchor for schools to use as a model of musical practice.²³²

Many choral-orchestral societies that were established in Germany, Austria, the U.K and USA in the nineteenth century still exist today. In contrast, the two societies that were established in Paris in 1932 and 1933 did not last for more than a couple of years and three decades, respectively.²³³ Although the tradition of choral music may have declined in France during this period, it returned with a noticeable increase in choral repertoire with works often reflecting the effects of both World Wars by composers such as Ravel and Poulenc.²³⁴

Worldwide, choruses have also formed that “reflect a wider educational and social agenda.”²³⁵ An example of this is the African Children’s Chorus which was started by the human rights activist Ray Barnett in 1984 during the Uganda Civil War. The choir’s purpose

²³⁰ Maas 2014, p.15.

²³¹ Lesure, *France, 1. Art Music*, in: “The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians”, 2001, p.140-142.

²³² Ibid, p.159.

²³³ Alves, see the *Table of Choral-orchestral societies in 19th Century*, in: “Choral music in the culture of the nineteenth century” in: *The Cambridge companion to choral music*, 2012, p.31.

²³⁴ Strimple, “Choral music in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries” in: *The Cambridge companion to choral music*, 2012, p.55-56.

²³⁵ Núñez, “Globalization, multiculturalism, and the children’s chorus”, in: *The Cambridge companion to choral music*, 2012, p.208.

was to show the world that even the most vulnerable children have unlimited ability.²³⁶ *Les Choristes* has also assisted in demonstrating the effects of choral singing for children with living disadvantages.

A further example from Africa is documented in the 2007 documentary film about the prisoner Jabulani Shabangu and his fellow prisoners who were inmates in South Africa's largest prison, Leeuwkop. The film documents the formation of a prison choir by Shabangu, and the choir's victory at the National Prisoner Choir Competition. The film also highlights the father figure of Coleman, the choir conductor, who provides Shabangu with wisdom that not only helps him survive prison, but also assists him when he is later released to live life as a free man.²³⁷

Another example of the positive effect of a choir is demonstrated by the *Choir of Hard Knocks*. In 2006, Dr. Jonathon Welch formed the choir in Melbourne for homeless and disadvantaged people. The recognition this choir has received in the form of the many awards it has received, sold-out concerts and cd sales demonstrates the success of the project. On a personal level, the choir has also been beneficial for the participants:

“Most importantly, the ongoing and regular contact the choir provides to the members has had a profound effect on their lives, leading many of the original 52 back to either part time or full time study or work. The choir has also given members the opportunity to find new purpose in life. Many had become socially excluded due to their socio-economic circumstances, and the choir has enabled them to acquire new skills and rebuild personal confidence and self esteem.

It has also created long lasting and ongoing friendships and relationships, and a unique opportunity for the choir members to make a positive and enduring contribution back to the community and has inspired a world wide movement of ‘street choirs’.”²³⁸

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, many television programmes have also promoted singing, through series competition formats. Soloist and choir competitions for vocal ensembles such as *Last Choir Standing* (BBC 2008), and *Kampf der Chöre* (2010

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ “The Choir” (2007) <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0929735/>, last accessed: 02.07.2017.

²³⁸ “Choir of Hard Knocks.” <http://www.choirofhopecandinspiration.com/our-journey>, last accessed: 02.07.2017.

Switzerland) have inspired people from most walks of life to audition.²³⁹ The participants of the wide variety of choirs that have been formed internationally vary greatly in age, gender, race, ability and often have very different goals.

7.2 The effect of singing on emotional well-being

Research has been undertaken proving that singing and emotional well-being are linked.²⁴⁰ Although this scientific research has only taken place in recent decades²⁴¹, the number of choirs world-wide that have been established and remain in existence, certainly indicates that the participants are well aware of the benefits of singing. The first principal of health as listed by the World Health Organization's definition of health (WHO 1946) and which still stands today states: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."²⁴²

The choir formed by Mathieu in *Les Choristes*, has a positive effect on the students' well-being for several reasons. Firstly, singing in the choir is a kind of safe haven from the distress the students endure on a daily basis at *Fond de L'Étang*. Singing in the choir gives them a place where, and a time in which they can escape from their reality and engage in an activity which allows them to be and feel creative. The students are also granted a sense of validation and a connection to others. Tia DeNora also asserts that through music, people experience pleasure and are provided with temporary relief from physical or emotional pain.²⁴³

DeNora continues by citing two situations: one where Beethoven himself plays piano to a woman who has lost her baby and another from 2003, around two hundred years later, involving a distressed woman with abusive internal thoughts, who sings in her therapy session while her therapist plays the piano.²⁴⁴ Both of these examples demonstrate how music

²³⁹ Mass 2014, p.19.

²⁴⁰ For example, research at The University of Gothenburg has been mentioned in the article "Create music that will open a person's heart": a perspective on emotional and social wellbeing as depicted in three films", Olivier & Potgieter 2015, p.2.

²⁴¹ 35 research reports addressing connections between singing, wellbeing and health in non-clinical samples and contexts have been published since the early 1960s. See Clift's (and others), "Choral singing and psychological wellbeing: Quantitative and qualitative findings from English choirs in a cross-national survey" in: *The Journal of Applied Arts and Health*, 2010, p.20.

²⁴² See World Health Organisation website, <http://www.who.int/about/mission/en/>, last accessed: 23.06.17.

²⁴³ DeNora, *Music Asylums. Wellbeing through music in everyday life*, 2013, p.1.

²⁴⁴ Ibid, p.1-2.

is beneficial to people in distress and how it eases their pain. In a similar manner, Mathieu supplies an environment in which music is constructive, not only in his students' lives, but also his own. He had believed that his days as a musician were over, but this changed with the catalyst of composing for his students which had the effect of increasing his own self-worth. Whether through making music or listening to music, it is the experience and active participation that has a positive effect on one's well-being.

It is also important to acknowledge why a musical activity, such as singing in a choir, has a different positive effect on people to that of other activities such as sport or painting. Music is rhythmically organised and therefore "can align individual and potentially inchoate or unruly bodies into shared time."²⁴⁵ The precise communicative synchrony required therefore facilitates intimate coordination, and hence, bonding.²⁴⁶ Therefore, at *Fond de L'Étang* the students' involvement in singing in the choir is not only individually constructive within their environment, but is beneficial to the group as a whole through the bonding that is experienced. A sense of community or family is created and through their singing, the children are empowered and a sense of spirit is instilled in them that carries them through their time at *Fond de L'Étang*. These ideas are demonstrated in scenes such as that where Maxence returns from hospital and those that show interaction in the classroom, ablution room and while playing outside.

Vocal music has been described by Patricia Campbell as "the most personal of all types of musical expressions, as opposed to the somewhat more "distant" performance on instruments as extensions of the body."²⁴⁷ Singing expresses the personification of the individual. The students at *Fond de L'Étang* realise they have the capacity to sing and the effect of singing is reflected in the change of their behaviours and dispositions.

Les Choristes has a 'feel-good' film effect on the audience because harmonic balance is achieved not only musically, but also metaphorically within the social environment. A developed sense of self and group identity is arrived at through team-work. Olivier & Portgieter comment that harmony (metaphorically) is thus established; "which leads to

²⁴⁵ Ibid, p.3.

²⁴⁶ Ibid, p.3. DeNora refers to Trevarthan "Origins of Musical Identity: Evidence from Infancy for Musical Social Awareness", in MacDonald, Hargreaves and Miell (Eds.), *Musical Identities*, 2002, p.21-38.

²⁴⁷ Campbell, "Songs in Their Heads: Music and Its Meaning in Children's Lives", 2010, p.250.

acceptance of social structures in the world we live”.²⁴⁸ When the boys sing together, nobody is oppressed or identified as weaker than anyone else within in the context of the group activity. Mathieu does not display dictatorial authority, but creates coherence at the school. Each person is respected equally and contributes individually to achieving the wellbeing of the group. The film audience therefore experiences the effect of musical well-being aurally and visually by watching a film that demonstrates the effects of well-being through music.

In particular, *Les Choristes* demonstrates the benefits of the choir for Mathieu, Morhange and Pépinot. We do not know what the future outcomes were for the other students, but we do know that during their active involvement in the choir, the majority of the students and as well as the staff members Maxence, Langlois and Chabert were positively affected. A constructive sense of social interaction occurred after the choir was formed. The students were able to find a new sense of inner strength and develop solidarity with each other, while becoming more disciplined in themselves and more tolerant of others. The visual impact of their emotional development is supported by their singing.²⁴⁹ After Mathieu is fired, the students and the other teachers all have the courage to testify against Rachin, which resulted directly in his being fired. Perhaps Mathieu’s belief in humanity and justice inspired them to finally come out and testify, an act that would positively effect their own futures as well.

Music is also implemented as a means of healing and a form of therapy for Mathieu and the students. Music is such a central theme in *Les Choristes* that “it not only serves as a soundtrack, but also provides the means for the characters to experience an active and constructive response to society.”²⁵⁰ At one stage Mathieu is even hopeful that the choir has had a positive effect on Rachin and his interaction with the children. “*C’est peut-être une illusion mais même notre directeur semble gagné par le changement.*”²⁵¹ Unfortunately, this is only temporary and the choir does not have a lasting positive effect on the lives of Rachin and Mondain. This part of the film synopsis also signifies reality, as it is unlikely for one activity to have a 100% success rate.

²⁴⁸ Olivier & Potgieter, "Create music that will open a person's heart": a perspective on emotional and social wellbeing as depicted in three films", 2015, p.2, refers to Drummond, "An international perspective on music education for adults", in: McPherson & Welch, (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Music Education*, vol. 2., 2012, p.307.

²⁴⁹ Ibid, Olivier & Potgieter 2015, p.4.

²⁵⁰ Ibid, p.5.

²⁵¹ English translation: "Perhaps it's an illusion, but even our headmaster seems to be changing." Sequence list No.27.

Well-being through group singing has also been demonstrated in films such as *Sister Act* (1992), *As it is in Heaven* (2004) and *Boychoir* (2014). Each film is comprised of distinctively different choral repertoire. However, the unifying phenomenon between these films and any successful choir in the world is the emotional and social well-being that is promoted and achieved through group singing and the harmony that is achieved through unity. Positive relationships are created through the team work that is required for the success of the choir as well as support for individuals who may be overcoming personal difficulties. An increase in self-esteem and a sense of achievement also contributes to the sense of accomplishment in the participants' lives.²⁵²

A purpose of community is demonstrated through the formation of a choir. A sense of harmony has a positive effect on the way people interact and respond to situations. Participants also experience a sense of belonging and develop "personal discipline and emotional confidence."²⁵³ As with the participants of many choirs, the students at *Fond de L'Étang* come from different social backgrounds. The positive effect of singing in a choir endures long after the singing takes place. Singing can bridge the social gap and broaden the individuals' perspectives of life.²⁵⁴

Except for Rachin and Mondain, the viewer sees how the students and the teachers Chabert and Langlois change in their attitude towards Mathieu. The relationships between the students and the teachers also improves. There is a new sense of being on the same level and a collective identity. They no longer oppose each other or are affected by different social status. Within any divided society, if a community can be formed where everyone is equal, healing and improved well-being can occur. Similarly, "moving from chaotic noise and sound to creating a piece of art generates positive emotions."²⁵⁵

Once the choir is formed, other positive outcomes such as kindness, hope, humanity and citizenship are also demonstrated during *Les Choristes*. The positive emotions surpass the negative emotions such as when Rachin bans the choir, Chabert and Mathieu still find a way

²⁵² Olivier & Potgieter 2015, p.5. Discussed further in: Gridley, Astbury, Sharples & Aguirre, "Benefits of group singing for community mental health and wellbeing" *Victorian Health*, 2011, p.51.

²⁵³ Gridley et al 2011, p.41, as cited in: Olivier & Potgieter 2015, p.6,

²⁵⁴ Gridley et al 2011, p.43, as cited in: Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

to turn the situation around positively and continue to rehearse in secret. The children also display their hopes and dreams and are no longer so affected by the adverse aspects of their lives. The communal act of singing also displays solidarity between the students and the teachers and helps them to resolve problems without turning to violence.

Recent research in neuroscience at the University of Gothenburg has confirmed the link between singing in a choir and emotional well-being. It was discovered that, similar to yoga, the breathing patterns that occur while singing in a choir can regulate your heart beat. Collins describes the process:

“When choir members sing together their heartbeats become synchronised growing faster and slower at the same time as they breathe in and out in unison, [...] reducing the variability of your heart rate is likely to be good for your well-being.”²⁵⁶

Dr. Gertrud Berka-Schmid concurs, and describes our body as an instrument. It is through the voice that one hears the result of their instrument. The possibilities of expression through the voice are also linked to the breath:

*“Wer aufgeregt ist, atmet anders als jemand, der traurig ist. Und damit wird klar warum es so wichtig ist, dass wir unsere Stimme benützen denn Sprechen und insbesondere Singen ist ja gestaltetes meist aus verlängertes Ausatmen. Da bewegen sich auch unbenennbare Gefühle, Emotionen aus uns heraus.”*²⁵⁷

Dr. Berka-Schmid suggests the main purpose of singing are its beneficial and healing effects. Singing in a group especially involves not only self-awareness, but also an involuntary perception of others. Skills of listening and participation in a group configuration results in a creation which makes everyone feel exulted.²⁵⁸ It has also been concluded that “singing can enhance the spirit of co-operation in a group because it helps regulate activity in the brain’s vagus nerve, which is linked to emotion and communication with others.”²⁵⁹ *Les Choristes* demonstrates these benefits in the boys who sing and the teachers who support the choir.

²⁵⁶ Ibid. p.2. in: Collins, “Choral singing regulates heartbeat”, *The Telegraph*, 08.07.13, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/health/news/10166789/Choral-singing-regulates-heartbeat.html>, last accessed: 25.07.17.

²⁵⁷ Interview with Berka-Schmid, *Der Mensch ist Musik* in: Kirschbichler, “Singen ist Medizin” in: *Medizin populär*, 3/2008, p.16.

²⁵⁸ Ibid. p.18.

²⁵⁹ Boyce-Tillman, “Music and Wellbeing”, in: *The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa*, Special edition, 10(2),12-33, 2014, p.13. Research discussed by Collins, in: “Choral singing regulates heartbeat,” *The Telegraph*, 08.07.13.

Their behaviour is in complete contrast to the attitude and behaviour of Rachin and Mondain who do not even passively participate.

7.3 The benefit of singing within society

In any society, leadership is a key element to the success of its people. A sense of growing humanity has been demonstrated through singing. The positive outcome of Mathieu as the conductor of the *Fond de L'Étang* choir is a reflection of his leadership within the community.

The film audience can relate to characters such as Mathieu and reminisce on their own pasts back to childhood and remember the people who, like Mathieu did for the students, supported them and inspired them during difficult times. Although Mathieu held a position of authority, he demonstrated respect to the students and did not use his power to demonstrate hierarchy or control. Mathieu's relationship with the children is also close to that of a father figure – his bedroom is also directly next to the boys' dormitory. In contrast, Rachin lives with his family in their own house (even if it is on the school premises) and there is no mention of where or with whom the other teachers live.

In 2005, Claus Spahn reported that the success of *Les Choristes* resulted in a “boom” of youth choir participation: “*Die erbauliche Kraft der Musik zu preisen ist jetzt wieder sehr in Mode.*”²⁶⁰ Although Spahn suggests that music may not be financially the wisest way to solve individual problems, he acknowledges that in *Les Choristes*, Mathieu is the key factor in turning the boys' lives around for the better: “*Er baut mit Hilfe der Kunst Druck ab. Alles wird lockerer, freier, sensibler.*”²⁶¹ Georg Maas also refers to *Les Choristes* as a film that demonstrates how singing in a group changes the participants' lives and assists them to cope with life. Maas suggests that music educators would be pleased that *Les Choristes* advocates for the benefits of music education: “*der pädagogische Umgang mit Musik wird ganz wesentlich getragen von der Erwartung, dass Musik eine Bereicherung des menschlichen Daseins leistet und positive Wirkungen zeitigt.*”²⁶²

²⁶⁰ Spahn, “Musik hilft immer. In Zeiten von Hartz IV soll Kunst als Salbe gegen den großen Krisenschmerz wirken. Aber taugt sie auch dafür? ”, in: Feuilleton, DIE ZEIT Nr.17, 21.April, 2005, p.47.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Maas, “Musik und Musiker in Spielfilm und Dokumentarspiel, Von der ‚Magie‘ des Musizierens“ in: *Der Musikfilm: ein Handbuch für die pädagogische Praxis*, 2008, p.278.

Vogt's perspective on the message of *Les Choristes* also confirms the reason that the formation of the choir had a positive outcome: "*Nicht der Unterricht steht hier im Mittelpunkt, sondern das Verhältnis der beteiligten Personen zueinander, die Musik, die jeweils gemacht wird, und die Wirkungen, die durch den Unterricht erzielt werden.*"²⁶³ Not only is the effect of the music on each individual important to acknowledge, but also the group solidarity that the choral activity triggers. It is the interaction between people that can subsequently have a positive effect on society in any situation where constructive communication is required.²⁶⁴

As discussed in the introduction, *Les Choristes* and *La cage aux rossignols* (1945) are based on the Ker Goat Education Centre which was established in Brittany in 1940. The choral programme that was established there became the core activity at the centre. In contrast, Vogt remarks that music education has not been a feature of school curricula in Germany. He describes the "*manipulativen und auch totalitären Ansprüche*" of music education that existed before 1970. Vogt discusses that as the reason there is no comparable film to *Les Choristes* in Germany, but that it was an appreciated topic and still a very popular film in the country.²⁶⁵

Les Choristes, a film set in 1949, demonstrates the benefits of a musical education even before pedagogical research took place into its benefits. The success of *Les Choristes* also suggests that the viewer takes pleasure in discovering that even in an era directly after a war where hardship was normality, successful choir projects such as the one at *Fond de L'Étang* existed.

Unlike in other "triumph through music" films, the first (and only) public performance in *Les Choristes*, which, in this case, takes place for the Countess, is not the main goal for the children or Mathieu. Unlike Rachin, who falsely takes the credit for the choir, they are not looking for recognition from others or expecting an audience of family and friends. It is the continuous experience of participating in a choir and the positive effects of doing so that are highlighted in *Les Choristes*. Some of the boys are orphans and therefore the only adult role

²⁶³ Vogt, *Monsieur Mathieu und seine Brüder. Anmerkungen zur Inszenierung von Musiklehrern im populären Film*, in: „Lehr-Performances, Filmische Inszenierungen des Lehrens“, 2011, p.129.

²⁶⁴ Effects of singing in film discussed by Gorbman in: "Artless Singing" in: *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image*, 2011, p.158.

²⁶⁵ Vogt 2011, p.130.

models that they can look to for praise, are their teachers. It is the self-worth and development of the boys that is highlighted in the film and how music helps the children find enjoyment in life in conditions where they have limited support.

The function of this performance does, however, not only show the progress of the choir musically, but also the general progress of students such as Morhange, who has learnt what it means to value something, in this case the choir, and that if one works hard one can achieve in life.

7.4 Nostalgia experienced through singing

Often, music activities also have personal or historical and cultural connotations.²⁶⁶ Again the theme of nostalgia is relevant. When we hear a certain song, a piece of music, or an instrument playing, we may remember a person or event from our past. The children and Langlois demonstrate their personal connection to songs by singing a range of melodies from their pasts. DeNora discusses that even passively hearing music presents benefits because a “highly active affair” and lively habitat is created.²⁶⁷ The film characters Maxence, Chabert and the Baroness also demonstrate their enjoyment of hearing and experiencing the effect of music during the film.

Singing or making music of any kind is a physical experience. It requires the whole body and is associated with memory and forms of emotional experience.²⁶⁸ Anabelle Cohen also discusses the short term and long term memory that occurs while listening to film music and how emotional meaning is created from music as its source.²⁶⁹ Cohen claims that consciousness of musical meaning only arises through correspondence with information based in long-term memory. Once the information generates in the long-term memory, consciousness in the short-term memory is achieved.²⁷⁰ Not only does *Les Choristes* demonstrate the effect of singing on the characters on the film, but members of the audience can identify with the effect of singing from encounters within their own long-term memory. A broad variety of singing encounters range from; singing a national anthem, experiencing

²⁶⁶ DeNora, “Music Asylums. Wellbeing through music in everyday life”, 2013, p.2.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid, p.3-4.

²⁶⁹ Cohen 2001, p.258-260.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, p.261-262.

lullabies as a child or singing them as an adult, watching musical performances, performing on stage or attending functions where music is part of the entertainment. People experience various emotions during these activities which is then repeated in their lives. Thus through long-term memory the experience of music will always be associated with emotion.²⁷¹

The benefits are immediate and also endure, remaining in one's memory, which one can then access when musical experiences such as singing re-occur. As an example, DeNora discusses that Bach composed with the intention of organising the congregation through the music. He acknowledged the link between music and affect and the benefit of binding humankind by gathering incongruent individuals and hence contributing to a better quality of life.²⁷² Mathieu instils the attitude in his students that, even in hard times, anything is possible. It is through the use of music that the viewer sees that the children are happier when they sing. Each audience member was also once a child (or is still one) and memories of this time are awakened by *Les Choristes*.

²⁷¹ Ibid. Cohen discusses that various researchers have identified that characteristics of musical stimuli give rise to particular emotions, p.262-263.

²⁷² DeNora, *After Adorno: Rethinking Music Sociology*, Cambridge University Press: 2003, p.139.

8. Conclusion

From the analysis of the function of the music in *Les Choristes*, it is possible to conclude that the topic of problematic children living in a difficult post-war society may be solved through music. The music functions two-fold, both as diegetic and non-diegetic and therefore has an impact on the audience as well as the characters within the narrative. The students' singing and the positive effect of this activity is also impelling for the film audience because it is an activity they can tangibly relate to experiencing.

The music in *Les Choristes* functions as a way of communication between the characters. It builds relationships and helps them to develop emotionally. The music also communicates with the audience, informing them of what is occurring in the narration, while also enhancing or altering the visual aspect, which is often the focus of attention. Barratier and Coulais composed music that was always emotional and/or expressive. The message of the music and the feelings of the characters is then clearly conveyed by the composers and perceived by the listener. Many elements of music, such as the choice of tonality, re-occurring melodies and instrumental timbre are effectively utilised and assist in achieving continuity in the musical tracks of the film.

Les Choristes is a French film that demonstrates the effectiveness of film music when the social and historical context of the narrative is considered. Each musical track accompanies the scenes or comments on the events taking place. Whether dramatic, melancholic or sentimental, the consistent and recurrent musical style of the compositions results in structural unity of the film from beginning to end.

The analysis of leitmotifs and musical themes proves their association with several events and the characters of Morhange and Pépinot. The musical themes reappear often enough so that the concept of certain emotions associated with the characters are conjured up and experienced on a subconscious level, even when those characters are visually absent.

When the choral pieces are performed, they capture the full attention of the audience and the students who are singing them. Analysing the text also reveals that it relates directly or metaphorically to the film narrative. The musical analysis and research in this thesis

discussing the effect of music on a subconscious level demonstrates that feelings of nostalgia are invoked when musical pieces are repeated non-diegetically and in orchestral variation.

The analysis of the music proves that it relates to the main features of the dramaturgy. The songs composed are stylistically French and the characters, particularly the students, are played by regular French children and not by actors. Their singing at the beginning of the film is also not that of trained choristers. The costumes and sets are also stylistically chosen and as the mood in the narrative begins to positively change, so does the lighting on the sets and the quality of the children's singing. The aural and visual elements of *Les Choristes* work in tandem. The aural element, i.e. the music, enhances the visual aspect and subsequently convinces the audience of the authentic nature of the narrative.

The music medium proves to be the fundamental element through which we see positive development of the characters in *Les Choristes*. It is through the activity of music that the concept of family is realised for the children, Mathieu and even other members of staff. Although the characters are not biologically related, the sense of family and community is created and metaphorically enforced through the music thus symbolising togetherness.

The film is inspiring because Mathieu is inspired by the children and in return they inspire him. People are brought together through his music and he has a positive effect on their futures, (as they do on his). Mathieu regards himself successful because he sees the progress in the students. The lack of praise for his compositions or teaching is irrelevant. Similarly, Barratier does not expect international recognition for his film and therefore uses a low budget to produce it. It is the international audience's positive reaction to the film and subsequent increase in choir participation that validates the success of *Les Choristes*.

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Appendix

Musical extracts:

Excerpt No. 1: Opening bars 1-11 from *Caresse Sur L'Océan*, composed by Christophe Barratier and Bruno Coulais, 2003. Piano adaptation *Caresse Sur L'Océan* by Raoul Duflot-Verez © 2005 by Éditions Galatée Films, Passerelle et Logline Studios.

Excerpt No.2: Closing bars from *Caresse Sur L'Océan*, composed by Christophe Barratier and Bruno Coulais, 2003. Piano adaptation of *Caresse Sur L'Océan* by Raoul Duflot-Verez © 2005 by Éditions Galatée Films, Passerelle et Logline Studios.

Excerpt No. 3: Closing bars from *Lueur D'Été*, composed by Christophe Barratier and Bruno Coulais, 2003. Piano adaptation of *Lueur D'Été* by Raoul Duflot-Verez © 2005 by Éditions Galatée Films, Passerelle et Logline Studios.

Excerpt No. 4: Opening of *Cerf-Volant*, composed by Christophe Barratier and Bruno Coulais, 2003. Piano adaptation of *Cerf-Volant* by Raoul Duflot-Verez © 2005 by Éditions Galatée Films, Passerelle et Logline Studios.

Excerpt No. 5: Second motif from *Pépinot* bars 12-16, composed by Bruno Coulais, 2003. Piano adaptation of *Caresse Sur L'Océan* © 2005 by Éditions Galatée Films, Passerelle et Logline Studios.

Excerpt No.6: Motifs from *Morhange*, composed by Bruno Coulais, 2003. Piano adaptation of *Vois sur ton chemin* © 2005 by Éditions Galatée Films, Passerelle et Logline Studios.

Abstract

This thesis discusses the 2004 French film *Les Choristes* by Christophe Barratier, which was based on the 1945 film directed by Jean Dréville, *La Cage aux Rossignols*. The Ker Goat Education centre, a correctional facility for minors was established in Dinan, Brittany during the Second World War, where choral singing became the core activity of the centre. Both films were inspired by this event. *Les Choristes* demonstrates the positive effect of singing on the characters.

In the thesis, the non-diegetic and diegetic music of *Les Choristes* is analysed and the utilisation of various musical elements and their affect on a film audience is discussed. Not only the music, but also the cultural and historical context of *Les Choristes* is investigated in this thesis, as is the way in which this contributes to this film being authentically depicted. The music of *Les Choristes*, often subconsciously, communicates with the audience, enhancing the visual aspects of the film and highlighting the emotions of certain characters. The dynamic and active relationship between the auditory and visual components in the film are considered and how the repetitive melodies throughout *Les Choristes* conjures up feelings of nostalgia for the audience, is discussed in detail.

Zusammenfassung

In dieser Masterarbeit geht es um den im Jahre 2004 produzierten französischen Film *Les Choristes* (*Die Kinder des Monsieur Matthieu*) von Christophe Barratier, welcher auf dem Film von 1945 *La Cage aux Rossignols* (*Der Nachtigallenkäfig*) von Jean Dréville basiert. Das Ker Goat Bildungszentrum, eine Justizvollzugsanstalt für Minderjährige, wurde während des Zweiten Weltkriegs in Dinan, Bretagne, errichtet. Chorgesang wurde zur Kernaktivität der Anstalt. Beide Filme sind davon inspiriert. Die positive Wirkung von Singen auf die Charaktere wird in *Les Choristes* dargestellt.

In der Arbeit wird die diegetische und nichtdiegetische Musik in *Les Choristes* analysiert und die Nutzung verschiedener musikalischer Elemente und deren Einfluss auf das Filmpublikum diskutiert. Nicht nur die Musik, sondern auch die kulturellen und historischen Elemente, die Wirkung und die authentische Darstellung werden ebenfalls in der Arbeit untersucht. Die Filmmusik kommuniziert, oft unbewusst, mit den Zuschauern und die visuellen Aspekte des

Films sowie die Emotionen von besonderen Charakteren werden hervorgehoben. Das dynamische und aktive Verhältnis zwischen der auditiven und visuellen Komponente des Films werden analysiert und der wiederholte Einsatz der Musik im Film, sowie die dabei entstehenden Gefühle von Nostalgie beim Publikum werden im Detail diskutiert.