

“(Un)Heavenly Choruses,” Spaghetti Westerns, and Morricone’s *Dollars* Trilogy

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With the addition of sound to cinema in the late 1920s, associations between visual modes of expression and corresponding musical representations found in nineteenth-century opera were transferred from the stage to the screen. This included non-diegetic dramatic vocalization, better known within film-composer circles as the “Heavenly Chorus.” This use of dramatic vocalization within filmic narrative to signify religious or numinous connotations expanded during the course of the 1950s through its inclusion in Hollywood Biblical epics, most notably in the scores of Miklós Rózsa.

In this paper I examine the influence of Hollywood Biblical film scores from this period, in particular Alfred Newman’s *The Robe* (1953), on the later work of Ennio Morricone (including his own participation as orchestrator of Mario Nascimbene’s score for *Barabbas* [1961]). Morricone transferred these influences to a new genre, the Spaghetti Western, and specifically what has been termed the *Dollars* Trilogy. Instead of using traditional folk-tunes, as found in most Hollywood Western film scores previously, Morricone took a new path, one establishing a new set of clichés that endured for the next thirty years.

Through his collaborative work with Alessandro Alessandroni’s *Cantori Moderni* and their ensuing relationship that would define all of Morricone’s Spaghetti Western film scores throughout the 1960s, a differing approach from the previous Hollywood style emerged. Instead of signifying—to accompany or associate vocalization with some extra-musical idea—Morricone used wordless vocalization to heighten the dramatic situation at-hand in the *mise-en-scene* in a truly unique fashion.