Name of Applicant: Leonard R. Koos

Department: Modern Languages and Literatures

Project Title: Popular Music in the Early Films of the French New Wave

Requested Funding Period (Month/Year-Month/Year): 7/2014-5/2015

**Funding For:** X Summer Stipend   Project Expenses $   (See note below concerning amounts)

Course Release:   Fall 2014   Spring 2015

Required UMW Institutional Review Board Information:
   Date Review was submitted N/A
   Check here if IRB is not required for this project N/A

Project Summary (50-75 words):
This research project will systematically and comprehensively analyze the use of popular French music in eight films of the early French New Wave made between 1959 and 1964. It will identify and classify the songs and singers in question, analyze the lyrics of the songs used, determine how the use of these songs relates to other formal systems functioning in the scenes, and will relate these details to the overall sound codes in the selected films. The research from this project will lead to an updating of my FSEM on the French New Wave and will be the basis of a conference paper and a peer-reviewed article.

Budget Summary:

Itemize and justify the project expenses. If you are requesting a stipend or a course release, you may request a maximum of $500 in expenses. If your grant request is for expenses only, the maximum is $3,500.

Applicant Signature: [Signature]   Date: 11/4/13

Chair Signature: [Signature]   Date: 11/4/13
Faculty Research Grant Proposal

Popular Music in the Early Films of the French New Wave

Leonard R. Koos, Modern Languages and Literatures

1. Project Description

In a famous comment made by François Truffaut in a 1960 interview, the French New Wave director contended that music in conventional filmmaking had become so secondary to other formal values that its use in most contemporary films was a mere afterthought. Truffaut also implied in this interview that the directors of the emergent French New Wave movement were seeking to revalorize its use in their own films. While many critics and scholars have examined the use of non-diegetic musical scores (that is, music on the “narrative” level of the soundtrack, audible to the viewer but not the character) in New Wave filmmaking as it relates to their larger experiments with sound codes in these films, little critical attention has been devoted to the use of French popular music in the diegetic context (that is, the realm of the story and audible to the characters). Beyond the general observation that these directors used actual songs popular in France during this period as a way to enhance the authenticity and realism of their stories set in the present, no one has investigated whether the use of this diegetic music had a more motivated and dynamic function in the mises-en-scène of these otherwise experimental and groundbreaking films.

When one watches the films of the first phase of the French New Wave (1959-1964), one cannot help but be struck by the profusion of contemporary popular music heard in them. On the one hand, radios, record players, and juke boxes playing current songs are frequent props in these films and their music provides an acoustic backdrop to action and dialogue. On the other hand, the popular music scene is also often featured in the plots of these films. For example, the protagonist Nana of Jean-Luc Godard’s Vivre sa vie (My Life to Live; 1962) spends her days listening to popular music while working in a record shop. Films like Jacques Rozier’s Adieu Philippine (Farewell Philippine; 1962) and Jean-Luc Godard’s Bande à part (Band of Outsiders; 1964) actually include live musical numbers. As well, François Truffaut’s Tirez sur le pianiste (Shoot the Piano Player; 1960) is notable for its casting of popular French singer Charles Aznavour in the title role and also includes a live musical performance by another French singer, Boby Lapointe. Finally, Agnès Varda’s Cléo de 5 à 7 (Cleo from 5 to 7; 1961) not only includes several musical numbers, but its main character is even a pop singer. All of these details suggest an ongoing and significant (sometimes covert and other times explicit) relationship between popular music and the fictional universes and formal systems created by these films.

I propose to examine the use of popular French music in eight films by representative directors of the early French New Wave (Adieu Philippine by Jacques Rozier, Bande à part by Jean-Luc Godard, Cléo de 5 à 7 by Agnès Varda, Les Cousins by Claude Chabrol, Lola by Jacques Demy, Paris nous appartient by Jacques Rivette, Tirez sur le pianiste by François Truffaut, and Vivre sa vie by Jean-Luc Godard). It is the intent of this research project to uncover and clarify the specific relationship between the
choices of music made by New Wave directors in their films and other salient aspects of this type of filmmaking. The French New Wave is famous in the history of world cinema for its groundbreaking experiments with genre, narrative structure, and formal systems (particularly editing and sound) and it will be necessary to determine how the use popular music in these films semiotically functions in relation to other formal systems of signification. In addition, critics and historians often see in the plots and characters of the films of the French New Wave the emergence of a new, transitional perspective that ultimately constitutes a generational revolt of young people against prevailing social and political conventions in terms of individual behavior, class, gender, and identity. In this respect, it will be important see if and how this system of values compares the content of the popular music that acoustically punctuates the films of the French New Wave. Not only will this research provide new insights on the films of a seminal cinematic movement, it will also ultimately comment on the interrelationships of different types of French popular culture during the late 1950s and early 1960s.

2. Goals, Specific Objectives, and Project Significance

The analytical goal of this project is to obtain a systematic and comprehensive understanding of the functioning of French popular music in representative films of the early French New Wave. The professional goal of this project is to deliver a conference paper based on this research and to write an article to be published in a peer-reviewed journal. The timeline for fulfilling the specific objectives intended to achieve these goals during the grant period is the following:

1. July, 2014: screen/rescreen the selected films, identify all relevant scenes, identify songs and singers therein, analyze song lyrics of identified songs, review secondary print sources;
2. August-September, 2014: perform shot-by-shot close readings of identified scenes, relating musical content to other cinematic formal systems in these scenes, review secondary print sources;
3. October, 2014: relate preliminary findings on the use of popular music in specific scenes to sound codes in the entire films;
4. November-December, 2014: place conference paper for spring, 2015 and begin to write it;
5. January-May, 2015: deliver conference paper, compose article-length study based on this research, send completed article to peer-reviewed journal for consideration.

This research project is significant in several respects. First, it will provide new insight on a group of films and directors universally recognized to be groundbreaking and influential in the history of world cinema. In the extensive body of critical commentary on the French New Wave, no article or book has attempted a comprehensive consideration of its use of French popular music. Second, this research project will augment and enhance my own understanding of individual directors of this seminal film movement, which will facilitate the updating of my First-Year Seminar on the French New Wave.
3. Procedures and Methods

I will systematically analyze the use of French popular music in eight films from different moments in first five years of the French New Wave movement and from representative major directors (Adieu Philippine by Jacques Rozier, Bande à part by Jean-Luc Godard, Cléo de 5 à 7 by Agnès Varda, Les Cousins by Claude Chabrol, Lola by Jacques Demy, Paris nous appartient by Jacques Rivette, Tirez sur le pianiste by François Truffaut, and Vivre sa vie by Jean-Luc Godard). First, I will identify the songs and artists in question and determine their musical genre in the context of French popular music (traditional, rock, pop, jazz, yé-yé [a pre-countercultural type of French rock in the early 1960s]). Second, I will analyze the lyrics in these songs with particular emphasis on specific themes that characterize French New Wave filmmaking (for example, youthful revolt, existential angst, the changing role of women in society, sexual freedom, etc.). Third, I will perform a shot-by-shot close reading of the scenes in which these songs appear, identifying how the use of these songs contributes to the meaning created by other thematic and formal elements in the scenes (plot, characterization, shot selection, editing, other mise-en-scène elements like lighting, set design etc.). Finally, I will relate these formal elements to a wider analysis of the sound codes (both diegetic and non-diegetic) that characterize these films. The information gathered from these analytical and interpretive steps will allow me to make more authoritative historical and theoretical assertions regarding the function and evolution of the use of popular music by these directors during the first phase of the French New Wave.

4. Results

First, I first plan to disseminate the results of this research project in my First-Year Seminar (FSEM 100F) on the French New Wave. In that seminar, I currently do not include any of the films I propose to examine and this research project will allow me to update in a meaningful way the program for that course. Secondly, I will derive at least one conference paper from this research. This paper will include a close reading from one of the films I analyze that best illustrates the general patterns that have been revealed. Conferences like the annual convention of the Popular Culture Association or the 20th and 21st Century French and Francophone Studies International Colloquium would be appropriate venues to deliver such a paper. Finally, I will write an article based on this research which will be a more expansive and synthesized discussion of the group of films I have analyzed and the tendencies I have identified in them. By the end of the grant period, I will submit this article for publication in a peer-reviewed journal like Wide Angle, Quarterly Review of Film and Video, or The French Review.

Documentation

Filmography:

Bande à part [Band of Outsiders] (d. Jean-Luc Godard, 1964)
Cléo de 5 à 7 [Cleo from 5 to 7] (d. Agnès Varda, 1961)

Les Cousins [The Cousins] (d. Claude Chabrol, 1959)

Lola (d. Jacques Demy, 1962)


Tirez sur le pianiste [Shoot the Piano Player] (d. François Truffaut, 1960)

Vivre sa vie [My Life to Live] (d. Jean-Luc Godard, 1962)

Selected bibliography:


**Budget**

I am requesting a summer stipend in the amount of $3500. I own dvd copies of the films I plan to study and secondary print sources can be obtained through inter-library loan. In addition, I will be able to consult the online databases of the music and multimedia departments of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (www.bnf.fr).

**Simultaneous Applications**

At the present time, there are no simultaneous applications for this research project.

**Previous Awards**


**Report**

I will submit a report before the specified deadline of May 15, 2015.