

# Cue Sheet: *Les Choristes* by *Christophe Barratier*

Music by *Bruno Coulais*



## **1. Morhange gets to know his mother's death (00:44-02:10)**

The symphony, *Künstlerleben* by Johann Strauss, begins when Morhange gets a message about his mom from Paris. When he appears on the stage to conduct the orchestra, non-diegetic music translates into diegetic music. There is a sharp contrast between upbeat melody and his sorrowful mood which accelerates the speed of movie's development. Then the scene turns to him driving back to Lyon, his hometown. The symphony accompanies him on his way back home as a musical montage.

## **2. Meet Pépinot (03:05-03:56)**

*Pépinot*, leitmotiv of the movie, accompanies the conversation. The piano and violin are slow and lyrical, making the room full of nostalgia.

## **3. Mathieu comes to the school (04:10-05:32, 05:51-06:05)**

*L'arrivée à l'école*, with gloomy and intranquil melody is played as background music. It reflects Mathieu's depressed feelings and implies the harsh atmosphere in the school, and embodies an important element in the movie, chorus. The music also appears when the schoolmaster shows up, which expresses his dictatorship and impersonality.

## **4. Mathieu's first class (17:30-19:12)**

Mathieu lets all the students write their name, age and dream job on a paper. It is hard to believe everyone is writing earnestly and the classroom becomes quiet for the first time. The same music as 2 is composed of piano and string, which makes the quietness in the

classroom beautiful and moving. The sun shines into the classroom for the first time, implying children begin to consider their future for the first time under Mathieu's guide.

#### **5. Mathieu's music scores are gone (21:54-22:36)**

The murmur violin and tum suddenly sweep to us when Mathieu found his scores had been stolen, thus the atmosphere becomes flurried to express the upset inside of him. Then the shot turns to three kids, who took the scores, they are talking about whether Mathieu is a spy. The incidental music makes this conversation a little bit mysterious.

#### **6. After children laugh at Mathieu by singing doggerel (25:09-26:12)**

Mathieu finds these kids have some talent in singing and he considers setting up a chorus. The Leitmotiv, begin with piano and harp, turns into a lively tune when strings join in. This change shows Mathieu's optimistic and confidence to the children. Again, has a function as musical montage, transiting one scene to the next.

#### **7. Training Morhange (48:30-50:12)**

*Vois sur ton chemin*, the theme song, is first presented in the version of chorus. And this is also an important scene in the movie, music accompanies the frequent cutaway shots: how Mathieu explores Morhange's talent. This song continues the exchange between diegetic and non-diegetic music, shows how time passes by. Morhange's progress also implies: as time goes by, the chorus becomes more and more professional.

#### **8. Children's life back to normal (53:15-55:18)**

*Caresse sur l'océan* works as musical montage, along with a series of children's game scenes, and ends up with a chorus practicing. This song contains great tender feelings, which means a kind of hope. Mathieu and children pull themselves up, and obtain the happiness they have lost, again. Everything becomes sunny with this pure and melodious song playing.

#### **9. Chorus influences the whole school (56:16-58:11)**

The duet accompanied by trippingly piano, *Lueur d'été*, the first song with such a quick pace. This joyful rhythm spreads the happiness to the whole school, even the school master begins to play a paper plane. Children find singing is the best way to express themselves, because music touches the deepest part of their hearts. They become sensible and sing diligently. All these happy memories were recorded in a family photo.

#### **10. Morhange surprised Mathieu (1:01:02-1:02:53)**

Children are practicing the new song, *In memoriam*. Beyond Mathieu's expectation, Morhange already learnt the second part by himself. The chorus becomes background music, which accompanies the eye contact between them. From Mathieu's eyes, we can read his praise. And Morhange gets his confidence back.

### **11. Morhange's solo is canceled (1:07:35-1:09:29)**

This leisurely diegetic music, *La nuit*, is part of the story which Mathieu uses a special method to punish Morhange.

### **12. Mathieu found Morhange's mom already in a relationship (1:13:32-1:14:40)**

Leitmotiv shows up again, when Mathieu gets back to school after he understands it's a one-sided love between him and Morhange's mom. Clarinet and French Horn tenderly express the slight feeling of loss inside of Mathieu.

### **13. The formal chorus show (1:16:12-1:18:44)**

Children's naive voices resound in this auditorium, clean and pure. The lead singer's singing reminds audience of a tranquil night in early summer, makes people forget everything else, only focusing on his singing. Mathieu made his peace with Morhange; we can read Morhange's gratefulness and the happiness from his dedicated eyes after being understood.

### **14. Aspire for freedom (1:18:53-1:19:54)**

Their new song, *Cerf-volant*. Compared with this bouncing triple music with piano, we found the children were really quiet. They get their children's simplicity back and become vivacious and aspire for freedom. Even though there is no conversation, the song reflects the changing of their inner process.

### **15. The bad news (1:22:57-1:24:01)**

Strings elongate the rhythm; the background music creates an intense atmosphere with the children's chorus. When it begins during the meeting, it implies some bad news happening. The tone grows higher and higher when the fire becomes more and more serious. *L'incendie* ends when the children's voices show up; this is a turning point that implies the kids are safe.

### **16. Mathieu's leave (1:27:38-1:28:58)**

The sad emotion of reluctance to part with Mathieu strongly contrasts with the three shot Waltz; which turns the mawkishness from good-bye ceremony into a tender feeling. Children's voices cover the schoolmaster's abuse, they will never be afraid of him. Music moves the movie to its climax, the meaning of a teacher's existence and Mathieu's achievability has been totally presented at this moment.

### **17. Mathieu takes Pépinot with him (1:31:27-1:32:55)**

At the beginning, the jumping rhythm of the theme song evokes our curiosity about whether Mathieu takes Pépinot with him. The chorus joins into the song when Mathieu brings him onto the bus; solving the last puzzle.

## Analysis

Only Mathieu, who was abandoned by mainstream society, can understand this group of rebel and uncouth children, who were banished to the bleak edge of education which leads to them all having a fragile and sensitive heart.

Splendid notes come from Mathieu's waving fingers; the beautiful-sounding songs he composed for children, not only enliven the atmosphere in this inanimate school, but also let music walk into children's gray life. The theme song *Vois sur ton chemin* is presented in the version of rehearse for the first time in the movie. Even though they didn't fully finish practicing their singing, the mood of long lingering and recounting with deep feeling already moving us a lot. The lyrics are:

<i>See on your way</i>	<i>Childish joys</i>	<i>The wave of hope</i>
<i>Children forgotten and lost</i>	<i>Erased and forgotten too soon</i>	<i>The ardor of life</i>
<i>Give them a hand</i>	<i>A golden light shines endlessly</i>	<i>The path to glory</i>
<i>To lead them</i>	<i>At the end of the road</i>	
<i>To other tomorrows</i>	<i>Feel in the middle of the night</i>	

Mathieu uses his music to make this school full of vitality again. Children relax themselves and learn to cooperate with each other through singing. Although the schoolmaster's gruff management still exists, melodious singing helps children find a safe and peaceful place from their tension life.

To show several changes that happened to children and the school, 3 minutes after *Vois sur ton chemin* is over, we heard a new song: *Caresse sur l'océan*. This song describes a spring with refreshing breeze and egret flying in the sky, which implies the severe winter in the school is over. Adagio rhythm, intervals over octave and the lead singer's pure timbre. All without exception take people to the most beautiful wishes in their heart.

Summer comes. The chorus changes everyday under Mathieu's instruction. The schoolmaster, seemingly influenced by children's happiness, begins to play with kids and throws paper planes in his office. His behavior is unexpected for the audience. Is this because of the magic of Mathieu's music?

In *Lueur d'été*, the music is lively and bright, full of energy. We can hear composer used various composition techniques: frequent modulation and detuning, polyphony imitates Canon, a counterpoint with melody created by simple and clear piano accompaniment, and the complex but orderly texture form of multipart music. All of these show how outstanding Bruno Coulais is. At the same time, we can experience the joyful feeling from children, after the music becomes part of their life.

Until now, all can we experience is the constantly positive changes in the music, the same about the children in chorus. This is a process of how the story turns from depressed to elated, the hue of movie changes from gray to bright. These three songs corresponding the season from

winter to summer, also reflect how music awakens children's heart from darkness at the same time. These songs are full of children's thankfulness to Mathieu and music, and we can feel their spirits become more and more optimistic. Now, we can tell, Mathieu and music mean the Light of Hope to this school. Especially the second song *Caresse sur l'océan*. When it began, the whole campus was enveloped by melodious chorus. All the darkness and ruthlessness in the school had been swept away, everything became serene and harmonious.

*La nuit*, one of the most famous *A cappella* works by Jean-Philippe Rameau. Deep, simple, and unsophisticated. Full of the numinous aesthesis back to Baroque. This song is Ternary Form, and the first two parts were used in the movie. Not only can we feel the beauty of the chorus, but also we were moved by the plot of Morhange's solo.

We didn't hear any sorrowful melody during Mathieu's leave, but a mildly undulating song with broad range. The orchestric rhythm with syncopations is telling Mathieu: Don't worry, the chorus will accompany children forever. At the end of this plot, the fundamental key was obviously raised up again, making audience maintain a hopeful outlook for the children.

At the end of the movie, *Vois sur ton chemin* showed again when Mathieu took Pépinot away. The feeling of fresh and nature vocal, just like two old friends are chatting, calm intonation sounds like a review or summary of the movie.

Without belle, violence; without action, murder and commercial elements, this fabulous movie became French people's chicken soup for the soul in 2004.

By Shimeng Tong  
Nov 29<sup>th</sup>, 2010