

## Neil Lerner

### “Look at that big hand move along”: Clocks, Containment, and Music in *High Noon*

There was something timely—and timeless—about [*High Noon*], something that had a direct bearing on life today.

—Fred Zinnemann, *A Life in the Movies*

**F**ocusing on boundaries—particularly the permeable symbolic membranes that bind political, economic, and narrative categories—provides new ways to approach the Cold War Western film *High Noon*. After the end of World War II, U.S. domestic and foreign policies and politics rapidly began to reflect a rhetoric of containment. Historians often point to George Kennan’s famous “long telegram” of February 22, 1946, sent from Moscow to Washington, as the beginning of a (fifty-seven-year-long) U.S. policy of containment. (See table 1 for a timeline of relevant events.) Communism, both foreign and domestic, was something to be contained, and many in the United States feared external attack and internal subversion from the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup> To contain something, though, one must have boundaries, and the sudden appearance of several government intelligence agencies (like the Central Intelligence Agency) and congressional committees (like the

Table 1. A list of dates relevant to *High Noon*


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<b>1946</b>	February: George Kennan's "Long Telegram" recommends policy of containment.
<b>1947</b>	July: Doomsday Clock of the <i>Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists</i> is set at 11:53 (seven minutes from Doomsday). October: "Hollywood Ten" appear before the House Un-American Affairs Committee (HUAC).
<b>1950</b>	April: United States commits, with NSC-68, to assist allied nations anywhere threatened by Soviet aggression. June: North Korean troops crossed 38th parallel; United Nations Security Council adopts a resolution calling for withdrawal of North Korean troops.
<b>1951</b>	January 12: President Truman establishes Federal Civil Defense Administration. Federal Civil Defense Administration releases film, <i>Survival Under Atomic Attack</i> . September 5–October 14: <i>High Noon</i> is being filmed. September: The HUAC hearings are taking place in Los Angeles. September: Carl Foreman testifies before HUAC.
<b>1952</b>	end of April: <i>High Noon</i> is previewed. June 21: Capitol Records releases "Do Not Forsake Me," sung by Tex Ritter. July 30: <i>High Noon</i> is released in the United States. November 1: United States tests first hydrogen bomb (Enewetak atoll).
<b>1953</b>	March 19: Twenty-fifth Academy Awards (first live telecast); <i>High Noon</i> wins four Oscars. July 27: An armistice brings Korean War to an uneasy conclusion. August: The Soviets test a hydrogen bomb. September: Doomsday Clock of the <i>Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists</i> is set at 11:58 (two minutes from Doomsday).

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House Un-American Affairs Committee) right after World War II set some of those boundaries rather clearly. Presidents from Truman to Clinton relied on containment as the basis for foreign policy, although with the U.S. invasion of Iraq on March 20, 2003, it appears preemption has replaced containment as the cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy.<sup>2</sup> Notably, the countdown to the U.S. attack was signaled with a small clock graphic that appeared in the corner of some cable news network broadcasts (such as MSNBC) on March 18 and 19, building tension as the world waited to see if Saddam Hussein would respond to George W. Bush's March 17 ultimatum that Hussein had to leave Iraq within forty-eight hours. That ominous ticking down

to a dreaded apocalyptic moment—the moment of the end of containment and the resulting consequences—brings us back to *High Noon*, a film whose rhetoric and iconography present various ruptures between the real and the fictional and whose musical score operates at the edge of those boundaries.<sup>3</sup>

In the history of Hollywood film music, the famous title ballad from *High Noon* has been hailed for being the first theme song from a film released before the film itself.<sup>4</sup> The timing was important. Hollywood had produced several other popular and marketable songs before “Do Not Forsake Me, Oh My Darlin’,” the ballad made famous by Tex Ritter on the film soundtrack and that was released as a single, by six different singers, in advance of the film.<sup>5</sup> David Raksin’s central melody for *Laura* (1944) provides one important precursor to “Do Not Forsake Me,” although in the case of *Laura* the lyrics were added after the film’s release, when the studio, surprised to receive fan letters asking about the music, had Johnny Mercer add lyrics, allowing for sheet music and record sales.<sup>6</sup> Dimitri Tiomkin claims to have revised his song after his wife urged him against his first draft, and he relayed lyricist Ned Washington’s skepticism upon first hearing Tiomkin plunk through the melody and chords at a piano; Washington said it sounded like Tin Pan Alley variations, and Tiomkin responded, “Is melody, Ned. Is melody for you writing words. Please don’t hate me.”<sup>7</sup> The resulting song earned an Oscar for Best Song to go along with the other three *High Noon* Oscars (Best Score, Best Actor, Best Editing), and after reading that President Eisenhower liked the song, Tiomkin “sent him a stack of records in German, Japanese, Hebrew, every important language except Russian.”<sup>8</sup> “Do Not Forsake Me” played no small role in transforming how the industry planned, produced, and marketed their soundtracks.<sup>9</sup>

Yet much remains to be said about the music for *High Noon* apart from how it transformed Hollywood’s marketing practices. This film score meaningfully subverts a number of the established Hollywood conventions for musical accompaniment. As an independent production, *High Noon* had more allowances for deviation from industry norms. In particular, Tiomkin’s score opens the picture softly, without the bombastic, epic-sounding symphonic overture typical of many Hollywood scores provided by composers like Max Steiner, Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Alfred Newman, and Franz Waxman, some of the first generation of Hollywood sound composers who helped to establish the sound of the synchronized Hollywood score. The *High Noon* score also complicates, or at least calls into question, the Hollywood convention identified as “inaudibility” by Claudia Gorbman

# HIGH NOON

(DO NOT FORSAKE ME)

Lyric by NED WASHINGTON

Music by DIMITRI TIOMKIN



**GARY COOPER**  
in  
**'HIGH NOON'**

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Figure 1. Sheet music for the title song from *High Noon*.

as the song and score frequently compete with the images for the spectator's attention, sometimes bubbling forth in a melodramatic fashion in ways that simply do not permit us to ignore them.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, this score resisted the violin-dominated orchestration so common in the typical Hollywood score of the preceding decades, where the throbbing violins often suggested the expressivity of the human voice. Jeff Smith reports a press release from Stanley Kramer's production company that called the score "one of the most unusual musical scores ever composed" and that "relayed Tiomkin's own belief that his was the first score ever recorded without the use of a single violin."<sup>11</sup> Instead, the orchestration highlights winds, brass, percussion, and lower strings (at times the violas are required to play above their normal range). Tiomkin did not write for violins in this score, in an effort to create a musical accompaniment that would not romanticize the nineteenth-century American West and avoid the glossy artifice of Hollywood, just as the director, Fred Zinnemann, and the photographer, Floyd Crosby, studied the Civil War still photography of Matthew Brady in order to impart a grittier, more realistic flavor to the film, to make it appear as though it were a newsreel from 1870, had newsreels existed then.

That Zinnemann and Crosby should exhibit a realist impulse toward a documentary style of filmmaking makes particular sense when recalling that both of them spent important apprenticeship periods under Robert Flaherty. Crosby won an Oscar for Best Cinematography for his camerawork with Flaherty in *Tabu* (1931), and it was shortly after working on *Tabu* that Flaherty met young Zinnemann, while Zinnemann was working in southern California with the Austrian émigré Berthold Viertel, and made him an assistant for a documentary in Russia that was never filmed. Zinnemann called Flaherty "the greatest influence on my style" and was most impressed with Flaherty's approach to time and place: "He lived in the place and not only got to know the people but he got to know the rhythm of the life they led which is even more important. The kind of rhythm that their life was conditioned by. And once he had captured that, he then made the film."<sup>12</sup> Zinnemann's first feature film was a documentary (*Redes*, 1936), and he spent time with his subjects, in the manner modeled to him by Flaherty, in several later fictional projects including *The Search* (1948), *The Men* (1950), *A Hatful of Rain* (1957), and *The Nun's Story* (1959). Shortly after World War II, documentary and fictional filmmaking styles began to blend (as in the neo-realism of Roberto Rossellini and Vittorio De Sica), and Zinnemann's work from the late 1940s and early 1950s, while still connected to Hollywood

commercialism, possesses a social realism in which Stephen Prince sees “both an ethic and aesthetic.”<sup>13</sup> Others involved with *High Noon* carried documentary pedigrees. Both screenwriter Carl Foreman and Tiomkin had worked with Frank Capra on his War Department–sponsored films of persuasion, Foreman on *Know Your Enemy: Japan* (1945) and Tiomkin on that and several of the *Why We Fight* films made between 1943 and 1945.

Documentary theorists such as Bill Nichols, Michael Renov, and Brian Winston have been observing the similarities and often misleading boundaries between fictional and documentary filmmaking. While *High Noon* in no way claims documentary status, it is nonetheless a fictional narrative that wears its fictitiousness uncomfortably. At first glance, there is little to lead us to categorize the film as a documentary: besides being produced within and for the commercial motion picture industry, it tells a story about fictional characters, portrayed by actors who are at one point obviously on a film set, and it eschews the patriarchal voiceover narration typical of documentary conventions from the 1930s and 1940s. Yet there are less imaginary elements bleeding into *High Noon*, and Tex Ritter’s recurring singing voice assumes the role of the documentary’s voice of God narrator. This film insists that it be read at multiple levels; the insistence comes, in part, from the music, which offers numerous clues that this film is more than just an escapist story and may be interpreted as such. At several points Tiomkin’s score for this film shifts between the nondiegetic—the music supposedly heard only by the audience—and the diegetic: the music that appears to emanate from the story world, the music of which the characters in the story, along with the audience, are themselves aware.<sup>14</sup> In *High Noon*, the boundaries between the diegetic and nondiegetic are continually collapsing. Such a narrative strategy is fitting for a film that was calculatedly constructed, at least by Carl Foreman, as a political allegory depicting the roles of individual and collective in the era of Senator Joseph McCarthy.

Critics and scholars in the 1950s were quick to supply this cinematic text with a variety of readings. Within three years of its initial release, three distinct subtexts emerged. Virtually all interpreters noted the conflicted relationship between the individual and a larger community—the Western as a genre is intimately tied up with these issues—but otherwise the readings differed. The first, and least compelling, reading—Howard Burton’s “*High Noon*”—sought to compare *High Noon* with the fifteenth-century morality play *Everyman*, but suffers from attempting too literal a connection between

the literary work and the film.<sup>15</sup> Harry Schein's interpretation of the film likened Kane's lonely role in Hadleyville to the United States' position in the Korean War, calling *High Noon* an "honest explanation of American foreign policy."<sup>16</sup> Schein was Swedish and his reading seems particularly plausible for an international observer less familiar with U.S. internal affairs.

A third reading, however, linked the story of Kane and Hadleyville to McCarthyism and the politics of anticommunism. Interviews with the filmmakers provide evidence that this third reading of the film was closest to how screenwriter Carl Foreman conceived of their text. Zinnemann explained that

the story seems to mean different things to different people. (Some speculate that it is an allegory on the Korean War!) Kramer, who had worked closely with Foreman on the script, said it was about "a town that died because no one there had the guts to defend it." Somehow this seemed to be an incomplete explanation. Foreman saw it as an allegory on his own experience of political persecution in the McCarthy era. With due respect I felt this to be a narrow point of view. First of all I saw it simply as a great movie yarn, full of enormously interesting people. I vaguely sensed deeper meanings in it; but only later did it dawn on me that this was *not* a regular Western myth. There was something timely—and timeless—about it, something that had a direct bearing on life today.<sup>17</sup>

Foreman had been a member of the Communist Party (1938–42) and was in fact subpoenaed by the House Un-American Activities Committee in April 1951, while involved in the planning of *High Noon*. No doubt Foreman could hear the clock ticking quite loudly for his own date with a Frank Miller. Martin Berkeley named Foreman as a communist before his hearing on September 24, where he was an unfriendly witness and pled a variation of the Fifth Amendment known as the "diminished" Fifth.<sup>18</sup> Forced to relinquish his Associate Producer credit, he found himself blacklisted in Hollywood, serving a sort of exile in England and working in the shadows of Hollywood, under pseudonyms or without credit at all. Stephen Whitfield has written that Foreman "insisted that *High Noon*, though set in a frontier hamlet called Hadleyville, is really about a town farther west called Hollywood."<sup>19</sup> And Foreman himself admitted that the film was about "Hollywood and no other place but Hollywood."<sup>20</sup> In this interpretation,

with Hadleyville symbolizing Hollywood, individuals such as Will Kane and Carl Foreman both find themselves betrayed by the larger communities to which they belonged, places where conformity, cowardice, and complacency have allowed bullies and outlaws to push around the few individuals who will still stand up and speak against injustice.<sup>21</sup>

Yet another reading of the film could center on the ways that elements of its visual and musical style suggest the multiple anxieties of the early 1950s, particularly the pervasive fear of atomic attack.<sup>22</sup> The clock becomes a symbol of fear and dread.<sup>23</sup> The film *High Noon* is prized for its sensitivity to time and icons of timekeeping, revealed through its mise-en-scène, which features many clocks, and its famous attempt to blend diegetic and non-diegetic time. Foreman's original script contained the concept of preserving the unity of time; Kramer gives credit for the idea of cutting to clocks to editor Elmo Williams, but Zinnemann has claimed that the clocks were part of his original concept before Williams was involved.<sup>24</sup> Of the three visual elements woven together by Zinnemann—the static threat of the railroad tracks, the constantly moving victim, and the urgency of the clocks—the last one may have carried the most potency as an anxiety-provoking symbol.<sup>25</sup> The action begins around 10:35 on a Sunday morning, and the film's running time of approximately eighty-five minutes lasts roughly as long as it takes for the noon train to arrive and the conflict to be resolved, although there are points when real time and narrative (or diegetic) time diverge.<sup>26</sup> Many interior scenes show clocks ticking in the background; several times the camera focuses on a character's face gazing off-screen, the subsequent eyeline match then revealing a clock. Sometimes we can already suspect that they are looking at a clock because of clues given by the music: seven times (at approximately 9:26, 22:10, 24:47, 26:53, 35:22, 54:30, and 68:14), Tiomkin responds to the visual gesture of the clocks by composing a quarter note ostinato on B-flat that chimes in time with the swinging pendulums.

This clock motif serves at least three important functions. First, the appearance of the clocks on-screen, together with the frequent dialogue and sung reminders of "high noon," heightens the dramatic tension, building suspense for the violent showdown everyone dreads yet cannot escape. Second, Thomas Doherty has suggested that the emphasis on time and timekeeping in *High Noon* may be related to the novel pacing and tension of live-action television drama, of anthology series like *Philco Television Playhouse*, *Goodyear Television Playhouse*, *Studio One*, and *Playhouse 90*, which



Figure 2. The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists's Bulletin Clock, set here at three minutes before doomsday (1984).

were building in popularity in 1952 but which would really start to dominate programming in 1953.<sup>27</sup> Third, shortly after World War II the icon of the clock becomes a symbol of terrifying Cold War tensions surrounding nuclear war, as revealed by the Bulletin Clock or Doomsday Clock established and overseen by the board of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. The Doomsday Clock first appeared on the cover of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* in 1947, which showed the upper-left quadrant of a clock face with the minute hand approaching midnight.<sup>28</sup> Designed by Martyl Langsdorf (and provocatively part of the lore behind its creation stresses that she first sketched the clock on the back of a bound volume of Beethoven sonatas), it was not until 1949 that the board had the idea of moving the hand further or closer to midnight as a gauge of the perceived threat of atomic warfare.<sup>29</sup> As the Bulletin rather casually indicates, the clock is “the symbol of the threat of doomsday hovering over humanity,” indicating figuratively how many minutes humanity had until nuclear annihilation. The Doomsday Clock was set at its closest setting in 1953 (a setting it nearly reached again in 1984), after the United States and then the U.S.S.R. successfully tested hydrogen bombs, and it has been set as far away as seventeen minutes (1991); it moved for the first time in four years in February 2002, in response to the attacks of September 11, 2001, to a setting of seven minutes before doomsday (its original setting in 1947).

It seems an improbable coincidence that the appearance of imagery of clocks nearing midnight during a key moment in the civil defense film *Survival under Atomic Attack* (1951) was uninformed by the Doomsday Clock.<sup>30</sup> Narrated by Edward R. Murrow and reportedly circulated with success, *Survival under Atomic Attack* instructs U.S. citizens how to prepare for the Soviet Union's nuclear onslaught.<sup>31</sup> The central sequence explains what to do in the event of an atomic bomb exploding in your neighborhood:

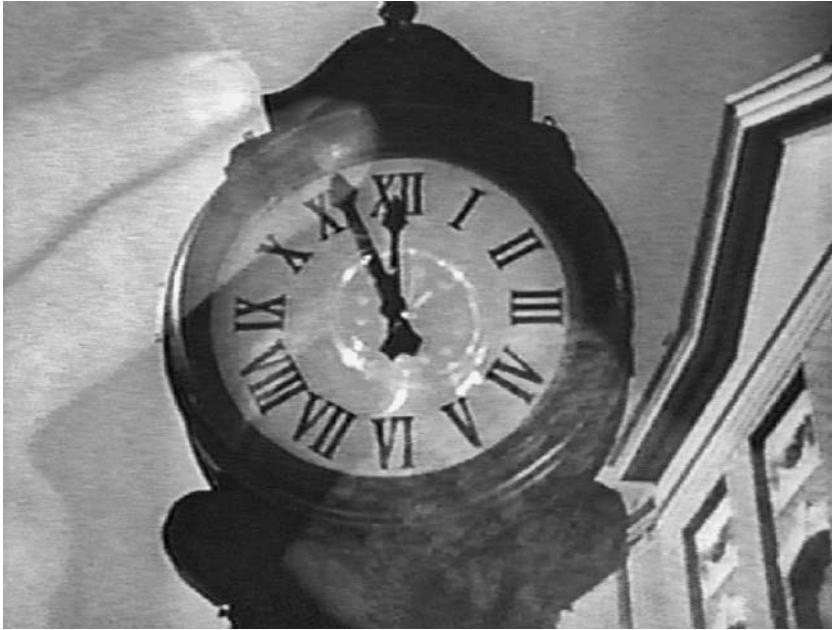


Figure 3. Dissolve from wristwatch to exterior clock with both timepieces showing hands approaching noon (11:56); from *Survival under Atomic Attack*, 1951.

Taking shelter may be a race against time, [family runs to basement and hides under workbench; close-up shot of father's wristwatch, time nearing twelve o'clock] even when you have some advance warning. But possibly there may be no time. An attack could come without warning. The sky would suddenly light up. [shot of man in street, blast of light, and man seeking cover] If a doorway is right at hand, use it. If the nearest shelter is more than a couple of steps away, fall to the ground immediately. Flying glass and debris are immediate dangers, so stay where you are until you're sure it's safe to move.

As with the Doomsday Clock, the clocks here direct us to a seemingly unavoidable moment of violence; it is not a matter of if, but when the hands will strike midnight or high noon. Given these fairly sinister associations with the icon of the clock in 1952, the time/clock motif in *High Noon* takes on an additional meaning.

Musical effects simulating clocks ticking and their links to the Bulletin



Figure 4. Kane looks at the clock approaching high noon (11:56) in *High Noon* (1952).

Clock are only one point at which the film loses its sense of containment. The title song also works to blur the boundaries between the diegetic and the nondiegetic, creating a musical anchor in the real world as the audience watches the film. In a famous anecdote, producer Stanley Kramer expressed an intense dislike for the first version of the film, complaining that it was just Gary Cooper walking up and down a street; he was said to have called it “a real stinkeroo.”<sup>32</sup> While there are conflicting reports of which individual made what contributions to the finished product, there is agreement that at this point, after a poor sneak preview, Tiomkin was asked to compose the title song. Lewis Milestone has taken credit for first having the idea of accompanying a film with a sung ballad whose words articulate important parts of the narrative; he reminisces that his use of a ballad in *A Walk in the Sun* (1945) led Carl Foreman to apologize for stealing Milestone’s idea and reusing it in *High Noon*.<sup>33</sup> Tiomkin, in his autobiography, suggests that it was he who had the idea to add a theme song and he also says he convinced Kramer “that it might be a good idea to have the song sung, whistled, and played by the orchestra all the way through.” In contrast to Tiomkin’s

claim, Drummond writes that Elmo Williams showed Kramer a rough-cut version with a Burl Ives recording over the silent prologue, giving Kramer ideas about the music and leading Kramer to commission Tiomkin to provide a song-based score. Zinnemann says that “Kramer had brilliant, original ideas about the musical style of the movie, especially the use of a theme song” and that “he kept asking the composer . . . to try and try again, until he had come up with the tune to Ned Washington’s lyrics,” although Tiomkin’s account claims he had Washington write lyrics after first writing the melody.<sup>34</sup> Giannetti notes how the cinematography, editing, and *mise-en-scène* work to trap Kane within Hadleyville; he suggests further that the obsessive repetition of the title song throughout the entire film heightens this sense of claustrophobia.<sup>35</sup> The title song recurs throughout the film, both in its original sung version, as nondiegetic music heard only by the audience and not the characters, but also, as the film progresses, woven into the diegetic source music, as we see characters in the film performing parts of “Do Not Forsake Me” on harmonica and piano.

The song first occurs during the film’s opening shots as we see Frank Miller’s henchmen assembling to wait for his train. Even though we see villains, we hear Kane. The lyrics establish Kane’s subjectivity—and the film’s sympathy with him as its protagonist—as they speak in first person to Amy (for instance, “on this *our* wedding day”), but they also set up the importance of the passage of time, explaining that the clock is “nearn’ high noon.” Fortifying the claims toward the score’s subjectivity, Drummond praises the music for its ability to convey Will Kane’s inner emotions. The sparse instrumentation of guitar, accordion, percussion, and singer stands in stark contrast to the sumptuous postromantic overtures of Korngold and Steiner, and Zinnemann said that the preview audience reacted nervously and laughed at the singing voice.<sup>36</sup> The song follows a modified AABA form, the rising and falling melodic contours of the A section (see example 1) contrasted against the repeated pitches of the B section (see example 2).<sup>37</sup> That both the A and B motives recur throughout the film is only one reason to reconsider the score’s designation as monothematic. Christopher Palmer, author of a biography on Tiomkin, writes that the *High Noon* score “is virtually monothematic; the tune is the source of practically every bar of the orchestral incidental music, thus ensuring a unique musico-dramatic unity.”<sup>38</sup> Even David Raksin’s score for *Laura* (1944), repeatedly cited by film music scholars as a “classic expression” of monothematicism, has more than one theme.<sup>39</sup> While the main “Laura” melody occurs multiple times, in various



Example 1. The “A” section of Tiomkin’s title melody (transcribed by author).



Example 2. The “B” section of Tiomkin’s title melody (transcribed by author).

styles and from several on- and off-screen sources, there is another melody that Kalinak rightly connects with the character of Waldo, a melody whose craggy chromaticism and unusual orchestration (solo piccolo) give the perceptive listener important clues about that character. Besides the problem of dual melodies within its vaunted monothematicism, the *High Noon* score contains other melodies, complicating Palmer’s claim that the ballad serves as the source for the rest of the score.

William Hamilton’s early analysis of *High Noon* makes the perceptive observation that “the ballad functions as a theme, unifying the score.”<sup>40</sup> Since the title song suggests Kane’s point of view, and since the film revolves mostly around Kane, it comes as no surprise to find a score dominated by melodies attached to Kane: monothematic as analogue to mono-protagonistic. While Kane’s character unquestionably received the most screen time and development, other important characters, namely Helen Ramirez and Frank Miller, actually receive their own melodic motives that are independent from “Do Not Forsake Me” (see example 3, Helen Ramirez’s motive, and example 4, Frank Miller’s motive).<sup>41</sup> The visual narrative, and the music that synchronously tells the same story, begins with Kane but gradually introduces other characters; musically, the score opens with Kane’s ballad but soon adds other character motives, alternating with Kane’s music as the film progresses; only at the end of the film does Kane’s title ballad reassert itself as the dominant and unchallenged center of the narrative. The melodies for Helen and Frank, just like the characters, remain for the most part confined to the periphery. Jeff Smith offers the option of considering *High Noon* either a monothematic or a theme score.<sup>42</sup> Theme seems preferable here since the *mono-* prefix has the possibility of



Example 3. Helen Ramirez's melody (transcribed by author).



Example 4. Frank Miller's melody (transcribed by author).

obscuring marginalized characters and their melodies. At the same time, the film does have a pervasive masculinist orientation. Even while offering stronger female characters than were typical in the Western at that time—and Gwendolyn Foster argues that Amy and Helen make possible the rare dual positional narrative, offering a female as well as male perspective—both women make greater sacrifices than Kane, Helen leaving her home and business, Amy renouncing her pacifist stance.<sup>43</sup>

While sound originally positioned as nondiegetic seeps into the story world, sounds from the story world are sometimes woven into the orchestral accompaniment. Tiomkin accompanied so-called silent film on piano as a young man in St. Petersburg and so was presumably familiar with the traditions of musical underscoring, musical practices that were based in part on stage melodrama. In the scene where Judge Mettrick tries to talk Kane out of staying and facing Frank Miller (17:59), Tiomkin responds to the rhythm of Mettrick's spoken dialogue and sets the musical accompaniment accordingly, coordinating the orchestra against spoken word in a manner not unlike an accompanied recitative in an opera. Prendergast, when discussing Copland's score for *The Heiress*, writes that "recitative like treatment of dialogue is not uncommon in films," and Robynn J. Stilwell has revealed Michael Kamen's recitative-like scoring of Hans Gruber in *Die Hard*.<sup>44</sup> Hamilton wrote of this specific scene in 1952, commenting that "the sensitiveness and precision with which both speech and movement are accompanied recall the best in operatic practice . . . [Mettrick's] words become a text set to the great, towering strokes of the orchestra." Example 5 has a transcription of the rhythm in the dialogue, along with a partial transcription of Tiomkin's orchestral accompaniment. The moment in the film that follows the transcribed section shows Miller's henchmen waiting at the tracks and Amy buying her ticket out of town. An accordion plays the B sec-

Metrick

Slightly slower

Don't you re-mem-ber when he sat in that chair and said

"You'll ne-ver hang me I'll come back.

I'll kill you Will

Kane, I swear it, I'll kill you!"

[medium shot of Will Kane]

[tracking shot towards chair]

[cut to close-up of bottle breaking on train tracks]

Example 5. Judge Metrick's recitative (transcribed by author).

[descending tetrachord]  
 4.70-74  
 violas  
 cellos  
 basses  
 + French horn  
 accordion  
 Do not for - sake me...  
 [descending tetrachord]  
 V \_\_\_\_\_ (i) \_\_\_\_\_ V \_\_\_\_\_ I \_\_\_\_\_  
 [medium tracking shot of Kane's legs & shadows as he walks] [medium tracking shot of Kane walking]  
 [cut to children playing "bang bang bang...you're dead Kane!"] [close-up of Kane's face looking up at Kane with a pained expression]

Example 6. Kane's walking lament (transcribed by author).

tion of the ballad (recalling the words “oh to be torn ‘twixt love and duty,” an appropriate lyric given Amy’s paradox) and flutes sound as Amy is buying her ticket (in Hollywood’s timbral codes, flutes are frequently linked with representations of the feminine).

The song soon begins to find its way into the diegetic world, seemingly coming out of a harmonica played by one of Miller’s gang waiting at the train tracks. This harmonica player is shown twice later in the film (33:17, 45:37, and 50:55) and each time he is accompanied by a larger number of instruments from the orchestra, as the boundary between fictional world and real world collapses. The second time we see the harmonica player—now blowing out the B section of the ballad after playing the end of the A motive in his first appearance—occurs after one of the several shots of the train tracks stretching on endlessly and ominously toward the horizon. The third time the harmonica player plays one of the other henchmen snaps, “Why don’t you put that thing away?”—reinforced by a stinger from the orchestra (a stinger is a sharply accented note or chord that normally corresponds with a sudden revelation or reversal). Immediately after that exchange, the film shifts to Kane, now rejected by everyone in the town, walking down the street in apparent misery. Tiomkin’s masterful cue, transcribed as example 6, amplifies the sadness visually present in the scene (the only scene with greater pathos may be the moment later in the film when Kane, sitting alone at his office desk, puts his head in his arms and appears to sob). As Kane walks down the street, he runs into children playing games where one of them gets symbolically killed because he was acting out the role of the unlucky Kane. The ensuing close-up on Cooper’s face shows a pained, saddened expression, part of the powerful performance that earned him his second Best Actor Oscar (although Cooper was reported to have been suffering from a painful bleeding ulcer during the filming of *High Noon*). As significant as the actor’s real-life gastrointestinal discomfort, though, the music in this section creates and reinforces the character of a lament through its use of the ancient trope of the descending tetrachord, a musical convention attached with laments since at least the seventeenth century.<sup>45</sup>

Gary Cooper’s ulcer provides yet another example of the leakage between the real and fictional world. As the film progresses, the diegetic/nondiegetic ruptures with the title ballad become more frequent. In addition to the opening and closing moments of the film, Ritter’s singing of “Do Not Forsake Me” occurs seven times (16:04, 38:41, 43:08, 51:36, 57:31, 1:03:14,

and 1:04:38), appearing more often in the final ten-minute span building up to the arrival of Frank Miller's train.<sup>46</sup> The first time (16:04), following Amy's sudden departure from Kane's office, Ritter's voice joins the melody, midphrase, that had been begun by the accordion alone. The next six occurrences of the singing follow Kane walking up and down the street of Hadleyville (hence a musical solution for Kramer's initial reaction of tedium at watching Cooper's perambulating). The fifth time we hear Ritter singing (57:31), the camera cuts from the street to the saloon; seamlessly, in the middle of a word (*dar-ling*), the piano that ostensibly originates from the saloon replaces Ritter's voice ("dar" is all we hear from Ritter's voice). The title melody is then replaced with the song "Buffalo Gals," reminding us of Harvey Pell's various constructions as an unmanly character. Finally, during *High Noon*'s famous crane shot, that use of a high long shot to highlight Kane's solitude within the physical and sociopolitical sphere of Hadleyville, we are reminded of the words "do not forsake me, oh my darlin'" yet again as we hear the A motive. As the camera rises higher and higher, so too does the viola part (playing harmonics). Tiomkin writes a cue that blurs the sense of meter, tonality, and timbre (he includes vibraphone here, along with piano, brass, strings, and chimes). This shot also contains a visual example of the diegetic/nondiegetic collapse, for the camera rose so high above Hadleyville that it captured twentieth-century utility lines in the upper-left part of the frame and even, faintly, some buildings in Hollywood and Burbank.<sup>47</sup> After the shoot-out and Kane's victory, the orchestra moves to a gentler mood before submitting to the original instrumentation of the guitar, drums, accordion, and Ritter's singing. The final moments of the film, as Kane throws his tin star to the ground and rides out of town, are accompanied by the A section of the song, the last utterance of "do not forsake me" now directed at the townspeople of Hadleyville.

Is *High Noon* a subversive text? The presence of diegetic/nondiegetic ruptures does not in itself distinguish *High Noon* from any of the numerous other films that do contain similar disruptions. Indeed, the genre of the musical plays upon that constant tension between source and nonsource music. When writing the first drafts of this essay in 1999, it was more difficult to understand why filmmakers (particularly Foreman) would cloak the McCarthyism subtext or how the symbol of a clock could generate dread; in the age of the USA Patriot Act and the Homeland Security Advisory System's five-color National Threat Level, it has sadly become less puzzling. One significant difference between 1952 and 2003, however, is the impor-

tance of containment to the earlier era, and it is significant then to find a cinematic text from that time that indulges in so much slippage and rupturing of the boundaries, in so many different ways. Violating containment meant risking communist attack and subversion. Placed within its historical context, *High Noon* is a subversive text in the way it knowingly violated the accepted paradigm of a carefully contained diegetic and nondiegetic sound world.

## Notes

Earlier versions of this essay were presented before the American Musicological Society—Southeast Chapter, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, February 1999; the Society for American Music, Toronto, November 2000; and the Popular Music and American Culture conference, University of Texas at Austin, November 2002. I wish to acknowledge the helpful insights of Mauro Botelho, Jeff Smith, Tim Waples, and especially Robert Williams, who steered me toward the Doomsday clock.

The quotation in the title of this essay is from “Do Not Forsake Me,” the title song of *High Noon*.

- 1 Further information about containment as it applied to domestic issues such as gender roles may be found in Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988). A collection of essays that applies the idea of containment to read a variety of narrative texts is *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age*, ed. Alan Nadel (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).
- 2 The assumptions behind preemptive strategic planning rest on real, rather than perceived, threats, and whether or not the U.S. attack was in fact preemptive has not been supported by the discovery of weapons of mass destruction in postinvasion Iraq.
- 3 A brief plot summary: Will Kane (Gary Cooper), the marshal of Hadleyville, has just gotten married when he receives news that Frank Miller, a criminal Kane helped put behind bars, has been released from prison and will arrive on the noon train. Kane must resist the charms of his unravished wife, Amy (Grace Kelly), and stay in town to face an old nemesis repeatedly characterized as savagely dangerous by the townspeople. Instead of fleeing Hadleyville, Kane chooses to remain. Kane tries to round up a posse to face Miller and his henchmen, but one by one, all of the townspeople turn their backs to him: a judge, a preacher, neighbors, fellow law officers, even old friends refuse to stand with Kane. Amy, a Quaker, is opposed to violence and so she too walks away from Kane. At the last minute she returns and through her help, Kane is able to defeat Miller and his three cronies. Only at this point do the townspeople rally around Kane, and the marshal, disgusted, throws his tin star to the dirt and rides out of town with Amy.
- 4 Among the earlier writers who have drawn attention to *High Noon*'s primacy in the history of the Hollywood theme song are Elmer Bernstein, “Whatever Happened to Great Movie Music?” *High Fidelity* 22.7 (July 1972): 58; Phillip Drummond, *High Noon* (London: British Film Institute, 1997), 40; Mark Evans, *Soundtrack: The Music of the Movies* (New York: Hopkinson and Blake, 1975), 191; Kathryn Kalinak, *Settling the Score: Music*

- and the Classical Hollywood Film (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 185–86; Gary Marmorstein, *Hollywood Rhapsody: Movie Music and Its Makers, 1900 to 1975* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), 300; Christopher Palmer, *The Composer in Hollywood* (London: Marion Boyars, 1990), 142–43; Roy M. Prendergast, *Film Music: A Neglected Art*, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 102–4; Jeff Smith, *The Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular Film Music* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 59–60; and Tony Thomas, *Film Score: The Art and Craft of Movie Music*, (Burbank, CA: Riverwood Press, 1992), 122. According to Ted Wick, the first time part of a film score was released before a film as a means of promoting it was in 1944, when parts of Max Steiner's score for *Since You Went Away* were recorded and released to radio stations a month before the film's premiere. "Creating the Movie-Music Album," *High Fidelity* 26.4 (April 1976): 68–71.
- 5 The six singers were Frankie Laine, Tex Ritter, Billy Keith, Lita Rose, Bill Hayes, and Fred Waring (Smith, *Sounds of Commerce*, 60). Smith notes that the multiple releases increased the chances for radio airplay and record sales.
  - 6 Kalinak, *Settling the Score*, 179–83.
  - 7 Dimitri Tiomkin and Prosper Buranelli, *Please Don't Hate Me* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 230–31. Concerning Tiomkin's broken English—which curiously appears only in his dialogue in *Please Don't Hate Me*, not in his interior recollections—consider David Raksin's appraisal: "[Tiomkin] was considered a buffoon by most of his colleagues, but was actually a shrewd operator; not without talent, he exploited it cleverly. Having observed that his thick accent gave him a kind of cachet among producers and directors, he made no attempt to overcome it. At a party I attended some years later, the comedian George Jessel was called upon to introduce him. 'Now,' he said, 'here is a guy who has been in this country for thirty years—and he sounds like he gets off the boat next Wednesday!'" ("From the President: All Unquiet . . . On the Tiomkin Front," *The Cue Sheet* 10.3–4 (1993–1994): 4.
  - 8 Tiomkin and Buranelli, *Please Don't Hate Me*, 234. Presumably sending a Russian version of "Do Not Forsake Me" to the Cold Warrior Eisenhower would have violated anti-Soviet protocols that were rapidly developing around the presidency, as was demonstrated at Eisenhower's 1953 inauguration. Aaron Copland's *Lincoln Portrait* was hastily removed from the inaugural concert program when a Republican Representative spoke against it on the floor of the House citing Copland's alleged communist connections. Howard Pollack discusses Copland's involvement with the politics of anticommunism, including his eventual hearing before McCarthy, in *Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man* (New York: Henry Holt, 1999), 451–60; an extended study may be found in Jennifer DeLapp, "Copland in the Fifties: Music and Ideology in the McCarthy Era" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1997).
  - 9 Smith, *Sounds of Commerce*, offers a detailed history of Hollywood's musical marketing practices.
  - 10 Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 76–79.
  - 11 Tiomkin and Buranelli, *Please Don't Hate Me*, 60.
  - 12 "A Conflict of Conscience" (an interview with Fred Zinnemann), *Films and Filming* (December 1959): 34.
  - 13 Stephen Prince, "Historical Perspective and the Realist Aesthetic in *High Noon*," *Film*

- Criticism* 18–19 (Spring 1994): 61. Brian Winston discusses the shifts in post–World War II documentary filmmaking in *Claiming the Real* (London: British Film Institute, 1995), 122.
- 14 Claudia Gorbman defines and discusses *diegesis* in *Unheard Melodies*, 20–26. Rick Altman writes of the constant crossing over between diegetic and nondiegetic, calling the technique the audio dissolve, in *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 62–80. Royal S. Brown discusses the distinction between diegetic and nondiegetic music in *Overtones and Undertones: Reading Film Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), especially the chapter entitled “Actions/Interactions: The Source Beyond the Source,” 67–91. James Buhler observes the theoretical bias toward nondiegetic music in “Analytical and Interpretive Approaches to Film Music (II): Analysing Interactions of Music and Film,” in *Film Music: Critical Approaches*, ed. K. J. Donnelly (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 39–61.
- 15 Howard Burton, “*High Noon*: Everyman Rides Again,” *Quarterly of Film, Radio and Television* 8.1 (Fall 1953): 80–86.
- 16 Harry Schein, “The Olympian Cowboy,” *The American Scholar* 24 (Summer 1955): 309–20.
- 17 Fred Zinnemann, *A Life in the Movies* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1992), 96. Stephen J. Whitfield is one of several who make the connection between Kane and McCarthyism (*The Culture of the Cold War* [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991], particularly chapter six, “Reeling: The Politics of Film”). Peter Biskind complicates the film further by revealing its criticisms of both corporate liberals and conservatives in *Seeing Is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), 44–49.
- 18 Drummond, *High Noon*, 37
- 19 Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 146.
- 20 Quoted by Thomas Doherty in “Sagebrush Subversives,” *The Chronicle Review*, September 13, 2002, B16. Doherty also recounts a story told in *The Hollywood Reporter* where Foreman’s nomination for Best Screenplay during the 1953 Academy Awards created anxiety among the production team. Since Foreman was already in London, Kramer and his associates drew straws to see who would accept the Oscar if Foreman won; production designer Rudolph Sternad drew the short straw.
- 21 It may also be worth noting the connection, made by Don Graham, between Foreman’s Hadleyville and Mark Twain’s Hadleyburg, from his short story “The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg,” another tale about a small town’s hypocrisy. “*High Noon* (1952),” in *Western Movies*, ed. William T. Pilkington and Don Graham (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1979), 55.
- 22 Paul Boyer discusses U.S. anxieties over the atomic bomb between 1945 and 1950 in *By The Bomb’s Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985).
- 23 In Zinnemann’s recounting of his formative years, he mentions clocks ticking in association with moments where he felt a sense of dread. First, during early days as a cameraman, his camera ran out of film, causing an expensive delay on the set and as time seemed to stand still for the horrified youth, he noticed that “clocks ticked unnaturally loudly;

- every second cost a fortune" (*A Life in the Movies*, 14). Second, while serving as an assistant to Viertel, Zinnemann would appear at 8:15 a.m. at Viertel's hotel room to take him to their 9:00 a.m. shooting; Viertel was typically unready for the day, reading the newspaper, and "oblivious of the ticking of the clock" (26).
- 24 Louis Giannetti, "Fred Zinnemann's *High Noon*," *Film Criticism* 1.3 (Winter 1976–77): 12.
- 25 Zinnemann described three elements guiding his visual style: "One: the threat—hanging over the entire movie, the motionless railroad tracks, always *static*. Two: the victim—looking for help, in constant *movement*, black against the white sky. The tension is enhanced by: Three: the urgency—time perceived as an enemy, shown by obsessive use of clocks (as indicated in the script); clocks looming larger as time slips by, pendulums moving more and more slowly until time finally stands still, gradually creating an unreal, dreamlike, almost hypnotic effect of suspended animation" (*A Life in the Movies*, 109).
- 26 Richard Combs calls the timekeeping in *High Noon* "the central myth of *High Noon*'s realism" in "When the Big Hand Is on Twelve . . . Or 7 Ambiguities of Time," *Monthly Film Bulletin* 53.629 (June 1986): 188. Alan Stanbrook earlier noted the time discrepancy in "A Man for All Movies," *Films and Filming* (May–June 1967): 11. Gérard Genette discusses some distinctions between story time and narrative time, citing the terms offered by Gunther Müller (*erzählte Zeit* [story time] and *Erzählzeit* [narrative time]), in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), especially 33–37.
- 27 Doherty cites Erik Barnouw, *Tube of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 156–57.
- 28 Martin Rees discusses the Doomsday Clock as well as the mounting possibilities for a twenty-first-century human extinction in *Our Final Hour: A Scientist's Warning: How Terror, Error, and Environmental Disaster Threaten Humankind's Future in This Century—On Earth and Beyond* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), especially 28–34.
- 29 "The Bulletin Clock Overview," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, [www.thebulletin.org/clock.html](http://www.thebulletin.org/clock.html) (accessed June 2, 2004).
- 30 *Survival under Atomic Attack* is available online at [www.archive.org/movies/movies-details-db.php?collection=prelinger&collectionid=19374](http://www.archive.org/movies/movies-details-db.php?collection=prelinger&collectionid=19374) (accessed June 2, 2004).
- 31 Allan M. Winkler, "A 40-Year History of Civil Defense," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 40.6 (June–July 1984): 18.
- 32 Marmorstein, *Hollywood Rhapsody*, 300. Stephen Handzo writes that *High Noon* "was considered a certain flop" before Tiomkin released the song in advance of the film ("The Golden Age of Film Music," *Cineaste* 21.1–2 [1995]: 52).
- 33 See Charles Higham and Joel Greenberg, *The Celluloid Muse: Hollywood Directors Speak* (New York: Signet, 1969), 185–86.
- 34 Tiomkin and Buranelli, *Please Don't Hate Me*, 230; Drummond, *High Noon*, 39; Zinnemann, *A Life in the Movies*, 108.
- 35 Giannetti, "Fred Zinnemann's *High Noon*," 10. Christopher Palmer discusses Tiomkin's particular affinities for the Hollywood Western in *Dimitri Tiomkin: A Portrait* (London: T. E. Books, 1984), 62–63, noting how Tiomkin's familiarity with Cossacks and exiles may have enriched his understanding with rugged outsiders. Tiomkin's Western scores include *Duel in the Sun* (1946), *Red River* (1948), *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* (1957), and the John Wayne trio of *Rio Bravo* (1959), *The Unforgiven* (1960), and *The Alamo* (1960).

- 36 Drummond, *High Noon*, 63. Zinneman, *A Life in the Movies*, 108. The opening percussion sounds are not attributed in any known sources, but Tiomkin describes a new orchestration effect in *High Noon*: “A final touch for the orchestration was provided by the pianist Ray Turner, who played in the orchestra. We were rehearsing a passage with strong rhythmic effects when he suggested a novel trick on a new-fangled electronic instrument with a piano keyboard. He struck it with his elbow, hitting several keys. It had a curious percussive effect, and we used it” (*Please Don’t Hate Me*, 233). In a radio interview with Tex Ritter, included in the Artisan Collector’s Edition DVD of *High Noon* (12571.1, 2002) Ritter speaks of singing the theme with someone playing organ, and since the other sounds heard are guitar and accordion, perhaps an electric organ was creating the percussive effect through Turner’s tone cluster technique.
- 37 Both motives A and B contain perfect fourths (sung with “do not,” “and duty”), which perhaps not by coincidence are the same intervals characterizing “Here Comes the Bride.”
- 38 Palmer, *Dimitri Tiomkin*, 92.
- 39 Kalinak, *Settling the Score*, 172.
- 40 Hamilton, “High Noon,” *Film Music* 12 (September–October 1952): 19.
- 41 Hamilton describes Helen’s theme as “a modal, Hispanic melody” (“High Noon,” 19) and Prendergast finds her motive distinctive, using it as evidence that the *High Noon* score is not monothematic (*Film Music*, 103).
- 42 Smith, *Sounds of Commerce*, 45.
- 43 Gwendolyn Foster, “The Women in *High Noon*: A Metanarrative of Difference,” *Film Criticism* 18–19 (Spring–Fall 1994): 72–81.
- 44 Prendergast, *Film Music*, 94; Robynn J. Stilwell, “‘I Just Put a Drone under Him . . .’: Collage and Subversion in the Score of *Die Hard*,” *Music and Letters* 78.4 (1997): 551–80.
- 45 See Ellen Rosand, “The Descending Tetrachord: An Emblem of Lament,” *Musical Quarterly* 65.3 (July 1979): 346–59; and Peter Williams, *The Chromatic Fourth During Four Centuries of Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). Williams speculates “that amongst Russian composers there may have been a penchant for chromatic” fourths, finding them in the music of Shostakovich, Prokofiev, and Khachaturian (239).
- 46 The last time we hear Ritter singing before Miller’s arrival, Tiomkin augments the instrumentation with a steadily beating drum, providing another reminder of the unavoidable ticking clock.
- 47 Zinnemann writes that “if you look closely you can see, in the upper frame, the Warner Brothers studio in the distance” (109).