History of Music in Silent Films

1895 **The first public projection** of the Lumière Brothers was accompanied by a guitarist in Paris France.

1896 **The precedent for orchestral accompaniment** for major motion pictures was set by Edison in New York City.

PRE 1909 **Most accompanists improvised** music on standard pianos, becuase smaller towns and theaters could not afford an orchestra for every showing of a film.

1909 **The invention of the cue sheet** revolutionized musical accompaniment. It was regarded as the most important device in the standardization of film music. It consisted of a list of musical selections fitted to the individual film.

1915 **The largest source of employment** for American instrumental musicians in the 19-teens was movie accompaniment.

1919 **Musical encyclopedias were invented** in 1919, the most popular being Giuseppi Becce's *Kinobibliothek* and J. S. Zamecnik's *Sam Fox Moving Picture Music*. The encyclopedias contained inventories of music for any on-screen situation.

1919 **Richard Wagner developed Leitmotifs**: musical cues which identified a place, emotion, or character. Often a melody, associated through repetition with a particular character or place. Leitmotifs are still used today in movie scores, the most famous being Darth Vadar's *Imperial March*.

1920 **Beginning of Mammoth Theatrical Organs,** the most famous being the *Mighty Wurlitzer*, which simulated orchestral sounds along percussion effects and sound effects ranging from galloping horses to rolling rain. The 1920's also saw the birth of **motion picture orchestras** (which were contracted to play/score music by the owners of the studios and theaters).

1927 **"Talkies" were detrimental** for the music workforce of the silent era. While many of the methods they used to create music lived on to this day, the live musicians themselves took a hard hit, which was shortly followed by the Great Depression in 1929.

1930 **In Japan, films had live music and benshi** (a live narrator who provided commentary and character voices). They stood in front of the screen and acted as a character/narrator/translator of their own, rather than a voice behind the screen. The popularity of the benshi was one reason why silent films persisted well into the 1930's in Japan.

Some ways that other nations implemented sound/music into silent films were in Brazil, and the use of **fitas cantatas**, which were filmed operettas with people behind the screen singing live.