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Philip Hayward, ed. *Off the Planet: Music, Sound and Science Fiction Cinema*. Eastleigh, UK: John Libbey Publishing, 2004. 214 pp. Paper. ISBN 0 86196 644 9.

In his book *Listening: An Introduction to the Perception of Auditory Events*, Stephen Handel remarks that “listening is centripetal; it pulls you into the world.” A compelling notion for film studies, Handel’s concept of the perception of sound and sound events as a key to an “inner” reality seems to get at the heart of editor Philip Hayward’s much-needed (and thoroughly enjoyable) collection of essays on the auditory components of science fiction cinema. *Off the Planet* quickly makes clear that, though a seemingly underappreciated aspect of science fiction studies, the act of documenting the ways in which music and sound pull you into the cultural/narrative frame is important. Operating within a variety of discourses, the essays gathered here make audible the potential of sci-fi sound studies and suggest the means by which it can expose the critical and cultural narratives so central to the science fiction universe.

From the beginning it is readily apparent that Hayward, a professor of contemporary music studies at Macquarie University in Sydney, has compiled a remarkably inclusive volume, despite its relatively modest page count. This is readily apparent even in the introduction (“Sci-Fidelity: Music, Sound and Genre History”) where Hayward sets out to “establish an historical framework for the films analyzed by contributing authors and to complement individual studies with discussions of related phenomena.” The result is a well-rendered account of the tangled and compelling history of music, sound and science fiction cinema that covers a broad territory, ranging from the evolution of various musical technologies to well-known scores such as Arthur Bliss’ *Things to Come* and Eduard Artemiev’s *Solaris* to the slightly more obscure psychedelic masterpieces of Syd Barrett and the orgasmic music of *Barbarella*.

But as he provides a timeline for and chronicles the tendencies of the genre, Hayward is simultaneously constructing a convincing argument for the potential in science fiction film’s relationship to music that will “allow for a flowering of the *audio*-visual potential of cinema that has been under-developed since its inception.” And it is this notion that there is something missing from this discussion—that there is something “under-developed” in the conversation critics, scholars and fans are having about SF cinema—that inspires so much of what is good in *Off the Planet*. For even the weakest articles in this collection appear to be fueled by a real desire to discover the way sound reveals something new in even the most familiar films.

As one begins to read through the collection, one finds that, like so much work in contemporary music and sound studies, the essays in *Off the Planet* can be divided into two basic categories: those that expect a certain degree of technical/musicological knowledge on the part of the reader and those that expect a familiarity with the discourses of critical and cultural theory. The juxtaposition of the musicological and cultural vocabularies of the auditory form is, in many ways, one of the many laudable qualities of this collection, for it provides the reader, regardless of her academic or musical background, with an accurate picture of the wide range of discourses at play in contemporary music/sound study—and the opportunity to wade into potentially

unfamiliar waters. Were the book to feature a subject heading on the back cover, it would be quite a long entry, including cultural studies, media studies, music studies, history of music, cinema studies and, of course, science fiction.

With entries such as Rebecca Leydon's essays on *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and *Forbidden Planet* and Shuhei Hosokawa's piece on *Godzilla's* sound design, *Off the Planet* begins with an engaging brand of musical/technical/historical analysis. For her part, Leydon starts off the collection by dealing primarily with early electronic musical instruments and their role in defining the sound of sci-fi, this new "music of the aether." She begins with a straight-forward discussion of the theremin, one of the first notable electronic instruments, made famous in Bernard Herrmann's seminal score for *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, and continues in a second article with an analysis of the fascinating story of Bebe and Louis Barron's hand-built circuits and the wonderfully strange electronic tonalities they rendered for *Forbidden Planet*, the first completely electronic film score.

In a similar vein, Hosokawa's essay argues for the crucial part played by the "sonic portrait" of *Godzilla* (what Hosokawa refers to as the "aural tryptich": the "music, stomping and roaring sounds") in making the monster both an "icon in film history" as well as a profound statement against the "ambivalence of science and technology." Like Heyward's introduction, Leydon and Hosokawa's essays seem to get at the heart of what many of these works are trying to do: better understand how the auditory component of cinema's audio-visual equation defines (and ultimately expands upon) the boundaries of science fiction as a cinematic genre.

Intermingled with these more technical essays are effective case studies such as Neil Lerner's work on John Williams' scores for *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, Paul Theberge's essay on sound and music in David Cronenberg's films and Nabeel Zuberi's fascinating "The Transmolecularisation of [Black] Folk: *Space is the Place*, Sun Ra and Afrofuturism" that adopt the discourses of media and cultural studies. These pieces in particular showcase one of the strengths of *Off the Planet* not only by challenging some dearly-held beliefs about certain films and directors, but also by bringing to the discussion aspects of SF film history too often neglected by critics and fans alike.

Right from the start, Lerner's piece is one of the more notable in the collection in that it outlines what he imagines might be, for some readers, potentially "unsavory arguments": namely, that the masculinist and authoritarian tendencies found in two canonical films are thoroughly reinforced by John Williams' scores. Continuing with things unsavory, Paul Theberge's essay, one of the most self-assured and convincingly argued in the collection, confronts the various ways in which music and sound have helped define the peculiar career of David Cronenberg. Zuberi's essay on Sun Ra and Afrofuturism brings much needed attention to a crucially important and sadly neglected moment in music and film history.

The other essays in the collection are Rebecca Coyle's analysis of the sound environment in *Mad Max*, Hannan and Carey's discussion of ambient music and effects in Ridley Scott's classic *Blade Runner*, and editor Philip Hayward's welcome adoption of

Deleuze and Guattari's notion of territorialization in a discussion of music, technology and Tim Burton's *Mars Attacks!* Wrapping everything up is the obligatory examination of the Wachowski's brothers' superstar *The Matrix* in Mark Evans' engaging essay "Mapping *The Matrix*: Virtual Spatiality and the Realm of the Perceptual."

Certainly, for all of its strong points as a collection, *Off the Planet* is not without its faults. At times the writing can seem a bit stiff (even tedious) as various authors work their way through plot summary or over-reaching analysis. Perhaps some of these failings can be attributed to the wide range of discourses represented and the different sets of compositional or argumentative expectations, but there are still moments that could be excised or expanded. And, though it seems good-natured, the cartoon artwork (a purplish and orange alien landscape with Robbie the Robot playing a flying-vee guitar alongside a medusa-space-woman, complete with no less than four or five ridiculously phallic objects) found on the paperback feels too silly and reductive for its own good. But regardless, *Off the Planet* is a book that sets a strong and workable standard for a productive line of inquiry and, given the tremendous amount of material that could so greatly benefit from this sort of scholarship, one can only hope that the possibility of a sequel that Heyward footnotes in his introduction becomes a reality.