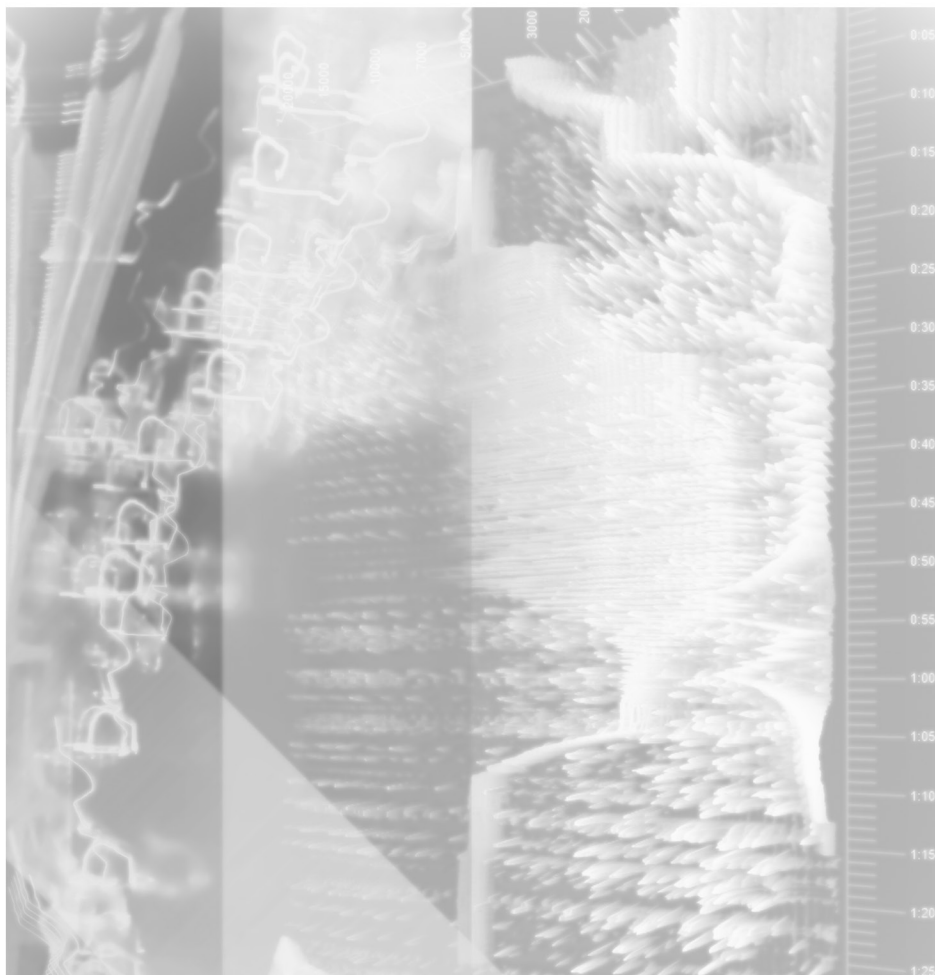


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## **Imagining Interwar Sound and Space: Film Music and Cultural Memory in the Post-Yugoslav Context**

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# IMAGINING INTERWAR SOUND AND SPACE: FILM MUSIC AND CULTURAL MEMORY IN THE POST-YUGOSLAV CONTEXT

## KEYWORDS

*Montevideo*;  
film music;  
cultural memory;  
collective identity;  
interwar period;  
Kingdom of Yugoslavia;  
post-Yugoslav context;  
Dragan Bjelogrić;  
Robert Pešut (Magnifico).

## ABSTRACT

In recent decades, the interwar period has emerged as a fertile ground for artistic imagination, inspiring a growing body of works across literature, visual arts, and film. Global and regional cinema plays a compelling role in reconstructing and reinterpreting this historical era. Given the centrality of music to everyday life in the interwar years, it naturally becomes an important element in shaping cinematic representations of the past. This article examines how music in Dragan Bjelogrić's films *Montevideo*, *God Bless You!* (2010) and *See You in Montevideo* (2014) contributes to the evocation of life in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia at the very juncture of the 1920s and 1930s. By focusing on the deployment of musical genres and their stylistic connotations, the study situates the soundtrack at the intersection of film music and everyday life studies, collective identity, cultural memory theory, thanatopolitics and post-Yugoslav cultural discourse. Rather than merely treating music as a decorative or atmospheric element, the paper explores how sound actively constructs historical imagination, reinforces collective identity, and shapes affective engagement with the past.

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## Introduction

Over the past few decades, the period between the two world wars has drawn much attention in different fields, from academic studies to popular culture. Many films and television series were produced during that time to revisit, reimagine, and artistically reconstruct this historical period. The production encompasses a wide range of genres, such as historical films, comedies, musicals, dramas, and thrillers, and it depicts a complicated, intolerable, and strikingly vivid time following the largest conflict in European history. Although it would be hard to list them all, several wildly popular works contributed significantly to the development of this trend. Among them, the musical *Chicago* (d. Rob Marshall, 2002) is often credited with helping to initiate a renewed cinematic interest in the interwar years, paving the way for subsequent international successes like *The Great Gatsby* (d. Baz Luhrmann, 2013), *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (d. Wes Anderson, 2014), and *Babylon* (d. Damien Chazelle, 2022). Television has likewise embraced this thematic revival, with the series including *Downton Abbey* (2010–2015), *Peaky Blinders* (2013–2022), and *Babylon Berlin* (2017– ) achieving both critical and popular acclaim. Around the same time, the YouTube project Postmodern Jukebox (2012–2013) began to attract significant attention with its archaic re-arrangements of contemporary popular songs and the stylized retro visual production that accompanied them. This renewed engagement with the interwar period also found resonance in Southeast Europe, including Serbia, where directors began to explore regional variations of the era's aesthetic and symbolic potential. Filmmaker Zdravko Šotra contributed to this regional trend through his highly popular television series *Ranjeni orao* [*Wounded Eagle*] (2009), *Greh njene majke* [*Her Mother's Sin*] (2009), and *Nepobedivo srce* [*Invincible Heart*] (2010), all based on Mir-Jam's<sup>1</sup> interwar novels and characterized by a similarly nostalgic and romanticized rendering of the period. Building on this broader cultural moment, Dragan Bjelogrić (1963) further adapted comparable visual and narrative strategies in his work, reinterpreting the interwar era through a distinctly post-Yugoslav<sup>2</sup> cinematic lens.<sup>3</sup> In his directorial debut *Montevideo, Bog te video!* [*Montevideo, God Bless You*] (2010), Bjelogrić offered a depiction of interwar Belgrade. Mediated through the lens of a myth about the national football team, Bjelogrić shows class divisions, competing ideologies, and contrasting cultural spheres through the "traditional/modern" dichotomy. This reimagining of a period no contemporary viewer remembers resonates with Velikonja's notion of "secondhand nostalgia," a mediated attachment to

<sup>1</sup> Milica Jakovljević (1887–1952), Serbian journalist and writer.

<sup>2</sup> Following the Kingdom of SCS/Yugoslavia (1918–1941), a socialist Yugoslavia was established (1945–1991). The term "post-Yugoslav" refers to the cultural, social, and political formations that emerged after the dissolution of the socialist state.

<sup>3</sup> His television series *Senke nad Balkanom* [*Black Sun*] (2017–) has frequently been compared to *Babylon Berlin* (2017–) due to its dark tone, period aesthetics, and engagement with Berlin/Balkan-specific historical trauma (Aćamović 2023). Notably, *Black Sun* premiered just ten days after *Babylon Berlin*, suggesting a shared transnational zeitgeist and a striking synchronicity in audiovisual explorations of interwar Europe.

the past shaped not by lived experience but by aesthetic conventions and circulating public narratives. As he notes, positive images of the past are easily adopted from the “supermarket” of popular history, media culture, and political rhetoric (Velikonja 2009, 538) – an observation especially pertinent in the post-Yugoslav context, where the interwar era is frequently framed as a culturally affirmative and symbolically cohesive period. Indeed, the recent post-Yugoslav surge of interest in interwar culture may partly stem from the fact that socialist Yugoslavia systematically constructed the interwar kingdom as a negative “other” – a bourgeois, centralist, and ideologically obsolete formation from which the socialist project sought to distance itself by articulating a radical alternative. This ideological positioning effectively marginalized and obscured interwar cultural production for decades, creating the conditions in which renewed scholarly and public engagement with the period could emerge only after the dissolution of Yugoslavia (cf. Jović 2009, 54–68).

Based on the eponymous book by sports journalist Vladimir Stanković, *Montevideo* franchise<sup>4</sup> follows the early years of football in Yugoslavia through two Belgrade clubs, Jugoslavija and BSK (Belgrade Sport Club), the formation of the national team, and participation in the 1930 World Cup in Uruguay.<sup>5</sup> These historical episodes are interwoven with the fictionalized personal stories of two young footballers, Aleksandar Tirnanić Tirke<sup>6</sup> and Blagoje Marjanović Moša,<sup>7</sup> whose contrasting trajectories illuminate central social tensions of the interwar period. In the first film *Montevideo, Bog te video!*, set between Belgrade’s urban center and its working-class outskirts, Tirke and the traditional Rosa embody modest provincial values, while Moša’s ambition and his relationship with the cosmopolitan Valerija signal the appeal of modern urban culture.<sup>8</sup> Under the guidance of the team’s coach Boško Simonović, their rise from local pitches to the national team unfolds against everyday hardship, emerging rivalries, and the broader dynamics of a society negotiating between tradition and modernity, poverty and the Yugoslav bourgeoisie. The film ends with the Yugoslav team’s victory over Bulgaria, followed by a fictionalized closing scene in which young Stanoje polishes the shoes of the

4 Parallel to the two films *Montevideo, Bog te video!* [*Montevideo, God Bless You!*] (2010) and *Montevideo, vidimo se!* [*See You in Montevideo*] (2014), Bjelogrić produced three television series based on the same (expanded) material: *Montevideo, Bog te video!* [*Montevideo, God Bless You!*] (8 episodes, 2012), *Na putu za Montevideo* [*On the road to Montevideo*] (9 episodes, 2013), and *Montevideo, vidimo se!* [*See You in Montevideo!*] (10 episodes, 2014).

5 Although written as a work of popular history, Stanković’s book is based on archival materials, old photographs, and newspaper articles (Stanković 2010, 7). On the development of football in interwar Yugoslavia, see Zec 2016.

6 Aleksandar Tirnanić Tirke (1910–1992), Serbian and Yugoslav football player, later the head coach of the Yugoslav national football team.

7 Blagoje Marjanović Moša (1907–1984), Serbian and Yugoslav football player.

8 Anthropologist Ivan Kovačević explores how the film’s central oppositions are constructed through its characters. In his article, he identifies a series of compelling pairings: Rada Pašić and Milutinac (the hedonist and satyr vs. the political activist and romantic); two semantically distinct oppositions, Tirke – Moša and Valerija – Rosa; as well as King Alexander – Atanas Božić, which he reads in relation to the film’s broader Yugoslavia–Serbia dynamic and its political implications. He also highlights the pairing of young Stanoje and Atanas Božić, whose shared entrepreneurial drive places them on the same semantic axis, differentiated only by the extremes of poverty and wealth, making their opposition scalar rather than contrastive (Kovačević 2017).

fans – a symbolic gesture of collective effort directed toward enabling the team's journey to Montevideo. The sequel, *Montevideo, vidimo se!* [*See You in Montevideo!*], follows the Yugoslav national team on its journey to Uruguay for the FIFA 1930 World Cup, where the players face new cultural settings, strong international rivals, and the pressures of representing a young state abroad. The film uses the tournament as a stage on which national expectations and personal ambitions unfold, with cultural differences rendered particularly visible through the film's soundtrack.

The film *Montevideo, Bog te video!* takes considerable liberties with historical fact, particularly in its depiction of the state's refusal to fund the national team's journey to Uruguay and the interethnic frictions surrounding that decision.<sup>9</sup> It interprets the financial dispute through the lens of political division within the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and highlights recognizably Serbian cultural and commemorative motifs, including references to the First World War through the recurring theme *Pukni zoro* [*Break, O Dawn*], performances of the Serbian national anthem, and the stylized evocation of *Marš na Drinu* [*March to Drina*].<sup>10</sup> Taken together, these elements advance a specific narrative of Yugoslav relations that departs from the archival record. Such departures are not merely dramatic devices but interpretive strategies through which the interwar past is selectively reconfigured and affectively mediated for contemporary audiences.

Like many contemporary historical films, both parts of *Montevideo* rely on an interplay of visual codes, narrative conventions, and particularly music to construct a convincing representation of the past. The stylized reconstruction of the interwar period in both *Montevideo, Bog te video!* and *Montevideo, vidimo se!* supports an approach that treats music as an active force in shaping historical imagination rather than merely as background embellishment. Instead of aiming for factual accuracy, the movies construct a universe that is emotionally believable and narratively compelling, projecting modern sensibilities onto a history that has been selectively remembered. The soundtrack, composed by Slovenian singer Robert Pešut (Magnifico), draws on a palette of stylistic references, including Balkan and Latin folk idioms, early jazz, cabaret, and schlager, producing a retro-sounding yet distinctly modern sonic landscape. Magnifico and Bjelogrić conducted extensive research on the music of the period, ranging from American popular music for dancing – Charleston – to early Croatian recordings of popular songs, as well as Serbian folk motifs and operetta (Matoz 2013). The soundtrack became so

<sup>9</sup> Historically, the financial burden of the 1930 World Cup was largely assumed by Uruguay, which covered travel, accommodation, subsistence, and compensation for lost wages for up to twenty players, with an additional eight days included (D'Amado 2020, 7–8). Stanković likewise notes that the organizer covered the travel and accommodation costs for seventeen members of the Yugoslav delegation (Stanković 2010, 25), which makes the film's portrayal of the team raising funds independently a clear departure from the facts. The narrative also attributes the lack of state support to political tensions following King Alexander's introduction of dictatorship in 1929 and the relocation of the Football Association's Assembly from Zagreb to Belgrade in March 1930. It further fictionalizes the claim that the king refused financing because no Croatian players joined the team, as well as the suggestion that private donors would have supported a solely Serbian representation. These narrative interventions shape the film's depiction of interethnic relations and the discourse of Yugoslav unity (Nikolić 2012).

<sup>10</sup> *Marš na Drinu* [*March to Drina*] was composed by Stanislav Binički at the beginning of the First World War, commemorating the Serbian army's victory over Austro-Hungarian forces at the Battle of Cer.

popular that Pešut released in 2013 an album containing twenty-one songs composed over four years of work on the two films and the television series, which serves as an expanded version of the cinematic story.

As film music scholars have noted, sound often operates as a vehicle for emotional orientation and historical imagination (Gorbman 1987; Kassabian 2001). Although *Montevideo, Bog te video!* has been discussed in terms of its ideological narratives and discursive constructions of space, time, and collective identity (Simeunović Bajić 2012; Nikolić 2015; Kovačević 2017), the specific role of music in shaping these frameworks remains underexplored. This article addresses that gap by examining how genre-coded musical references contribute to the emotional framing of history and the construction of cultural memory. The central research question asks: How does music produce a stylized vision of the interwar period within post-Yugoslav historical imaginaries in conjunction with image and dialogue? Rather than focusing on musical structure, the analysis foregrounds affective functions and intermedial dynamics, situating the soundtrack as a key agent in reconfiguring the past for contemporary audiences.

## Theoretical Framework

Music in films is crucial for providing the audience with emotional and temporal orientation. It creates mood, maintains consistency, and aids in creating a logical sense of location and time (Gorbman 1987, 53–69). As music helps create memory-worlds, these emotive functions become even more apparent, opening up the past through sentiment and atmosphere rather than empirical detail. In *Montevideo*, these functions acquire particular significance: music operates as a structuring device that shapes the viewer's orientation toward the interwar period, mediating temporal continuity, emotional tone, and the film's broader framework of memory. While Gorbman underlines music's narrative and emotional function within films, Fiske offers a broader lens through which music can be understood as socially embedded and materially experienced. That is in line with more general viewpoints in cultural theory, which hold that popular forms play a part in blurring the lines between art and everyday life. As John Fiske argues in his account of the culture of everyday life, popular cultural practices reject aesthetic "distance" and instead embed art within the social and bodily context of lived experience (Fiske 1989, 154–155). Although he is not addressing music explicitly in this section, his insight can be quite relevant to the analysis of historical movie soundtracks that, like both parts of *Montevideo*, rely on genre-based and stylistically familiar idioms. In this sense, the *Montevideo* films use music as a vehicle of affective memory: it bridges the gap between past and present by activating sensory and emotional associations rooted in both cultural knowledge and personal identification. This concept is also articulated by the Serbian historian Andrej Mitrović, who highlights how the arts document history by describing how historical events are experienced emotionally and symbolically rather than by narrating facts. Rather than portraying events in a documentary or sequential fashion, artistic forms such as music and film

reveal the existential and affective dimensions of historical experience. According to Mitrović, this fusion of personal narrative and broader historical forces allows us to grasp the past not merely as a series of external occurrences, but as a human reality shaped by memory, identity, and cultural values (Mitrović 2008, 48–49). His observations refer to the first half of the twentieth century – an era defined by war, revolution, and systemic crisis – in which cultural production functioned as a “seismic sensor” of history’s intrusion into the everyday. Viewed through this lens, art becomes a site where the “tragedy of living” is both represented and emotionally processed and collectively remembered (Mitrović 2008, 84, 88). Applied to the *Montevideo* films, this perspective highlights how their portrayal of different social strata enables a nuanced understanding of interwar society in all its class, cultural, and ideological diversity. It also conveys the rhythms of everyday life, ranging from the city center, where the upper social strata spent their nights in clubs and entertainment venues, to a *kafana*<sup>11</sup> in Čubura, which at that time marked the edge of the urban periphery. In this respect, it is hardly surprising that one of the principal settings of the narrative is a *kafana*, given the significant social role it played in that period.

Since the plot of both films unfolds during a turbulent chapter of Serbian national history nearly a century ago, it is necessary to address the role of cultural memory because this period still intrigues public interest. Contemporary theories regard remembrance not as the transmission of historical truth, but as a mediated and symbolic process shaped by structures of representation. Film and music are actively performing the past by reshaping it to fit present cultural frameworks. Within this theoretical horizon, Aleida Assmann emphasizes that memory is never purely individual but always culturally constructed through communicative practices such as speech, images, and rituals. Because memory depends on representation, it is inseparable from the media that sustain it. As media technologies evolve, so too does the constitution of memory: it once relied primarily on written language, but from the nineteenth century onward it expanded to include visual images, and in the twentieth century it incorporated recorded voices and sounds. In this sense, cultural memory continually changes in tandem with the media through which it is transmitted (Assmann 1992, 10–11). The distinction becomes particularly evident in the difference between written and oral cultures: while writing provides the possibility of separating functional from storage memory, oral traditions rely on embodied and performative practices such as rhythm, song, dance, or visual techniques of recall, where such a division cannot be sustained (Assmann 1992, 126). In this sense, the *Montevideo* films exemplify the dynamics Assmann describes: through familiar musical idioms, recurring motifs, and stylistically recognizable sonic gestures, they activate cultural memory not by reconstructing the interwar past, but rendering it affectively present. In doing so, the films translate historical material into emotionally resonant forms that circulate as part of contemporary remembrance.

<sup>11</sup> The *kafana* (from the Turkish word *kahvehane*) is a traditional Balkan establishment serving food and drinks, but it has also been a central space of social and cultural life. The most proper English equivalent would be tavern.

Sociologist Todor Kuljić shows that such narratives serve to stabilize the present by reinterpreting the past in ways that accommodate current needs and by neutralizing the disruptive potential of history (Kuljić 2006, 10–13). This mechanism is clearly at work in *Montevideo*, where the interwar past is reframed through a harmonizing and emotionally accessible vision that aligns with contemporary expectations of continuity. Within this mediated logic, music can be interpreted as a form of memory work, a medium that structures affective responses and embeds historical meaning in emotionally resonant soundscapes. This provides the theoretical ground for examining how *Montevideo*'s soundtrack contributes to the construction of collective memory. By reconfiguring interwar musical idioms into nostalgic and emotionally charged soundscapes, the film reframes trauma and loss, integrating references from the First World War and its aftermath into a harmonious narrative that favors consensus over conflict. This dynamic resonates with what has been theorized as thanatopolitics – a logic in which remembrance of loss is not confronted, but neutralized through omission, aestheticization, and emotional consensus (cf. Kuljić 2014). In this sense, the song *Pukni zoro* offers an especially vivid example of thanatopolitics: while serving as a leitmotif for the horrors associated with the First World War, it simultaneously neutralizes their disruptive force by translating them into an aesthetically cohesive and emotionally uplifting musical code. It is also worth noting that, in the context of post-Yugoslav screen culture, Dijana Jelača argues cinema actively participates in narrating and emotionally processing trauma rather than simply reflecting it. Her study focuses on the concept of “dislocated memories,” which are types of remembrance that surface in the voids of official historical discourse and allow movies to use affective registers to give voice to repressed or unresolved pasts. From this angle, both parts of *Montevideo* can be viewed as a cinematic practice of selective remembrance: instead of directly addressing traumatic ruptures, it reimagines the interwar years through nostalgia and, most importantly, music, which recasts collective memory into a seemingly cohesive national story (Jelača 2016). Based on the theoretical insights outlined above, the discussion now turns to the role of music in reimagining the interwar period and in mediating the historical narratives and emotions associated with it.

Although Nataša Simeunović Bajić has examined notions of time, space, and collective identity in her study of the first *Montevideo* movie (Simeunović Bajić 2012), the present analysis takes a different approach by focusing on how music shapes the films' representation of the interwar period. Regarding to geographical space, we can observe several contrasting relations in which music plays an important role, establishing a clear trajectory: on the local level of the city of Belgrade (center vs. periphery), through the national frame of Serbia and Yugoslavia, then to Yugoslavia's relations regarding Europe, and finally the intercontinental (and global) relations between Uruguay and Latin America, and Yugoslavia. The text is thus structured around these four axes, each of which highlights a distinct dimension – whether practices of cultural exchange, cultural memory or collective identity, in which music plays an important role.

## Belgrade's city center vs. periphery: Between the East and West, Tradition and Modernity

When discussing the interwar period in Yugoslavia, one inevitably encounters the dichotomies of East and West, or tradition and modernity – tensions that have been extensively analyzed in the scholarly literature, and also reflected in popular media. In *Montevideo, Bog te video!* and *Montevideo, vidimo se!*, sound and image conjure a vision of the interwar past, where music plays a crucial role in evoking time, space, and atmosphere. The soundtrack combines mostly newly written material with retro-styled arrangements that do not seek historical fidelity, but instead generate an affective soundscape capable of bridging past and present.

Belgrade, the capital of the newly established state of Kingdom of Yugoslavia, is portrayed as a stratified urban space, with its vibrant center on the one hand and its working-class periphery on the other. The center is shown through cafés, cabarets and night-time promenades, accompanied by music that evokes the cosmopolitan image of interwar Belgrade through a series of popular musical forms. Songs such as *Pinja kolada* [*Piña Colada*], arranged in the style of interwar schlager and deliberately recorded with a retro timbre reminiscent of (for example) Vlaho Paljetak's Edison Bell Penkala recordings,<sup>12</sup> conjure the sound of urban entertainment culture. This song also becomes a leitmotif of Terazije, one of Belgrade's main streets, which pioneer of Yugoslav film criticism Boško Tokin described as a stage for the city's modern transformations. In his words, Terazije embodied the ambivalence of the new era: a space at once semi-urban and semi-cosmopolitan, dazzling with automobiles, jazz, and elegant appearances, yet reckless and morally unsettled, playing what he called a "dangerous game" of modernization (Tokin 2015, 51). The cabaret number *Samo malo* [*Just a Little*] is introduced at the very moment when one of the main characters, popular football player Blagoje Marjanović Moša, announces that the players are going to the Džokej club. The ensuing line, "Mošo, to je za gospodu – zato će vam trebati šeširi," ["Mošo, that's for gentlemen, so you'll need hats"] functions as a marker of class distinction, situating the scene within the codes of bourgeois sociability.<sup>13</sup> Music begins at precisely this juncture, underscoring the transition from everyday life to the elite spaces of urban nightlife. Other sequences further accentuate the theme of cosmopolitan decadence. In the Džokej club scene, the song *Marija Ana* underscores an eroticized dance performance, staging the pleasures and ambiguities of interwar nightlife. The melody subsequently reappears in Tirke's opium scene at Valerija's, now framed as diegetic gramophone music, which

<sup>12</sup> For more on popular music published by Edison Bell Penkala, see chapter V in book *Rana domaća diskografska industrija: Edison Bell Pekala, Elektroton i Jugoton* (Ceribašić, Dunatov, and Vukobratović, eds. 2025).

<sup>13</sup> The Džokej (Jockey) club was an exclusive members-only venue in Belgrade, regarded as the city's most elite gathering place. Presided over by Prince Paul, it attracted the political and economic elite, offering luxury cigars, expensive drinks, and popular dance music such as the Charleston (Belingar and Mijatović 2018, 233–234).

amplifies the sense of decadence and the transgression of social norms. Finally, the original interwar schlager *Tri palme na otoku sreće* [*Three Palms on the Island of Happiness*], heard when Milutinac<sup>14</sup> is called to join the team, ties the making of the Yugoslav football squad to a repertoire of European-style popular song, aligning the sport with the sound world of interwar modernity.

The gathering of football representatives is staged in the popular Belgrade *varieté* *Ruski car*,<sup>15</sup> where the performance of Cossack musicians illustrates the blend of modern urban entertainment with the traditions brought by the Russian émigrés. This detail highlights yet another aspect of interwar Belgrade, which was the significant presence of Russian émigrés who were intricately woven into the city's musical and cultural life (Golubović 2025). Therefore, entertainment for the upper social strata here does not consist solely of European popular genres, but also incorporates elements of Russian musical heritage perceived as an exoticized refinement from the cultural Other (Vesić 2015; Golubović 2024). The sequence includes famous song *Kamouua* [*Katyusha*], although the song was first premiered only in 1938. This anachronism exemplifies the film's broader approach to stylization: while not strictly adhering to historical chronology, it employs one of the most famous Russian romances to evoke the memory of a shared Russian legacy within Belgrade's interwar soundscape. This sequence then moves to *Evo banke, cigane moj* [*Gipsy, here's my money*], a popular urban song not political in itself, but placed alongside dialogue about disputes between Zagreb and Belgrade football authorities and the Croatian boycott of the national team. Its cheerful tones create an ironic counterpoint, overlaying serious tensions with the familiar sounds of interwar entertainment. In this way, the film uses music not to document events, but to juxtapose registers of pleasure and conflict, transforming a well-known song into a vehicle for narrating broader social divisions.

The other face of Belgrade emerges in scenes set on the city's periphery, most vividly in the *kafana* Čuburska kasina, which functions as a focal point of communal life. Here, the musicians perform urban folk songs such as *Tri metera somota* [*Three Meters of Velvet*], evoking forms of entertainment characteristic of the local milieu and rooted in older traditions of conviviality. The tension between center and periphery is further articulated through class distinctions. When Valerija, portrayed as a wealthy painter with cosmopolitan ties to Paris, arrives with Moša at the *kafana*, confronted with the setting, she ironically remarks: "šteta, nisam ponela opanke [too bad I didn't bring my peasant shoes]" (in Serbian – *opanci*). This moment underscores the social contrasts within interwar Belgrade, where elite nightlife and vernacular spaces coexisted as parallel but hierarchically marked domains of cultural expression.

<sup>14</sup> Milutin Ivković Milutinac (1906–1943), Yugoslav football player and medical doctor.

<sup>15</sup> The *Ruski car*, located in Knez Mihailova Street, was likely opened around 1870 in a single-storey building with a garden. After the construction of the new luxury palace, completed in 1926, a restaurant operated on the ground floor, while the basement housed a nightclub intended for elegant evening outings. The venue functioned as a *varieté*, with dance, music, and song; jazz orchestras performed there, and dance evenings (in Serbian – *igranke*) followed the *varieté* program (Belingar and Mijatović 2018, 193–194).

A notable exception to the predominantly Europeanized soundscape is *Zum-zum kolo*, whose folk resonance makes it one of the most distinctive numbers in the films. It appears consistently in football scenes, functioning as a leitmotif that symbolically intertwines two seemingly distant practices: the modern sport imported from the West and the traditional *kolo* dance. The piece first appears during Tirke's ball dribbling, and later underscores the training sequence in which coach Boško Simonović exhorts the players to act "svi kò jedan" ["all together as one"]. Here, the music translates football into a metaphor of coordinated collective performance, its rhythmic structure echoing both the steps of the dance and the movements on the field. The same melody returns in a very different register when it accompanies the brawl between BSK and Jugoslavija team players, where it ironically frames conflict as another form of collective release. Through these shifts, *Zum-zum kolo* highlights an additional tension: football, though introduced as a modern Western sport, becomes fully assimilated into local identity through its association with folkloric musical idioms.

### Conflict with Memory: Thanatopolitics and Constructing the Past

Both parts of the *Montevideo* film franchise present the interwar years in a filtered manner rather than presenting a complete confrontation with the national ruptures of the time. The darker aspects of the time are not absent, but remain largely in the background, surfacing only occasionally. The crossroads of the 1920s and 1930s was a time of profound upheaval, both in Yugoslavia and globally. King Alexander established a royal dictatorship in 1929, which exacerbated ethnic tensions inside the fledgling nation. At the same time, socioeconomic divisions became more pronounced, and the New York Stock Exchange crisis had an impact on the global economy. These realities are only faintly registered in the films, which instead foreground sporting success, camaraderie, romance, and scenes of communal celebration. Nevertheless, the result is not a denial of conflict, but its aesthetic containment within a narrative of youthful optimism and national aspiration.

The tone is set already in the opening sequence, established through the theme *Ljubav u Ce-duru* [*Love in C major*]. A clarinet melody with string accompaniment, recalling the idiom of light salon music, conveys a bright and optimistic atmosphere as the young narrator Stanoje walks through images of "old Belgrade." The voice-over presents 1930 as a year of dreams, "the first decade of peace after the Great War," while archival footage situates the story in a city still recovering from destruction. The music contributes to an image of the past as a space defined by stability and everyday charm. The same theme reappears when Tirke is first introduced in the Čubura district, where it symbolizes the optimism of a younger generation – set in sharp contrast to *Pukni zoro*, whose recurring presence throughout the film evokes the trauma and losses of the First World War. These contrasts, arising from shifts in atmosphere, carry interpretive weight and are far from neutral. Ultimately, a light melody in C major curates the past

into an emotionally cohesive narrative, trading historical rupture for affective continuity and recasting interwar life as a space of play, achievement, and shared pleasure rather than conflict.

The most popular song, the aforementioned *Pukni zoro*,<sup>16</sup> composed by Robert Pešut in a pseudo-traditional style, features a quasi-martial introduction reminiscent of *Marš na Drinu* and a simple, melancholic, and singable melody in moderate tempo. Although written nearly a century after the First World War, it evokes the sonic profile of 'old' patriotic songs and functions as a kind of mnemonic code for sacrifice and collective memory. Its recurring use across both films also mediates between personal memory and collective aspiration. This dual role creates a reminiscence effect typical of classical cinematic storytelling, where music operates both as an emotional cue and as a tool for memory and anticipation (Bribitzer-Stull 2015, 11–12). The appearance of the same theme in moments of hope and disillusion is no coincidence: *Pukni zoro* serves as a leitmotif, transforming cultural memory into an affective code for the interwar past. In this capacity it takes on a mournful, prophetic quality, linking sporting injustice to the larger cycles of national loss and further reinforcing the song's role as a conduit of emotional and collective memory. *Pukni zoro*'s broad popular appeal shows how a newly composed song can resonate as if it belonged to an older cultural repertoire, softening the distance between contemporary listeners and the interwar past.

Particularly significant is the use of this song that appears in varying narrative contexts and accumulates meaning through repetition and transformation. Its first appearance coincides with Tirke's entry onto the BSK's football field, which the narrative overlays with memories of the First World War and the moment he learns of his father's death. Here the melody underscores the intertwining of personal loss and national sacrifice: Tirke inherits his father's medal together with the charge to "carry it with pride," just as a French soldier urges him to strike the ball back. *Pukni zoro* symbolically substitutes for the memory of the Great War, transforming loss into pride, sacrifice into continuity, and grief into collective resilience, while simultaneously positioning football itself as a symbolic continuation of wartime endurance. In this way, the song glorifies sacrifice by making football players national heroes and presenting sporting triumph as a symbolic continuation of wartime endurance. These depictions are prime examples of what Todor Kuljić has referred to as thanatopolitics, which is the political use of sacrifice and death as the cornerstones of collective memory and national cohesion (Kuljić 2014, 19–35). The song *Pukni zoro* does not evoke a Yugoslav collective identity but rather reflects a distinctly Serbian memoryscape, rooted in narratives of sacrifice and suffering from the First World War.

The relationship between Serbian and Yugoslav identity surfaces most clearly in the stadium scene that concludes the first film. After the victory over the Bulgarian national football team, the crowd began to sing the Serbian national anthem *Bože pravde* [*God of Justice*], rather than the Yugoslav hymn.<sup>17</sup> The choice is symbolically charged: by this

<sup>16</sup> The song *Pukni zoro* recurs in both vocal and instrumental arrangements.

<sup>17</sup> The anthem of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, later the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, was

point, the Yugoslav national team is composed exclusively of Serbian players, and the anthem underscores the persistence of a specifically Serbian identity that resists subsumption into a broader Yugoslav framework. The moment thus captures the inherent tension between the official narrative of Yugoslav unity.

Nevertheless, in the second film, *Pukni zoro* appears in an instrumental version during halftime of the final match, when Yugoslavia has been treated unfairly against the Uruguayan team – a moment that not only highlights sporting injustice, but also foreshadows the broader disappointments awaiting the country in the years to come. At this moment, coach Boško Simonović delivers a poignant speech:

If you go back onto the field now, you will face injustice – an undeserved defeat. But I'd like us to go through this final lesson together, while we are still a team. In life, you'll face many more injustices, many more defeats, but you'll be on your own. All of this must be endured. They say that's how one becomes a man, my children [*Montevideo, vido se!*, 131:30–131:20].

The return of *Pukni zoro* in this scene signals a shift in tone: from hopeful anticipation to a sober acknowledgement of life's hardships. The music foreshadows the broader historical tragedies to come – the 1929 Wall Street Crash that reached the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the assassination of King Alexander in 1934, and eventually the outbreak of World War II.<sup>18</sup>

## Yugoslavia and Europe: Music and Identity

The relationship between Yugoslavia and Europe may be seen, in a broader frame, as analogous to that between Belgrade's city center and its periphery, for the newly established state itself functioned as part of Europe's periphery. This was evident on multiple levels, including the musical one (Tomašević 2008). Yet the situation was not uniform across the country. The western regions, formerly part of the Habsburg Monarchy, were more directly exposed to European influences than Serbia in the East. Such historical asymmetry shaped the cultural geography of the interwar state, but Belgrade, as the capital, rapidly advanced and absorbed European currents (Babović 2018; Marković 2025). This dynamic is visible on multiple levels in the film, from social distinctions and fashion to music, automobiles, and football, culminating in the expanding reach of mass media that were transforming Europe at the time. Particularly striking is the live radio broadcast of the Yugoslavia – Bulgaria football match in the final sequence of the

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combined of three songs: *Bože pravde* (formerly the anthem of the Kingdom of Serbia and today the anthem of Serbia), *Lijepa naša domovino* (now the Croatian national anthem), and *Naprej, zastava slave* (the former anthem of Slovenia). It was never officially proclaimed as the state anthem by law; the only formal regulation concerned the order in which the verses from the songs were to be performed.

<sup>18</sup> The team's captain, Milutin Ivković Milutinac was executed by the Germans during World War II for "communist activity."

first film, presented as a technological marvel that situates Belgrade within a modern European framework. Popular culture in interwar Yugoslavia rapidly expanded through dance, film, the illustrated press, and radio, creating a shared cultural space that often transcended regional and social boundaries (Vesić 2023; Golubović 2024). Although cultural elites frequently expressed concern about the “foreignness” of such influences, mass entertainment nonetheless functioned as one of the few integrative forces in a heterogeneous state. This tension – between the transnational influx of new cultural forms and the political imperative of national integration – mirrors the ambivalence staged in *Montevideo*. The film’s soundtrack negotiates precisely these codes, aestheticizing rather than resolving them.

The soundtrack thus participates in broader cultural narratives about the Balkans and Europe, constantly balancing imported idioms and national frameworks. In the film, jazz, cabaret, and schlager signify cosmopolitan modernity, resonant with the mass-entertainment culture of urban centers such as Berlin or Paris, while folkloric inflexions and Orientalizing gestures evoke what Maria Todorova has described as symbolic Balkanism – a discourse that situates the region as liminal and exotic in relation to Europe’s cultural “center” (Bakić-Hayden 2006; Todorova 2009).<sup>19</sup> Balkan idioms in Serbian music in the first half of the twentieth century often functioned both as signs of national specificity and of alterity (Milanović 2008). This interplay of imported and native codes mirrors Yugoslavia’s ambivalent positioning in European cultural space: at once a participant in modernity and a bearer of a distinct, frequently stereotyped, identity. Although composed to sound old and evoke nostalgia, the soundtrack operates through modes of listening that Kassabian defines as “ubiquitous listening” – forms of everyday musical presence whose emotional effect arises not from analytical attention, but from ambient resonance embedded in daily life and mediated by mass media (Kassabian 2013).

The ironic reappearance of *Zum-zum kolo* during the brawl between the football players of BSK and Jugoslavija underscores its dual symbolic register. What begins as a fight between rival teams turns into a joint clash with Rade Pašić<sup>20</sup> and his friends. In this context, the music not only underlines the physicality of the scene but also transforms conflict into a form of collective release, a trope that resonates with stereotypical images of the Balkan temperament. Unlike the cosmopolitan idioms that dominate most of the soundtrack, overt folk markers are scarce. The striking exception is *Zum-zum kolo*, whose vernacular inflexion sets it apart as the most recognizably folk-oriented piece in the films. By reactivating these symbolic codes, *Zum-zum kolo* stages the clash at the intersection of European modernity and Balkan alterity, turning the fight itself into a metaphor for Yugoslavia’s cultural position.

<sup>19</sup> For instance, the songs *Pinja Kolada* and *Marija Ana*, conceived in the style of interwar schlager, together with *Samo malo* and *Bum Bum*, which draw on the idiom of modern dance music (Charleston), demonstrate the film’s engagement with contemporary currents in popular music. By contrast, *Zum-zum kolo*, *Koka kolo*, and *Pukni zoro* function as representatives of the traditional strand.

<sup>20</sup> Radomir Rade Pašić (1892–1964) was a Serbian and Yugoslav industrialist, the son of politician Nikola Pašić. He was notorious for his arrogance, involvement in scandals, and a lavish lifestyle.

## Yugoslavia and Uruguay: Collective Identity and the Conflict of Cultures

A pivotal instance of cultural struggle in *Montevideo* occurs at the arrival of the Yugoslav team in Uruguay, where Serbian musical symbols are reinterpreted through local expressions. These symbolic encounters have historically functioned as venues for identity negotiation, wherein cultural practices serve as tools for both resistance and self-assertion. Theorists of nationalism assert that music and dance frequently serve as succinct symbols of national identity, transforming abstract concepts of “us” and “them” into emotionally resonant forms. As Martin Stokes observes, music event “evokes and organizes collective memories and present experiences of place with an intensity, power and simplicity unmatched by any other social activity. The ‘places’ constructed through music involve notions of difference and social boundary” (Stokes 1994, 3). Anthony D. Smith similarly emphasizes that national identity rests on shared symbols, myths, and memories that bind members together and differentiate them from others, investing the idea of the nation with emotional depth and a sense of historical continuity (Smith 1991, 19–42). In this sense, the arrival of the Yugoslav team in Montevideo becomes not only a sporting or cinematic event, but also a performative scene of cultural translation, where music itself mediates between two symbolic geographies – the Balkans and Latin America. As Robert Pešut (Magnifico) once noted, the dialogue between Latin rhythms and Balkan melodies – and, conversely, Balkan rhythms and Latin melodies – feels almost natural, despite the enormous distance between the two worlds. What connects them, he suggested, is a shared emotional intensity – a pathos woven equally into their lyrics and harmonies (Matoz 2013). A South American song, he added, could easily find its home in a Serbo-Croatian arrangement for accordion and tambourine, sounding both new and strangely familiar – and the same could happen in the opposite direction (Ibid.).

Therefore, *Marš na Drinu*, the most recognizable patriotic march from the First World War, is presented in the style of the Cuban cha-cha-cha dance [*Cha del Rio Drina*]. One of the film’s leitmotifs *Pukni zoro* is heard in Spanish during a celebration of a football game triumph. This version – titled *Madrugadas* – is one of two songs<sup>21</sup> recorded by the Spanish singer Luz Casal in collaboration with Robert Pešut and underscores the film’s transnational affective appeal and suggesting how emotional memory is mobilized through familiar melodies across linguistic and cultural boundaries. This was confirmed by the singer herself in an interview: “For me, singing the two songs from *Montevideo* is a necessity. They are sometimes performed even outside this part of Europe, because the lyrics carry a meaningful message – they speak of nostalgia, freedom, of those values that are understood in every corner of the world” (Savanović and Đorđević 2022). These transpositions dramatize the encounter of national identity

21 The other one is called *Al Viento*.

with global modernity: melodies deeply rooted in Serbian and Yugoslav memory circulate in new, hybrid forms, simultaneously affirming continuity with the homeland and inscribing the narrative into an international soundscape. This gains further clarity when viewed through Bohlman's reflections on world music, which he situates within the broader processes of globalization (Bohlman 2002, xi). His discussions of repertoires that take on new meanings when separated from earlier functions, as well as of the shifting boundaries between the West and its "others," further illuminate how familiar melodies can be reinterpreted when heard in new stylistic and performative settings (2002, 19–20, 38). Within this framework, the musical adaptations in *Montevideo* emerge not merely as playful stylistic gestures but as historically grounded transformations that activate and redirect cultural memory. The symbolic axis of this negotiation is crystallized in the line "Na njihovu sambu – mi ćemo kolo" ["To their samba, we will respond with a kolo"] (*See You in Montevideo*, 38:52), uttered by the team's coach Boško Simonović during a training session ahead of the match against Brazil.

The contrast between samba and kolo goes far beyond the level of popular entertainment. It becomes a way of performing and affirming collective identity, framed by the tensions of international rivalry and cultural curiosity. This dynamic becomes especially evident in the scene where the Yugoslav team plays against Uruguay in soundtrack called *Koka Kolo*: the soundscape of the match blends the rhythm of the tango – a marker of the host nation's musical identity – with the recurring motives of the kolo, suggesting a moment of similarity rather than opposition. In this light, the film turns football into a symbolic stage where music draws and re-draws cultural boundaries. Identity here is not something fixed or isolated – it takes shape through contact, imitation, and even confrontation with the Other.

## Epilogue

In the post-Yugoslav cultural landscape, the interwar period has increasingly become a space of projection and rediscovery – a symbolic reservoir through which fragmented histories are reimagined in search of continuity. The films *Montevideo*, *Bog te video!* and *Montevideo, vidimo se!* acted as a sort of gateway into a larger wave of film and television creation that looks to the 1920s and 1930s as a fertile field for communal imagination. Yet the value of these films extends beyond their emotional or aesthetic appeal. They are grounded in historical fact and supported by substantial research aimed at portraying the interwar period, but this material is mobilized selectively, shaping a version of interwar life that aligns with the filmmakers' aesthetic and interpretive aims.

If we return to the questions posed at the end of the Introduction, it becomes clear that the stylized vision of the interwar period emerges precisely through the interaction of music with image and dialogue, where the soundtrack serves primary as mediator of affect and historical imagination. Magnifico's movie soundtrack that blends Balkan and Latin folk idioms, early jazz, schlagers, and cabaret, constructs a nostalgic sound-

scape that encompasses both the culture of remembrance of the immense losses of the First World War and the optimism of the interwar years as a period of renewed vitality and hope. This soundscape does not simply accompany the narrative but shapes its emotional texture and mediates the relation between history and memory, translating football matches, friendships, and scenes of everyday life into musically choreographed tableaux.

While this stylization lends the films their emotional appeal, it is also ideologically charged. As Mitrović observes, cultural products rarely reproduce history itself and they rather provide interpretive frameworks through which history is emotionally processed and aesthetically reshaped. In *Montevideo*, political discord and social tensions give way to narratives of perseverance, camaraderie, and communal affect. The soundtrack thus functions as a unifying element, translating historical complexity into a mood of coherence and belonging. What results is not a reconstruction of the past, but an aestheticized memory – a carefully orchestrated vision nostalgically reimagined by filmmakers. This aligns with the broader romanticized perception of the interwar period as a time when Belgrade was striving toward European modernity, while the newly formed Yugoslavia sought to establish itself as a participant in the cultural and political life of Europe. In this light, the analysis has shown that it is not musical structure but music's affective and intermedial functions that shape the film's historical imaginary: through mood, pacing and associative resonance, the soundtrack reframes the interwar past for contemporary audiences.

By examining these two movies, we have demonstrated how recently written music contributes to the development of national identity, the culture of memory, and an imagined daily existence that is almost a century apart from our own. The song *Pukni Zoro*, which soon after the movie's premiere transcended its cinematic beginnings and into popular circulation, is arguably the most notable example of this continuity. Within weeks, the songs from *Montevideo* were echoing through public places across Serbia, while *Pukni zoro* quickly acquired the status of a contemporary folk anthem – performed by choirs, pop singers, and even the Radio Television of Serbia Symphony Orchestra, which incorporated the film's music into its regular repertoire. Its immense popularity illustrates how music can bridge almost a century of historical distance, transforming a newly written song into what feels like a long-standing expression of collective sentiment and national memory. In the end, *Montevideo* shows that music can occasionally transcend historical distance more successfully than words or images: Magnifico's soundtrack serves as a tool for both remembering and reimagining history through affect and sound in the post-Yugoslav present.

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## OBLIKOVANJE MEĐURATNOG ZVUKA I PROSTORA: FILMSKA MUZIKA I KULTURA SEĆANJA U POSTJUGOSLOVENSKOM KONTEKSTU (rezime)

U radu smo analizirali muziku u filmovima *Montevideo, Bog te video!* (2010) i *Montevideo, vidimo se!* (2014) u kontekstu rekonstrukcije prostora i vremena između dvaju svetskih ratova. Međuratni period poslednjih decenija predstavlja neiscrpnu inspiraciju na svim poljima, od naučnih istraživanja do muzike, filma i drugih umetnosti, pa je cilj rada bio da se muzika osvetli u kontekstu nekih njegovih ključnih odlika: nastojanja društva da se oporavi od gubitaka u Prvom svetskom ratu, idealizovanog viđenja tog vremena kao epohe mira i blagostanja, kao i prodora modernih muzičkih žanrova u urbani prostor. Stoga smo analizirali na koji način muzika aktivno oblikuje istorijsku imaginaciju i emocionalni okvir filma (Klaudija Gorbman), kao i ulogu koju je umetnost – i posebno muzika – imala u svakodnevnom životu (Džon Fiske i Andrej Mitrović). Pošto se na početku filma kaže da je reč o „prvoj deceniji mira posle Velikog rata”, muzika je tumačena i kontekstu kulture sećanja (Aleida Asman i Todor Kuljić) i tanatopolitike (Todor Kuljić).

Celine u radu postavljene su prema prostornim relacijama: (1) centar Beograda i periferija; (2) Srbija i Jugoslavija; (3) Jugoslavija i Evropa i (4) Jugoslavija i Urugvaj. Takav koncept omogućio je da se muzika sagleda u lokalnom, državnom, evropskom i globalnom kontekstu. Analizirani su dobro poznati dihotomi „Istok–Zapad” i „tradicionalno–moderno”, gde je centar Beograda predstavljao žarište modernosti (klubovi, džez i šlageri), a periferija čuvala tradicionalne oblike muziciranja (kafana i narodna muzika). Pesma *Pukni zoro* analizirana je kroz prizmu kulture sećanja i koncepta tanatopolitike.

tike, kao i nostalgичnog, emotivnog narativa koji prožima oba filma. Odnos Jugoslavije i Evrope se umnogome pokazao sličnim odnosu centra Beograda i periferije, budući da je Jugoslavija u međuratnom periodu delovala kao evropska periferija. Konačno, dolazak jugoslovenskog tima na fudbalsko prvenstvo u Urugvaju 1930. godine otvorio je prostor za susret kultura, što je inspirisalo Roberta Pešuta Magnifika da spoji balkanski i latinoamerički muzički idiom.

Analiza muzike pokazala je da Magnifikova muzika u ovim filmovima aktivno učestvuje u predstavi konstruisanja nacionalnog identiteta, kulture sećanja i zamišljene svakodnevnice udaljene gotovo čitav vek. Najupečatljiviji primer je pesma *Pukni zoro*, koja je ubrzo nakon premijere filma nadrasla svoju izvornu namenu i postala svojevrsna savremena himna. Njena izuzetna popularnost pokazuje kako muzika može premostiti istorijsku distancu, pretvarajući novu pesmu u trajni simbol kolektivnog sećanja i nostalgije za jednim idealizovanim vremenom.