

April 2012

"Someday We'll Find It." An Inside Look at the Music and Cultural Perspectives of *The Muppet Movie*

Eric Dancy
Western Michigan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/hilltopreview>



Part of the Family, Life Course, and Society Commons, Film and Media Studies Commons, and the Music Commons

Recommended Citation

Dancy, Eric (2012) ""Someday We'll Find It." An Inside Look at the Music and Cultural Perspectives of *The Muppet Movie*," *The Hilltop Review*: Vol. 5 : Iss. 2 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/hilltopreview/vol5/iss2/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate College at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Hilltop Review by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.

“SOMEDAY WE’LL FIND IT.” AN INSIDE LOOK AT THE MUSIC AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES OF *THE MUPPET MOVIE*

By Erik Dancy
School of Music
erik.j.dancy@wmich.edu

Introduction –“A Rainbow Connection”

Tradition in any culture helps showcase a group of people’s identity. Whether it is food, music, politics, college football, family rituals, you name it, people are looking to feel appreciated because they associate with a certain group of people. When people within a group break tradition, name-calling, bullying and even physical harming becomes more common, because they do not “fit the norm.” Sadly, these kinds of negative behaviors can cause serious mental and physical damage to those who try to “think outside the box.” Interestingly though, the ones who tend to think creatively are ultimately the ones who bring something new to culture that everyone falls in love with. Steve Jobs changed the world with his personal computer; George Lucas changed the way we look at movies, and Jim Henson brought light into a limited world of family and children’s entertainment outside of Walt Disney’s creations. Jim Henson set out to convey an anti-bullying message with his friendly cast of friends from Sesame Street and The Muppet Show, and he inspired kids like me to keep dreaming, keep believing and do just what you set out to do, even if it is not easy “bein’ green.”

Even though my father passed the tradition of watching *The Muppet Movie* to me, this message from the 1970s had such an impact even in the 1990s during my childhood, and I am sure I will continue to pass this on to my own kids. So how did a frog, and a pig and a bear and a... a whatever come to steal the hearts of kids like myself in the 1990s and others from the 1980s and 1970s? Hopefully looking at the music of Paul Williams and Kenny Ascher from *The Muppet Movie* will give us an insight to why their popular music score helped this movie become a National Film Registry member. The music of *The Muppet Movie* demonstrates how popular music in film can help depict timeless cultural values, even in the setting of one particular decade.

What’s So Special about The Muppet Movie?

With the music from *The Muppet Movie* presenting an array of popular styles, the film’s music can connect to audiences of all ages at various levels. Before diving into the specifics of the films, it is important to focus on some ideas considering popular film music in general. Kathryn Kalinak writes in her book *Film Music: A Very Short Introduction*, “The contemporary theorist Michel Chion argues that film needs music because it makes images pliable. Music allows film ‘to wander at will through time and space.’”¹

1 Kathryn Kalinak, "Why Does Film Music Work?" In *Film Music: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 24.

She goes on to say, “Film is produced through culture, but it is perceived by individuals.”² These two short quotes introduce why the music from *The Muppet Movie* can depict certain emotions throughout the film, and how the audience can embrace the ideas heard and seen on the screen. For example, Kenny Ascher and Paul Williams use melodies from their songs as a part of the score in the film, giving us continuity in time and space, and these melodies also hint at the emotions we felt during the songs as the dialogue occurs between the characters. For example, Ascher uses a short melodic line from “Rainbow Connection” during Kermit’s conversation with himself in the desert scene, and the music reinforces the audience’s feelings for Kermit when he’s sad for letting people down (8:20).³ Ascher also relives Miss Piggy’s emotional high on her date with Kermit at the hotel by using a melody from “Never Before and Never Again” (5:20).⁴ Observing these two examples of why film music works in this movie, it is necessary to be clear on how popular music affects our outlook on culture and how films that use popular music—in this case, a film musical—help establish a sense of identity in time.

The Muppet Movie can be classified as a “Hollywood musical,” not because the gang of Muppets travels to Hollywood, but because it is a film with musical numbers, as opposed to a stage musical. Given this information, the roles that the music provides in terms of emotional connection and cultural context are evident. Heather Laing writes in her essay, *Emotion by the Numbers*, “One of the primary roles of music in narrative film is the representation of an emotional level that it would be impossible to convey through the visual or other soundtrack elements.”⁵ This quote alludes again to why film music works, but it also provides us the fact that in Hollywood musicals every song, every cue and every score element serves a purpose and reiterates emotions to the audience. For these reasons, she also suggests that film music does not rely on self-contained form, much like a symphony or any other art music form that has no visual aid to keep the music from sounding spontaneous or congested. In an opposite light though, within the film musical are songs that rely heavily on form.⁶

Even in viewing films, audiences need consistency and familiarity with each other and with music, so songs in a movie may be easier to relate to than abstract score samples, since choruses and verses repeat during a given number. This element allows the audience to hear the songs and interpret the lyrics more thoroughly as opposed to focus on the instrumental score elements seen in non-musical films. In his essay, *Cinema and Popular Song*, Rick Altman discusses these attributes that allow for song to connect with emotions. He says, “Popular song depends on language, and is predictable, singable, rememberable, and physical ly involving in ways that ‘classical’ music usually is not.”⁷ Since songs have a central form to them, this allows people to also look at the songs in a film as an outside art form, and in the case of *The Muppet Movie*, many of the songs gather inspirations from popular traditions during the 1970s, when the film was produced.

1 Kathryn Kalinak, “Why Does Film Music Work?” In *Film Music: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 24.

2 Kalinak, “Why Does Film Music Work,” 29.

3 *The Muppet Movie*, DVD, directed by James Frawley (1979; Burbank, California: Walt Disney Home Entertainment, 2005), Chapter 8.

4 *The Muppet Movie*, Chapter 6.

5 Heather Laing, “Emotion by Numbers: Music, Song and the Musical,” in *Musicals: Hollywood and Beyond*, eds. Bill Marshall and Robynn Stilwell (Exeter, United Kingdom: Intellect Books, 2000), 6.

6 Laing, “Emotion by the Numbers,” 9.

7 Rick Altman, “Cinema and Popular Song: The Lost Tradition,” in *Soundtrack Available: Essays on Film and Popular Music*, eds. Pamela Robertson Wojcik and Arthur Knight (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2001), 24.

Popular music at the right place and the right time can lead to emotional and cultural success on screen. *The Muppet Movie* gathers many dramatic and comedic elements to create the tone of the film, so it is difficult to describe the film as either a “serious” or a “funny” film. What other film features a frog, a bear and a pig journeying across the country with a greedy salesman chasing after them, to start their own television show? What other film features an alien from outer space singing a ballad about how he dreams of returning to his homeland? Thankfully, because the film plays to both sides of the spectrum, comments regarding both sides are valuable concerning the popular music and the score. Robb Wright, author of the essay, *Score vs. Song*, comments on popular music in film and the “proper” usage after discussing certain elements that may appear dated, such as language, clothing and hairstyles. He says, “For dramatic films therefore, it appears that there are significant risks in using popular music rather than score.”⁸ After reading what he says about dated material, this quote about the risk of using popular music in dramatic or comedic film would concern any director.

Choosing the right music to connect with the audience plays a factor in how successful a film can be. He goes on to say, “The right song in the right place can be an extremely powerful device, which enables a film to effectively build on the work that the song has already done.”⁹ In the substance of the article, it is clear that Wright emphasizes his focus on popular songs in films that are not musicals, but that does not mean musical films cannot apply to this same principle. *The Muppet Movie* with its original songs from a 1970s composer and songwriter demonstrates an excellent example of using the right songs at the right time. Paul Williams had enjoyed so much success with The Carpenters during the 1970s, and he also loved working with Kenny Ascher¹⁰, so having the two write the music turned out to be a smart move by the production staff. *The Muppet* franchise took a risk by using popular music from this decade in a later film, *Muppets from Space* (1999), and recorded the lowest box-office success of the seven-movie franchise. Sure, the music from the film highlighted some excellent funk tunes from the 1970s, including “Brick House,” “Celebration” and “Shining Star,”¹¹ and the use of these tunes could have paid homage to the era of *The Muppet Show*, but overall, a late 1990s audience was not going to connect with the film as much as a 1970s audience did with the first film, because the right songs were used at the wrong time.

Up until now this essay has discussed a general sense of why film music works, how musical numbers and cues play to the emotions of audiences in film musicals, and what constitutes popular music’s ability to be successful in film. Using these ideas, the following sections will explore the film in-depth from a musical perspective, not just as a separate art form, but how the music helps carry the narrative and highlight the messages that Jim Henson and his crew set to portray in this masterpiece.

8 Robb Wright, “Score vs. Song: Art, Commerce and the H Factor in Film and Television Music,” in *Popular Music and Film*, ed. Ian Inglis (London: Wallflower Press, 2003), 12.

9 Wright, “Score vs. Song,” 13.

10 Carl Wiser, “Songwriter Interviews: Paul Williams,” Songfacts, accessed October 30, 2011, http://www.songfacts.com/blog/interviews/paul_williams/.

11 Various Artists, *Muppets From Space: The Ultimate Muppet Trip – Music from the Motion Picture*, ©1999, Sony Wonder, B00000JKPE, Compact Disc.

Musical Features in The Muppet Movie

The score and songs during *The Muppet Movie* represent a popular style of songwriting from the 1970s, but the placement of cues and song lyrics gives the audience a timeless appreciation. Though some of this material may appear chronological, the point is not to present each musical moment as a “run-down” of the film, going scene by scene and analyzing every detail of the music. Rather, these are key examples that show how the music, both singing and non-singing elements, helps carry the story, and how the music emphasizes the overall themes or messages for audiences to reflect upon.

The film opens with a short introduction at the first screening of *The Muppet Movie*, in which all of the main characters from the film are watching. The camera starts at the top of the revolving globe and glides down to show the setting: “World Wide Studios.” This first shot features no character appearances until Stantler and Woldorf (the heckling duo from *The Muppet Show*) crack the joke about nobody wanting to see this movie in public. Kenny Ascher and Paul Williams, during those forty-five seconds before their appearance, cleverly set up the scene with an “overture-like” cue including eighth notes in the piano and a triumphant brass and woodwind melody (0:27–1:16).¹² How else would you likely start an American musical, other than an overture? Even though Kermit and the gang’s road trip does not start until later, the two composers set up the audience with the same expectations as a stage musical by using this technique in the cue.

After the initial scene filled with nonsense so typical of the Muppets, Kermit sings the most popular song from the film: “Rainbow Connection.” Paul Williams described a few insights to writing this song in an interview for Songfacts saying, “It’s the one that establishes the lead character... how do we show that he’s a thinking frog, and that he has an introspective soul, and all that good stuff?”¹³ He goes on to say, “I think the song works because it’s more about questions than answers.”¹⁴ These two quotes are so crucial to the plot and the overtones of the movie. Many scholars and critics have often been praised the Muppets for being “believable,” even though they are Muppets, not human beings. In this three-minute song, Williams and Ascher establish that Kermit has been exposed to culture by singing and asking questions about what is going on in the world. Kermit has high hopes, and he is a dreamer. Ascher’s beautiful scoring filled with orchestral strings, banjo, and bass guitar along with Williams’s lyrics send a message to all of us: keep searching, keep dreaming and “someday we’ll find it” (4:37–7:50).¹⁵

Williams’s comments about this song having more questions than answers add depth for the upcoming plot of the film. With too many answers, the movie is going to be very short, leaving little to learn from our felt friends. For the audience, the lyrics also demonstrate a personal message to our daily lives. With have too many answers about our own future, the need to learn, grow or be molded into the person we become means nothing. Everyone searches for purposes to life, whether immediate or long-term, and this song encourages the audience to keep dreaming and keep asking. “Rainbow Connection” connects the audience to those inspirational thoughts, and it attaches us to the character that wants to make “millions of people happy” after being confronted by the Hollywood agent in his home swamp.

12 *The Muppet Movie*, Chapter 1.

13 Wisner, “Songwriter Interviews: Paul Williams.”

14 Wisner, “Songwriter Interviews: Paul Williams.”

15 *The Muppet Movie*, Chapter 1.

Kenny Ascher's instrumentation choice also adds to the emotional connection of this song.

The banjo and bass guitar function as a stereotypical "folk sound," helping establish the swamp setting, but that sound also helps define a sense of "home" for Kermit, as many folk songs and traditions help us establish "home" in our own lives. On the other side are these beautiful violin countermelodies, which can be associated with "art music," so the instrumentation almost "bridges the gap" between folk and art. With the song connecting to so many people inside and outside of the film, this mix of folk and art music becomes popular to our culture. "Rainbow Connection" along with other songs in the film, address these values of pursuing your dreams, whether it is love for another, such as Ms. Piggy's ballad "Never Before, Never Again" (6:46–9:16),¹⁶ or The Electric Mayhem's dream to "land that big gig" with their funky rock tune "Can You Picture That" (3:50–6:10),¹⁷ but the film's music also explores this idea of a journey throughout the story.

The very next scene showing Kermit on the bicycle not only demonstrates great technological achievement, but it also shows us how music can be flexible in time and space. Williams and Ascher again use "folk-like" sounds with harmonica, fiddle and a single snare drum to help the audience see Kermit ride the bicycle from his swamp home into town. Once he reaches civilization, the music changes as well to using more orchestral instruments. In this short clip, the viewers also hear the first of many cues to an upcoming song: "Moving Right Along" (2:57–3:01).¹⁸ Ascher and Williams's utilizing this quote from the upcoming song symbolizes this overall journey throughout the movie as a growing, changing character, not just the trip to Hollywood.

Journey as a concept plays a large role in character development and fuels the music for this film. After meeting Fozzie Bear in the "vaudeville-like" El Sleezo Café, characterized by its stereotypical tango music (3:47–7:49),¹⁹ Journey as a concept plays a large role in character development and fuels the music for this film. After meeting Fozzie Bear in the "vaudeville-like" El Sleezo Café, characterized by its stereotypical tango music (3:47–7:49),²⁰ With the fun-filled, nonsensical characters to the hope and joy that many of these songs embody, Jim Henson clearly aimed this movie at "family" audiences, so that everyone could enjoy watching. This song and scene demonstrate how these unforgettable qualities embody the journey and fits into this "family-oriented" genre. A bear and a frog singing about a road trip to Hollywood, while driving a car would be nonsense in every day life, but instead, it has become an enjoyable expectation of films aimed at this audience. American and British societies have been associated with these nonsense traits in literature since the nineteenth century. Michelle Ann Abate's article, *Taking Silliness Seriously*, says, "With their unusual appearance and equally bizarre names, many of Henson's Muppet creatures resemble the fantastical Jabberwockies, Bandersnatches, Sneetches and Zooks found in the work of Carroll and Seuss."²⁰ With the fun-filled, nonsensical characters to the hope and joy that many of these

16 *The Muppet Movie*, Chapter 5.

17 *The Muppet Movie*, Chapter 4.

18 *The Muppet Movie*, Chapter 2..

19 *The Muppet Movie*, Chapter 2.

20 Ian Wojcik-Andrews, "What is a Children's Film?" in *Children's Films: History, Ideology, Pedagogy, Theory* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000), 9.

songs embody, Jim Henson clearly aimed this movie at "family" audiences, so that everyone could enjoy watching. This song and scene demonstrate how these unforgettable qualities embody the journey and fits into this "family-oriented" genre. A bear and a frog singing about a road trip to Hollywood, while driving a car would be nonsense in every day life, but instead, it has become an enjoyable expectation of films aimed at this audience. American and British societies have been associated with these nonsense traits in literature since the nineteenth century. Michelle Ann Abate's article, *Taking Silliness Seriously*, says, "With their unusual appearance and equally bizarre names, many of Henson's Muppet creatures resemble the fantastical Jaberwockies, Bandersnatches, Sneetches and Zooks found in the work of Carroll and Seuss."²¹

Nonsense in this film does not stop at the character's appearance, though. The lyrics for "Moving Right Along" contain so many nonsense phrases that help the viewers further themselves from reality and deepen their connection to the story and characters. Additionally, Henson's small group of "misfits" can be seen as minority group to their human counterparts, given the continual persecution of characters like Kermit and Fozzie. Given this mindset, the Muppets moving through space so freely in the film is a huge statement about cultural values in the United States. Richard Dyer writes in an essay concerning race in Hollywood musicals about minority groups being restricted to "entertainment" roles, such as a bandleader or a performer, staying in one space rather than moving freely as a developing character.²² The Muppets exemplify the exact opposite persona, as they are the main characters traveling across the nation. As a message to families, the song and scene also encourages certain activities such as singing in the car together, dreaming of special places we want to visit, and being generous to help friends.

Songs like "I'm Going to Go Back There Someday," "Never Before, Never Again," and "I Hope That Something Better Comes Along," reveal a deeper perspective on the journey concept. Journey does not always relate to reaching goals, rather it is a search to find a place or a group of people we call "home" or even a search within oneself for personal identity. Tara Parmiter writes in her essay for *Kermit Culture*, "This sense of belonging highlights one of the most important philosophies of all the Muppets movies: we will find ourselves when we find our home, and that search for home is the true purpose of our travels."²³ Miss Piggy's one "claim to fame" in this film, "Never Before, Never Again," represents (or stereotypes) not only her femininity but also her satisfaction in her identity through this film. While we find character changes in Kermit, Fozzie and Gonzo, having been hunted down by Doc Hopper and continuing to build their relationships, the dominant female character Miss Piggy never really changes her attitude after falling in love at first sight with Kermit. She even sings, "For me this is the first time and the last. Is this an angel's wish for men? Never before and never again" (0:22-0:32).²⁴ She has made up her mind, and she will not stop at anything to fall into her lover's arms, even if that means demonstrating her martial arts skills on the villains. Some would argue that Miss Piggy may not need to have dreams like Kermit does, because she already has commercials and beauty pageants lined up to be featured in. One could also argue

21 Michelle Ann Abate, "Taking Silliness Seriously: Jim Henson's *The Muppet Show*, the Anglo-American Tradition of Nonsense, and Cultural Critique," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 42 (2009): 597.

22 Richard Dyer, "The Colour of Entertainment," in *Musicals: Hollywood and Beyond*, eds. Bill Marshall and Robynn Stilwell (Exeter, United Kingdom: Intellect Books, 2000), 27.

23 Tara K. Parmiter, "The American Journey Narrative in the Muppets Movies," in *Kermit Culture: Critical Perspectives on Jim Henson's Muppets*, eds. Jennifer C. Garlen and Anissa M. Graham, (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009), 139.

24 Paul Williams and Kenny Ascher, "Never Before, Never Again," in *The Muppet Movie: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack*, ©1993, Jim Henson Records, 35019, Compact Disc.

though, as I mentioned earlier, that her journey is pursuing her dream of loving Kermit. Instead, with all of these other distractions, she comes back to Kermit, almost as a last resort as she hitchhikes following her failed commercial session, and her character as well as her dreams never truly develop into anything more than her love for our green friend.

Though it is an opposite reaction of Miss Piggy's feelings, Rowlf's solo piano buster, "I Hope That Something Better Comes Along," depicts a flat journey as a male without a love interest. There is no denying that this song embodies a popular trend through out many musical genres: male self-pity. After exclaiming his nightly routine of drinking beer and walking to tire himself for rest, Rowlf sings, "You can't live with 'em, you can't live without 'em. There's something irresistabullish about 'em. We grin and bear it 'cause the nights are long. I hope that something better comes along" (1:33–1:48).²⁵ He has made up his mind that all women have an irresistible quality, but he hopes that something other than a woman comes in his life to take his mind off of life's stresses. Though he finds a group of friends to associate with and joins in on their travels, his stubbornness does not allow for him to grow into anything better than what he already is. On screen, we have the one connection between Rowlf and Miss Piggy during the hitchhiking scene, and in the background (or on the car radio) we hear a slow swing trumpet version of Rowlf's song (1:50–3:00).²⁶ These two characters show us a few things about gender roles, given the circumstances. However, this is not a 1950s sitcom or variety show, featuring the standard false reality of Mom cooking in the home and Dad reading the newspaper with a pipe after dinner in *Leave it to Beaver*. Instead, an established woman hitchhikes to fall back into her lover's arms, and a struggling male musician tries to make ends meet, relying on alcohol and self-pity to keep his sanity level. Is that "family" entertainment? Is that material to expose to children? Given these two examples, the journey does not always mean, "I am going to do that someday!" Sometimes it is a need for a character to be comfortable about his or her identity, and other times the journey stretches into searching for "home," such as Gonzo's beautiful ballad, "I'm Going to Go Back There Someday."

The new car breaks down in the middle of the desert the night before the audition, and it seems as though Kermit is not going to become "rich and famous." The only incident to make this scene more miserable would have been some rain, and after the last song, "I Hope that Something Better Comes Along," one could assume Gonzo might start singing about how miserable life can be when goals seem unattainable. Instead, our blue friend sings a song wishing to go back "home" to the stars (5:00–7:36).²⁷ On a side note, Gonzo does not officially find out he is from outer space until the film *Muppets from Space*, but provided the lyrics to this song, everyone can assume he is not from this world. Fozzie strums his guitar, and Rowlf blows his harmonica to introduce this song, reminding us again of this "folk sound" associated with "home" for Kermit and the other characters. Gonzo sings, "Come and go with me, it's more fun to share. We'll both be completely at home in midair. We're flyin', not walkin', on featherless wings. We can hold on to love like invisible strings" (1:15–1:45).²⁸ The song may allude to the idea of pursuing dreams, but the main focus here is Gonzo wishing he could find his way home, because that would be so much better than sitting in misery, being stuck in the desert. One review says about Gonzo singing this song, "Gonzo's now more

25 Paul Williams and Kenny Ascher, "I Hope That Something Better Comes Along," in *The Muppet Movie: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack*, ©1993, Jim Henson Records, 35019, Compact Disc.

26 *The Muppet Movie*, Chapter 8.

27 *The Muppet Movie*, Chapter 8.

28 Paul Williams and Kenny Ascher, "I'm Going to Go Back There Someday," in *The Muppet Movie: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack*, ©1993, Jim Henson Records, 35019, Compact Disc.

than the blue puppet from space... He’s something else, he’s some of us; still here, still weird, and still wondering what’s out there and still blue.”²⁹ Do we not find ourselves wondering the same things? *I just want to go home. I am so weird, why would anybody want to fall in love with me? What happens if I fail?* Luckily, Gonzo provides the audience with hope in this song by saying that he is going to go back; he is not going to give up; he wants us to come with him; he is going to be okay with who he is, and he will find home, someday. Eventually, the Muppets band together to become a family, giving everyone a sense of security, an element of feeling at home in their new habitat: Hollywood.

After examining many of the songs and some of the score elements of *The Muppet Movie*, Paul Williams and Kenny Ascher composed a soundtrack worthy of high recognition, adding popular and “classical” elements to grab the hearts of audiences everywhere. Before concluding this essay, it is important to understand some of the ways the movie and the music continue to live their legacies, even after thirty years since the theatrical release.

What legacy does this movie leave?

With the Muppet franchise spanning over four decades now, the legacy of this movie will continue to remain in the homes of many family traditions, including my own. In particular, since the film was aimed for people of all ages to enjoy, especially children, the experience of the movie on television is a way that the movie will continue to live on for generations as long as we allow it to. Karen Lury’s essay on popular music in children’s television explores the relationship between children’s experience with television and their tastes in popular music. She says, “The experience of television is understood as entwined with this ‘evolution’ of musical taste.”³⁰ If we continue to show *The Muppet Movie* DVD to our children, not only will they enjoy the nonsensical elements, but also their tastes in “popular music” may extend past the current “top forty” songs on the radio. Lury also discusses that the television is a private experience within the safety of the home, so there are more opportunities to experience the television with more activity, such as dancing along to the songs.³¹ The more children actively participate in the viewing experience, the more likely they will remember the amount of fun they are having and the material they are learning. Lury’s article focuses on television shows as opposed to movies, but since this film is no longer being shown in theatres, watching the DVD on television is the closest venue to exposing this movie’s legacy to upcoming generations.

While many of the values and visual experiences of this movie start in the home, there is opportunity for musicians and educators to pass on the recurring messages from the film to audiences and students. Many artists have covered songs from *The Muppet Show* and *The Muppet Movie*, including “Rainbow Connection” and “Bein’ Green.” Musicians are always striving for authenticity in performance, but many are also striving to realize their own voices, so covering these songs is a way to convey the messages underneath to new listeners. Live performances and recordings of these covered songs can create a much stronger connection between the musicians and listeners with convincing interpretations. Educators also play a large role in relaying these values into the youth of this nation. Julie Maudlin writes in her essay for Kermit Culture, “Like Henson, I always have been, and always will be a dreamer...

29 Andy Worehall, “‘The Muppet Movie Soundtrack’ Review,” Sock Monkey Sound, accessed November 10, 2011, <http://sockmonkeysound.com/articles/album-reviews/muppet-movie-soundtrack/>.

30 Karen Lury, “Chewing Gum for the Ears: Children’s Television and Popular Music.” *Popular Music* 21 (2002): 296.

31 Lury, “Chewing Gum for the Ears,” 299.

I believe that imagination is the only way to find ‘more vibrant ways’ of being, doing, and teaching.”³² Not just music teachers, but all teachers carry the legacy of these messages with-in Williams and Ascher’s music by continuing to dream and pursue their highest educational potential. Savvy teachers carry the legacy of this film by relaying these messages to students, even in the face of adversity and persecution, in order to better this next generation. Gender, race, search for home, journeying and dreaming are all subjects from this film and its music to implement into curriculum and mentoring. Yes, this may be the formal way of inspiring new generations to experience the film and the music, but the messages are timeless values to our culture, so it is important to expose students of all ages to these issues.

Conclusion –“The Magic Store”

On November 23, 2011, Walt Disney Pictures released *The Muppets* as a new adventure for Kermit, Fozzie, Gonzo and Miss Piggy to gain popularity with audiences in today’s culture of high speed chases, scandals and epic battles highlighting American cinemas. A new generation brought new styles of music that work for today’s audiences, and like the original, the movie uses the right music at the right time, allowing for financial and musical success. If you have made it this far into the paper, you may be thinking to yourself, *what else can he have to talk about? I get it. The Muppet Movie and its music show us timeless values in our culture.*

The Muppet Movie with its “socially redeeming value” exemplifies how one film can influence generations of people through singing and performing. Nearly three decades have passed before this latest film has brought back some of the same “magic” qualities that the reviewers loved about the original. James Bobin’s film direction and Christopher Beck’s original music finally brought back some of the traditions including witty humor, memorable melodies and nonsensical lyrics with songs such as “Pictures in My Head,” “Are You a Man or a Muppet?” and the “The Whistling Caruso,”³⁴ that fans have been dying to relive since “Rainbow Connection,” “Moving Right Along,” and “I’m Going to Go Back There Someday,” hit the big screen. *The Muppets* shows us how the legacy of *The Muppet Movie* continues to grab audience’s hearts now and hopefully forever, therefore promoting a timeless appreciation of Jim Henson, Paul Williams and Kenny Ascher’s masterpiece of a movie and soundtrack. The journey certainly does not stop here, even if the Muppets do not remain an icon in American “family” entertainment forever. Yes, the Muppets have established a tradition that people do not like to veer far away from, but they also continue to inspire us to keep our hopes alive for the future, and to try new experiences along the everlasting, ever-changing journey. “Someday, we’ll find it,” and together, we can build a better tomorrow at “The Magic Store,” can you picture that?

Works Cited

Abate, Michelle Ann. “Taking Silliness Seriously: Jim Henson’s *The Muppet Show*, the

32 Julie G. Maudlin, “The Muppet Show as Educational Critique,” in *Kermit Culture: Critical Perspectives on Jim Henson’s Muppets*, eds by Jennifer C. Garlen and Anissa M. Graham, (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009), 179.

33 Vincent Canby, “The Screen: Muppets Go to Hollywood: Roadiest Road Picture,” *New York Times*, June 22, 1979, Movie Review, accessed November 5, 2011, <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9B03EFDD1239E732A25751C2A9609C946890D6CF>.

34 Christopher Beck, *The Muppets: Original Soundtrack*, © 2011, Walt Disney Records, B005NKIQ3K, Compact Disc.

- the Anglo-American Tradition of Nonsense, and Cultural Critique." *The Journal of Popular Culture* 42 (2009): 589–613.
- Altman, Rick. "Cinema and Popular Song: The Lost Tradition." In *Soundtrack. Available: Essays on Film and Popular Music*, edited by Pamela Robertson Wojcik and Arthur Knight, 19–30. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2001.
- Canby, Vincent. "The Screen: Muppets Go to Hollywood: Roadiest Road Picture." *New York Times*, June 22, 1979, Movie Review. Accessed November 5, 2011. <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9B03EFDD1239E732A25751C2A9609C946890D6CF>.
- Dyer, Richard. "The Colour of Entertainment." In *Musicals: Hollywood and Beyond*, edited by Bill Marshall and Robynn Stilwell, 23–30. Exeter, United Kingdom: Intellect Books, 2000.
- Kalinak, Kathryn. "Why Does Film Music Work?" In *Film Music: A Very Short Introduction*, 22–31. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Laing, Heather. "Emotion by Numbers: Music, Song and the Musical." In *Musicals: Hollywood and Beyond*, edited by Bill Marshall and Robynn Stilwell, 5–13. Exeter, United Kingdom: Intellect Books, 2000.
- Lury, Karen. "Chewing Gum for the Ears: Children's Television and Popular Music." *Popular Music* 21 (2002): 291–305.
- Maudlin, Julie G. "The Muppet Show as Educational Critique." In *Kermit Culture: Critical Perspectives on Jim Henson's Muppets*, edited by Jennifer C. Garlen and Anissa M. Graham, 170–180. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009.
- Parmiter, Tara K. "The American Journey Narrative in the Muppets Movies." In *Kermit Culture: Critical Perspectives on Jim Henson's Muppets*, edited by Jennifer C. Garlen and Anissa M. Graham, 129–141. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009.
- Wiser, Carl. "Songwriter Interviews: Paul Williams." Songfacts. Accessed October 30, 2011. http://www.songfacts.com/blog/interviews/paul_williams/.
- Wojcik-Andrews, Ian. "What is a Children's Film?" In *Children's Films: History, Ideology, Pedagogy, Theory*, 1–23. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000.
- Worehall, Andy. "'The Muppet Movie Soundtrack' Review." Sock Monkey Sound. Accessed November 10, 2011. <http://sockmonkeysound.com/articles/album-reviews/muppet-movie-soundtrack/>.
- Wright, Robb. "Score vs. Song: Art, Commerce and the H Factor in Film and Television Music." In *Popular Music and Film*, edited by Ian Inglis, 8–21. London: Wallflower Press, 2003.

Filmography-Discography

- The Muppet Movie*. DVD. Directed by James Frawley. 1979; Burbank, California: Walt Disney Home Entertainment, 2005.
- Beck, Christopher. *The Muppets: Original Soundtrack*. © 2011. Walt Disney Records. B005NKIQ3K. Compact Disc.
- Various Artists. *Muppets From Space: The Ultimate Muppet Trip – Music from the Motion Picture*. ©1999. Sony Wonder. B00000JKPE. Compact Disc.
- Williams, Paul and Kenny Ascher. *The Muppet Movie: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack*. ©1993. Jim Henson Records. 35019. Compact Disc.