

Cultural Crossroads: British Film Music in the 1930s

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Alexis Bennett, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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Some research from this thesis has been published in a different form in the following articles:

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Abstract

This thesis gives a historical account of British film music in the 1930s, and re-interprets the period as an important artistic and cultural crossroads. The film scoring scene in the UK between the consolidation of sound film and the beginning of the Second World War was complex, rich and varied, and marked a stylistic intersection between competing and often contrasting traditions, aesthetic sensibilities, and practical approaches. The music that was produced for theatrical features and documentaries in the period grew out of a situation wherein its creators lacked a well-defined precedent for what they did. Some composers or musical directors were drawn towards experimentation; others transferred practices from other forms, such as the stage musical, operetta, or live accompaniment to silent film. In this project, I offer a detailed revision of received notions of the period in response to the lack of extant research and the assumptions of the few music scholars who have — briefly and insufficiently — examined it. The thesis arguably represents the first substantial work of scholarship on British film music of the period.

The chapters that follow identify trends, tendencies, and fashions; but I also show how none of these became mainstream practice. This applies both to the methodology composers adopted when working on scores, and to the character and function of the music they wrote. I challenge assumptions about the perceived qualitative divide caused by the ‘Quota Act’ by comparing scores written for ‘quota quickies’ to music composed for ‘prestige’ productions. It is a study that assesses the modes of creative film music practice and the variety of styles produced, set against the state of the film industry and the broader cultural climate of Britain in the 1930s. The means by which this is achieved is threefold: 1) the use of primary sources such as the films themselves, manuscript scores, and other archival materials, to illuminate creative practices and aesthetic approaches; 2) in-depth assessment of secondary film-musicological texts that have brought the subject into their field of vision; and 3) the drawing-together of items of criticism and journalism of the period under study to further inform findings.

A principal aim in this thesis is to demonstrate that the relative lack of scholarly attention the subject has attracted is disproportionate to the sheer variety of creative approaches to film scoring in Britain in the 1930s, and that by giving a multi-faceted overview alongside close examination of films, composers and music directors, and their scores, new perspectives on this period can be drawn.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Key Issues, Sources, and Methodology

Definitions: *which* 1930s?

A discussion of artistic activity during a specific decade must properly start with a clarification of the actual historical boundaries it assumes. For this, the film historian Jeffrey Richards extends a helping hand in asserting that it was a clearly “definable decade”: in effect, it started with the arrival of sound in 1927 and ended with the outbreak of war in 1939.¹ This helps to contain any discussion of the period and the development of the industry within it. However, this study is not intended to be an examination of the transition period itself, although films from those early years are discussed. Most of the work contained in these pages concerns music written after sound had established itself. So, while Richards’ definition remains a basic guideline for the research undertaken here, the years 1929-1939 are afforded priority over the first two years of transition. By 1929, sonorized versions of formerly silent films were being released, and by the end of 1930 the newly-equipped cinemas were reluctant to show silents.² Therefore, the period under study can be understood as starting just as the sound film was winning general acceptance as the new standard format (the very late 1920s) until the outbreak of war. This era is bookended by the demise of the varied and complex conventions of silent film sound in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and the changes in priorities (budgetary, generic, and in terms of subject-matter) necessitated by war. Indeed, the Second World War caused the closure of many studios and instigated changes in production and exhibition (the ‘quota quickies’, for example, were effectively replaced during the war by documentary featurettes as the standard ‘supporting’ film).³

¹ Jeffrey Richards, *The Age of The Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain 1930-1939* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 3

² Steve Chibnall, *Quota Quickies: The Birth of the British 'B' Film*, (London: BFI Publishing, 2007), 6

³ Adam Burton and Steve Chibnall, *Historical Dictionary of British Cinema* (Plymouth: Scarecrow, 2013), 52

An identity crisis

Generally aware of the swiftly developing American formulas of scoring during the decade (US dominance was already apparent), the groups and individuals responsible for making film music in the UK demonstrated a variety of modes of operating, of brokering collaborations, and trying out aesthetic styles. There was an experimental hue to this moment in British film music, more so if one were to interpret the 1940s as a celebrated classic period that has garnered more attention and critical consensus in comparison.

Indeed, a frequent trope in discussions of 1930s film music in Britain is the ever-looming comparison with Hollywood. Two points should be made regarding this tendency: first, this thesis will not dwell on examinations of Hollywood film scores; those which are entirely relevant to British work, or those whose influence and reach is so total that it would be irresponsible to neglect them, are mentioned and given due attention within my context. Second, I will argue that comparisons with Hollywood are not particularly helpful in understanding the approach of much musical activity in film in Britain, and that an awareness of the complexity and variety of British culture in the period, and its interpretation as a ‘cultural crossroads’ is much more pertinent.

In 2004, Rick Altman published *Silent Film Sound*. A ground-breaking study of musical practices in the pre-sound era, it has emerged as something of a milestone in recent film musicology. Early in the text, he asserts that “[d]uring a crisis, a technology is understood in varying ways, resulting in modifications not only of the technology itself but also of terminology, exhibition practices, and audience attitudes. These changes resist linear presentation precisely because they are generated not by a single social construction but by multiple competing approaches to the new technology.”⁴ A key starting point, in Altman’s study at least, is that consumers of the musical practices under his investigation “lacked a clear model for their activity”.⁵ By extension, producers lacked models and templates for the sound film. Altman’s student Michael Slowik adopted the methodology (which Altman called “crisis historiography”) and applied it in *After the Silents* (2014), which tackled the early Hollywood sound film. My project might be seen as a British cousin to Slowik’s, but only to the extent that in this study I look at a relatively neglected period — very close to that under Slowik’s gaze — and attempt to

⁴ Rick Altman, *Silent Film Sound* (New York & Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2004), 21

⁵ Ibid.

examine it in unprecedented detail.⁶ I argue that British film music in the early sound era was, despite and because of its lack of historical precedent in the actual form of expression and combination of media, in a crisis of identity that stands up to comparison with the silent film era as described by Altman; but this crisis was a huge creative opportunity that led to diversity and fragmentation rather than the development of homogeneity in sound and approach. Thus, I contribute a new slant to the study of the 1930s in Britain: that the music being written for the cinema can be interpreted as an intersection of various competing strands and sensibilities. London in the 1930s, before the outbreak of war and after the settling of sound film as the new medium, was a melting-pot of film music ideas and personalities: the great English theatre tradition, music hall, the West End and Broadway, contemporary British concert music, western European Romantic symphonism, modernism, ‘orientalism’, dance band music, popular song, British patriotism and heritage, the rich folk music traditions of the various regions of the United Kingdom, and military music. All of these had their places in different corners of the film music landscape.

The British scene had little of the collective drive towards ubiquity and homogeneity that Hollywood already showed signs of developing. Film was indeed undergoing a new crisis, that of the recent introduction of sound, which by the dawn of the decade had become standard for filmmaker and exhibitor alike. Almost as important as the question of linguistic hegemony (whether English could, should, or would become the international language of cinema, as hoped by the American mogul Louis B. Mayer) was the question of the role of music in films after the point-of-no-return for sound (when it seemed that sound was ‘here to stay’).⁷ This remains a central position in my work here, and is raised repeatedly: in short, it can never be overstated how important the *carte blanche* situation was in these early years of scoring the sound film in Britain.

It was, paradoxically, never assumed that music would survive the coming of sound. In 1933 Alfred Hitchcock commented on the “damage” that the talkies did to music.⁸ By balancing and cross-referencing sources from journalism and the trade press of the period, I show that there was

⁶ As this thesis was being completed, Hannah Lewis published *French Musical Culture and the Coming of Sound Cinema* (Oxford: OUP, 2018), a welcome addition to the literature.

⁷ Kristin Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment: America in the World Film Market, 1907-1934* (London: BFI, 1985), 158. See also Wedel, ‘Universal, Germany, and *All Quiet on the Western Front*’, *Necus* 1, no. 1 (2012): 126-147

⁸ Alfred Hitchcock quoted in Stephen Watts, ‘Interview with Alfred Hitchcock’, *Cinema Quarterly* 2, no.2 (1933)

indeed a dramatic struggle of ideas, and music was central to this. Cinema as an international industry was still young, and codes of representation were beginning to establish themselves. With sound, film was opened up to entirely new, controllable possibilities (the silent cinema was almost entirely exhibited with live musical or sound accompaniment, but the extent to which this music or sound was guided and prescribed by filmmakers varied wildly, as Altman has shown). I show evidence for a conflict between opposing factions in a battle of ideas concerning the use of music — What kind of music? When? How much? — discernible in the early 1930s, and I ask to what extent these varying strands changed, solidified, and dissolved, as the decade progressed. Utilising studies of production companies and their musical practices helps to illuminate these issues, and this thesis will ask how distribution and financial resources affected the development of homogeneity or otherwise in film music style.

One caveat must be raised before any discussion of this nature: quite what constitutes a British film score is of course mutable and subject to a certain amount of reasoning. Many of the prominent composers working in Britain in the 1930s were not British, and in countless cases they were working for immigrant producers and directors. As prominent writers have explored, ‘British film’ has been an inconsistent and slippery concept from the earliest years of the country’s industry to the present day.⁹ In this thesis, I define a ‘British film’ as a picture the major part of whose creation — writing, development, shooting, and post-production — was undertaken in the UK under the auspices of a British company, and most of whose financing was from British-based sources (with the occasional exception of US-backed quickies).

Six important areas of contention lie behind the material presented in this thesis. They are presented below, in order of importance, and relevant chapters that deal with each subject are noted:

⁹ See Pam Cook, *Gainsborough Pictures* (London: Cassell, 1997), Christine Gledhill, *Reframing British Cinema 1918-1928: Between Restraint and Passion* (London: BFI, 2003), and Robert Murphy, *The British Cinema Book* (London: Palgrave Macmillan / BFI, 2009)

1. Lack of scholarship

The first and most important area that this thesis will tackle is the lack of prior scholarship that explores British film music in the short decade between the consolidation of sound and the beginning of the Second World War. Despite a healthy body of work from *film* historians that covers the period, some of which is discussed below, there are no significant modern texts on the subject of music specifically, unless one includes Jan Swynnoe's *The Best Years of British Film Music, 1936-1958* (2002) which begins its study nearly ten years after the dawn of sound, and a full six years after sound became standard; by implication this ignores several years of work and development in the medium. Swynnoe's book, whilst being a lively and absorbing piece of scholarship, generally favours concert composers (Bliss, Bax, Walton, and the later work of William Alwyn) and skips over the 1930s somewhat in favour of later decades. Her scope does not reach to lesser-known figures whose music can be found in many films of the period. This thesis fills that gap, examining the work of several composers who are entirely absent from scholarship. Furthermore, Swynnoe does not engage with musicals or other sub-genres like the dance-band film; nor does she tackle the problem of the 'quota quickie', and the implications that this budget-led sub-genre had on music.

The first third of Swynnoe's book is perhaps the most valuable, being a comparative discussion of the American and British systems, and their respective effects on the film music being composed and produced in the late 1930s. Much of this debate, as Swynnoe points out, centres around the audio-visual parallelism and leitmotivic approach seemingly favoured by the Hollywood system, due in part to the influx of European musicians to California in the inter-war years. The generation of Max Steiner, Erich Korngold and others arriving in America brought with it a tradition steeped in high Romanticism. During these early years of the sound film in the US, high production values began to be applied to all aspects of the filmmaking process, and an emphasis on expression as opposed to reserve in musical composition resulted in the gestation of a classical Hollywood style suffused with codes of thematic development and, importantly, close musical treatment of dialogue.¹⁰ The US studios were famously organised around a conveyor-belt system of contracted composers, orchestrators, copyists and others working closely to tight deadlines.

¹⁰ My use of the term 'classical Hollywood style' is drawn from the work of David Bordwell et al., *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (New York: CUP, 1985)

British-based composers, Swynnoe opines, not tethered to studios in the same manner as their Hollywood counterparts, collectively formed a far more reticent style, rarely underscoring dialogue and eschewing the ‘mickey-mousing’ that the major Hollywood studios apparently favoured.¹¹ She makes several observations to account for the perceived differences in style that resulted from the contrasting systems in the two countries. One is the strong theatrical tradition in Britain, to which the country’s filmmakers naturally deferred in matters of source material, screenwriting and casting. The Hollywood approach to cinema, conversely, was untarnished by established codes of stagecraft and dramatic presentation but drawn towards the legacy of melodrama (a form which had appealed to the East Coast immigrant population in particular because it did not rely on spoken language). It follows that the influence of the British theatrical heritage is inescapable when analysing films made in the UK in this period. (Indeed, the relative ease and rapidity with which figures like Laurence Olivier, Ralph Richardson, John Gielgud and Charles Laughton gained currency in motion pictures as actors, and sometimes directors, influenced the cinematic language of British work to a significant degree.) The result, to critics such as Swynnoe, is a peculiar insularity, a focus on character, and dialogue presented in often awkward, stagey *mise-en-scène*. Hollywood, in contrast, had from the outset a purely cinematic outlook, freed from these traditions and under no obligation to draw upon the dominant figures from the theatre. Swynnoe summarises this situation thus:

Ultimately, it is the fundamental divergence of primary motivation between the British and the Americans which is the dominant factor in their comparative affinity with the cinematic medium. The inwardly directed impulse of the British, manifested by their reticence and inhibition, contrasts with the indiscriminating self-aggrandizement of the outwardly directed American.¹²

Swynnoe’s thesis implies a lack of scope and ambition in the film scores of 1930s Britain, but she makes a clear distinction between British composers and foreign composers, one not normally made when discussing the classical Hollywood style, usually because the assumption is that California’s composers were by-and-large immigrants. She also makes various claims that

¹¹ ‘Mickey-mousing’ has long described the close synchronization of onscreen events with illustrative musical gestures. The term usually applies to visual events and their musical counterparts but is sometimes applied to significant moments of musical accompaniment of dialogue.

¹² Jan G. Swynnoe, *The Best Years of British Film Music, 1936-1958* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002), 18

will be debunked in these pages, such as the assertion that dialogue underscoring was “almost entirely absent from British film scores, and they are nowhere to be found in scores from the 1930s.”¹³

Balancing the discussion of Hollywood scores with illuminating analyses of scores by Alwyn, Addinsell and others she demonstrates that there is much in *later* British film music that deserves greater exposure, especially in the 1940s and 1950s. The chapter supposedly devoted to dialogue scoring in British films of the 1930s falls short of penetrating the subject to any satisfactory degree, but raises some valuable points *vis-à-vis* the question of the differences between US and UK approaches to dialogue. This last comparison is made repeatedly but there is an absence of detailed research into the lesser-known films of the 1930s, and the author is reluctant to delve into the variations and complexities of the scene.

What we are left with is a dearth of material that engages with music in 1930s British filmmaking in any detail, and it becomes clear that the amount and variety of music written is not reflected in scholarship. Hollywood is far better represented. David Bordwell with Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, and James Buhler with David Neumeyer, have written in depth on the early sound era in Hollywood, their work establishing systems of analysis and typology, and asking crucial ontological questions concerning the emergence of aesthetic identity, but focusing on American cinema. Essential for an understanding of the codification and homogenisation of the classic American score, these studies act as supporting research for the in-depth examination of a discourse from which British scores frequently dissented, as explored in chapter 3 of the present thesis. These studies are largely written with a comparative glance towards the later years of the classic Hollywood era, a position of hindsight that is not taken here.¹⁴ Similarly, Altman’s work on genre and silent film practices illuminates the right issues but discusses the wrong texts (as far as this project is concerned), and Julie Brown’s extensive research on British film is also largely concerned with the silent era.¹⁵ Lea Jacobs has recently contributed *Film Rhythm After Sound* (2014), which rivals Slowik’s in being one of the more relevant works here, despite its focus on close readings of the interaction of sound, movement, and editing in European and

¹³ Swynnoe, *The Best Years*, 127

¹⁴ Bordwell, D., Staiger, J. & Thompson, K. *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); Buhler, James. & Neumeyer, David. ‘Music and the Ontology of the Sound Film: The Classical Hollywood System’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Film Music Studies*, ed. Buhler & Neumeyer (Oxford: OUP, 2014)

¹⁵ Rick Altman, *Film/Genre*. London: Palgrave BFI, 1999; *The Sounds of the Silents in Britain*, ed. Julie Brown and Annette Davison (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013)

American cinema.

Too often relegated to sidebar status in the more ambitious film music histories, British scores from the thirties can suffer from a narrow focus on some of the more prestigious composers or films. Mervyn Cooke's substantial *A History of Film Music* (2008) surveys a handful of these better-known films, including *The 39 Steps* (1935) and *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1934) (Cooke notes a lack of non-diegetic cues in these titles), Bliss's *Things to Come*, and Britten's only feature film effort, *Love from a Stranger* (1937).¹⁶ In so doing, Cooke eliminates the frequently more interesting music being written for a range of largely ignored pictures.¹⁷ There is little more on the 1930s in Britain, understandable in the context of Cooke's project, which is not intended to focus on a specific moment but is designed as a broad survey. Elsewhere, Kevin Donnelly gives a degree of scholarly thought to the period, but like Swynnoe, the 1930s seem to represent for Donnelly an interesting diversion *en route* to more fertile ground. He writes on the subject in certain parts of his *British Film Music and Film Musicals* (2007), but only a basic outline is given in the few pages devoted to the 1930s. Donnelly is one of very few present-day music scholars who have tackled the subject, but — like others — he does so in the context of a project with a wide canvas, covering films and their music beyond the war years and into the modern era. Identifying key figures like Mathieson, Bliss, Korda, Walton, and Arthur Benjamin, he makes some aesthetic judgements:

It is notable that film music in Britain appeared to have had less of a Viennese influence than its counterpart in Hollywood. There was, however, a significant continental influence, with the influx of personnel from the German film industry in the 1930s. Immigrants like Hans May, Allan Gray and Mischa Spoliansky not only added to the establishment of film music as a particular entity in Britain, but allowed something of an international style to take root in British films.¹⁸

Here he hints at something this thesis explores at great length: what Donnelly calls the “international style” might also be interpreted as a rich variety of competing approaches, and it is

¹⁶ ‘Diegetic’ / ‘non-diegetic’ have been the predominant terms to describe music as either arising from the space/time of the narrative, or music imposed from without respectively, since the publication of Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies* in 1987. The theorist Michel Chion, in *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (1990), trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York & Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1994), prefers the terms ‘screen music’ and ‘pit music’ (the latter a theatre analogy).

¹⁷ Mervyn Cooke, *A History of Film Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 229

¹⁸ K. J. Donnelly, *British Film Music and Film Musicals* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 17

significant that he highlights the immigrant composers working at the time. His treatment of the period is representative of an academy that chooses not to delve beneath the surface of only the ‘best’, most famous or most relevant scores in the discussion of mainstream cinema: a canonical approach, selecting key texts based largely on their quality, visibility, and longevity, that does little to assess the full scope of the subject. It also perpetuates and enhances the tendency that Rick Altman and others have noted, for scholars to be drawn to a ‘corpus’ of reassuring, genre-friendly texts.

Earlier historiographical works fail similarly to penetrate beyond the more visible and mainstream pictures. John Huntley’s *British Film Music* (1947) is of course a valuable resource, written at a time when all the key players in the 1930s were still relatively young. But his assessment of the film music scene in the 1930s is limited in its praise compared to his discussions of the following decade. However, he gives Bliss’s music for *Things to Come* (1936) its due as “the score that even to-day holds a unique position in any history of film music” due to the unusual working methods that brought it about.¹⁹ Short chapters in Huntley’s book are given over to other contributors, notably Gaumont’s Louis Levy, who gives his predictions of how the process of capturing sound and image are to be developed in the future. Huntley’s chapter on music in documentaries gives overviews of significant work for the G.P.O. Film Unit, the Crown Film Unit, and production outfits associated with the Forces. Throughout the book Huntley gives detailed information that might have been lost otherwise. As far as British feature film music is concerned, he decries the fact that so few concert composers have been commissioned by filmmakers in 1950: “Meanwhile, the musician’s attention is herewith drawn to the problem; but don’t write to your MP, for he couldn’t care less: which, indeed, is one of my implied points.”²⁰

The field of film music scholarship in general was greatly enhanced by the contribution of *Composing for the Films* (1947), Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler’s quietly incendiary manifesto for film music theory and practice. Its focus is the US industry, so its usefulness to the present study is limited, but it retains a special place due to the quality of its prose and the context in which it was written. Their émigré status, in combination with a sense of solidarity with those composers in Hollywood who had fled Europe for similar reasons, afforded them both an outsider’s view and a sense of camaraderie with the practitioners. The authors discuss the

¹⁹ John Huntley, *British Film Music* (1947) (London: Skelton Robinson, 1972), 39

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 52

tension between seeing and listening, and interpret these sensory experiences through a Marxist critical lens: films buy into the audio-viewer's habit of using material goods to make sense of the world. Meanwhile, listening — and music by implication — checks this process and masks it to a degree. Alongside these politically-charged ideas are a series of chapters devoted to the practical matters of the craft itself. But very little in either the Adorno/Eisler text, or Hans Keller's writings, being what might be seen as the more academic end of the spectrum, engages specifically with the film music of 1930s Britain.²¹ They are thus consigned, alongside most of the other works discussed here, to those sources which can only act as peripheral to the topic at hand.

A monograph from 1936 acts as a primary source, representing a snapshot of the film music landscape in a key year. Kurt London's *Film Music* (1936) covers the transition from silents to sound, recording techniques, portraits of composers and compositional approaches. It is perhaps the most substantial critical analysis of the period. It straddles both musicological and technological territory, analysing scores and discussing aesthetics alongside lengthy chapters on the current state of recording apparatus and technique. London is admirably broad-minded in terms of his attention to European composers; in fact, Hollywood is largely marginalised in this text.

The Technique of Film Music by Roger Manvell and John Huntley, which first appeared in 1957, is still a landmark publication. It is notable for its vocabulary: for example, what is now universally termed 'diegetic' music was still defined as 'foreground' or 'realistic' music.²² Non-diegetic material is referred to as 'functional'.²³ The authors grappled with non-diegetic music's *raison d'être*, and in the context of the present thesis, one particular passage is useful as a reminder that terminology was still not agreed many years beyond the thirties:

'Background' music in relation to the film is a misleading term and, in any case, does not describe its functions. 'Integral' or 'complementary' music might serve better, but the term 'functional' is preferable, since the word implies the work a thing is designed to do. It is a proper and practical description of this newest branch of musical composition.²⁴

²¹ Hans Keller, *Film Music and Beyond: Writings on Music and the Screen, 1946-59*, ed. Christopher Wintle. London: Plumbago, 2006

²² Roger Manvell and John Huntley, *The Technique of Film Music* (1957) (London: Focal Press, 1975), 11, 63

²³ *Ibid.*, 89

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 88

More pertinent is Fred Steiner's article 'What were musicians saying about movie music during the first decade of sound? A symposium of selected writings', which draws together a variety of commentary by composers and musicologists from the 1930s. It excludes "historical and biographical writings, discussions of composition methods or orchestration, special topics such as studio routine, recording and microphone technique, and, with a few exceptions, reviews of film scores."²⁵ Despite these drawbacks, his writing is refreshingly broad-minded: he gives equal weight to European writers as to his compatriots. The paragraph summarising musical practices in the silent era is brief, largely delegating responsibility to Kurt London's Eurocentric 1936 book (mentioned previously), which had already been available for 63 years at the time Steiner's article was published. However, he does give a disclaimer in admitting that his paper is intended to give an overview of what writers on film music felt when "such a seemingly miraculous technological marvel [sound] came into the world" and an effort to identify what might be seen as the first stirrings of a theoretical literature on the subject.²⁶

Frequently, one has to turn to film criticism and film history for any scraps of pertinent commentary on British scoring from the decade. Jeffrey Richards' chapter 'Music for Imperial Films' in his *Imperialism and Music* (2001) discusses the various contributions to the canon of 'imperial' cinema produced both in Britain and the US; a substantial portion is given to a series of brief summaries of the music written for the 'imperial trilogies' of Balcon (*Rhodes of Africa* [1936], *The Great Barrier* [1937] and *King Solomon's Mines* [1937]) and Korda (*Sanders of the River* [1935], *The Drum* [1938] and *The Four Feathers* [1939]). Further attention is given to the scores and musical supervision of the two Victoria biopics made by Wilcox, *Victoria the Great* (1937) and *Sixty Glorious Years* (1938). Richards is rare among film scholars for discussing music alongside the other elements of filmmaking, and giving it due attention within his subject. However, Richards' scope is narrow here. Film music is examined through the lens of imperial and colonial-era subject matter, with a glance at the sub-genre of royal biopics that became popular in the period. Even on these subjects his analysis is brief and embedded within a much larger work that covers other subjects more satisfyingly. What Richards does for projects such as the present thesis is show another strand that contributes to the 'cultural crossroads':

²⁵ Steiner, 'What were musicians saying about movie music during the first decade of sound?', in *Film Music I*, ed. Clifford McCarty (New York & London: Garland, 1989), 84

²⁶ Ibid.

imperial/colonial discourse in film music. This is a fascinating sub-section of the film scoring landscape because the music is crucially heard differently in the post-colonial, post-modern era than it would have been by film audiences in pre-war Britain.

This concept of the reception of film scores being dependent on when they are received, and by whom, is explored elsewhere in the literature. There are several pamphlets produced by the BFI by writers on the subject of film music, one of which, written by Hans Keller in 1947, discusses the drawbacks of being a film music critic. Developing a notion he draws from George Bernard Shaw — “[N]obody, not even a critic, can acquire more than a fragmentary musical culture from public performances alone” — Keller identifies a potential advantage that the film music critic has over the concert critic.²⁷ A review based on a single showing of a film, with no recourse to other materials such as scores or first-hand testimony of intent from the composers and filmmakers themselves, would be inadequate, but often a film is shown several times even in the course of one day, “so that the film music critic will be able to be at once fairly topical and tolerably responsible. At the same time he should of course always be invited to inspect the score.”²⁸ This pamphlet represents Keller in his most idealistic mode. (The implausibility of such desires as wanting to be “invited to inspect the score” in the context of an industry that had already hardened into a commercial enterprise far removed from the academy, means that this should be read as a passage passionately supportive of the narrow range of music that Keller admires.) Further, Keller points out that the performance of a given score, as captured on the soundtrack, is rarely criticised, nor is the means of sound reproduction in the cinema in which the critic might be watching the picture.

Keller’s remarks are reminiscent of those from one of the prominent music directors of the 1930s, Ernest Irving, who seemingly had a remarkable ability to distance his musical side from his filmmaking persona. In the following passage, Irving declines to mention film music criticism but implies that criticism only really applies to concert music:

²⁷ George Bernard Shaw quoted in Hans Keller, *The Need for Competent Film Music Criticism* (London: BFI, 1947), 10fn

²⁸ Keller, *Film Music Criticism*, 10

I have offered the opinion elsewhere that the most difficult job in the film studio is that of the man who has to sell the film. In the musical world most certainly the most difficult job is that of the critic who has to express an opinion of an explanatory kind more often than not without seeing the score or having an opportunity of finding out the composer's intentions or method.²⁹

Irving's writing stands alongside autobiographies by other filmmakers, composers and music directors: always enlightening but usually heavily biased towards their own production companies and their own body of work. Louis Levy's autobiography *Music for the Movies* (1948) is, despite this, remarkably informative regarding recording techniques and studio protocol. His second chapter, 'How It Works', is designed as a kind of response to the many questions the author received about how films were made, and in particular how the sound film became possible. He writes, "[t]his chapter has become more technical already than I intended, but if we are going through the maze of movie music-making together, we must know how the job is done."³⁰ He closes the volume by advising anyone who wants to make a career in the pictures to get a job in a bank; this pragmatism infuses the book. It bears the hallmarks of a ghost-written memoir, not least because the two times Jack Beaver — a frequent colleague of Levy's — is mentioned, he is misnamed as "Jack Beavers". A hint to a mysterious "collaborator" in the preface further implies that Levy had help in preparing the book.

The composer Mischa Spoliansky's autobiography remains unpublished at the time of writing, its manuscript not included in his archive of papers in Berlin, and there is only one biography of Muir Mathieson, director of music at London Films. Its author, Sheila Hetherington, treats her subject with barely concealed admiration at every turn, well-deserved but rather a hindrance to rigorous scholarship. Mathieson's life story is told, chronologically but with little depth or thorough cross-examination of the sources available. As one of the three major music directors working in the scene, quality scholarly writing about his life and work is another absentee from the literature. Louis Levy, incidentally, makes no mention of Mathieson in his autobiography. This can only be explained by Levy's repeated assertions that creative people must also be fiercely business-minded, and for Levy this includes simply ignoring his competition.

²⁹ Ernest Irving, *Cue for Music: An Autobiography* (London: Dobson, 1959), 167

³⁰ Louis Levy, *Music for the Movies* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1948), 17

Memoirs by other kinds of film musicians, like that of the band leader Henry Hall, contribute useful material. Hall devotes a significant section to his experience starring in and arranging music for light-hearted musical comedy films. Hall and others, when writing about their film work, contribute a valuable counter-argument to the idea of Britain's film scoring scene being dominated by concert composers. These, and several accounts of the practice of film scoring, including first-hand accounts from Arthur Benjamin (1936) and Maurice Jaubert (1936), in addition to archival material explored in later parts of this thesis, are often all we have in the absence of the scores themselves.

Indeed, the scholar researching this field is all too aware — alongside the absence of academic attention afforded it — of the lack of extant scores. This problem occurs throughout all film music research but the situation is generally worse for the 1930s than later decades. There have been incidents of entire major studio music libraries being thrown away in a matter of hours with no prior consultation. Where a score was written for a smaller company, the chances of finding any notes on paper, handwritten or printed, are extremely slim. Film composers themselves have historically been rather blasé about the fate of their written scores. According to Philip Lane, John Huntley claimed that scores and parts were routinely “thrown in the skip” after recording sessions in the 1930s.³¹

Some original manuscript scores survive from the decade. A glance at those which do reveals that they are usually by those composers who already had a reputation as concert composers prior to working on films, and whose art-music outlook therefore made them more careful to preserve their materials. Furthermore, the likes of William Walton and Arthur Bliss have the benefit of significant scholarly attention that promotes a culture of protection. This may be extended to other, lesser-known figures such as Mischa Spoliansky and William Alwyn, who have a small but loyal following in academia and archives devoted to their music. Some key items among these manuscripts will be discussed alongside those of Francis Chagrin and Walter Leigh. The scores provide key primary evidence of certain practices and processes, and will be used to illustrate key points about collaboration and practical approaches, alongside some analytical work on the musical material itself.

Film musicologists such as Lane and Christopher Palmer have shown that reconstructing scores

³¹ See Appendix A

can be a fruitful way of enjoying and studying film music in the absence of original scores.³²

Palmer was also responsible for several concert suites based on film music that might not otherwise have been published or released on disc. Furthermore, often songs or piano arrangements of themes from films, such as *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933) and *Fire Over England* (1937), were published to coincide with their theatrical releases, but these are limited in their scholarly use in the present study.

The pertinent point regarding scores is the assumption that they cannot be found for many British pictures from the 1930s; this has undoubtedly made musicologists shy of tackling the subject. The present project shows that not only have scores survived, but they can indeed give illuminating insights into all aspects of film music practice throughout the era. Whilst this is a historical study first and foremost, with limited musical analysis, scores are nonetheless essential to its arguments.

Recent research in audio-visual studies informs this thesis at a theoretical level. Work on the nature of ‘diegetic’ and ‘non-diegetic’ music, and indeed the drawbacks of making these basic distinctions, has been undertaken by Robynn J. Stilwell and Ben Winters.³³ In addition, exercises in the close reading of the classical Hollywood score as demonstrated by David Neumeyer in *Meaning and Interpretation of Music in Cinema* (2015) has informed the theoretical understanding of many of the issues at stake, particularly in regard to dialogue scoring. Whilst these studies largely place their emphasis on phenomenological issues of interpretation and reception by focusing on the musical and audio-visual minutiae of case studies, the present study takes a broader view by collecting a range of sources to ascertain trends and patterns, or otherwise, in the chosen historical period. Of more direct relevance are articles or monographs which ask penetrating questions about the early years of sound, and how composers and filmmakers navigated the uncertain territory they presented. Once more, these studies — like a recent article by Neumeyer and James Buhler³⁴, and the aforementioned projects from Jacobs and Slowik — rarely mention British film music at all, so their findings have to be treated with caution.

³² Ibid.

³³ Robynn J. Stilwell, ‘The Fantastical Gap between Diegetic and Nondiegetic’, in *Beyond the Soundtrack*, ed. Goldmark, et. al. (LA: University of California Press, 2007); Ben Winters, ‘The Non-diegetic fallacy: Film, Music, and Narrative Space’, *Music and Letters* 91, no. 2 (2010): 224-244

³⁴ James Buhler & David Neumeyer, ‘Music and the Ontology of the Sound Film: The Classical Hollywood System’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Film Music Studies*, ed. Buhler & Neumeyer (Oxford: OUP, 2014)

2. Misinterpretation and misrepresentation of the period

In the last 20 years there has been an improvement in the scholarly attention afforded the 1930s by film historians. The effect has been twofold: the work of earlier writers such as Rachael Low has been re-assessed and frequently challenged, and the range of cinematic texts and theoretical frameworks through which they can be examined has been broadened. David Sutton's *A Chorus of Raspberries: British Film Comedy 1929-1939* (2000) brought the discussion of genre to bear on the cycles of films associated with Jack Hulbert, Cicely Courtneidge, Will Hay, George Formby, and others. Key to Sutton's work is the idea that hybridity is a central element of British comedy, an idea that will be taken up in the genre chapter below. But he also argues for British comedy being "an essentially communicative form drawing on discourses central to the society in which it circulates", which is highly pertinent when considering the ways that music was used in the films.³⁵ But repeatedly in scholarship, both in works addressing the history of film music specifically and those exploring British films of the 1930s themselves, music is either dismissed as uninteresting or noted as being completely absent. This amounts to a basic misrepresentation of the period. There is a huge amount of material worthy of detailed study that has not been written about in a serious way. Huntley's aforementioned book *British Film Music* gives a general survey, but he calls the years 1936-1939 "erratic".³⁶ His view is that during this period little of value emerged but "very firm foundations were being laid" and that it was actually "during the war years that the real value of the spade work made itself felt".³⁷

In that statement Huntley laid the groundwork for what has been an academic blind spot until this thesis. Since Huntley, no scholars except those discussed and criticised above, have asked penetrating questions about the complexities of the subject. The 'elephant in the room' is of course the development of the US style, which gradually became a kind of *lingua franca* of Western scoring, and is still arguably the most influential aesthetic language of audio-visual composition. The fundamental mistake that scholars have made, when they discuss music at all, is the inevitable comparison with Hollywood and the consequently 'disappointing' scene in the UK (Swynnoe certainly tends towards this conclusion). This thesis will shift the academic

³⁵ David Sutton, *A Chorus of Raspberries: British Film Comedy 1929-1939* (Exeter: Univ. of Exeter Press, 2000), 24

³⁶ Huntley, *British Film Music*, 40

³⁷ Huntley, *British Film Music*, 43

discourse by not discussing Hollywood in any depth, but instead looking at the industry as it operated in the UK: how composers approached their projects, regardless of any comparison to US systems of operating, and how others responded to the music that was being written for films. This last point is pertinent, since running through the current scholarship as it stands is an assumption that the Hollywood approach, increasingly standardised in technique and aesthetic principles, was somehow the most advanced, leaving the British scene held in comparatively low esteem. Here the aim is to explore the nebulous nature of British film scoring — in all its diversity and contradictions — and thus produce a scholarly reassessment.

My work examines specialist film writing alongside journalism in the form of film reviews and music reviews (and rare film music reviews). These sources are key texts because they hold a double value: on the one hand, they can tell us what certain thinkers and practitioners thought was tasteful or effective in approaches to film scoring; but on the other, the fact that they dismiss certain practices means that those practices were common. This relates directly to the discussion of dialogue below.

This thesis is partly designed to explain film music styles by way of extra-musical phenomena; works on film history, and even the general history of the decade itself, are therefore useful as supporting sources. For example, in *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain 1930-1939* (1984), Jeffrey Richards regularly confronts the concept of ‘Britishness’ in film within the context of a nation undergoing immense cultural change; of an entertainment industry newly shaken-up by the coming of sound, and alongside intense political and economic turbulence. His work serves as a reminder of the driving commercial force behind the production of many of the pictures under discussion in this thesis: the cinema-going habits and preferences of the British public. Richards delved deeper into the subject by editing *The Unknown 1930s: An Alternative History of the British Cinema, 1929-1939* (1998). This volume of articles explores a number of sub-genres and under-appreciated filmmakers of the period, beyond the well-documented canon of Korda, Hitchcock, George Formby, Gracie Fields, and John Grierson, and is therefore applicable as broader scholarship that provides essential context. Anticipating the later work of Matthew Sweet (see below), Richards brings together some excellent additions to the literature which challenge, enrich and expand the current critical consensus of the period.

Andrew Higson’s significant contribution delves into the issue of a ‘national’ cinema, and has

informed parts of this thesis, particularly the section on musicals. His work in *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (1995) reassesses and improves on scholarship of British cinema of the 1930s. In comparing *Sing As We Go* and *Evergreen* (both 1934) and arguing for their difference in terms of dissent from, or adherence to classical models, *Waving the Flag* stands as a larger work alongside Sarah Street's analysis of *Evergreen* in her article "'Got to Dance My Way to Heaven": Jessie Matthews, Art Deco and the British Musical of the 1930s' (2005), which fascinatingly brings the craft of set design to bear on the performance of songs, specifically in relation to the latter film. It is a theme which is touched upon in her book *Transatlantic Crossings: British Film in the United States* (2002). Street's work finds common ground in a musicological thesis such as this one, since her interest is frequently interdisciplinary analysis, and drawing different elements of the filmmaking process together, elements that might not usually be associated.

Higson's findings frequently harmonise with those of David Sutton, whose thesis on comedy in *A Chorus of Raspberries: British Film Comedy 1929-1939* (2000) grappled with the influences and reception of that genre, including musical comedy. Both authors argue for a way of seeing musicals and comedies as legacies of a carnivalesque entertainment culture that was imported into cinema quite distinct from the classical cinema emergent from Hollywood. The latter's construction prioritised narrative and used songs or routines in the service of story or character, a relationship that Sutton (and Higson) argues is turned over in much of the British comedy output. Many of these ideas can be digested and adapted for use in analysis of music, either songs or otherwise. In the chapters that follow, they are particularly relevant when penetrating into the ways that composers or music directors broke through expectations or conventions.

One theme that runs through this thesis is the way that films tackled the economic misery of the time, and how music fits into this. Stephen Shafer's *British Popular Films 1929-1939: The Cinema of Reassurance* (1997) examined this in detail. His exploration into the kind of cinema that was designed to raise spirits, the eponymous "cinema of reassurance", chimes to some extent with my analysis of the musical approaches to certain kinds of films. Musicals, comedies and dance band vehicles all relied on an optimistic sentiment that filtered through to the fundamental choices made by musical directors and composers. The spectre of unemployment, economic misery and rising political tension in Europe will form a quiet backdrop to film music analysis,

and will feed into the central idea of the ‘cultural crossroads’: desperate times called for extraordinary creative ideas. However, Shafer’s ideas are challenged to some degree in the chapter on genre, particularly in relation to the ways certain scores subverts a viewer’s anticipation of its ‘reassuring’ role. For example, the material on *Looking on the Bright Side* and other musical comedies confronts Shafer’s view.

After this initial introduction with its discussion of literature and contentious issues, Chapter 2 is an overview of the state of the filmmaking business post-1929, placing music into its industrial context. It contains a discussion of the implications of sound for film in the UK, and what the introduction of new technology meant for musical accompaniment; the diffusion of sound apparatus across the industry and therefore across the country is analysed and explored. The state of the industry *directly* affected the kinds of music that was used in motion pictures, and this includes the mysterious disappearance of music in hundreds of films early in the decade as a result of certain filmmakers’ belief that the new capacity for dialogue rendered music redundant. There were, in addition, wider social trends that identified cinema-going as a staggeringly consistent popular leisure activity in a period of economic desperation and widespread unemployment and poverty.

3. Quality or quota?

Mervyn Cooke’s chapter “‘Never let it be mediocre’: film music in the United Kingdom’, which forms part of his substantial *History*, takes its title from a declaration by Muir Mathieson on the value and purpose of music written for movies. In so doing, Cooke acknowledges the importance of Mathieson to the craft in Britain and his role in bringing important composers into the industry. He opens his chapter with the issue of musical respectability that plagued composers working in film, and suggests that this was a particularly British dilemma: “In the UK [...] the stigma attached to commercial composition blighted critical perceptions of a number of composers who worked regularly in film; those who simultaneously attempted to forge careers for themselves as symphonists, such as William Alwyn, Malcolm Arnold and Benjamin Frankel, inevitably suffered from an establishment view that they were somehow prostituting their art”.³⁸ This effect Cooke does not seem to extend to Walton, Bliss or Britten, whose music for film he

³⁸ Cooke, *History of Film Music*, 226

clearly admires. Perhaps the implication is that if the composer was good enough then his reputation was ultimately unharmed by flirtation with film.

There was, however, a further layer to the problem of the artistic quality of film scoring: that of the perceived quality of the films themselves. An aesthetic divide emerged in British filmmaking during these years, caused by legislation put into place in the previous decade. Various factions within the cultural establishment late in the 1920s began to ask how the seemingly unstoppable force of American film exports could be resisted, and this resulted in the controversial Cinematograph Act. (This legislation, and its effect on scoring, is assessed in Chapter 4.) In January 2007, the BFI in London curated a season of ‘quota quickies’, helping to consolidate the place of those films in British cinema history.³⁹ Key figures in world cinema have publicly supported the BFI’s efforts to track down lost films from the period, some of which are categorized as ‘quickies’. Indeed, a huge swathe of quota pictures is thought to have been lost forever.

The ‘quickies’ have generated extended and heated debate among film scholars, if not among film musicologists (this project is the first time that any musicologist has looked at ‘quickies’ in detail). Rachael Low boldly assessed British filmmaking of the time as “either quality or quota”.⁴⁰ This reductive binary, propagated in part because of Low’s deserved status as a leading writer on this period of British film history, sums up one of the problems that plague the scholarship dealing with the thirties, since it causes researchers to avoid nuanced analysis. In writing that examines film music at all, there are a few scores that are celebrated, all of which fall into the ‘quality’ category, and the rest are generally ignored. Furthermore, there is an implication that ‘quota’ films have little music and ‘quality’ films have more substantial scores. This element of the thesis takes the form of a close look at several examples of scores that defy this attitude: ‘quota’ films which demonstrate a significant care and attention to musical material and show an enhancement in that aspect of their production, and ‘quality’ films which contain little or no music without any clear aesthetic justification. The picture is further complicated by the changes in filmmaking craft and culture throughout the decade. The early optimism sparked by the likes of Korda was scuppered by a mid-decade funding crisis that filtered down into scoring. But within this context, the scoring of quota pictures cannot be seen as consistent.

³⁹ Matthew Sweet, ‘Fancy a Quickie?’, *The Guardian*, January 2, 2007

⁴⁰ Rachael Low, *Film Making in 1930s Britain* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), 115

Comparing early-30s quota scores to certain ambitious late ones, such as *The Spy in Black* (1939) or *Law and Disorder* (made 1939, released 1940), is revealing.

By far the most accessible recent work on the broad subject of the films themselves, including discussion of the ‘quickies’, is Matthew Sweet’s *Shepperton Babylon: The Lost Worlds of British Cinema* (2005). He balances vigorous historical research with a gossipy style that reflects the sensationalism of the media surrounding the industry during much of the pre-1939 era, giving succinct analyses of the appeal of iconic stars such as Ivor Novello or George Formby.⁴¹ Sweet is largely suspicious of the claims routinely made about the Quota Act, and he challenges the “conclusions and prejudices” of Rachael Low’s *Film Making in 1930s Britain* (1985), part of her *History of the British Film*, which famously attacked the legislation. Like Sweet, H. Mark Glancy’s work tackles the received opinion of quota films head on by boldly asserting that the British film industry “made remarkable progress under the first quota system, and came to represent a significant threat to Hollywood in the 1930s.”⁴² Glancy opines that British films did not have to be expensive to be ‘good’. But defining ‘quality’ and ‘quota’ as categories is a somewhat slippery business, and Steve Chibnall’s key research collected in *Quota Quickies: The Birth of the British ‘B’ Film* (2007) has been indispensable here.

4. Genre: a diversity of approaches

Chapter 3 looks at the way that composers dealt with genre, in a focused analysis of three carefully chosen areas: musicals, comedies, and historical or costume dramas. How did musical treatment differ according to these generic considerations? Genre as a filter of analysis is significant, and raises key questions: did composers bring pre-defined notions of generic musical responses with them to a picture, or was the state of uncertainty in the industry such that these notions were yet to be formed? Genre dictated — to some extent — *which* composers were sought, according to their background. So, in order to satisfactorily place genre into the overall theme of this project (the metaphor of the crossroads), different generic strands of filmmaking which trace the inroads from music hall, musical theatre, dance bands, and the concert hall are studied through the activities of certain composers and music directors, to show how film scoring

⁴¹ Matthew Sweet, *Shepperton Babylon: The Lost Worlds of British Cinema* (London: Faber & Faber, 2005), 137

⁴² H. Mark Glancy, ‘Hollywood and Britain: MGM and the British “Quota” Legislation’, in *The Unknown 1930s: An Alternative History of the British Cinema 1929-1939*, ed. Jeffrey Richards (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998), 58

as a craft was as diverse a field as music-making itself. For example, Gainsborough comedies starring Jack Hulbert were very much a branded product which relied on the draw of the star. Korda's epics at London Films exploited the producer's name, and the often historical, biographical, or patriotic subject matter (Henry VIII, Queen Victoria, Rembrandt) as much as they banked on the involvement of actors like Charles Laughton or Elisabeth Bergner. From a film-musicological point of view, it is fruitful to compare these generic fields, and to discover how the actuality of scoring practices varied. Within these subdivisions of research, other factors emerge, such as the treatment of composers under their musical directors. For example, Louis Levy's dominating style at Gaumont was in stark contrast to Mathieson's deferential attitude to composers at London Films.

Whilst this study focuses mainly on narrative feature film scores, it is useful to include some study of documentary practices in order to illuminate the central idea of the 'cultural crossroads'. The reasons for this are twofold: 1) documentaries provided more freedom for composers to explore new audio-visual approaches that the restrictions of commercial narrative film disallowed; 2) there are several surviving scores from documentaries, and these can be informative about the nature of the business of composing and recording. The relative lack of scores in the period as a whole would make the omission of these intact manuscripts somewhat erroneous. Chapter 6 will take two documentaries as case studies, alongside an introduction to some of the leading figures in the sector.

5. Dialogue underscoring and its implications

Key to this discussion is the question of music as 'underscore', a term which will be used here to indicate music that is used under dialogue. To what extent was music actually used to underscore dialogue? How did budgetary considerations, personnel, subject matter or genre affect the use of underscore? The findings in this area are crucial, since dialogue underscoring was becoming so ubiquitous in the US style that it seemed almost as if the British composers were challenged to either follow their example or take another route. Chapter 5 is devoted to this topic alone, and is the closest this project comes to overt comparison with the classic Hollywood score. The chapter offers an in-depth study of journalism, criticism and other commentary on the subject from the period, alongside discussion of a variety of films. There will be comparisons

between pictures covering similar subject matter in the same genre but with contrasting approaches to dialogue. In the course of these interrogations, one issue raised is whether British film scoring was closer in aesthetic to European trends, particularly those of French cinema, when seen through the lens of the dialogue underscore. This factor of my argument strengthens the contention that comparison with US systems is largely redundant, and feeds into the metaphor of the ‘cultural crossroads’.

Hollywood practice is most relevant in Chapter 5, since if any industry can be held responsible for the use of extensive underscoring as a ubiquitous film trope, and close-synchronised ‘mickey-mousing’, then the US composers of the ‘Golden Era’, or the ‘classical’ Hollywood period (roughly, 1930s to early-1950s), are among the prime suspects. But I must restrict my analysis of American styles, and assume that as a stylistic convention the classic Hollywood score is understood by the reader to a sufficient degree. In that chapter I uncover some surprising published opinions from a variety of individuals: composers, critics, musicologists, directors and journalists. All have something to say about dialogue underscoring and close-synchronisation: this is aligned with considerations of concepts like ‘restraint’ when dealing with emotion and, conversely, the heavy-handed direction of audience reactions that film music can effect. This chapter, like primary-source treatises on historical performance in baroque or classical music, exposes a double-edged sword: just because someone from a given period opined that an artistic activity *should be done in a certain way*, it does not follow that this is how it *was being done*. Depending on the critic’s point of view, it often means that precisely the opposite was happening, resulting in a division between the desired practice and the practice itself. So just because critics complained often that lavish underscoring was vulgar, or manipulative, or unnecessary, might mean that they were hearing far more of it in British films than they wanted to, and that the received notions of British film music as having a dearth of underscoring are somewhat misguided.

As far as the current state of literature is concerned, there is a relative embarrassment of riches when it comes to research into American dialogue scoring. Caryl Flinn’s excellent *Strains of Utopia* (1992) took a long, hard look at the classical Hollywood film score and went some way to answering the burning questions about its origins. Similarly, Kathryn Kalinak’s *Settling the Score* (1992) deconstructs the history of the classical Hollywood model and asks what

implications it has for the relationship between the film and the audio-viewer. Both of these texts are useful in any comparative studies that I make between the two industries.

6. 'Responsibility' and standards

My thesis draws together various strands to assert that the diversity of British film scoring of the 1930s was due in part to other cultural developments. This included public service broadcasting and the early development of the BBC. The UK scene must be analysed with a degree of isolation from US trends, so it helps to note that broadcasting took very different paths early on in these respective countries, and in the UK a sense of duty towards the listening public took hold. The terms around which institutions such as the BBC distributed cultural and artistic material, during the period under discussion, were influenced by strong notions of responsibility. My contention is that this sensibility filtered into other cultural pursuits, and I take Muir Mathieson as a key figure in this process. Furthermore, broadcasting allowed for greater dissemination of musical styles across social divides, and thus it can be seen as a catalyst for the creation of the cultural crossroads.

Critical to the thought processes behind the writing of this thesis is the ubiquity of public improvement as an artistic attitude in British culture in the inter-war years. As Europe's political situation began to boil over in the 1930s, the UK increasingly saw itself as a bastion of conscience and civility, and this is reflected in the various organisations that began to spring up in the country at the time. The BBC and the documentary movement emerged alongside other institutions that were formed partly out of a sense of public duty and responsibility. In Chapter 4 I highlight the strands of public improvement and 'responsible' artistic standards that might be seen to be running through film music practices at the time. But before these questions can be applied to the film scores, some context should be established.

Chapter 2

The British Film Industry and its Music in the 1930s

The coming of sound caused shockwaves across the film industry in Britain and elsewhere. Cinema — the most popular form of entertainment by a long margin — changed forever, and the new era afforded composers from a range of backgrounds the chance to write and record synchronised music for film. Hitherto, technologies for matching onscreen events to musical material were not uncommon, but none had the failsafe reliability of ‘sound-on-film’, which would become standard. Furthermore, the process by which a composer could be commissioned to write an exclusive score for a picture immediately became more feasible, since the technology allowed the music to be married to the picture permanently. It was not obvious, however, that this new era of bespoke film music would become a reality; in fact, the very role of music as a factor of film production was questioned when dialogue was introduced. Such was the hype around speech that music was initially neglected, as can be heard in many British pictures from the early thirties. This chapter assesses the state of the British film industry at the close of the 1920s and the beginning of the next decade, and how the sense of crisis ultimately enabled the development of a rich and varied scoring scene.

Before exploring the shift to sound, it is useful — with a view to establishing context — to glance at the period of filmmaking since the end of the First World War, and the parallel development of mainstream cinema in the US and Britain. Whilst cinema in its silent period had become enormously popular, radio was the new sound medium, and in Britain radio was dominated by the BBC. That institution’s public service profile was created partly as a reaction to the way American wireless technology had developed. British State broadcasting sought to be everything that US commercial radio was not: non-commercial, and therefore not in thrall to profit-making third parties; informed and morally sound; and with public improvement at the core of its outlook. Whilst this period coincided with the dawn of broadcasting, mass wireless-listening was by no means universal, and remained an expensive luxury. This contrariness in relation to the US extended to film, in the context of the increasing domination of Hollywood

cinema over markets in Europe and North America after the First World War. That conflict to a significant extent stunted the growth of British and European filmmaking. (Similarly, the Second World War contributed to the setback in the development of television in Europe. Both periods ensured that the US gained the extra ground in these formative years.)¹ Film in the US developed apace towards the classical style perfected in the 1930s and 1940s while Britain largely relied on the infrastructure and modes of expression already established in the theatre.²

If the 1930s in Britain is to be characterised as a decade by any one thing, it must be unemployment.³ Despite this, cinema-going remained by far the era's principal leisure activity outside the home. So even though radio was becoming an important cultural landmark throughout the 1920s and very much established in the 1930s, cinema was already a staple of popular entertainment and by the 1930s a constant in terms of a day-to-day mode of escapism for the clear majority of British people, and as a commercial leisure activity it was unrivalled.

By 1930 the cinema had completely eclipsed live entertainment forms like music hall and conventional theatre to become the primary amusement for British people; thousands of new cinemas were built, and audiences continued to grow throughout the decade. People who visited the cinema generally went once a week, making film-going part of the weekly family social routine. The evident general trend towards lower-income families visiting the cinema does not eliminate the fact that cinema-going grew in respectability during the decade; increasing numbers of new cinemas were built in suburban areas in the wake of the sound revolution, due in part to Oscar Deutsch's plans for the promotion of Odeon cinemas around London's wealthier surrounds.⁴

The Transition to Sound

Combining moving pictures with synchronised sound was not a new idea by any means. For some time, filmmakers and technicians had been grappling with the logistics of audio-visual entertainment, without widespread success. Talkies finally emerged as a lasting format partly as

¹ Jack Bornoff, *Music and the Twentieth Century Media* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1972), 78. Television was operational in the UK from 1936

² Swynnoe, *The Best Years*, 13-19

³ The national average unemployment rate reached 22% at times, and in key industries such as mining and shipbuilding the localised figure frequently rose to nearly 75%. Juliet Gardiner, *The Thirties: An Intimate History* (London: Harper Press, 2010), 25-6

⁴ Richards, *Dream Palace*, 16

a result of Warner Bros.' financial difficulties in 1927, a crisis which forced the development of sound cinema into a mass-market product.⁵

British cinema continued to flourish alongside increasing economic desperation, rampant unemployment and gathering political storms in Europe (at least until a decline in the industry in the latter part of the decade), but there were early casualties. With the promise of a swell in British film production and distribution after the first Quota Act, several young film companies were floated on the stock market; this created capital but few had the expertise to see it through. The double trauma of the economic crisis and the introduction of sound caused the collapse of some of these companies.⁶ Others survived by making films for their American owners.

Such was the state of flux in the British film industry at the close of the 1920s and into the early thirties. Even the gatekeepers of the trade press were baffled at the atmosphere of confusion and uncertainty that the coming of sound had brought to cinema in the crucial last years of the 1920s. Some doubted that audiences would ultimately commit to sound:

Now we are met with a quaint evidence of public taste and public demand. Not once nor twice, but in a great number of tests carried out by anxious exhibitors in different parts of London and the provinces, the public have given a vote on the straight question of their preference — silent or talkie? Without exception they have expressed a firm allegiance to the older form of screen entertainment.

This, one would think decisive, although not final, for the sound film is a step forward from which it is impossible to recede. But in any case the position taken up by the patron when asked for his opinion is absolutely different from that shown in a practical fashion at the box office.⁷

Despite this, the studios could not risk being left behind, and suddenly the trade magazines were filled with advertisements for *Simplex* projectors, *Audifilm* screens, *Edibell* apparatus, the *Celebritone* disc and film synchroniser, and countless others — many of whose names would disappear as quickly as they arrived. Like any new technology, the scramble for a monopoly was fierce and rapid. Meanwhile, advertising for cinema organs and other live musical devices in the same pages dwindled as their manufacturers suffered an unprecedented loss in confidence. The

⁵ Huntley, *British Film Music*, 29

⁶ Sarah Street, *Transatlantic Crossings: British Feature Films in the United States* (NY & London: Continuum, 2002), 43

⁷ S. G. Rayment (ed.), *Kinematograph Year Book 1930* (London: Kinematograph, 1930), 9

reality was that “fundamental patterns of consumption, manufacture and distribution have been realigned [...] Mechanized sound has replaced live performance as the normal experience.”⁸

The crisis caused ripples across the industry, and changes that were keenly felt at the vanguard of production affected the manner of exhibition further down the line. But in the clamour for dialogue and the frenzy around the miracle of speech, music was suddenly in jeopardy. Recording speech was one thing, placing music underneath it quite another. The systems for both recording and reproducing film sound were not yet advanced enough for smooth underscoring to take place. There were other considerations: if dialogue could give voice to emotions, would music be as indispensable as it had been hitherto? The irony of this situation — that the capability for recording and reproducing sound had reached marketable levels of achievement but seemed to push music out of its remit — was not lost on many cinema musicians and composers, whose livelihood had depended on the silent era. Some survived: Louis Levy and Ernest Irving, for example, both made the transition from silent film musician to sound film music director. W. L. Trytel, music director and composer of several Twickenham films in the 1930s, similarly worked as a cinema musician in the silent era and continued to work in sound film throughout the 1930s.

For music, it was a paradoxical backwards-step in the context of an era of seemingly relentless progress. Filmmakers initially ignored the richness of British musical life, and in the process of developing the sound film as a marketable product and expressive artform, they effectively sleepwalked into a familiar ontological stance: the visual, having been the raw genetic material of film, could never submit to sound by creating an equal partnership between the two senses, and still less would allow music to compete for attention. This crucial bias was to inform not only the reception of film thenceforth but also the development of its critical literature and scholarship.

⁸ Cyril Ehrlich quoted in Jennifer Doctor, *The BBC and Ultra-Modern Music, 1922-1936: Shaping a Nation's Tastes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 15

The Quota Act

The Cinematograph Films Act, appearing in two main stages, loomed over the interbellum period of British filmmaking. Usually referred to as the ‘Quota Act’, it triggered an avalanche of critical debate among film historians from the very date of its inception. Initially enforced in 1927 and revised in 1938, it has variously been celebrated as a protective measure that nurtured British talent, or branded a disastrous miscalculation that ultimately only benefitted American companies. For the Conservative government, re-elected in 1924, cinema was important in terms of upholding British values as well as oiling the economy. It was also argued that the film industry was of sufficient “national importance” — a key criterion surrounding contemporaneous debate about protectionist legislation.⁹ The history of the Quota Act must be understood within the context of the American monopoly on British distribution that had emerged in the 1920s. The US distributors consolidated their grip with the practices of ‘block-booking’ and ‘blind-booking’, which meant that cinemas had to sign up to months of American films in advance, and often without knowing which films they were signing up for. British titles were effectively starved out, especially those that may have been seeking a quick turn-around period from production through to exhibition to satisfy their investors. Secure long-term investment in picture production increasingly became the reserve of the American majors.¹⁰

The two stages of the Quota Act represented the direct intervention of State in private film distribution and exhibition business practices in an attempt to maintain international standing for the industry. These examples of governmental influence acknowledged what filmmakers knew: that market forces were the bottom line, and that if the domestic market frowned upon film output, only the State could exercise leverage of any sort. So, commercial filmmaking was not divorced from State-run cultural endeavours, and this point must be borne in mind when discussing the crafts associated with cinema, such as music. What kind of music, how much, and by whom, were all factors dependent to some extent on how films were funded and by whom. Edward Dryhurst, who made quickies at Worton Hall Studios for MGM and others, remembers one of his projects, *The Woman from China* (1930), and discusses the negative aspects of the

⁹ Lawrence Napper, *British Cinema and Middlebrow Culture in the Interwar Years* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2009), 18

¹⁰ The Conservative government was reluctant to impose tax duties on imports because of the free-trade dogma that they steadfastly held, and because such measures might cause a higher cost of living among the working classes and newly enfranchised women, two of the most prominent film-going sectors. Cinema as an industry was by no means an insignificant element in this broader picture, since most lower- or middle-income families could afford to — and did — visit the cinema at least once a week in the late 1920s. (Napper, *British Cinema*, 18)

legislation as he saw it:

Eddie Dryhurst: Well the film was made for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. I don't know what they did with them, they were delivered to them, after that what happened to them nobody knew.

Roy Fowler: You didn't go to see it?

ED: No. Well I can tell you this much, that the Empire, Leicester Square, they had about five screenings a day of their pictures. They started in the morning, about eleven o'clock I think and the first, there was one screening only of *Woman from China* that was at ten a.m.

RF: To the cleaning ladies?

ED: To the cleaning ladies, yeah.

RF: Yeah. What other aspects of quota do you remember? [...]

ED: Well it gave production a fillip because as I explained in my book, what the people who drafted the legislation didn't think of was quality. And the result was that the quality was often very, very poor indeed and of course it had a deterrent effect on British production. The leaders of the film industry in those days, Mickey Balcon and Maurice Ostrer and others were very perturbed about it and they banded together to try and force the government to change the quota act, which indeed they did later.

Roy Fowler: Yeah, and Metro really had no interest in doing anything other than satisfying the quota?

ED: That's right. [...] It was a nuisance, they regarded it as a form of taxation. [...]

RF: Right, they did the minimum that they needed to, to satisfy...

ED: That's it yeah, and the worse the pictures were, the better they liked it.¹¹

Dryhurst's comment about the cleaning ladies is something of a cliché, one repeated by Michael Balcon and others. It is possible that this interview, drawing on some fairly distant memories, has benefitted from some hear-say. It would be reasonable, though, to trust the general theme of his comments, that he regarded the legislation as somewhat destructive.

The 1927 Act simply required that the quota of British films distributed by the 'renters', and exhibited by the cinemas, was to reach 20% by 1938. The film had to be shot in the British Empire, by a British company, and it had to have a 'scenario' by a British citizen. Not less than 75% of labour wages should be paid to residents of the British Empire.¹² The 1927 Act did not provide for the introduction of a minimum wage to film technicians or cinema staff; in 1938,

¹¹ BECTU History Project, Interview 36

¹² Vincent Porter, *On Cinema* (London: Pluto, 1985), 78

when the second Quota Act began to take effect, this was redressed, and crew members (including those working on musical scores) were offered more financial incentive. Minimum labour costs of £7500 was required of a quota film.¹³ There were also new restrictions on films made overseas but within the British Empire, thus further encouraging home-made pictures. Michael Balcon, at the forefront of the changes to the industry as head of Ealing Studios, but largely a beneficiary of the quota restrictions, looked back with mixed feelings on a period of filmmaking that required State intervention to keep it in stable competition with the US:

[British films'] career between the two world wars was chequered and frustrated. There were temporary booms, but booms in the financial rather than the genuine sense — booms artificially created by an inflow of speculative capital which was never balanced by an outflow of commercially successful films — or even of films which lacked commercial success but made up for it by acquiring for the industry international prestige.¹⁴

On the surface, then, the legislative steps taken by the government in the late 1920s to encourage British filmmaking to challenge its main rival seemingly promised a new era of possibilities for composers to work on an increasing number of domestic projects. But the reservations expressed by jobbing technicians like Dryhurst or indeed industry leaders — among whom Balcon was a key player — serves to demonstrate that the reality 'on the shop floor' was far from secure.

New technologies: re-recording and its advantages

Amidst these legislative measures the craft itself was subject to significant shifts, and the rapid changes meant not only that techniques had to be adapted, but that a variety of musical styles and approaches could be used in film. Advances in sound film technology enabled a situation in which "the first five years of British film music [in the sound era] was naturally a period of experiment, as it was with the whole process of movie making."¹⁵ Film score professionals had to find ways to be more versatile. Ernest Irving wrote that his years with Ealing in the 1930s

¹³ Films with labour budgets of £22,500 or more (which worked out at a film costing around £45,000), would qualify as double for the renters' quota; those with labour of £37,500 (£75,000 total) as triple. Low, *Film Making*, 50

¹⁴ Michael Balcon, 'The British Film Today', in *Twenty Years of British Film 1925-1945*, ed. Balcon et al. (London: Falcon, 1947), 7-8

¹⁵ Huntley, *British Film Music*, 33

“were all exciting, because all the time we were learning something new about this kaleidoscopic art which changes its aim and method week by week.”¹⁶ Aesthetics were often closely linked with the actual practicalities of sound film production and exhibition, especially — as will be noted below — the introduction of ‘re-recording’, that is, the laying of one sound recording over another on the sound-strip of a picture.

The most revolutionary catalyst in making sound film a permanent possibility, and therefore leading the way for the richness of film scoring in the 1930s, was the incorporation of an optical sound-strip down the side of the physical film, making the sound-on-disc experiment obsolete and — among other benefits — facilitating film projection and helping to enable a smoother distribution process. That is not to say that the physical film did not have to change to accommodate sound: once the sound-on-disc experiments had run their course, and sound-on-film became the standard, the frame of motion pictures actually shrunk, from 1:33:1 down to 1:2:1 in order to adopt this physical soundtrack. The soundtrack normally encroached 0.1 inches into the standard 1-inch width of the silent film.¹⁷ The resultant ‘square’ look of the projected image was unpopular, but was abated by a Hollywood system of trimming the upper and lower portions of the image.¹⁸ Sound was recorded by means of exposing the narrow optical strip to light, via a galvanometer. As described in a 1945 survey of the technology, the “size or intensity of the light which reaches the film fluctuates in accordance of the volume and pitch of the sounds being recorded. In this manner, the exposure of the strip of film is controlled in sympathy with the character of the original sound, and after chemical development the photographic image of the sound is visible on the film as a continuous trace of varying density or shape.”¹⁹ Reproduction was achieved by effectively reversing the process: beaming light through it *en route* to an amplifier in much the same way that a much more powerful light was used to project the image frames.

Speed control was paramount to maintain pitch consistency, and so constancy of within one fifth of 1% was achieved within the first years of the decade. However, at this early stage, there were limits to the fidelity of reproduction. Higher frequencies, which correspond to some of the sibilants of speech, were slightly impaired. Similarly, female voices suffered somewhat under

¹⁶ Irving, *Cue for Music*, 132

¹⁷ RCA Photophone used 0.8 inch sound tracks. Bernard Brown, *Talking Pictures* (London: Pitman, 1931), 30

¹⁸ Low, *Film Making*, 73-74

¹⁹ Edward Molloy, *Sound Film Projection* (London: George Newnes, 1945), 2

the technology, being made of higher frequencies in general. Bernard Brown noted in 1931 that a “typical example of this was encountered with ‘talkie screams’. The voice used to run right up the scale as terror increased, and then suddenly one felt rather than heard a curious restriction or throttling of sound, due to the fact that the apparatus had passed its upper limit and could vibrate no faster.”²⁰ On the studio floor, incandescent lights replaced the old arc lights because the latter were too noisy. This necessitated a change in film stock to panchromatic rather than orthochromatic stock; the consequence was that the deep focus of the latter was lost.²¹ Furthermore, the frame rate had to be standardised to 24 fps to maintain a steady and consistent pitch in the sound reproduction. The old system of hand-cranking movie cameras was now obsolete.²²

Two American companies, Movietone and Vitaphone, eventually began to dominate the production of sound film stock and associated technologies in Britain as the 1930s progressed.²³ But they were only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the sheer number of companies — including Western Electric, RCA, British Talking Pictures, British Acoustic — who had been involved in the intricate process of wiring cinemas across the UK for sound exhibition. Between 1929 and 1931 they sold equipment to British film studios gradually reshaping themselves to the demands of sound.

‘Re-recording’, the process of dubbing additional dialogue and other sounds on to a film’s soundtrack, was at first not undertaken at all.²⁴ Early experiments in synchronised on-set music capture had limited results, and were fraught with logistical difficulties. Alfred Hitchcock’s early sound thriller *Murder!* (1930) demonstrates in certain scenes the difficulty of mixing different sound stems into the final film. A scene featuring a central character shaving and listening to the prelude to Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde* on the radio also includes a ‘voiceover’ of his inner thoughts. Both the music and the voiceover were played on set, the former by a live orchestra overseen by John Reynders and the latter via a gramophone recording of the actor’s voice. Only through this live juxtaposition could both music and dialogue be rendered on the final

²⁰ Brown, *Talking Pictures*, 26

²¹ Low, *Film Making*, 73

²² Low, *Film Making*, 73-4

²³ Movietone was an affiliate of Fox, and Vitaphone was owned by Warner Bros. One is reminded of Wierzbicki’s remarks on Arthur Benjamin’s scoring process that “while the aesthetic attitudes are staunchly European, the techniques — arguably in the England of 1937 still somewhat behind the times — are thoroughly American.” James Wierzbicki et al. (eds.), *The Routledge Film Music Sourcebook*, (London: Routledge, 2012), 93

²⁴ Lea Jacobs has discussed the aesthetic changes that occurred in film during the transition years, brought about by the technological advances that continued to be made. Lea Jacobs, *Film Rhythm After Sound* (Los Angeles: UCP, 2014)

soundtrack. The editor Sidney Cole remembers another instance of similarly challenging conditions before re-recording had established itself, on the set of *The First Mrs Fraser* (1932):

All sound had to be recorded direct and since there was a cabaret sequence in *The First Mrs Fraser*, the music had to be recorded at the same time. So the editor, who was Thorold Dickinson, had to work out this elaborate plan with the director as to whereabouts the music was when any particular shot was being taken and various cutaway shots had to be taken to fill in any discrepancies between the planned length of the music behind the dialogue and what actually happened.²⁵

Not until 1931, with the invention of noise-reduction technology, did re-recording become a viable fix for sound that had not been properly captured with on-set microphones, and only in 1935 did it become routine. Even then, mixing music with dialogue was fraught with difficulties, Leonid Sabaneev noting that dialogue “does not blend well with a musical background [...] [and] one or other is bound to lose.”²⁶ Nonetheless, re-recording represented a significant moment of liberating sound recording from a solely production-phase craft to a post-production process. Its technique was a method of combining separate pieces of film on which optical audio signals had been exposed.²⁷ Re-recording held the same basic principles through the decade and beyond. Only limited ‘sync sound’ was recorded on set, the rest achieved through re-recording. A film phonograph was used to transfer sound recordings back into electrical signals so that they could be merged with others, via a mixing console, and subsequently printed on to a new piece of film.²⁸ The implications of this process were remarkable for composers, who could now score a film in post-production with a relative amount of certainty regarding synchronisation, and indeed now had a degree of control over volume levels. Not only this, but music editing was now enabled to an unprecedented degree of accuracy and efficiency:

²⁵ BECTU History Project, Interview 7 (1987), 3

²⁶ Leonid L Sabaneev, *Music for the Films*, trans. Pring (London: Pitman, 1935), 40

²⁷ With the widespread use of the ‘push-pull’ track, from around 1935, re-recording started to be a routine part of post-production. Push-pull recording was an optical method for recording low-noise sound, which worked by placing two identical audio signals side-by-side, but 180° ‘out of phase’ with each other. After combining these, and thus rendering the audio silent, one side has its phase reversed; this results in a signal with low noise. (‘Push-pull’, triggertone.com/term/Push-pull)

²⁸ Molloy, *Sound Film Projection*, 22-23

The director, with this photograph at his command, is in a position to treat sounds just as he treats images: the technique of mixes and cuts is just the same. Indeed, the device of ‘dubbing’, or re-recording, allows him to go further still in manipulating the sound-track. A certain sound or musical phrase, or several, can be first recorded separately and then transferred together to a single strip of film.²⁹

The importance of this development cannot be understated, since it allowed filmmakers and composers to review and consider passages of film for scoring subsequent to the production process, thus allowing director-composer collaborations to flourish in a more considered way. In this sense, re-recording was just as revolutionary as the introduction of sound itself.

Recording sessions

Re-recording was thus one of the key technological developments in the early thirties, enabling composers to write scores that could be rehearsed and recorded properly after the shooting and editing of film had been completed. But issues persisted, and even though it “gave filmmakers very fine-grained control over the relative volume and placement of multiple sound elements, it was not an option that most filmmakers employed extensively until the mid-1930s.”³⁰ The orchestra, furthermore, presented real challenges for sound recordists: certain frequencies were easier to render than others, and some sections of the orchestra suffered in the final sound mix.

However perfect our recording and reproduction instruments may be now, the microphone effects in the sounds a transformation of which the composer must take into account. [...] [He] will certainly bear in mind that the position of the microphone may result in a reversal of sound values: a flute close to the microphone will give a more powerful tone than a trombone.³¹

The composers whose work features prominently in the 1930s were those who understood and embraced these restrictions, and indeed most had to find new ways of writing that was not always concurrent with the acoustic norms; but film work already presented different challenges to the composer used to the concert hall. Typically, a composer would be given the length of a scene in feet, which had then to be converted in a simple calculation to seconds and minutes:

²⁹ Maurice Jaubert quoted in *Footnotes to the Film*, ed. Charles Davy (London: Lovat Dickinson, 1938), 113-14

³⁰ Jacobs, *Film Rhythm After Sound*, 20

³¹ Jaubert quoted in Davy, *Footnotes to the Film*, 113

approximately 90 feet for every 60 seconds of screen time. Arthur Benjamin's scoring process was similar to that undertaken by composers today: a 'spotting' session with the music director — only "sometimes" with the director — was followed by a short hiatus during which the editing was completed. The "chief cutter" assisted in providing stretches of the picture to compose to, and during this time the composer "is constantly in touch with his metronome and stop-watch[.] [...] The music [is] written and scored, the parts are copied; and then the fun commences."³² A session at Denham Studios is humorously described by the violinist Edward Silverman, giving the kind of detail often lacking in more technical surveys of recording methods:

Murmurs of 'Tea, tea, tea,' rise from all over the orchestra as we put down our instruments rebelliously and straighten up for a dash to the head of the queue.

Hopefully the conductor shouts 'End Titles, please', but seeing the tea wagon at the door, resigns and cries even more optimistically, 'O.K., make it ten minutes.'

We make it a quarter of an hour, and half a session is through.³³

The standard for recording sessions was much the same as it is today: three hour sessions with a short break in the middle. The film was usually screened in the studio to enable the conductor to synchronise, with the aid of 'flashes' at one second intervals on the screen. Either the composer or the music director conducted, whilst the other checked the balance in the control room. And "when balance is perfect and the music has been adequately rehearsed, it is decided to try a 'take'. [...] The conductor says 'O.K. Turn 'em over.' That is a signal for the film and sound film to be speeded up."³⁴ At least two good takes for each cue were habitually recorded to enable a session to be completed satisfactorily, whereupon the sound film was sent to be developed, often through the night.³⁵ The best takes were then chosen and sent to the final dub alongside dialogue and all other sound elements. Benjamin opined that dubbing in the UK was "not yet good. There seems to be a timidity lest the music should cover up any other sound. But they have mastered this abroad."³⁶ It was a situation in which composers could thrive if they had the imagination and resilience to realise that sound did not always mean fidelity, as Walter Leigh noted in preparation for a lecture:

³² Arthur Benjamin, 'Film Music', in Wierzbicki et al., *Sourcebook*, 95

³³ Edward Silverman quoted in Huntley, *British Film Music*, 155

³⁴ Benjamin, 'Film Music', 95-6

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 96

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 96

[C]asual natural sounds may form a totally inadequate accompaniment to the visuals, or may indeed, through the distortion they suffer over the microphone, definitely irritate by their wrongness. Footsteps in most films have a hollow sound as though on bare boards in an empty house; tea poured into a cup sounds like tin-tacks dropped on to a tray. [...] Microphone doesn't select as ear does [*sic*].³⁷

Indeed, sound affected the aesthetics of filmmaking profoundly. Two of the key movements in the development of silent film technique and grammar, Soviet montage and German expressionism, were challenged at a basic level by sound, which “functioned to anchor the image in the ‘real’, sacrificing much of the stylistic autonomy of silent film in favour of a powerful referential illusion.”³⁸ Leigh, whose work for *Song of Ceylon* (1934) is explored later in this thesis, jotted down his thoughts on the shift in consciousness. It required a new mode of reception and therefore a fundamental revision of the role of the composer:

Audiences [are] not as a whole sound-conscious. [...] While looking at [the] picture, [you] have to make an effort of make-believe that [the] sound proceeds from [the] screen, instead of listening to sound as accompaniment to picture. All right and proper for dialogue alone, but what about other sounds? Problems arise.³⁹

Without the comfort of hindsight that André Bazin had later when he wrote that “sound has given proof that it came not to destroy but to fulfil the Old Testament of the cinema”, Leigh expresses an anxiety surrounding the role that music — and particularly non-diegetic scoring — took.⁴⁰ The medium had developed to the point where manipulation of reality, the moulding of time and meaning through montage, and the forging of synchresis (the fusion of image and sound) was routine.⁴¹ It was not clear how the traditional score would, or should, be used. Keeping up with technological change was one challenge, but maintaining artistic integrity and focus quite another.

³⁷ Walter Leigh Collection, unbound notes for lecture, undated, Add 65132

³⁸ John Belton, ‘Awkward Transitions: Hitchcock’s *Blackmail* and the Dynamics of Early Film Sound’, *The Musical Quarterly* 83, no.2 (1999): 238

³⁹ Walter Leigh Collection, unbound notes for lecture, Add 65132

⁴⁰ André Bazin, ‘The Evolution of the Language of Cinema’ in *What is Cinema*, Vol.1, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley & LA: University of California Press, 2005), 23

⁴¹ ‘Synchresis’ is a term invented and explored by Michel Chion in *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (1990), trans. Claudia Gorbman, (New York & Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1994)

Early quickies and part-talkies

The year of the first instalment of the Quota Act in 1927 roughly coincided with the beginnings of the widespread transition to sound. One of the consequences of this process was that several films made as silents were revisited so that they could be sold in the rapidly growing sound film market. Various approaches were adopted. Some pictures were intended from the start to have a limited amount of spoken dialogue (or singing) sequences, and came to be known as ‘part-talkies’. The production process of these pictures included the recording and shooting of short sections of dialogue or singing, with other parts of the soundtrack entirely given over to music and effects.⁴² ‘Goat gland’ pictures (a bizarre term apparently borrowed from an old treatment for impotence) were those that were given a handful of brand new sequences of dialogue or singing with sound, and then rushed out into cinemas. A third category included those completely remade with extensive dialogue, only the sound version being released. Others were made in both silent and sound versions at the same time, Hitchcock’s *Blackmail* (1929) being an example of a picture that was released in both formats simultaneously. In terms of British sound cinema, *Blackmail* was a remarkable moment; John Belton sees it as a key text amidst the aesthetic changes that British filmmaking underwent with the coming of sound:

Hitchcock’s work in general – and *Blackmail* in particular – illustrates the challenge the new technology posed to the then-traditional mode of film practice and to previously established methods of visual storytelling or, in nonnarrative films, visual expression. Early sound films like *Blackmail* are remarkable because they provide examples of the rupture created by the new technology; from today’s perspective, you can see and hear that break in the films themselves.⁴³

The various incarnations of sound film that jostled for position, as exemplified by *Blackmail*, show that the options open to composers in terms of the role of their music and indeed the quantity of music that might be provided for a given picture was under constant review, further problematising composers’ sense of being valued artistic contributors.

⁴² *The Jazz Singer* (1927) is often cited as the first talkie, but was in fact only a part-talkie.

⁴³ Belton, ‘Awkward Transitions’, 236

The prestige triumvirate: Louis Levy, Ernest Irving, and Muir Mathieson

A reactionary musical landscape emerged in the inter-war period, in which those composers whose work became most celebrated in the United Kingdom might be seen to be conservative in comparison to the efforts of Schoenberg and Webern to break from the musical and political past. Elgar, Walton, Stanford and Vaughan Williams were the darlings of British music until the Second World War, leading a charge that was anything but *avant-garde*, even if they might be said to be taking broadly post-romantic tropes and shaping them into a peculiarly British idiom for the first time. Other composers, Ernest Moeran, Edmund Rubbra and Arnold Bax among them, remained important figures in music during the war years as those most capable of representing the values of Britain as cultural propaganda.⁴⁴ The style of some of these composers must be recognized as hugely influential on the composers who worked in film. A few — Walton, Britten and Bliss among them — tackled both concert music and film scores. Rollo H. Myers balanced the problems associated with the artistic compromises that inevitably come with film work and the opportunities that the industry's fast-maturing sound capabilities provided for concert composers:

If he is writing for films he will have yet another set of problems to cope with, and the exigencies of the sound-track are more restrictive than those of the radio. In film-music the composer is a mere cog in the machinery, contributing just as much and no more than he is told to the general effect. He is literally on 'piece-work', and must be prepared to cut out or tack on so many bars here or there at a moment's notice, working, as it were, with a slide-rule and composing so many notes to the yard. On the technical side, notwithstanding, great progress has been made in the photographing of sound, and on the artistic side a good deal of excellent work has already been accomplished in this sphere. It is probable then that if the cinema industry continues to develop in the future as it has in the past, it will attract more and more serious composers who will see in it one of the few remaining fields in which to exercise their art.⁴⁵

The picture that emerged was more complex. Concert composers were not unified in their experiences of working in film, and a factor affecting this was the attitude of the department head of whichever studio they found themselves working for. Whilst the common view of British

⁴⁴ See John Morris, *Culture and Propaganda in World War II* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014) for a detailed study of composers whose works were championed by the British Council during the war years.

⁴⁵ Rollo H. Myers, *Music in the Modern World* (London: Edward Arnold, 1939), 197

scoring in the 1930s frequently contrasts with Hollywood's studio system and 'production line' structure, there is seldom acknowledgement that — especially in the 'prestige' sector — established music departments were indeed operational, whose roster of regular composers was overseen by a music director. The latter figure, in certain studios, habitually took sole credit, often leaving the actual composers anonymous.

This system was particularly entrenched at Gaumont-British alongside its sister company Gainsborough. There is some debate about how much creative work its music head Louis Levy actually did. What is known for certain is that he oversaw a staff of composers comparable to Twentieth Century Fox's music division under Louis Silvers.⁴⁶ Levy, whose first major film project was the sound re-fit of Gainsborough's initially silent *The Crooked Billet* (1930), took sole credit for much of the Gaumont catalogue, despite several composers writing an extraordinary amount of music under his name throughout the decade, including Jack Beaver, Hubert Bath, Charles Williams, Leighton Lucas, Bretton Byrd, and Clive Richardson. These were all musicians who led what might now be called 'portfolio careers' as professionals in various musical capacities, and remained somewhat out of the limelight.⁴⁷ The consequence is that there are several pictures that are highly likely to have been scored almost entirely by one of them, or a combination of them, even though the scholar is left without sufficient evidence to back this up. The Levy stable is problematic for this reason, and several of the films contain cues which might have been taken from other projects, but which work appropriately for certain scenes. Some research (mostly of the kind that is not found in published journals or monographs, but appears on light music information sites or online British film forums, and therefore of limited scholarly reliability, whilst carrying a certain amount of informal interest) implies that Louis Levy composed very little music for any of the pictures he oversaw.⁴⁸ Levy's top-heavy management of his department and insistence on sole credit seems to have deprived these composers of greater exposure. Kevin Donnelly writes in some detail about this, noting that Levy's work as a music director was largely overlooked by Roger Manvell and John Huntley in

⁴⁶ David Raksin writes engagingly on Silvers' authoritarian style, comparable to Levy's apparently controlling personality. See Raksin, 'Holding a Nineteenth Century Pedal at Twentieth Century Fox', in McCarty, *Film Music I*

⁴⁷ Beaver was Vice President of the Musicians' Union Arrangers, Composer & Copyists Section, alongside Bretton Byrd as a Trustee. Francis Chagrin was also on the committee, alongside Rosie Bramson, who acted as William Alwyn's copyist throughout the 1940s, and Van Philips, who worked as music director on several titles including *For Valour* (1937), *Two Hearts in Harmony* (1935), and *Sweet Devil* (1938, with Pembroke Davenport). See Francis Chagrin Collection MS. Mus 83:1.

⁴⁸ See Appendix E: Gleason correspondence

their *Technique of Film Music* (1957), and opines that this

may be partly explained by the dominant paradigms for understanding musical production, especially that of the individual artist-composer figure. Levy does not conform to this — there were widespread (although unconvincing) rumours about his lack of musical ability. As the musical director for all the output of Gainsborough films until the late 1940s, his creative position remained unclear to people both inside and outside music.⁴⁹

Donnelly acknowledges Muir Mathieson, Levy and Ernest Irving as the three key music directors; he also discusses the possible class-based snobbery toward Levy, and wonders whether his Jewish background might have contributed to this. Moreover, Levy's background in live cinema music contrasted with Mathieson's classical training at the Royal College of Music. But Donnelly asserts that Levy "was interested in the craft of music in the cinema, in music enhancing the film through blending with it rather than being an almost separate attraction lumped together with the film."⁵⁰

The omissions from Levy's autobiography tell us much more than what he actually sets down. Hubert Bath, who wrote a vast amount of music for Levy in the pre-war years, is mentioned only in connection with the *Cornish Rhapsody* that appears in *Love Story* (1944). Bath is never mentioned again. Another collaborator, Charles Williams, is completely ignored. This is also striking, since Williams, alongside Clive Richardson, wrote the scores for a substantial portion of Will Hay's output (one of Gainsborough's most lucrative cycles), and probably much of the material for several of the great run of pictures Hitchcock made for Gaumont, including *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1935) (with Beaver and Bath), *Secret Agent* (1936), *Sabotage* (1936), and *The Lady Vanishes* (1938) (with Clive Richardson), thus establishing a kind of specialism in the polar opposites of comedies and thrillers.⁵¹ Richardson remained, like Beaver, Lucas, Williams, and Byrd, a relatively unsung prolific composer, although his services to what is often referred to as 'light music' were recognised much later.

While Levy ran a top-heavy, tightly controlled operation, geared largely towards retaining his own grip on the music department at Gaumont, Alexander Korda's London Films employed a

⁴⁹ Donnelly, *British Film Music*, 42

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 44

⁵¹ David Ades, 'Clive Richardson', robertfarnonsociety.org.uk/index.php/legends/clive-richardson; Gleason, private correspondence. See Appendix E

music director with a palpably humbler attitude. Like Levy, Muir Mathieson was never comfortable in a composing role. But famously, Mathieson — who had started at London Films soon after graduating with a conventional music college training — brokered contracts for reputable ‘name’ concert composers, bringing them into the field of film scoring and engineering some classic collaborations in the process (albeit alongside a handful of creative blind alleys). Furthermore, the composers working on Korda’s pictures were usually credited alongside Mathieson, in contrast to Gaumont’s protocol.

Completing a kind of triumvirate of ‘prestige’ music directors was the head of Ealing’s department, Ernest Irving. His background — like Levy’s — was in the theatre, and it was indeed the stage impresario Alfred Butt whose influence led Irving to work on his first film projects in the late 1920s. He remained at Ealing until 1953, working through the most famous years of Ealing comedy.⁵² In terms of aesthetic sensibility and business outlook, Irving was the link between Mathieson and Levy. He shared Levy’s commercialism, since he already had several years of apprenticeship behind him working in theatre pits. He was used to music being a ‘department’ within a larger production machine, and he was familiar with the mercurial nature of showbusiness. But Irving also simultaneously gravitated towards the same music establishment circles that attracted Mathieson, shared the latter’s literacy, and his friends included the most respected names in concert music. Despite Irving’s apparent dislike of some of Ralph Vaughan Williams’s film music, the latter wrote an affectionate epitaph following Irving’s death:

I had already written some film music which he criticized adversely in an article; not indeed for its artistic quality, but for its special mission as film music. In spite of this, Irving asked me to write some music for Ealing Studios and when, under his guidance, I made a success of this he literally went down on his knees and apologized for his former strictures.⁵³

Such an environment, wherein commercial film music producers could be personally close to some of the great names in British concert music, seems somewhat remote from a modern

⁵² Ealing had its fair share of musical comedies in the decade before its celebrated canon of films in the 1940s elevated it to one of British cinema’s great assets. Basil Dean had founded Associated Talking Pictures there, using the site as its principal base. It wasn’t until 1938 that Michael Balcon discontinued the ATP brand and ushered in the use of ‘Ealing’ as a mark of a peculiarly ‘British’ form of filmmaking.

⁵³ Ralph Vaughan Williams, ‘Ernest Irving: 1878-1953’, *Music and Letters* 35, no.1 (1954): 17

perspective. Indeed, the tendency, when looking back at the 1930s from the early 21st century, is to assume that film scoring was not as desirable an occupation among young composers as it is now, but Ernest Irving

had hundreds of letters when I was music director at Ealing Studios offering to do it and dozens enquiring how to do it. Many correspondents wished to take up a career to 'write music for films' and had to be informed that film music was just the same as any other music except that it was paid at a higher rate. There is one advantage in writing film music; millions of people have to listen to it whether they like it or not.⁵⁴

Professionals like Irving, Mathieson, and Levy had a precarious existence in the 1930s, since the changes that were brought about with the coming of sound caused industrial upheaval first, and subsequently an atmosphere of artistic crisis. They worked in an industry that was under constant pressure to fight its corner against American dominance. While the Quota Act had promised some comfort in that regard, the actual effects were complex in ways that filmmakers could not have foreseen. But genuinely revolutionary advances like re-recording empowered composers amidst this uncertainty, giving them the tools to score pictures wielding a degree of control that they had not enjoyed before, and laying the basis for a model of film score production that was to endure through the decade.

⁵⁴ Irving, *Cue for Music*, 161

Chapter 3

Against Expectations: Approaching Genre

The British film industry at the opening of the decade was in the midst of an identity crisis with no clear vision of how motion pictures would look and sound in ten, or even five years. Scoring — its styles, scope, and purpose — was in a state of flux and uncertainty. It was no surprise, then, that a range of musical approaches to genre operated. Furthermore, this chapter will demonstrate that composers frequently found ways to disrupt and subvert the audience experience. But the diversity in stylistic and technical responses is evidence of an environment in which composers came from an array of backgrounds. This chapter is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of music across all film genres. The aim is rather to understand how composers brought individuality to films, and to demonstrate this by a methodology which sees and hears films through a generic lens. This process makes the differences in approach between composers clearer by comparison. Three principal generic strands are examined: musicals, comedies, and historical or costume dramas.

Some points of theoretical groundwork must be laid prior to the case-studies below. The first is the opposing positions of genre history and genre theory. Should film scoring in this period be understood as creating its own generic codes over time, forming conventions in the post-sound era that might then become *lingua franca*, approximating a set of expectations; or should the researcher treat genres “as if they spring full-blown from the head of Zeus”, that is, as fully formed concepts that informed the way that composers worked from the beginning of the era?² The position taken in the present chapter is that generic codes in scoring were settled upon to an extent by composers, but the codes were not primarily *filmic* codes, but rather borrowed from other musical discourses, and other subcultures within the entertainment industries. In other words, composers had structures of musical expression in mind that effectively subdivided into generic differentiation, both consciously and unconsciously, but they drew them from the theatre, from dance band music, and from the concert hall. This chimes with the view of David Sutton,

² Rick Altman, ‘A Semantic/syntactic approach to film genre’ in Altman, *Film/Genre* (1999) (London: BFI, 2000), 218

writing specifically about comedy:

British comedy films operate[d] a distinctive mode of address, one which has more in common with the ‘open’ and interactive forms it derived from live entertainment than the ‘closed’ and historic ones of the narrative film. [...] [Comedy’s relationship with its audience] tended to be one based on familiarity, on forms and materials already known from other non-cinematic media or, indeed, from the everyday life which so much working-class comedy is intent on evoking. British comedy tended to appeal to these knowledges, which its audience brought with it to the cinema, rather than to any specifically cinematic literacies.³

The intention in this chapter is to show that, while historians like Sutton can see extra-filmic ideas brought into an isolated genre in an identifiable way, the same can be said of music in a range of generic categories. So analysing scores through the filter of genre, and taking the cue from Sutton in arguing for a spectrum of sensibilities imported from traditions outside film, can show that in Britain the individual composers’ characters and tastes could emerge more freely. This, incidentally, applies also to those instances where composers had unhappy experiences on the pictures, examples which tell us much about their personal sensitivities. In the case of musicals (and some comedies), where there might have been several composers working on songs and other material, and therefore a greater degree of anonymity or a diluted sense of authorship, the films can be interpreted as examples of the melting-pot of British film music in practice, as shown by key films like *Evergreen* (1934), explored below.

A second area of genre theorising that informs this chapter is the tendency, as identified by Rick Altman and Andrew Tudor, for scholars and others to bring a “corpus” of exceptional works to any discussion about genre.⁶ This canonical approach is deeply problematic for the present discussion. British film scores in the pre-war decade were in such a state of uncertainty in the early 1930s that even identifying a canon would be precarious; it is one of the reasons that film musicologists have avoided the period. Janet Staiger noted the development of the “purity thesis” that underpins a stereotyped view of the classical film (and by implication the film score) that is

³ David Sutton, *A Chorus of Raspberries: British Film Comedy 1929-1939* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2000), 23

⁶ Andrew Tudor, *Theories of Film* (New York: Viking, 1973); Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (1999) (London: BFI, 2000), 24

particularly vulnerable to dismantling.⁷ With this in mind, the picture that emerges when examining British film — already deemed in the present study to be less homogeneous than Hollywood’s classical output examined by Staiger — is kaleidoscopic as opposed to unified, multi-faceted rather than drawn together by a common stylistic mission. Budgetary considerations, furthermore, are too important to dismiss when discussing the age of the ‘quickies’, a sector that made up in quantity what it was accused of lacking in quality. Cari McDonnell summarises:

The vast majority of these “key works” discussed by scholars are what industry executives would have classified as prestige pictures or A-class pictures, the films with the largest budgets and most extensive advertising campaigns. Low-budget and B-class films have tended to garner attention mainly from amateur scholars and tradebook writers, rather than from academics — a curious thing, perhaps, considering these films were so numerous and were often extremely formulaic; a trait that should make generic definition easy.⁸

The system of the ‘quickies’, furthermore, was so instrumental in providing employment in music departments, albeit often for slim scores, that when analysing music in these films through generic filters one cannot but help taking economic restrictions into account. If genres “do not consist only of films, they consist also, and equally, of specific systems of expectation and hypothesis which spectators bring with them to the cinema, and which interact with films themselves during the course of the viewing process”, then the threading of social, economic, and other musical discourses through film scoring should be deployed in order to challenge and confront the canonical agenda.⁹

Composers working in the British system, an industry far less standardized in its musical conventions than its American counterpart but nevertheless adopting generic tropes from Hollywood to varying degrees, were aware of the expectations that viewers brought with them, and were capable of teasing and subverting those expectations. This chapter examines some examples of how music could experiment, bend and distort narrative flow or diegesis while seemingly acknowledging generic formulae.

⁷ Janet Staiger, ‘Hybrid or Inbred: The Purity Hypothesis and Hollywood Genre Theory’ in Grant, B. K. *Film Genre Reader III* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 194-5

⁸ Cari McDonnell, ‘Genre Theory and the Film Musical’, In *The Oxford Handbook of Film Music Studies*, ed. David Neumeyer (Oxford: OUP, 2014), 248

⁹ Stephen Neale cited in Altman, *Film/Genre*, 85

A caveat should be added regarding the influence of silent film practice. It is reasonable to ask whether silent film practices were potentially influential for some composers. Whilst there has indeed been a “tendency to downplay real continuities between silent and sound musical styles and scoring practices” (and Michael Slowik has argued this convincingly in relation to US scores), the aim in the present chapter is to emphasise strong influences from identifiable styles and traditions of music that betrayed the backgrounds of each composer and/or music director individually, and for some that might include experience working in cinemas throughout the twenties.¹⁰

1. MUSICALS

Muir Mathieson, music director of London Films, was sceptical about the British film industry’s capacity for producing good film musicals. It was certainly the one area of filmmaking that most obviously languished in the shadow of US productions, largely due to the close relationship between budgets and spectacle, both visual and musical. Musicals (of various kinds) were the first pictures to be sonorized, as Charles Chaplin remembered bitterly:

M.G.M. produced *The Broadway Melody*, a full-length sound musical, and a cheap dull affair it was, but a stupendous box-office success. That started it; overnight every theatre began wiring for sound. That was the twilight of silent films. It was a pity, for they were beginning to improve.¹¹

Musicals had seen a boom in the first two or three years of sound but producers started to lose faith in the format on both sides of the Atlantic in the early 1930s. A revival was attempted in Britain, since even relatively poor production values did not necessarily prevent a good box office return. Mathieson, as head of music at one of the major ‘prestige’ producers in Britain, was uniquely qualified to comment, but betrays a dismissive tone. In an undated fragment written in hindsight, he notes the mid-decade push by certain companies to try their hand at rivalling American musical films:

¹⁰ Quote from James Buhler and David Neumeyer, ‘Music and the Ontology of the Sound Film’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Film Music Studies*, ed. James Buhler and David Neumeyer (Oxford: OUP, 2014), 18. See also Michael Slowik, *After the Silents: Hollywood Film Music in the Early Sound Era, 1926-1934* (New York: CUP, 2014)

¹¹ Charles Chaplin, *My Autobiography* (London: Bodley Head, 1964), 351

Then came the great upheaval from about 1935 to the beginning of World War II. Britain was to make big musicals, just like Hollywood; we were going to beat them at their own game.

It did not work out that way. Unfortunately this is a branch of film production which has consistently failed in this country. [...] [I]t seemed that the British film industry was permanently cursed with a fundamental inability on the part of all the studios to get any life or spectacle into our musicals. Usually they were technically inferior in every way to the Americans; in star build-up, in general publicity [*sic*] values, in direction, in photography and in music.

Of course, that is true to-day; we have not the right temperament for the 'all-singing, all-dancing' stuff, and now we have realised our weakness we avoid them. We can't do big Hollywood musicals and we don't try.¹²

Mathieson does not acknowledge that musicals formed a significant portion of the most successful British films of the era, despite his suspicions concerning their quality. (Perhaps, when he wrote, "we can't do big Hollywood musicals and we don't try", what he really meant is that *he* couldn't do musicals. His background, training, and tastes barely touched anything resembling musical theatre or musical films.) It is a startling moment of wilful ignorance on Mathieson's part: a peak year for the British musical film was 1936, when musicals made up 48 out of the 219 films released, second only to comedy (74 films released).¹³ Indeed, those pictures that the film historian Dennis Gifford categorises as comedies, musicals, or revues, when totalled up, contributed just over 60% of all feature films in the year 1936.¹⁴ The misplaced perceived legacy of mainstream filmmaking in the decade emphasises drama over these musicals. London Films did not specialize in musicals, and Mathieson's complaint was indeed a moment of insecurity from a musician writing about a technical sphere with which he was relatively unfamiliar.

Maurice Jaubert, also not usually working in the genre, similarly acknowledged the challenges inherent in the production of musicals outside the US, noting that the process of creating scenarios based around songs was in effect the opposite to that of the dramatic film. Musical needed (and still do today, in most cases) to sync their onscreen action to music that is already recorded, or at least already temporally 'locked', and this reverses the usual power relationship

¹² Muir Mathieson Archive MS.MUS.1763/3/3

¹³ Denis Gifford cited in Shafer, *British Popular Films*, 20

¹⁴ A significant falling-off occurred after this year, due to a general downturn in the industry, and the subsequent outbreak of war, so that in 1939 just under 40% of films were comedies, musicals, or revues. (Gifford cited in Shafer, *British Popular Films*, 25)

between music and visual frame:

We see, however, that if the musical film presents to the musician technical problems of re-recording, montage, etc., it does not raise any essential problem of the harmony between image and music. For here the music commands and the images obey. The musical film, therefore, represents only one particular form of the sound picture – a form not yet exhausted in spite of its abuse. The general timidity of producers, directors and scenario writers has not yet allowed a full study of its possibilities.¹⁵

One can only infer that what Jaubert meant by “general timidity” on the part of producers was a reluctance to experiment aesthetically, since musicals were consistently on the playbills of 1930s cinemas. However, they relied on stars, arguably more than other genres, to bring substantial return on investment, especially in the context of strong competition from Hollywood. Jack Buchanan, Jack Hulbert, George Formby, Jessie Mathews and Gracie Fields led the roster of British stars whose success at the box office rivalled — at least in the domestic market — that of the great American musical screen personas of the decade. Britain was of course never immune to the obsession with star worship that Hollywood and other world cinemas had developed: whilst Judy Garland and Deanna Durbin brought innocence and charm to US screens, Britain nurtured Matthews and Fields, both of whom had a wide popular appeal (Matthews born behind a butcher’s shop in London, Fields above a fish-and-chip shop in Rochdale) that attracted cinemagoers in their millions. But lacking the budgets and often the resources for the kind of scale and spectacle achieved by Busby Berkeley and his contemporaries in the US, British musicals were often restricted by their compromised production values, and if their stars could match the popularity of Hollywood’s counterparts domestically, ultimately their projects could not compete internationally. It was a paradoxical state of affairs, since a picture like *Sing as We Go* (1934), made under Fields’ lucrative contract at ATP, was an expensive project when judged against domestic budgetary standards (although her salary accounted for a substantial portion of the cost).¹⁶ Andrew Higson writes of *Sing as We Go* as having “the sensibility, the setting, and the milieu [that] insist upon its difference from Hollywood”¹⁷: his examination of the way the

¹⁵ Jaubert quoted in Davy, *Footnotes to the Film* (London: Lovat Dickinson/Readers’ Union, 1938), 105

¹⁶ Higson, *Waving the Flag*, 116

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 163

picture structures itself around “the gag, the song, the spectacle, the attraction”, in contrast to *Evergreen*’s (1934) narrative-driven classical discourse, drawing it away from internationalism because of its alienation from classical cinema, is pertinent here.¹⁸ Higson’s work on the latter film is taken up below, acknowledged and challenged to some extent, since the way Higson dissects the structural basis of these films can be applied to the use of music, an area which he does not fully interrogate.

Borrowings from the stage: the legacy of revue, music hall, and operetta

British films featuring song and dance sequences from the late 1920s and early 1930s seem to invoke the term ‘musical’ almost by default, when viewed and listened to from a modern perspective. The fact that they had songs helped their makers to overcome anxieties about the sound film and music’s role in it, since the musical “permitted music to be plausibly motivated consistent with the premise that sound film entailed recording a performance rather than constructing a representation.”¹⁹ Furthermore, as Rick Altman writes of Hollywood musicals in the early sound era, in an observation that applies to a significant degree to the British scene as well, the fact that films were ‘musicals’ was not considered a generic choice *per se* in the early sound era. Pictures that were clearly marketed as light entertainment did not particularly need to advertise that they had song-and-dance sequences, which they usually did. Only when the honeymoon period of sound had begun to wane did the ‘musical’ label become a marketing choice, bringing the term more openly into the sphere of reception:

Prior to late 1930, the standalone term ‘musical’ was almost never used. [...] Only retrospectively could films of such differing natures appear to constitute a coherent grouping. Not yet musicals when they were *in*, certain films became musicals retroactively precisely because they constituted a general style that had gone *out*.²⁰

In addition, many musical films featured artists whose reputations as singing and dancing performers on the stage were already established, so the need for excessive genre-encoded publicity was reduced. Some performers, such as Violet Loraine in pictures like *Road House*

¹⁸ Ibid. 162

¹⁹ Buhler and Neumeyer, ‘Music and the Ontology of the Sound Film’, 26

²⁰ Altman, *Film/Genre*, 33

(1934), played characters whose onscreen rendering closely matched their real lives.

Marketing for *Road House* relied on the fact that Loraine's musical theatre work was well known and sufficiently popular. Consequently, the film's crime plot is interspersed with Loraine performing standalone musical numbers. So, in keeping with Altman's observation of American musical pictures, the marketing for many musicals had no need to emphasise the point that they would contain songs. This meant that one could often assume that a family entertainment film with West End stars and widespread marketing was usually a 'musical'.

Variety informs and infuses the comedy musical (and musicals were by-and-large comedies) to such an extent that — to borrow David Sutton's idea — it is the presentation of different kinds of entertainment within one film which might help to define it generically:

[W]e can perhaps see something akin to the cinema of attractions surviving far longer into the classical period than is normally acknowledged; the interruptive and explosive elements are still present, the degree-zero of narrative posed by certain types of self-contained gag, the presence of variety as both a structural and semantic principle. All of these point to a specifically British 'cinema of attractions', a cine-variety form which simultaneously offers a number of different pleasures to its audience, from slapstick to verbal wit, from musical numbers to chases, and within which the pleasures of an unfolding narrative may or may not be present, or are present to varying degrees, as *one attraction among many*.²¹

The UK's rich musical-theatrical tradition, central to the social lives of British people in the early decades of the century, was hugely influential in the development of this domestically-targeted strand of filmmaking in the decade, and therefore to the musical material that is found in the pictures produced during those years.²² In addition to the signposted 'attractions' as identified by Sutton, the pictures were largely concerned, in terms of subject matter and plotting, with British stories, people, and places. Indeed, apart from the dramatic and historical productions that aspired to the American market (Korda's work being the obvious example), British cinema in general was "an indigenous cinema, made for a local audience and indexing its social divisions",

²¹ Sutton, *A Chorus of Raspberries*, 47-8

²² This strong British theatrical impulse was by no means isolated: there were links to other European traditions in these productions. Early in the decade, the composer Paul Abraham worked on a remake of the German film *Die Privatsekretärin* entitled *Sunshine Susie* (1931). It retained the original film's star, Renate Müller and much of Abraham's music from the original. Abraham was active in Berlin in the early 1930s but fled soon afterwards, having gained a reputation in Europe for a string of operettas.

which had important implications for its music.²³

British film musicals drew their heritage from a range of sources, but it is informative, in addition to absorbing the research of Higson and Sutton mentioned above, to refer to the work of Richard Traubner and others in distinguishing between the ‘operetta’ style, which derived musical numbers from plot and character development, and those pictures that were generated from variety or music hall, which used episodic musical comedy frameworks and whose numbers did little to further narrative.²⁵ The latter format, more flexible in terms of merging scripts with unrelated songs, was more prevalent in 1930s Britain, and it was those variety stage formats which flourished in parallel with the era of the silent cinema that left their mark on musicals and other genres. Much of this is evidenced through the use of popular refrains that served as echoes from a fading generation. Songs like ‘Knees up Mother Brown’, ubiquitous in music hall and still very much within popular consciousness in the thirties and beyond, frequently appeared in various kinds of pictures.²⁶ Some films even took their titles from music-hall songs, like the comedy *Oh, Mr. Porter!* (1937). According to Stephen Guy, British film musicals of the 1930s brought elements of both music hall and musical comedy revue to the screen, with European operetta making up a third sub-generic category. In addition to the widespread use of the new and exciting jazz styles in musicals, explored below, the structure of musical films thus drew formal inspiration from important stage formats still in living memory. So much of the musical film output of these years was based around a ‘variety’ format that would have been *lingua franca* to most adult cinemagoers.

Several of the most prolific film composers and music directors had already enjoyed substantial careers in the orchestra pits of West End theatres and music halls. The musician and bandleader Percival Mackey, for example, had established himself as a leading West End musical director, arranging and conducting revues and musicals throughout the 1920s and into the next decade.²⁷

²³ Steve Chibnall, *Quota Quickies*, 93

²⁵ Richard Traubner, *Operetta: A Theatrical History* (1983) (Oxford: OUP, 1989)

²⁶ An example of a picture featuring that song was Ealing’s late-decade boxing drama *There Ain’t No Justice* (1939), well-received by critics and audiences as an intelligent and thoughtful commentary on class politics and the exploitation of the poor. The song is here sung spontaneously in a pub scene. Even non-musicals, like the late-thirties drama *Thunder in the City* (1937), used music hall songs to indicate class differences. An awkward moment in that picture occurs when the seemingly naïve American Edward G. Robinson invites two poor buskers to sing a popular music hall song to his aristocratic English relatives. The social divide between the characters in the scene would not have been lost on audiences, and the song merely acts to consolidate this effect.

²⁷ Mackey worked for a Tipperary outfit called the Royal Irish Animated Picture Company Grand Orchestra, which “consisted of a trumpeter from a circus, aged 72, a drunken fiddler of 45, and young Mackey, aged 18, on the piano, occasionally augmented for special overtures and intermissions by a harmonium with six notes missing.” John Huntley, *British Film Music* (1947) (London: Skelton Robinson, 1972), 27

Following the career path of others who were fortunate enough to make the transition, he went on to work variously for British Lion, British & Dominion, and Associated Radio Pictures, writing cues or simply coordinating the use of pre-existing material. The British theatrical revue, with which Mackey and others were most at home, was hugely important to the gestation of musical theatre, and by direct descent, the musical film as it developed in the sound era. Song-based, but also incorporating the pull of stars and personalities, ‘revue’ was a tradition that was as complex and varied as that which we might now call the ‘musical’. It had no clearly defined form for many decades, even during its boom during the First World War. James Moore takes issue with the common assumption that revue was generated out of late-Victorian and Edwardian music hall, and argues for a more chaotic rise: “the word [‘revue’] obviously meant whatever its impresario wanted it to mean.”²⁸ Revue thus absorbed elements of other, older traditions, as did the film musical of the 1930s. Even burlesque, a format heavy with parody and satire, and “clearly on its last legs in the 1890s”, was a factor in the development of revue, and can be glimpsed in the film work of Jack Hulbert or Stanley Lupino, at the forefront of the more slapstick strand of musical pictures in the 1930s.²⁹ Its characteristics now surviving in modern Christmas pantomimes, burlesque relied heavily on puns and thinly veiled dirty jokes, but nonetheless worked with contemporaneous topics and news stories.³⁰ Musically speaking, the songs that were featured in burlesque

simply grafted new words upon standard melodies, and the original songs of burlesque were usually forgettable; they rarely had anything to do with plots which were in any case contrived for easy and frequent abandonment; they employed standard patterns and in any event the music was clearly subordinated to physicality and word play.³¹

Kevin Donnelly notes that film musicals exploited the tradition of stage operetta (the works of Jacques Offenbach and Gilbert & Sullivan being prominent references), with musical numbers linking often flimsy and farcical plots in a conceit similar to the approach of burlesque as described above.³² But stage musical comedy as it emerged in the early 20th century, and as it matured into the twenties and thirties, relied not on the punning that characterized burlesque but

²⁸ James Ross Moore, *An Intimate Understanding: The Rise of British Musical Revue 1890 – 1920* (Doctoral thesis. University of Warwick, 2000), 4-5

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 6

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 8

³¹ *Ibid.*, 9

³² K. J. Donnelly, *British Film Music*, 104

on catchphrases, more akin to music hall shows. In this it profited from the rapidly changing youth-focused fashions and ‘in’ trends that characterized the era of the ‘Bright Young People’.³³ Such disposability of musical material amid non-committal plots influenced by stage conventions, generating a syntax that prioritised popular discourse over narrative, is recognisable in the flimsy and carefree storytelling approach in Stanley Lupino’s 1930s pictures. Even those films of the thirties that were not made directly from recycled stage shows displayed characteristics clearly recognizable from the stage. Hummable songs are positioned around characters and situations that place light entertainment over any kind of meaningful narrative or dramatic development. Furthermore, those pictures that might not invite the definition of ‘musical’ often seemed unable to resist the occasional musical number, like the strange hybrid of humour and crime drama *Irish and Proud of It* (1938), a quickie whose soundtrack features several performances of Irish songs and one lengthy medley of Irish airs and Italian arias. A hearty rendition of ‘Johnny I Hardly Knew Ye’, written by the music hall personality Joseph B. Geoghegan again provides an example of the strong links that still existed between stage and screen.³⁴

Crucially in musicals, the concept of the star personality was transplanted from the music hall and revue to the screen, so that one performer could essentially regenerate the same character in different guises over multiple pictures, much like Will Hay did in the non-musical comedy genre. These actor-singers played themselves in every film to a noticeable degree (in the same way that the bandleaders did in the dance band films discussed below). It was a luxury that musicals afforded them more than straight filmmaking could, the latter forcing them to play more thoroughly defined characters. Thus, the syntactic frameworks of stage musicals were reflected in the film musicals of the 1930s: a rags-to-riches, or ‘everyman-in-extraordinary-circumstances’ trope is common in this strand of cinema, an element that often helped to endear audiences to the star.

³³ Moore, *Intimate Understanding*, 10

³⁴ Typical of this kind of song, ‘Johnny I Hardly Knew Ye’ has a complex history. It took its tune from an 1863 American civil war song ‘When Johnny Comes Marching Home’, which in turn was probably based on much earlier English melodies. It is now probably best known as that of the children’s refrain ‘The Animals Came in Two by Two’. The full history of the tune is surveyed in Jonathan Lighter, *The Best Antiwar Song Ever Written* (Windsor, CT: Loomis House, 2012)

Imaginative approaches to the musical

Gaumont-British exploited the comedy musical in intriguing style relatively early in the decade with *Britannia of Billingsgate* (1933) about a woman who is discovered by a film director after being mistakenly recorded singing while working in a fish-and-chip shop. Notable because of its recurring theme of film sound technology, it engaged cleverly with the anxieties surrounding the mysterious new apparatus that had begun appearing on film sets and locations in the preceding five years. The early sequence wherein Gordon Harker's local man meddles with the machinery in a location 'sound truck', thus enabling the serendipitous recording of Violet Loraine's voice, plays deftly with the imagery of recording devices and other machinery. Audiences would have been largely ignorant of the science behind the novelty of sound in the cinema. Such scenes featured this equipment as a device to engage viewers and bring notes of interest to the plot, and used the new visual discourse of on-screen sound apparatus as a plot feature. *Britannia of Billingsgate* was an early indicator of the company's often highly imaginative approach to threading the use of music, sound, and associated imagery, into the plots of its musicals. It also serves as an early-thirties example of how the 'everyman' figure so frequently fronted these pictures.

Always glancing to the West End for its material, Gaumont's closely-associated sister company, Gainsborough, released several musical comedies including hugely popular films starring Jack Hulbert, an actor whose frequent roles as characters named 'Jack' attested to the fact that the pull



Fig. 1 On-screen sound apparatus: *Britannia of Billingsgate* (1933)

of his films was his own amiable, cheerful man-on-the-street personality, delivering corny one-liners and witty quick-fire dialogue. Vivian Ellis, a composer who dominated much of the West End stage throughout the decade, frequently collaborated with Hulbert. Ellis wrote for several Gainsborough comedies, some of which were based on stage productions, using recycled material. The correspondence of dense dialogue in relation to musical prominence in the *mise-en-bande* of these films is surprisingly high. Cues are not restricted to transitions or hurries, but frequently accompany comedy scenes in a closely synchronised way. Many are interior scenes, which would normally give a sense of restricted scope and therefore a psychological limit to the amount of material that might be applied to the soundtrack. However, a film such as *Jack's the Boy* (1932), presents a varied and constantly shifting palette of musical devices to enhance the actors' performances and the impact of the dialogue. It follows the eponymous character's ham-fisted attempts to impress his father by joining the police, meeting Ivy (Winifred Shotton), along the way. A series of mishaps and farcical situations ensue, culminating in the hero capturing a

gang of thieves and getting the girl. Walter Ford's direction produces action of a suitably light and slapstick nature. Louis Levy was musical director on *Jack's the Boy*, overseeing uncredited composers.³⁵ Playful transitions between diegetic and ambi-diegetic scoring occur, especially in the scene wherein Jack and Ivy attempt to listen to the criminal gang through an adjoining wall. Jack ineptly plays a piano, Ivy takes over, seemingly 'scoring' his movement towards the wall, but then Jack accidentally switches on the wireless, whose music has a tense, hurrying nature. Ivy's melodramatic reaction to the music obediently resembles the over-acting of a silent starlet. Recognisably vaudevillian songs by Vivian Ellis also feature, including 'The Flies Crawled up the Window' and 'I Want to Cling to Ivy', both of which became popular as a result. *Jack's the Boy* takes its narrative influence from the stage, but the scoring approach in between vocal numbers applies a balletic sensibility and remarkable sophistication in regard to musical agency. Onscreen actions are mirrored in music that takes an ambi-diegetic role, particularly in the listening-in scene described above.

Hulbert's collaboration on *Jack's the Boy* with director Walter Forde had evidently come a long way musically from an earlier collaboration, *The Ghost Train* (1931). Although the sound only survives on two reels out of eight in *The Ghost Train*, enough of the film exists to show that music was limited to opening and closing titles and possibly transitions and dissolves.³⁶ It was the influence of Ellis that transformed this series of films musically; they are effectively filmed stage musicals. *Falling for You* (1933) is essentially a series of slapstick routines and dance numbers, this was a vehicle for Hulbert and his stage partner (and wife) Cicely Courtneidge. Music is prominent, with a range of theatrical orchestration flourishes that give a clear sense of having been transplanted from the theatre pit: frequent timpani rolls and hits to underscore falls and other visual gags, up-tempo dance numbers with frequent changes of metre and feel, and smatterings of xylophone and harp. The songs are frivolous but catchy, as was to be expected from revue-style cinema. Hence the cross-fertilization of stage entertainment and film was manifested in these musical comedy pictures, and those mentioned above benefitted from the collaboration between Louis Levy and Vivian Ellis, whose respective backgrounds in film and theatre brought slightly different experience and attitudes.

³⁵ These composers may have included Jack Beaver, Bretton Byrd and Leighton Lucas, according to Alexander Gleason. See Appendix E

³⁶ *The Ghost Train* and another Hulbert vehicle *Kate Plus Ten* (1938) have both benefitted from recent restorations by the BFI.

Music and desire: *Evergreen* (1934)

Victor Saville's *Evergreen* (1934) is a unique case in point when discussing the influence of the stage, since the main character of the film (played by Jessie Matthews) is tasked with impersonating her mother, a fading star of the Edwardian music hall. Arguably the most significant musical released by Gaumont-British in the thirties, *Evergreen* is still — unusually — widely available in quality prints, streaming and DVD editions: testimony to its enduring appeal. The picture comprises a series of set pieces, influenced by the still-familiar variety format of which music hall was a part: “[R]egardless of the level of taste or audience, an evening of variety remained — well — varied, and therefore incomparably placed to go with the flow of current trends. Variety remained a collection of ‘turns’[.]”³⁷ However, Andrew Higson has argued convincingly for the ways that *Evergreen* dissents somewhat from a straightforward variety discourse and steers its style towards classical cinema, noting that it

takes on board the iconographic, thematic, discursive, and structural conventions of contemporary Warner Bros. backstage musicals. [...] and the classical film's particular articulation of sexual difference and the eroticization of the gaze.³⁸

Higson's work informs this discussion of *Evergreen* to some extent, although the purpose here is to illuminate the way that the *music* (not fully explored by Higson) enhances this process of eroticization, and also takes extra-filmic conventions and adapts them so that these familiar musical techniques can be experienced differently in a cinematic context.

Part backstage musical, part revue, part farce, *Evergreen* was based on a stage musical *Ever Green* by Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart, although the screen version came with new songs, including the Matthews favourite ‘Over My Shoulder’. A key example of how the 1930s cultural crossroads applied to musical films, *Evergreen* utilises the discourses of variety and music hall as a plot device, but simultaneously reflects those traditions in its structure. Furthermore, the picture rewards close scrutiny as a text which interrogates the melting-pot of popular music styles that characterised British film in the period. It is also one of the better efforts of British producers to compete with Busby Berkeley and the other Hollywood musical fantasists. The picture boasts big tunes, grand chorus numbers, intricate choreography, lavish costumes, ambitious art deco set

³⁷ Moore, *Intimate Understanding*, 17

³⁸ Higson, *Waving the Flag*, 135, 140

design, and flamboyant cinematography. Its keynote — crucially — is nostalgia, largely due to the central character's attempts to replicate her mother's music hall turns in a bid to find West End success. The range of song and dance genres that *Evergreen* covers is remarkable, especially in the medley of 'staged' sequences (the show-within-the-film) featuring Matthews operating a giant egg timer to represent the device of reaching back into the musical past. The early sequences of the film, set in the Edwardian era and laying the foundations for the plot, feature well-known music hall numbers like 'Daddy Wouldn't Buy Me a Bow Wow', but other items in the picture run the gauntlet through Charleston, ragtime, quickstep, swing, and a lengthy, fast tango-inspired sequence arranged for full band.



Fig. 2 Reaching into the musical past: *Evergreen* (1934)

In keeping with the familiar generic territory of backstage musicals, in *Evergreen* there is inventiveness in the multi-layered diegetic sphere of the musical number, explored below. Furthermore, in certain moments the film exhibits what Sarah Street describes as “a crucial interrelationship between the dance numbers, their sets and narrative intent. This sense of transatlantic exchange — between classic European art deco and American consumer culture — was absorbed by Gaumont-British for Matthews’ star vehicles.”³⁹ Indeed, despite the *potpourri* of styles and routines that it offers, the picture draws the discourse of the British musical away from a structure that builds itself around musical numbers and closer to what Higson identifies as a subordination of songs, editing, sets, and other elements to the smooth presentation of narrative: “the spectacle of the production numbers and other song-and-dance routines is tightly integrated into the narrative, rather than simply accumulating into a series of turns or

³⁹ Street, *Transatlantic Crossings*, 81

novelties.”⁴⁰

That *Evergreen* is celebrated as a challenger to Hollywood musicals is no surprise considering the presence of American personnel, not just the songwriting team but the cinematographer and choreographer as well.⁴¹ This case study will take one scene of the film, the ‘Dancing on the Ceiling’ number, and examine how Rodgers and Hart used elements of a standard structural formula imported wholesale from Broadway in the song’s music, but whose themes of erotic fantasy and imagination are intensified by the use of complex diegetic location and a sense that our expectations of how the song ‘should’ be structured remains unrequited.

In an era when “the plots of virtually all [Broadway] shows of the day involved characters seeking someone to love”, love songs were the common currency of writers and composers.⁴² The kernel of ‘Dancing on the Ceiling’, after what can be defined as an extended introductory passage, follows a familiar AABA pattern, one that had become ubiquitous in this period, the ‘Golden Age’ of the American musical. This structure, usually consisting of thirty-two bars, “became the accepted musical housing. It took a principal eight-bar melody, repeated it, inserted a secondary eight-bar melody known as a bridge, and then concluded by returning to the original eight-bar theme.”⁴³ The challenge lay in the ability to make something seem new and catchy whilst confirming to the thirty-two bar template: “masters of the genre could seize upon a detail — a fantasy or a fleeting moment — and make it a meditation on the workings of the human heart. [...] A dream, a moment, a question, a metaphor, a phrase, a word, a name, anything could provide the idea around which a love song could be built.”⁴⁴ The template is evident in ‘Dancing on the Ceiling’, as illustrated by the lyrics:

⁴⁰ Higson, *Waving the Flag*, 134

⁴¹ Ibid., 122

⁴² Richard Crawford, *America’s Musical Life* (New York: W.W.Norton, 2001), 669

⁴³ Gerald Bordman, *American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle* (New York: OUP, 1992), 388

⁴⁴ Ibid. 669, 672

(A)

*He dances overhead
On the ceiling near my bed,
In my sight,
Through the night.*

(A2)

*I tried to hide in vain
underneath my counterpane.
There's my love,
Up above.*

(B)

*I whisper 'go away my lover it's not fair',
But I'm so grateful to discover he's still there.*

(A3)

*I love my ceiling more
Since it is a dancing floor,
Just for [fermata here] my love.*

At this point in the story, Harriet (Matthews) and Tommy (Barry MacKay) are trying to maintain the pretence that she is his daughter, but their attraction to each other is palpable. The simple idea at the heart of the song is that Harriet is downstairs and Tommy is upstairs, but she fantasizes that he is with her. An extended sequence showing them preparing separately for bed and meeting by chance in the kitchen — accompanied by moderately synchronised, languorous scoring — precedes the song. The implication is that she then sings the number in her nightclothes. Tommy is in the room above, likewise in pyjamas and a dressing gown.

A key consideration is the look of the scene. This is singled out by Sarah Street as being particularly demonstrative of the *moderne* style, adopted by other Matthews vehicles of the same era, and similar to the *mise-en-scene* of the Astaire-Rogers cycle.⁴⁵ It opens with a wide shot of a luxurious interior as Matthews enters, a piano placed on the left of the frame. Street asserts that the design of scenes like this can be directly tethered to Matthews' performance:

⁴⁵ Street, *Transatlantic Crossings*, 81

An analysis of some of Matthews' film performances, which demonstrate the interrelationship and tensions between the aesthetic concerns of art deco and its commercial/consumerist logic, will depend on seeing set design as an integral aspect of musical performance. [...] She appears to 'extend the frame' as in this example ['Dancing on the Ceiling'] we see her solo dance 'push outwards' from the frame, as she longs to break free from the narrative restrictions (she is occupying a space with someone for whom she has a forbidden attraction) and to interact with, and extend the art deco set.⁴⁶

Street's interpretation can be useful in discussing musical detail, since the creation of tension from playful alteration and interaction of the diegetic location(s) of the score has a comparable effect of 'pushing' against or outwards against the restrictions that we might expect. In the first few bars of the song — the long introduction, constructed from three short, attention-grabbing motifs followed by an answering phrase, and repeated — Harriet is seen accompanying herself by playing the first few chords diegetically on the piano. Since there is nobody else in the room, the metaphor of onanism is suggested both in the lyrics and her visual performance. She touches the keys as if toying with the instrument, but never fully commits to it: she plays a few notes at random whilst standing up, sings the first short phrases seated and playing, then abandons it. The lyrics bring auto-eroticism to the fore, the following words sung just after Tommy has gone upstairs and Harriet blows hot-and-cold with the piano:

[Playing piano] *The world is lyrical*

Because a miracle

Has brought my lover to me.

[Turns from piano] *Though he's some other place, his face I see.*

[Playing piano] *At night I creep in bed*

And never sleep in bed

But look above in the air.

[Turns from piano] *And to my greatest joy, my boy is there.*

Non-committal, she finally abandons the piano at the short passage linking the above material to the AABA central section — the song proper — in which the dance becomes a focal point, visually interacting with the design, her body "quite classical and flowing in its movement,

⁴⁶ Sarah Street, ' "Got to Dance my Way to Heaven": Jessie Matthews, Art Deco and the British Musical of the 1930s', *Studies in European Cinema* 2 no.1 (2005)

resembling the typical art deco feminine figure, balletic and graceful.”⁴⁷ Andrew Higson has written at length on the way that *Evergreen*, and Matthews’ performance, eroticises the material in a way that encodes the film along more classical lines than many of its British contemporaries: “Matthews’ mode of performance in *Evergreen* produces a certain eroticism, and her clothes and her position within the *mise-en-scene* invite a voyeuristic gaze from the spectator, so reproducing a classical (‘American’) articulation of desire.”⁴⁸ But what Higson and Street do not adequately explore is the way that the *music*, and the way the actors interact with it, flirts (the word seems appropriate) with the listener. An important moment comes when Tommy first ‘listens’ from upstairs to a *fermata* point in Harriet’s vocal on the words “*I love my ceiling more, since it is a dancing floor, just for my love*”, and then obediently dances self-consciously along with the *a tempo* instrumental reprise of the opening material, which he seemingly overhears being ‘performed’ downstairs.



Fig. 3 Listening...to what? *Evergreen* (1934)

A kind of audio-voyeurism, it involves both the character and the audience as complicit in his listening. But the moment occupies uncertain diegetic territory, since the sound he apparently ‘hears’ is the full mix (of the instrumental play-out) of the song that has simply been muffled momentarily to indicate his point-of-audition. The arrangement is actually a relatively intimate one, closer to a small tea-dance band than a full orchestral sound, with sultry solo clarinet, tender solo violin, and light percussion. In keeping with Altman’s concept of the audio dissolve, the diegetic location of music shifts: as he dances to the music, no voice is singing, and no diegetic sound is implied.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Street, ‘Got to Dance My Way to Heaven’, 25

⁴⁸ Higson, *Waving the Flag*, 159

⁴⁹ Altman, *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 62-74



Fig. 4a, 4b, 4c Abandoning the piano: *Evergreen* (1934)

As audience, we understand that the song, performed by Matthews in a manner just shy of direct-address to camera (her eyes narrowly avoid the camera) is presented as if on stage, in keeping with the conventions of the film musical. Inherent in our viewing of this is the tacit understanding that the music emanates as if from the orchestra pit: an ensemble that is heard, but usually unseen according to convention, unless a diegetic band is made obvious by context or visual placement. We nonetheless expect the music to fill the theatre/cinematic space. To portray Tommy as hearing the arrangement muffled as if through the floor thus ruptures this expectation, because we would normally expect him to hear the ‘pit orchestra’ just as clearly as we do. Only

later, when we see him get into bed at the end of the scene, his onscreen presence seems to share in the full sound mix.

But there is more to the eroticization of music in the scene, and this relates back to the way the material is structured. Its central portion, shaped around the standard AABA, gives way to a return of the introductory material in an instrumental reprise. But curiously, the song lacks completion in the sense that the vocals never return as we might expect them to, in a repeat of some of the AABA material, as was common on Broadway. The listener waits for Matthews' voice to reprise the refrain at least, or even to speak, but this is withheld as the number ends instrumentally, and the effect is that the viewer wants more. Higson's analysis demonstrates the film as being expressive of a sexual desire that is "constantly thwarted and repressed. [...] Matthews is forced to dance on her own in order to express her feelings. She also dances alone for much of the final dance-number of the film."⁵¹ By not returning to her vocal performance in 'Dancing on the Ceiling', and — literally — switching her bedside light off to end the sequence, Rodgers and Hart musicalize the sexual frustration that Higson identifies. So while not unique by any means, this formal disruption and diegetic 'flirting' (and the word feels appropriate here) certainly brings the scene into a more experimental sphere than is normally encountered in the musicals of the period.

Evergreen left a substantial legacy. It remained one of Matthews' most popular achievements, and 'Dancing on the Ceiling' was later recorded by others including Frank Sinatra and Ella Fitzgerald. It has a unique place among musical films of the 1930s as an example of a text that brings a variety of influences together, setting contrasting styles, genres and musical periods side-by-side. It symbolises the layers of musical influences and references that permeated the genre in Britain in the 1930s. But this sequence in particular provides a fruitful example of the way that the British musical could anticipate and subvert the preconceptions that viewers and listeners might bring to it.

⁵¹ Higson, *Waving the Flag*, 138

‘I Hate You’: resisting ‘reassurance’ in *Looking on the Bright Side* (1932)

Audiences were drawn to a variety of film entertainments in the 1930s, but in an age of poverty and discontent, the emergence of what Stephen Shafer has called the “cinema of reassurance” might be a powerful argument for why some genres dominated over others.⁶² While Shafer’s view is challenged to some extent below, escapism and light-hearted distraction were undeniably prominent elements of many musicals released. The attraction of musical films continued to be an opportunity for cinema-goers in their millions to be transported away from the hardships and uncertainty that were all too often the reality of daily life amid widespread economic turmoil. Christine Gledhill wrote that during the interwar years filmmaking in Britain did not reflect the hardships of the time.⁶³ Perhaps she was looking in the wrong places, because underneath the slapstick and frivolity of the songs and scores of pictures like Ealing’s *Cheer Up* (1936) there runs a subtle despair. Shafer asserts:

Even in unashamedly ‘escapist’ features, certain messages implicit in the film’s content could be suggested to the audiences troubled by the economic woes they encountered each day. Because these films were ‘escapist’ in nature, they have not been regarded seriously. Yet the very fact that these features were ‘escapist’, that is, movies designed to take a viewer out of reality, can often make them more valuable to the social historian than so-called ‘serious’ films, for in this ‘escapism’ can be found the dreams and aspirations of people whose lives are troubled and pain-filled.⁶⁴

In one scene in *Cheer Up* a penniless banker, ruined by financial misfortune, attempts to pretend otherwise by sitting down to lunch with two equally desperate writers trying to find a backer for their show. All are in immaculate evening dress, trying to maintain the appearance of solvency. Later, all three sing the title song ‘Cheer Up’, featuring a tap sequence, and crowds of chorus girls open umbrellas in the rain outside in a choreographic gesture that predates *Singin’ in the Rain* by fifteen years. Music and dance acts as a unifying force for both characters and audience, helping to raise the hopes of the film’s protagonists while rousing a dispirited picture-going public.

⁶² Stephen C. Shafer, *British Popular Films 1929-1939: The Cinema of Reassurance* (London: Routledge, 1997), 1-9

⁶³ Christine Gledhill cited in *The British Cinema Book*, ed. Robert Murphy (London: Palgrave Macmillan / British Film Institute, 2009), 163

⁶⁴ Shafer, *British Popular Films*, 7

Jeffrey Richards notes the Marxist view of cinema in the inter-war years, asserting that people certainly went to the cinema to be entertained, but “with their entertainment they frequently got a message that may not have been relevant to social change but was centrally important to the maintenance of the *status quo*.”⁶⁵ Desperation is subtext, hiding under the light musical language, but indicating that there was always something to escape *from*.

Basil Dean’s *Looking on the Bright Side* (1932) demonstrates the vibrancy of the early comedies coming from Ealing Studios. But it also serves to undermine the idea that these films were always optimistic, never confrontational. The Northern, working-class heroine of a host of musicals, the film’s star Gracie Fields was not popular with the more snobbish critics, but her pictures always reaped a substantial box office return. She was uncomfortable on a film set, but the success of the pictures meant that her fame was rivalled by few British actor-singers of her generation. Her films were curious, in that they frequently matched the budgets of the ‘prestige’ sector (partly because of her salary) but did not appeal directly to the middle classes: her accented voice was her distinctive feature, but also a source of some contention. Rachael Low does little to disguise a slight disdain for ‘Our Gracie’, who was

very proud of the range of her voice, but its tone was harsh and the vocal mannerisms and trills which delighted her fans in the sentimental songs which were always included, seemed tasteless to those with a more educated ear.⁶⁶

Under the musical direction of bandleader Carroll Gibbons, there is a palpable sense of the structure of the film being driven by the recapitulations of its principal songs as sung by Fields: ‘Looking on the Bright Side’, ‘You’re More Than All the World to Me’, and ‘After Tonight We Say Goodbye’. This process of hanging the plot on the songs, and not the other way around as might be expected from the classical model of the American musical, is explored by Higson in relation to another Fields vehicle, *Sing As We Go* (1934), which “attempts to reproduce the participatory community audience of pre-cinematic modes of entertainment such as music hall, the pleasures on offer at Blackpool, and more generally the tradition of carnival.”⁶⁷ Low notes the use of the non-diegetic mode in the film’s songs, comparing it with the previous year’s *Sally*

⁶⁵ Richards, *The Age of The Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain 1930-1939* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 5

⁶⁶ Rachael Low, *Film Making in 1930s Britain*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), 152

⁶⁷ Higson, *Waving the Flag*, 165

in *Our Alley* (1931), in which “the several songs she sang were part of the story [diegetic]”.⁶⁸

In *Looking on the Bright Side*, she finds more artifice in the placement of the songs, akin to the full-blown stage musical: “[n]o longer did the songs occur naturally. The sweethearts burst into song in a shop with full orchestral backing on the sound-track, and crowds dance down the street singing.”⁶⁹ (Low’s use of the word “naturally” clearly means “diegetically” in this context.)

Fields plays ‘Gracie’, one half of a fictional songwriting partnership thrown into turmoil when the other partner Laurie (Richard Dolman) is lured away by a glamorous starlet. Despite largely following the revue-style conventions of punctuating the basic plot with songs, this picture nonetheless uses music to disrupt and subvert expectations of the musical comedy genre. The startlingly-titled song ‘I Hate You’, one of the numbers written by the fictional pair, is first introduced as a device through which the leading man falls out with a powerful producer, who sees the song’s obvious drawbacks and considers it an affront. It is sung twice, once by the mildly talented starlet and later by the superior Gracie, whose rendition transforms it from a ridiculously funny travesty into a genuinely affecting and quite shockingly rage-filled tirade:

*I hate you,
For the agony and pain
That I’ve been through,
For the sorrow and the rain ,
That’s just what I mean,
When I say
I hate you.*

Not settling for the more common practice of placing a number in the narrative and then moving on (or reprising it in much the same manner as when first aired), the film reinvents the song and transforms it, disrupting the generic expectations that the viewer might have. In comparison with the title song (*‘Sometimes grey days make us weary, and nothing seems worthwhile. / Though it’s difficult, just keep cheery, and say with a smile...’*) the song expresses negative emotions in ways that the musical comedy seems not to accommodate under normal circumstances. It starts as a pitch to a producer as part of a backstage musical template, and becomes a much more narrative-driven piece. This transformation casts Higson’s views on Fields’ work (albeit on a different film from the Fields cycle) in a new light, since this picture

⁶⁸ Low, *Film Making*, 152

⁶⁹ Low, *Film Making*, 153

goes some way to dismantling the ‘cinema of attractions’ model through the mutating device of this song.

A second unexpected use of musical subversion comes in the final scene, as the title song ‘Looking on the Bright Side’ is sung by the assembled party-goers at a celebratory ball. The crowd are unaware of the unhappiness of their newly found star Gracie and her songwriter Laurie, who feel that their relationship is broken beyond repair. Thus, interspersed with Gracie’s desperate attempts to perform the song with a smile, are shots of Laurie upstairs at his piano, trying to drown out the sound of his own music with jarring whole-tone clusters. A shot of Gracie running up the stairs of the elaborate set, away from the celebrations towards Laurie in a bid to speak to him (as the crowd sings ‘*Today I’m in the shadows, tomorrow maybe*’), breaks the optimistic mood for the viewer. Laurie’s musical vandalism is a peculiarly musical act of self-sabotage and creative self-destruction, and highly sophisticated for a genre still finding its feet early in the post-sound era, despite its stage roots.



Fig. 5 Running from the party: *Looking on the Bright Side* (1932)

In light of Higson’s work on *Sing As We Go*, which discussed that film in comparison with *Evergreen* and identified its national characteristics as palpably other from the latter film’s ‘Americanised’ classicism, these moments from *Looking on the Bright Side* break with the idea that musicals of this kind were indifferent to their musical numbers in terms of narrative meaning. Furthermore, the example of *Looking on the Bright Side* serves to show that musicals of the same cycle as *Sing As We Go* could show *resistance* to, if not a complete dismissal of, the sense of ‘reassurance’ that some musicals (and by implication, musical comedies) might have evinced.

Interlude: the impact of dance bands

Musicals utilised popular music, in the form of songs and dance music, to appeal to a wide audience. Indeed, the widespread enjoyment of dance band music in this period impacted film scoring of various kinds. Not until the 1960s would the complex interaction of film and popular, highly commercialised and monetised music be again seen by both industries to be at a fresh new juncture: all the more exciting because American popular styles were relatively new to British audiences in the 1930s. Dance music can be heard across all genres of British pictures of the thirties, with the exception of costume dramas or historical films. Even the darkest thrillers or dramas often featured party or club scenes with diegetic band music.

The Frog (1937), about police attempts to thwart a criminal gang, relied on band music, whilst Norman Lee's gangster picture *Murder in Soho* (1939) takes a slightly darker tone, being set largely in a nightclub; there is plenty of diegetic dance music under Harry Acres's direction here. These examples are representative of music usage in dozens of cheaper crime pictures. Quota budgets indeed allowed for thrillers to be produced in abundance since, in comparison to musicals and the historical or biographical epics, expenditure on sets and costume was minimised.^{70 71}

Jump for Glory (1937), one of the films Douglas Fairbanks Jr. made in Britain, was clearly inspired by stateside scoring trends in combination with dance band idioms.⁷² The composer and bandleader Percival Mackey's work here brings a thematic approach to characterisation. Mackey made the most of the fact that Fairbanks played a violin-playing thief: a solo violin melody accompanies Fairbanks wherever he goes, and waltz-like romance music illustrates the love scenes. However, this and certain suspense passages are re-used several times without discernible alteration, marking them apart from the kinds of scoring that might have been undertaken under a more elaborately staffed — and classically trained — studio music department, or a different composer. Mackey's contributions to pictures clearly demonstrated his jazz roots, and here a key identifying British ingredient emerges: his own musical background was given space to flourish. Mackey's cues for films such as *Jump for Glory* and the effective

⁷⁰ Chapman, 'Celluloid Shockers', 80

⁷¹ It is worth bearing in mind that the British Board of Film Censors had some impact on the kinds of crime pictures being made. Angus McLaren, *Playboys and Mayfair Men: Crime, Class, Masculinity, and Fascism in 1930s London* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017)

⁷² Fairbanks Jr., son of the *Robin Hood* actor, had refused to take a pay cut from Warners in a depressed US economy, and came to Britain.

mid-decade Ealing detective picture *The Silent Passenger* (1935) are often constructed using clear blocks of music, of four, six, or eight bars. Even suspense cues or romantic moments are scored as if for dance bands even if the actual orchestration is more conventional, using distinct symmetrical musical passages that could almost be read from a lead sheet. Mackey seems most comfortable with montage sequences, such as newflash transitions, and shies away from synchronisation: an extended action sequence at the denouement of *The Silent Passenger* is left unscored, giving it a peculiar sense of quiet unease that would not have seemed out of place in Hitchcock's early thrillers. The cue would have required intricate timings and sync points that he was relatively inexperienced in providing.

The influence of jazz on British popular culture of the interwar era was indeed profound: Duke Ellington's compositional flair and versatility, the hugely influential stride rhythms of instrumentalists like Earl Hines and Art Tatum, the band-leading charisma and melodic gifts of Glenn Miller, among countless others, infiltrated into film scoring in much the same way as rock and pop did later in the century. Many of the generic strands that emerged, the 'hot' jazz of the 1920s (as exemplified by the work of Louis Armstrong, merging ragtime, blues, and military band music) and the more recent swing styles, often arrived together with new and furiously trending dance forms, so that in those film cues which borrowed from popular forms the different variations of Charleston, Lindy Hop, and other fashionable routines can be heard. Elaborate and detailed arrangements became the norm in dance bands, and collective improvisation — more common in earlier incarnations of American jazz — was less fashionable. Rhythm sections enhanced their reliance on the string bass and the hi-hat, and the saxophones grew to be the dominant choir. Where smaller groups were used, the piano was crucial: a stride feel, using chords on every beat in imitation of a banjo or rhythm guitar was frequently interspersed with florid embellishments, to produce the familiar 'comping' effect.⁷³

Despite restrictions on large bands visiting the UK from the US, imposed by the Musicians' Union, Louis Armstrong visited Britain in 1932, Ellington in 1933. They were significant moments; audiences "gaped, wondered, and were utterly enthralled" by Ellington.⁷⁴

⁷³ Gridley, *Jazz Styles: History and Analysis*. (1978) (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1988), 130-1

⁷⁴ Godbolt, *A History of Jazz in Britain, 1919-50*. (1984) (London: Northway, 2005), 99

Indeed they were overwhelmed by the spectacle of thirteen men performing, before their very eyes, magical flights of improvisation interwoven in a rich tapestry of orchestral colours on tunes ranging from the plaintively melancholy to the lustily exultant. It was a supremely imaginative and superbly executed distillation of African-American culture. No wonder it was a revelation! An exquisite assault on the ears!⁷⁵

The impact was huge, and the infiltration of this music into film scoring was inevitable. Much of the British jazz scoring of the period draws influences from Count Basie's species of swing, which "never seems out of breath nor the least bit frantic", a mood that filmmakers liked to use when trying to portray characters as young, carefree, and romantic.⁷⁶ This "emphasis on buoyancy rather than intensity" functioned well in all diegetic spheres since it could be used as a musical backdrop to dialogue or action.⁷⁷ Furthermore, for composers with a classical background, the jazz-inspired scores of Gershwin and Ravel offered a useful template for the cross-fertilization of late-Romantic orchestral forms with the harmonies and rhythms of popular music.

There was another category of films that might be viewed as distinct, and which further disrupts a straightforward generic taxonomy of the musical: pictures which took dance bands as their focus. This was the era of the great British dance bands, whose leaders — suited and bespectacled — were raised to unlikely celebrity status by extensive radio exposure in many cases. The bands and their music, taking their cues from the explosion of jazz and other music of black origin in the US, in combination with song writing styles borrowed from Tin Pan Alley, Broadway, and the West End, usually took up residencies in high-end London hotels, theatre pits, or seaside resorts, and gained a following among bright young people hungry to recreate the heady atmospheres of the parties and society soirées chronicled in the ubiquitous gossip columns. The bandleaders became almost as famous — in name, if not in appearance — as the music they played. The American bandleader Roy Fox recalled meeting Jack Hylton, who worked on several British films, in London in 1930:

⁷⁵ Godbolt, *History of Jazz*, 99

⁷⁶ Gridley, *Jazz Styles*, 128

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 129

One night a dance band leader came in to see me and asked me to join him at his table. He said his name was Jack Hylton and he wanted to welcome me to England. His name rather startled me, as here was the same Jack Hylton I had heard on the radio in my home in Beverley Hills. Well, I was really pleased to meet him and it wasn't until he drove me to his theatre where he was playing for me to watch his show, that I realized his great popularity over here in Britain – and even on the Continent.⁷⁸

The celebrity culture of dance music had an immediate impact, and whether played by small groups or flamboyant big bands, the style — or more accurately, this group of styles — was routinely featured in films, but was so widespread that entire pictures like *Music Hath Charms* (1935) were built on bands alone. In the context of a film market that was dominated by musicals and comedies, bandleaders could act as stars alongside actor-singers, and their ensembles and repertoire could form the backbone of entire features; Hylton, Payne, Carroll Gibbons and Henry Hall were all household names, if not instantly recognisable faces, and all of them made the successful transition from radio fame to the screen. This often occurred despite the absence of other characteristics that might otherwise be regarded as desirable by producers to propel an individual to mainstream stardom, such as youth, or even acting talent, since – like Gracie Fields and Jack Hulbert in other genres – the bandleaders essentially played themselves. These films “very much reflected the British music industry of the time [...] During the 1930s, musical films were made by musicians and performers who had achieved fame elsewhere.”⁷⁹

A business model of interaction between dance bands and film studios emerged, and the musicians would act as musical directors, composers or songwriters alongside on-screen roles.⁸⁰ They came from professional music backgrounds: Jack Payne and Henry Hall, for example, both held the post of Director of Dance Music at the BBC, leading that institution's first dance band. Hall, already a radio celebrity through broadcasting a show every weekday, took a central role playing himself in *Music Hath Charms*, which is little more than a collection of numbers performed by Hall and the orchestra, loosely tied together by a basic story; the revue format

⁷⁸ Roy Fox, *Hollywood, Mayfair, and All That Jazz: The Roy Fox Story* (London: Frewin, 1975), 175

⁷⁹ Donnelly, *British Film Music*, 105

⁸⁰ Even as war broke out in 1939, bandleaders were asked to score films that might not normally have invited individuals with such populist backgrounds. Ronnie Munro, whose career was almost entirely as bandleader and arranger (he arranged for Jack Hylton, Henry Hall and Lew Stone) was the unlikely choice to head up the music department at British National Pictures; more at home with foxtrots and quicksteps, he scored a war thriller, *Spies of the Air* (1939) just as hostilities got underway.

again provides the backbone to the generic syntax of the film.⁸¹ Hall worked with Mabel Wayne on the score, and Benjamin Frankel orchestrated the material.⁸² Frankel, classically trained but already experienced in film work through his involvement in the Will Hay vehicle *Radio Parade of 1935* (1934), also had a hand in the conceit of one particular scene. In moments such as this, generic expectations are subverted much like the examples of musicals given above. Perhaps the most famous sequence in the film, Hall recounts it in his memoir:

In the story my band hadn't turned up in time for a broadcast, so as I was alone in an empty studio I had to begin on my own, playing the piano; then Burton Gillis dashed in playing bass clarinet and so making it a duet. Gradually, from all corners of the studio and at all camera angles, other musicians came in playing their various instruments. The scene and the music moved step by step from a trio to a quartette, to a quintette, to an octette, [*sic*] until the full orchestra raised melody and counter melody to a rousing and effective finale.⁸³

As a moment which dissects the elements of a piece of band music, and creating a humorous situation in the process, it represents a snapshot of the genre of the dance band film itself as using music and its performance as a conduit for narrative, a device which remains powerful in contemporary cinema. Furthermore, although the pop music feature film — centred around a single band or artist — is more readily associated with later decades, the dance band pictures of the 1930s are directly comparable in scenes such as that described above. *Music Hath Charms*, in presenting celebrity popular musicians as stars of their own goof-ball feature film and playing themselves, foreshadows many of the well-known popular music films of the 1950s and 1960s.

The dance band film formed a sub-genre of the musical picture, usually having fewer songs and paying even less attention to plot formation than song-based films, but gravitating around swing music. Absorbing popular idioms in this way into its stylistic landscape, there is a cultural hybridity that is discernible in the various incarnations of the film musical, merging conventions of theatre, popular song, the relatively new sound of jazz, and the hero-worship that the big screen enabled. The wide-reaching impact was twofold: first, the mix of musical styles offered

⁸¹ Hall famously recorded the first vocal version of 'Teddy Bears' Picnic' with Val Rosing.

⁸² Henry Hall, *Here's to the Next Time* (London: Odhams Press, 1955), 138

⁸³ Hall, *Here's to the Next Time*, 141

jazz styles that were youthful, exciting and redolent of America and the freshness and opportunity which that country represented, although these soundtracks were also *nostalgic* experiences for large portions of the British cinema-going public since they borrowed structural tropes from stage revue. Mixed cultural ingredients and reference points, far from restricting or hindering the musical genre, created an environment in which playfulness and experimentation could take place while still largely fulfilling the expectations that audiences had when going to the cinema. Second, the economic downturn opened a market for entertainment that bolstered public morale and formed a mandate to provide the kind of escapism comparable to the hyperbolic spectacles of Hollywood; Busby Berkeley's work at Warner Bros. was already culturally iconic and set a new standard. Later, the sparkling success of the likes of *Top Hat* (1935) and *Swing Time* (1936) from Astaire and Rogers at RKO consolidated the American knack for musical film. Despite being rarely the equal of American studio pictures in terms of budget and production values, many British musicals attempted to fulfil the same socio-cultural role in the domestic market.

2. COMEDY

This section is designed to be separate from the interrogation of musicals above, even though most musicals of the period *were* comedies almost by default. British comedy pictures (including musical comedies) increased in production as the economic situation in Britain worsened, so that — as Steven Shafer points out — in 1933, arguably the worst year of the depression in the UK, nearly half of all feature films were comedies.⁸⁴ Many of these were made as 'quickies', since comedies could rely on dialogue and physical humour and not necessarily on locations, effects and other costly production elements. A huge number of these pictures are now lost, along with their scores, but those that survive give a reliable sense of trends running through their use of music; although in this chapter comedies made in the 'prestige' sector will be discussed primarily (quota quickies are examined in more depth in Chapter 4). Comedies provided the canvas for a variety of scoring approaches and techniques, and a wide range of musical styles. Like the musicals discussed above, the scores of these films contained references to several traditions:

⁸⁴ Shafer, *British Popular Films*, 23

western art music, music hall, jazz, and folk music. The common factor is extra-filmic sensibilities brought into the audible frame by composers from contrasting backgrounds. Furthermore, key to the analyses below is the assertion from David Sutton that

British film comedy is marked by its refusal of the straightforward narrative paradigms of classical cinema, and tends instead to create a performance-based, interruptive form in which older, pre-cinematic elements of popular entertainment co-exist with specifically cinematic codes.⁸⁵

Sutton's work on comedy emphasises the element of variety that achieves this refusal, and he — like Higson in relation to the musical — uses the term “carnavalesque” when describing the ways in which comedy presented attractions (songs, set-pieces, etc).⁸⁶ This concept is essential to understanding the range of scoring approaches that are heard in comedies without songs. But in the discussion below, the aim is to show how the individual experience of working on the pictures, and the backgrounds that the composers brought to them, can explain further the aesthetic choices made.

Early Ealing comedy scores; music for Will Hay and Tom Walls

Ealing, now celebrated for its cycle of classic comedies in the following decades, made several with Carol Reed in the 1930s which established early the studio's deft handling of droll material and farcical plotlines.⁸⁷ For example, the score for *Midshipman Easy* (1935), by far Reed's silliest picture of the period, frequently indulges in witty ‘mickey-mousing’; elsewhere, Frederic Austin's score indulges in sketchy exotic shorthand. The Italian scenes have a bafflingly ‘Spanish’ musical flavour but still achieve the desired Mediterranean ‘otherness’. Ealing's music chief Ernest Irving had invited Austin to score the picture after working with him in the theatre, but the experience was not a happy one:

I gave [Austin] some film music to write for *Midshipman Easy* at Ealing Studios and found him very inflexible to work with; he seemed to think that the film should be shot to fit the music. I see that in a recent book Dr. Vaughan Williams

⁸⁵ Sutton, *A Chorus of Raspberries*, 80

⁸⁶ Ibid. 48; Higson, *Waving the Flag*, 165

⁸⁷ By the time *Hue and Cry* (1947) emerged as arguably the first of the classic ‘Ealing comedies’, a recognisably matured scoring approach had begun to appear in the comedy output of the studio. Georges Auric's zesty musical backdrop adds to the irony of the film's deceptively silly demeanour, since onscreen we are constantly reminded of the damage that war had wrought on the streets of London.

puts forward something of the same kind, but, of course, only a very small proportion of the people from whom the cinema revenues come is musical, and films must not be treated as if they were operas.⁸⁸

Irving had pragmatic views on the extent to which the composer should be indulged in comedy scores, and even went so far as to believe that “there are quite a number of film fans who positively dislike music”.⁸⁹ He was, furthermore, suitably modest about his — and his composers’ — role in the big picture. He also published his thoughts about the part that budgets played in the eventual outcome of a score. Working with George Formby during the 1930s, and with the equally popular Will Hay in the 1940s, Irving became aware of the effect of budgetary variations on music:

Ealing has a fine record in the production of comedy: Gracie Fields, George Formby, Will Hay and Tommy Trinder were all best-sellers. Their songs were written by our English Wardour-Street [*sic*] composers and the incidental music was mostly composed by me. [The producer Basil] Dean was, I think, pinched a little in the amount he could spend upon music and I squeezed as many players out of him as I could [.]⁹⁰

Louis Levy, similarly, did not always see the need for over-exerting himself when working with Hay on comedy pictures at Gainsborough during the second half of the thirties. Most of the music Levy and his associates provided for comedies such as this tended towards the light-hearted and up-tempo, and indeed many of the composers working in the department would go on to become prolific composers of ‘light music’ in the decades that followed, not least Cecil Milner, who worked closely with Clive Richardson and Charles Williams on several of the company’s scores.⁹¹ These were relatively unchallenging scoring assignments, with limited scope for serious dramatic cues, but instead giving way to a series of ‘hurries’ and frequently rather ill-fitting underscoring of slapstick routines. Hay tended to play the same character with only minor alterations in each respective film, recycling the same formula, so a comparably formulaic approach to scoring was evidently applied. Levy oversaw the composer Charles Williams on the

⁸⁸ Irving, *Cue for Music*, 96

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 163

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 145. Trinder was relatively late to the 1930s party. His first film was *Almost a Honeymoon* (1938)

⁹¹ Milner’s music and arrangements would resurface on newsreels, advertising shorts, and television programmes over subsequent decades. Richardson was apparently envious of Milner, who had private means of finance that could support him in times when music did not pay enough. Colin Mackenzie and Timothy Milner, ‘Out of the Shadows: The Cecil Milner Story’, robertfarnonsociety.org.uk/index.php/legends/cecil-milner

classic sequence of pictures that Hay made for Gainsborough, including *Boys Will be Boys* (1935), *Windbag the Sailor* (1936), *Oh, Mr Porter!* (1937), and *Ask a Policeman* (1939), with Bretton Byrd and probably Clive Richardson contributing further material.⁹² Music is generally mixed low, which avoided unnecessary distraction away from the star and his antics.

Oh, Mr. Porter! is something of a diversion: it has opportunities for a more expansive and expressive musical approach. The plot concerns Will Hay's character, an incompetent stationmaster, being transferred to a job in rural Ireland; his arrival is illustrated by a folk tune pastiche accompanied by moody orchestration to reflect the rainy conditions he encounters. Then the following morning, in the brighter weather, the tune is reprised in a sunnier arrangement. There is a palpable sense in this score that Charles Williams enjoyed embodying a pastoral style influenced by Vaughan Williams and George Butterworth.

Levy's supervision on other comedies, such as those directed by and starring Tom Walls, especially earlier in the decade, usually dealt with even scantier resources than Irving describes above, and consequently lacked musical imagination: Walls' directorial effort *A Cuckoo in the Nest* (1933), in most other respects a brilliantly paced and very funny adaptation from the stage (an import from the Aldwych Farces), contains only title cues. Walls made films that were largely dialogue-based, heavy on puns, verbal misunderstandings and character interaction, sometimes making them suitable vehicles for bandleaders like the American jazzman Roy Fox, with whom Walls worked on *A Night Like This* (1932). Bandleaders were not used to writing highly synchronised cues, so it was often loose-fitting pieces that can be heard on these pictures.

Close synchronisation and 'mickey-mousing' in comedy was left to those composers with a grounding in classical composition and orchestration, and the technique became more pronounced later in the decade. Attention to detail, manifested in the subtle manipulation of short moments in time with a careful deployment of tempo and changes in rhythm, betrayed the knowledge of ballet scores that these composers brought to the screen. *Strange Boarders* (1938), probably written by Charles Williams under the supervision of Levy, was a stand-out score. The music accompanying a scene featuring Walls creeping around the guest house deftly shadows his movements, and a suspense cue set in a dark room, as the hero is shot at by a blind man, is similarly treated. Much is made of the potential for diegetic music to interact with dialogue,

⁹² Ibid. Richardson was physically imposing at 6'9", and had a remarkable memory.
See also Appendix E: Gleason correspondence.

particularly in a comedy nightclub scene wherein a diegetic bass saxophone interferes with Walls' attempts to eavesdrop on a conversation. *Strange Boarders* is an example of the popular comedy-thriller hybrid, and has narrative similarities with a quickie made at the same time, *Passenger to London* (1937). The latter employs a device found frequently in such pictures, wherein a penultimate denouement scene (including a struggle or chase) is succeeded by a final reconciliation moment, in this case set in a hospital where the hero is recuperating. These closing scenes are frequently underscored with dance band music, either segueing musically into the end titles or cross-faded with a concluding orchestral cadence. The up-beat nature of these final cues always contrasts with the tension of the previous scene, creating a satisfying musical coda, and a reaffirmation of the generic expectations of comedy.

Certain kinds of comedies relied habitually on extended chases or action sequences, and this often called for long stretches of material provided by the composer or music director. *Emil and the Detectives* (1935) is a case in point, and something of an oddity, being a shot-by-shot remake of a German picture from 1931, and using the same composer, Allan Gray (Józef Żmigrod), who subsequently scored the great run of Powell & Pressburger pictures. *Emil and the Detectives* is closer in aesthetic to silents than nearly all films released in the middle of the decade. Much of this is due to its exact mirroring of the earlier German film, which quite clearly separates dialogue and action sections. Gray's principal influence is military band music: frequent tuba basslines and march-like rhythms accompany the antics of the gang of boys trying to recover £6 stolen from the eponymous hero by a strange man in a bowler hat.

Comedy scores thus often betrayed more about the characters and tastes of individual composers than the perceived generic templates that films might have carried. The assertion from David Sutton that comedies exhibited a "refusal" of classical narrative and instead opted for a variety-inspired discourse, with plots arranged around gags and set-pieces (or — in the case of musical comedies as explored in the previous section — songs), certainly meant that composers might have felt more at liberty to draw on influences from the theatre, dance music, or other traditions when composing cues.⁹³

⁹³ Sutton, *A Chorus of Raspberries*, 80

Archival case study: Mischa Spoliansky

The comedies released in the ‘prestige’ sector — to which Ealing and Gainsborough contributed much of their material but arguably not all of it, since budgets varied within companies — enjoyed significant financial support, high production values, and wide distribution deals. This often meant that composers had bigger budgets, sometimes more time, and frequently better dramatic material to work with than those working on lower budget comedies or ‘quickies’. The music of Mischa Spoliansky for the comedies made at London Films in the thirties emerges as an example of a body of work in the prestige field, and it is exemplified by two major mid-decade pictures: *The Ghost Goes West* (1935) and *The Man Who Could Work Miracles* (1936).

In an article written in 1945, the Australian composer and conductor Hubert Clifford celebrates Spoliansky as representing the kind of composer who might be trusted not to appeal to an “imaginary lowest common denominator”.⁹⁴ He praises *Don't Take it to Heart* (1944) as a film that “combines the virtues of intelligent and technically skilful direction with an adroit use of music”. Spoliansky was emerging years before this as a composer who pleased critics and audiences alike, and his work on some of the most high-profile comedy pictures of the 1930s is evidence in favour of an accomplished and thoughtful composer.⁹⁵

Spoliansky's background in the cabaret of the Weimar Republic helps to locate his film work into the proper context. It was a rigorous training in the techniques of musical commentary on comedy and satire, and he brought influences from cabaret to his films. Cabaret was an artform beset with paradox; in its early incarnations, it struggled to find an identity that pleased audiences, since for the *literati* it was too populist and often crude, and for those seeking entertainment, the politically-charged patchwork of *kleinkunst* proved too highbrow. Spoliansky found himself having to negotiate this difficult territory, and indeed “[t]he dilemma of mediating between the public taste and the ideals of artistic style was to plague the cabaret of the Weimar Republic”.⁹⁶ Reflecting his experience in German cabaret, Spoliansky was to find that British filmmaking did not usually *directly* reflect the hardships of the time, leaving despair and pessimism to be expressed using humour, as described above in relation to the optimism of

⁹⁴ Clifford, ‘Music from the Films’, *Tempo* 10 (1945): 10

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 10

⁹⁶ Lareau, ‘The German Cabaret Movement During the Weimar Republic’, *The Theatre Journal* 43, no.4 (1991): 474

musicals. *The Man Who Could Work Miracles*, whose protagonist is suddenly given the ability to perform miracles of his choosing, conforms to this discourse, and it gave Spoliansky an opportunity to apply the skills he developed in Berlin to a different idiom.

The Man Who Could Work Miracles is an example of a picture that ostensibly seems to allow Spoliansky to undertake imaginative scoring approaches simply because of its unreal subject matter. The light-hearted comedy plot invites a significant amount of colourful dialogue scoring from the composer, whose music betrays a clear debt to Bartók in much of his harmony (the brass splashes of the latter's *Concerto for Orchestra* clearly haunts some cues), but also makes use of Debussian textures and, more conservatively perhaps, a distinctly Mendelssohnian orchestral wit. The latter's music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is clearly referenced in style and orchestration: it is almost pastiched in the scene during which the hero tidies his shop with one simple wave of his hand.

The material held in the Spoliansky archive illuminates his work process on *The Man Who Could Work Miracles*, right from the beginning of the project. The heading *Miracle Man* appears on many of the sheets in the score, indicating that this was a working title that was later changed. Handwritten notes for a sung sequence attest to the spirit of self-improvement and classical education that permeates the film, a trope that would resurface later in Powell & Pressburger's comparable classic *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946), a picture which shares supernatural themes and contains a highly-stylised portrayal of a deific realm resembling part of the earlier film. Muir Mathieson, acting as music director, contributed to the manuscripts: his handwriting is visible on several sheets, often in pencil noting repeats and other directions. That the hand is in fact Mathieson's is a reasonable conclusion based on its striking similarity with that appearing on documents from Mathieson's archive.

Spoliansky usually orchestrated his own music, and was a particularly fine writer for the woodwind choir. Because of the winds' shared frequencies with human voices, it was an element of orchestration that — particularly during this period of film music when low strings were often muffled or obscured by the limitations of recording and reproduction technology — was arguably more sensitive and required more care and consideration than string writing.

"The Man Who Could Work Miracles"

Picc.
Fl.
Ob.
Clar.
Bassoon
Corn
Tpt.
Trb.
Tuba
Drum
Perc.
I. Viol.
II. Viol.
Viola
Cello
D. Bass

Grandioso

Title.

f, *mf dolce espress.*, *mf dolce*, *f*, *S.D.*, *f marc.*, *p. dolce*, *rub.*, *V.S.*

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Fig. 6 Mischa Spoliansky: Opening of *The Man Who Could Work Miracles*

Akademie der Künste, Berlin

His skill as an orchestrator, and willingness to mix styles and traditions, is evidenced in another comedy, René Clair's first English language picture *The Ghost Goes West* (1935). In this, another supernatural farce, a Scottish laird (Robert Donat) is visited by the ghost of an ancestor as American investors attempt to buy his castle and re-build it in Florida. Spoliansky's music for

the walk of the ghost on the castle battlements brings woodwind chords to the fore, showing a sensitivity to the coloristic possibilities of different combinations. There are several inventive musical touches, not least a Dixieland jazz band, complete with highland dress, giving traditional Scottish tunes a New Orleans makeover. The romantic sub-plot is given due musical attention, and the opening sequences, set during an 18th century feud between rival clans, afford the composer opportunities for synchrony with onscreen action, especially during the light-hearted battle scenes.

A significant amount of primary material survives from the scoring process of *The Ghost Goes West*, which went under the working title of *The Glowrie Ghost*. A cue sheet from Reel 10 shows some handwriting that is again probably Mathieson's (a comparison of this handwriting to Spoliansky's ink handwriting demonstrates the difference). The cue sheet is divided into columns: "Scene" (description) / "Time on watch" (i.e. length of the cues, not time from the beginning of the reel) / "Music" (description of musical material). There are references to specific musical themes, and multiple pencilled corrections; also visible are notes indicating diegetic music (e.g. "Introduction to love theme played by radio"). A glimpse into the minutiae of Spoliansky and Mathieson's process of planning and executing the musical narrative of the film, this document illuminates the thought and care that went into the scoring process.

Furthermore, throughout the comedy output of British filmmaking, the characteristics of scores are more easily explained by placing them in the context of the particular situations and abilities of the composers themselves. Those who worked for Levy brought a sense of refined classical discernment to their scoring, and were more likely to engage in close-synchronisation techniques. Bandleaders composed in broader brushstrokes, preferring to let the mood of the music run its own audio-visual course, whilst figures like Spoliansky emerged from other musical cultures with a keen ironic ear.

5- Extra parts in Score-
of Battle for Bigelow's Chase

ARRANGEMENT OF MUSIC FOR REEL 10:

Scenes	Time on watch	Music
Donald's room - Wireless to:		Introduction to love theme played by radio
TERRACE - we see Peggy	21 s.	
To "When I first saw you..."	52 s.	Love theme
End of Terrace scene	2 m. 1 1/2 secs.	
Interruption of music		
From "Murdoch! Did you hear that?" to:	4.	Violent attack, orchestra, explosion. Then piano ghost w/ played quietly in the
Explosion Murdoch appears:	5 1/2 secs.	
to "MacLaggan!" corridor:	23 secs.	Finish abruptly
Interruption of music		
From "Ha! ha!", to: (Chase!)	22 secs.	Beginning very fast - stops on Bigelow falling on floor with fff chord.
Interruption of music		
From "In the name..."		A. solemn music: with lightning flashes as lib. (2 secs.)
to First lightning flash.	6 1/2 secs.	
Second " "	12 secs.	
Third " "	23 secs.	
Fourth " "	33 secs.	
Bigelow touches the floor with his nose	45 secs.	Finish solemn & lightning music
EXT. "Father! Father..."	1 m. 2 secs.	Father's Theme
"...of this earth"	1 m. 24 secs.	
Murdoch disappears	1 m. 51 secs.	Buy pipe theme from Titles
End Terrace	1 m. 55 secs.	
Interruption of music		
Illuminations	About 2 bars	to be written as INTRO.
To Fade	19 secs.	
END TITLE	32 secs.	

One bar held chord for Titles

Fig. 7 Mischa Spoliansky: Reel 10 Cuesheet, *The Ghost Goes West*

Akademie der Künste, Berlin

Spoliansky's work on the comedies explored above lies within the more generously budgeted sector of filmmaking, and those projects will have been completed in close proximity with some of the celebrated dramas produced by London Films at the time. In a sense, then, his work is a link between the vast numbers of comedy pictures that effectively propped up the industry, with their varied musical approaches, and the serious drama pictures that are more frequently celebrated by critics today. Whilst it is not always true that dramas contained more music, post-Romantic orchestral writing is perhaps associated most strongly with those works that lie in the dramatic categories: there is usually more scope for leitmotivic development and rich harmonic treatment to underline the interactions of characters and plot tensions.

3. HISTORICAL OR COSTUME DRAMA

If musicals and comedies brought popular music to the screen and reflected an increasingly pluralist musical culture that was developing away from the cinema, and romantic drama or thrillers were elevated by those composers whose backgrounds were of a more conventional nature, the scores that were written for films set in the past took a different path. They enriched the multi-layered stylistic environment in British film music beyond the scope of popular music discourse and frequently dissented from the late-Romantic idioms of dramatic scoring conventions. Importantly, though, historical films and costume dramas (such as Shakespeare adaptations) channelled recognisably patriotic strands of musical discourse at a time of constitutional unease.

Patriotism in *Victoria the Great*

Initiated by Korda's early success with *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933), in the thirties there was steady stream of pictures that engaged with historical events, the lives of great men and women, adaptations of literary classics or folk tales, Shakespeare pictures, and a sub-genre of exotic epics based on myths and legends. In most, British themes filtered through regardless of their setting or narrative. Contemporary events and sensibilities were never far from the minds of the filmmakers or audiences, and viewing these pictures from a 21st-century perspective, one

might assume that themes of national pride, royalism, and cultural and political conservatism grew from the decade being characterised by those very traits. But in fact, there are strong arguments for the opposite:

[I]t would be simplistic to see the political significance of interwar cinema in crude reductionist terms. British cinema, for example, constantly reiterated in this period the theme of national unity, mobilizing insistently an ideology of a national family; a priori, the fact that this theme was so constantly reiterated is more likely to signify an attempt to produce such unity rather than signify its existence in reality.¹¹⁴

In September 1935 Herbert Wilcox published a statement declaring that “[t]he guiding principle of my company will be productions based on outstanding star personalities with music, romance and comedy as the basic ingredients.”¹¹⁵ Music in several of these pictures was less composed than compiled, *Victoria the Great* (1937) being one prominent example. Commenting indirectly on contemporaneous politics, made at the height of the abdication crisis and prior to the coronation of George VI, *Victoria the Great* took on great significance in the fall-out from the crisis.¹¹⁶ Its overblown patriotism and sense of regal celebration invite a bombastic musical accompaniment — mostly in the form of arrangements — from Anthony Collins, under Muir Mathieson’s musical direction. The objective of the film was to celebrate the monarchy and paint Victoria (read: George VI) in a glorious light:

With Herbert Wilcox, we have a producer with no firm views of his own who possessed an outstanding sense of the *anxieties* of a conservative populace plunged into radical change. The *Victoria* films should be interpreted as a measured response to crises temporarily experienced because of high unemployment and the abdication.¹¹⁷

Musically, the film is overwhelmed, with adjacent cues often contrasting and jarringly placed. In

¹¹⁴ Peter Miles and Malcolm Smith, *Cinema, Literature & Society: Elite and Mass Culture in Interwar Britain*, (London: Croom Helm, 1987), 165

¹¹⁵ Herbert Wilcox quoted in Richards, *The Unknown 1930s*, 252-3

¹¹⁶ Jeffrey Richards, *Imperialism and Music: Britain 1876-1953* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), 307

¹¹⁷ Sue Harper, *Picturing the Past: The Rise and Fall of the British Costume Film* (London: BFI, 1994), 184

fact, the approach to music placement in *Victoria the Great* aligns with its political aims, in that historical accuracy is sacrificed to the prioritising of splendour and pomp (in switching to colour at the end, *Victoria the Great* announces its spectacular nature). Collins' music is woodwind-heavy, with strings serving as padding to the Elgarian pageantry. March-like original cues, which certainly take the sweep and flourish of (anachronistic) Elgar as their reference, compete on the soundtrack with choral settings for the coronation scene, and frequent sonic and visual depictions of bell ringing. Handel is quoted and embedded more than once, and Mozart's overture to *Le Nozze di Figaro* features as awkward underscore. Unlike Ealing's *Lorna Doone* (1935), whose impressive audio-visual synchronicity is discussed below, this royal biopic is unconcerned with matching on-screen instruments to audible music: a Viennese waltz accompanies anachronistic images of a swing band. This glaring mismatch is surprising for a film under Mathieson's watch, although it is entirely possible — even probable — that he had limited or no control over on-screen instruments and ensembles.

Jeffrey Richards asserts that *Victoria the Great* is “a classic exercise in intertextuality”, going on to list a range of the musical and artistic references that the film contains.¹¹⁸ Little original music was written for either *Victoria the Great* or its sequel *Sixty Glorious Years*; this justified the employment of Anthony Collins, not an established composer of original music by any means. Certainly, the lengths to which Collins and Mathieson had gone to recreate plausible musical programmes for coronation scenes and jubilee sequences attests to the generalized attitude of deference to regal splendour that prevailed in the years between the abdication crisis and the start of the Second World War.

Listening to scores such as these brings us to question the function of elements of ‘pomp’ and overblown patriotism, and whether there was something forced and propagandist in their use, since the period in which they were written — dominated by a monarchy in crisis, a wrecked economy, and a declining empire — was so turbulent. Lawrence Napper describes the films produced in this period as being similar in outlook:

¹¹⁸ Richards, *Imperialism and Music*, 308

While on a broad political level it is true that basic tenets such as the monarchy, democracy and Empire were generally accepted, it is easy to forget, in the face of such language, quite how much of the fabric of British life was unfamiliar, in doubt, or (at the very least) *in the process of establishing itself* during the interwar period.¹¹⁹

If a sense of ‘Britishness’ is linked to nostalgia and memory, and the need to create a past, then these films required heightened patriotism in their music. Indeed, several historians have insisted upon the importance of the *imagined* past as key to the construction of Britishness.¹²⁰ History films and costume dramas of the thirties negotiate themes of identity through stories of the past, and with music that simultaneously evokes the past and rouses the patriotism of the present. As Irene Morra writes, “[a]ssertions of Britishness in relation to music are characterized by discursive attempts to define the nation and its people. This discourse originates in England and assumes England’s centrality to that expression.”¹²¹

Historicism: *Nell Gwynn*, *Fire Over England*, *Lorna Doone*

Questions of historical ‘authenticity’ (with all the inherent difficulties that the term carries) are raised in the study of scores for certain pictures, mostly produced in the ‘prestige’ sector. Philip Braham’s music for *Nell Gwynn* (1934) is generally celebratory and fun-filled, even if some cues are rather clumsily repeated several times over certain scenes. Braham, a well-known West End musical director, was chosen to give the film what must have been thought of as historical musical accuracy of a kind, with mixed results. The extended dance sequences wherein Neagle entertains at the theatre or at court are flamboyantly balletic. Arthur Benjamin disliked the mismatch of onscreen instruments with the music actually heard:

Nell was dancing on the stage of Drury Lane to a little orchestra of about four antique instruments; but, booming forth from the loudspeaker, the Edward German Dances were heard on a full orchestra! This was a place where realism was ruined without excuse on the pleas of emotional background. It was simply bad art.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Napper, *British Cinema*, 6-7

¹²⁰ Mark Easton, ‘Define Britishness? It’s like painting wind’, bbc.com/news/uk-17218635

¹²¹ Irene Morra, *Britishness, Popular Music and National Identity: The Making of Modern Britain* (New York & Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), ix

¹²² Benjamin, ‘Film Music’, 93

Nell Gwynn is a rather more musical film than it might be assumed to be, since Neagle undertakes several dancing and mime performances throughout, all accompanied by Braham's score. Furthermore, it occasionally experiments with ambiguous diegesis. The dance sequence during which Nell taunts Charles II's other mistress, the Duchess of Portsmouth, by way of a costume that mocks the latter's clothing, is set to a light orchestral accompaniment whilst an audibly unrelated ensemble mime on stage. The music nonetheless seems to acknowledge the mockery of the scene at the same time as fulfilling its function as stage music. Later, a harpsichord line as played by Nell onscreen is taken up by the orchestral underscore throughout her dialogue with the king.¹²³

Richard Addinsell's work on *Fire Over England* (1937) is similarly imaginative, and made use of what might now be termed historically-informed music to enhance the Elizabethan flavour (albeit a musical history as viewed through a 1930s lens – prior to the major developments of the early music revival). Roy Douglas, who would later assist Walton on *Henry V* (1944), was almost certainly involved as an orchestrator and harpsichordist on this score.¹²⁴ A picture that was deemed to be popular enough to sell merchandise, Chappell's issued a piano/vocal score of Addinsell's song 'The Spanish Lady' from *Fire Over England* to tie in with the release of the film, much as Kurt Schroeder's music had been issued in edited and digestible form after the release of *The Private Life of Henry VIII*. In *Fire Over England* we can observe that there was a growing industry of history pictures and the subsidiary attractions (like music) associated with them.

The historical aspects of *Fire Over England* might be compared with C. Armstrong Gibbs' period score for Ealing's *Lorna Doone* (1935), under the musical direction of Ernest Irving. In *Lorna Doone* the musical approach is admirably careful and precise in terms of the synchronisation of onscreen instruments to those heard on the soundtrack. Ernest Irving attests in his memoir that the musical budget for the picture was larger than producer Basil Dean would normally allow, and certainly it has characteristics that set it apart.¹²⁵ It was Gibbs' only feature film score, and is unusual in taking historical musical performance relatively seriously, with its

¹²³ *Nell Gwynn* ran into difficulties with the USA's Hays Code (later known as the Production Code) of film standards. It was given a new beginning and ending for American viewers showing Gwynn as a destitute old woman being evicted and later found dead, thus imprinting on the picture a moral that wasn't enforced in its British version.

Slide, *Fifty Classic British Films, 1932-1982: A Pictorial Record*. (1985) (New York: Dover, 2013), 13

¹²⁴ Swynnoe, *The Best Years*, 195, 215

¹²⁵ Irving, *Cue for Music*, 145

inclusion of viol, recorder, fiddle, violone, and serpent in the harvest festival scene. Where a fiddle is shown on-screen, it is duly heard on the soundtrack, and the sound mix is careful and attentive. Gibbs sourced folk melodies and harvest songs to add to the West Country rural flavour of the story, and his orchestral passages are effective in marking the transition of time over months and years; time passing is signified in montage by editing together, for example, a shot of the start of a piece of needlework with the completion of the same work. Late in the picture a royal palace scene contains a newly composed pastiche of late-baroque orchestral music. Action sequences are treated with caution: there are several fight scenes but only the last one, the extended fight which has most narrative sway, is scored. ‘Lorna’s Song’, the love theme composed by Rutland Boughton, was deemed to have too many repetitions at the premiere of the film, causing laughter among the audience, and its last appearance at the end of the film was removed before the film was released nationwide.¹²⁶

More music in costume: *Don Juan*, *Rembrandt*, *Abdul the Damned*, *As You Like It*

History films motivated their composers to embody the past, but other projects required, in addition, a degree of stylistic diversion so that foreign or remote places might be conjured musically. Ernst Toch’s score for *The Private Life of Don Juan* (1934) is an excellent example of a work that utilizes a significant amount of music, stopping short of close illustrative effects, but characterised by Spanish-inspired material. It opens with a diegetic serenade scene (the ‘Don Juan Serenade’ is credited to ‘Michael Spoliansky’, as Mischa was known then — some of this music survives in the Spoliansky archive), accompanied by onscreen guitar in a suitably quaint Spanish courtyard. Later, there is an exotic dancing sequence with chromatic and sensuous music, and an effective transition from a love scene (which has gentle, broad underscoring) into the grand exterior of a mountainside, whereupon the material swells into full orchestral colours. A funeral scene is scored in sombre tones, with woodwind, bells and a choir. *Don Juan* was a failure compared to London Films’ other recent effort *Henry VIII* and their forthcoming *The Rise of Catherine the Great* (1934). Rachel Low opines that “[I]n his last film [*Don Juan*] Douglas Fairbanks Sr., looked the part of the ageing rake only too convincingly and the disenchanted,

¹²⁶ Sweet, *Shepperton Babylon: The Lost Worlds of British Cinema* (London: Faber & Faber, 2005), 131

world-weary approach was not enlivened by his one obligatory leap.”¹²⁷

The Rise of Catherine the Great, also scored by Toch, again featured solemn choral material in its wedding scene, a cue almost certainly overseen by Roy Douglas, who recalled rehearsing the choir at Elstree.¹²⁸ There is no direct underscoring but atmospheric scene setting, e.g. Viennese-style waltzes for the society balls. Like *Don Juan*, the film features a startling amount of bell ringing, a sound that is more flexible in terms of semiotic reference than it might seem. In both productions, bells of different kinds are variously heard to announce a significant time of day, to herald weddings, funerals, coronations and executions, or simply a straightforward alarm; not all of these instances are clearly diegetic.¹²⁹

The score for London Films’ *Rembrandt* (1936), by Geoffrey Toye, is constructed from musical segments that match clearly defined sections in the narrative, often acting as transition between acts.¹³⁰ One important cue comes at the end of the exposition part of the film, after the death of the painter’s wife and just as he declares his interest in seeking another. His commission from the local dignitaries has been rejected as inadequate, and he is at a particular point of personal and professional crisis. Toye’s music here is tumultuous and swirling, reflecting the gothic staircases and moody lighting and set design, but crucially it does not begin until after he has given an important speech to his servants. This leaves the music to run without interference from dialogue. *Rembrandt* is dominated by only one theme, characterised (perhaps with a nod to Dowland) by the first four notes of a descending natural minor scale. This theme recurs throughout the film, and might be said to be the only such melody. Toye’s approach is indeed not leitmotivic but is based around the development of this lonely theme.

Rembrandt was among Korda’s follow-ups to *Henry VIII*, in a series of biopics that were an attempt to capitalise on that initial success. Other producers tried to emulate this. In one of Max Schach’s early efforts to jump on Korda’s bandwagon, *Abdul the Damned* (1935), Hanns Eisler makes little discernible effort to write music that sounds particularly ‘Turkish’, although it is

¹²⁷ Low, *Film Making*, 169. His son, Douglas Fairbanks Jr., made the heroic leap a feature of the aforementioned *Jump for Glory* (1937)

¹²⁸ Swynnoe, *The Best Years*, 197

¹²⁹ A ‘checklist’ of Ernst Toch’s complete works, which closes his book *The Shaping Forces in Music*, declares, quite plausibly, that the scores for *Don Juan*, *The Rise of Catherine the Great* and Gaumont’s *Little Friend* (1934) are lost. The index of the Ernst Toch archive in Los Angeles certainly lists few relevant items. However, Spoliansky’s contribution to *Don Juan* survives.

¹³⁰ A reasonable comparison may be drawn with Walton’s score for Olivier’s *Hamlet* twelve years later: a distinctly modernist take on a score for a ‘period’ film. See Bennett, ‘The Ghost of Early Music in Walton’s *Hamlet*’ *Historični Seminar* 9 (2011): 131-146

sometimes difficult to know, in the hands of a staunch academic like Eisler, where the line between modernist dissonance and 1930s 'ethnic' pastiche might lie. Much of the score is taken up with fanfares and other regal or military cues.

As You Like It (1936), financed by Fox and directed by Paul Czinner (but in most other respects a 'British' picture) was the first time that Shakespeare's play had been adapted in the sound cinema, and was an early pairing of William Walton with Laurence Olivier. Olivier played Orlando opposite Elisabeth Bergner's Rosalind, the latter doing her best to disguise her German accent. In many respects *As You Like It* was a stylistic blueprint for Walton's later contributions to Olivier's great Shakespeare films *Henry V* (1944), *Hamlet* (1948) and *Richard III* (1955). He delivers music that combines his own concert style — a characteristically English modernism tinged with the neo-classicism of Ravel and Stravinsky — with a catch-all antiquarianism to evoke a hazily-defined Elizabethan or Jacobean setting. He stops short at underscoring dialogue precisely, but chooses instead to paint the shapes of scenes with mercurial changes in orchestration and texture. The song settings are peculiarly hymn-like, and informed by Anglican music more than anything else, a style with which Walton was extremely familiar. Arthur Benjamin criticised the sound dub of the film, writing that "Walton's lovely pastoral music in *As You Like It* was almost completely lost every time a sheep said 'Ma-a-a.' One day it will be an essential part of a sound-engineer's training to be able to read a music score."¹³² Benjamin Britten bemoaned that Walton had not improved on the promise of the same director's *Escape Me Never* (1935):

There is, of course, the Grand Introduction over the credit titles – pompous and heraldic in the traditional manner. There is a Grand Oratorio Finale with full orchestra, based on Elizabethan songs, in which a bunch of Albert Hall contralti is very prominent. Both these are written with great competence, and indeed Walton is incapable of any sort of inefficiency. But apart from suitable Waldweben noises at the beginning of each sequence, which tactfully fade out as the action starts, that is the whole of Walton's contribution to *As You Like It*. One cannot feel that the microphone has entered very deeply into Walton's scoring soul. A large orchestra in which strings are very prominent has been used, and in the accompanying pastoral music one is conscious of the energetic ranks of the London Philharmonic sweating away behind the three-ply trees. As far as he is allowed, Walton makes one or two musically apt suggestions. The introduction is very neatly dovetailed into the chicken-yard, and Leon Goossens

¹³² Benjamin, 'Film Music', 96

on the oboe mixes very creditably with the Wyandottes [chickens]. Also a neat and poetic use of the leitmotiv [for] Rosalind is to be noted. But the music for *As You Like It* is not the advance on *Escape Me Never* which we all expected.¹³³

Britten misses the subtlety of sequences such as the wrestling scene, which is cleverly timed and carefully reflected in the shifting orchestral colours. The review is notable in other ways: Britten is vaguely dismissive of the film's production values ("three-ply trees"), and betrays his distrust of commercial filmmakers, and their supposed disregard for serious music. As also demonstrated by his experiences on *Love from a Stranger* the following year, it is clear that Britten found the show business end of filmmaking distasteful, and regarded most feature films with suspicion.

Film genres and their sub-divisions were remarkable not because composers approached them with a set of conventions that they felt should be applied, although it would be erroneous and unhelpful to suggest that they brought no generic assumptions at all. Instead, the most striking thing that emerges when considering film scores through an analytical filter built on genre is that the genres enhanced the sensibilities that the individual composers had, brought out their own idiosyncrasies, and — in the case of composers whose experience put them off film scoring — seemed to illuminate more about their own insecurities and characters than any possible generic indoctrination that they might have brought to the work itself.

In Britain, the fragmentary nature of the industry, the constant issue of budgeting, and the small-scale nature of many production companies — and music departments within them — meant that broad homogenisation in terms of style, and consensus in the musical treatment of contrasting types of narrative was far less pronounced than in other industries, particularly the US. And while the US did have the smaller, cheaper productions made by the 'Poverty Row' companies, whose music use varied considerably, the spectre of the powerful studios was such that generic responses were culturally controlled to a greater extent than in Britain. The result is a British scene that showed a greater variety of individual characters among composers and the styles and attitudes they chose to adopt.

¹³³ Benjamin Britten quoted in Philip Reed, *The Incidental Music of Benjamin Britten: A Study and Catalogue of his Music for Film, Theatre and Radio* (Doctoral thesis. University of East Anglia, 1987), 13-14

Chapter 4

Quality or Quota?

‘Respectable’ Film Scoring in the Age of the ‘Quickie’

The ‘cultural crossroads’ was in part brought about by the financial and legal conditions imposed upon filmmaking in Britain. Variations in the size, scope and style of scores written for motion pictures was dictated partly by economic conditions and the context of the market for cinema in an uncertain climate. An industry which nourished such contrasting idioms as western art music, popular dance music, historically-informed ‘period’ music, and folk music of the British Isles and beyond, was moulded by the realities of production and distribution under which it found itself. This chapter will examine the effect of government legislation on the scoring of British films, and will assess the extent to which certain practitioners of British film music in the 1930s regarded their occupation as somehow an artistically ‘responsible’ craft, one which relied on rigorous classical training and a sense of duty to provide music of the highest standards; or whether the phenomenon of the ‘quota quickies’ (or ‘second features’) complicated the picture by necessitating a more ‘dumbed-down’ approach in certain corners of the market.

This chapter is divided into two distinct parts. First, it undertakes an examination of some of the scores written for the quota output of the decade, and assesses to what extent the habitual dismissal of quota pictures, and the complete absence of scholarship dealing with their music, is justified. Second, this chapter discusses the working methods and collaborative frameworks adopted by composers for selected ‘prestige’ pictures.

Rachael Low famously wrote that early 1930s British cinema was “either quality or quota”; it is a simplistic binary view that has endured in scholarship with only a few exceptions.¹ This chapter is designed to provide a balanced and nuanced response to — but not a complete dismissal of — Rachael Low’s further observation that “in the early thirties the sound track of the ordinary commercial film was still fairly immature. But by 1937 [...] considerable progress had been

¹ Low, *Film Making*, 115

made and in most films both speech and music were used with greater discrimination.”² By the mid 1940s, Muir Mathieson had noticed the increasing film literacy of the general public, and suggests that music written for films was now being assessed and appreciated by non-specialists:

I have often been amazed at the amount of constructive criticism one hears on buses and trains in connection with such technical aspects of film-making as cutting, editing and direction. Music is probably the latest of the technical ingredients to have captured this attention. This may be due to the new awareness and appreciation of music, as seen in all the concert halls around the country; it may have been helped by the romantic success of [Addinsell’s] *Warsaw Concerto*: it has certainly been stimulated by the quality of the work that composers have put into films during the last few years. Whatever the cause, I can vouch for it that people are as quick to notice the distinguished in music on the screen as they are to deplore the commonplace.³

Mathieson was ultimately unsure of the real reasons; perhaps he understood that the causes were complex. But the process of maturity in audiences had begun well before the coming of sound. Efforts to raise the status and importance of film scoring in the minds of general cinema audiences had been made prior to the coming of sound. The founding of the Film Society in 1925 was a milestone: its founder Ivor Montagu was adamant that music played a key role in the maintaining of standards. He knew that specially composed music — well written and skilfully performed — could raise the impact of a picture during the silent era and sometimes make the difference between a hit or a flop.⁴ The coming of sound may indeed have disrupted this temporarily, but the impetus survived and grew to be a prominent factor as the thirties drew on. But added to the uncertainty surrounding sound was the growth of the quickies, and it is this sector (often dismissed by critics and audiences) that is most frequently overlooked in film music research.

² Ibid., 126

³ Mathieson quoted in Huntley, *British Film Music*, 184

⁴ Robert Sitton, *Lady in the Dark: Iris Barry and the Art of Film* (New York: CUP, 2014), 109

‘Quota Quickies’

A picture that can be defined as a ‘quota quickie’ was one made in less than four weeks at a low budget (from as little as 15/- per foot of film, to £2 per foot, depending on the year it was made.)⁵ These films fulfilled the obligations placed upon ‘renters’ (distributors) to provide a certain number of British features.⁶ The renters and exhibitors had to make sure that a certain amount of British-made films were screened in cinemas, a quota that rose in annual steps to 20% throughout the projected period of the measure between 1927 and 1938. The quickies were not the result solely of this legislation though. The move to sound had led in part to their emergence, since in the transition years between 1927 and 1933, silent films often played as second or ‘supporting’ features to the more popular sound films.⁷ Still, more than 700 films that can be categorised as ‘quickies’ were made in the 1930s.⁸ Contributing to the received notion of the quickies being a phenomenon started by US studios making pictures on the cheap to meet the quota, the American majors Fox and Warner Bros. established subsidiaries in Britain at Wembley (Fox) and Teddington (Warners), but many quickies were also made at Shepperton and Pinewood.⁹ Smaller, home-grown production companies, such as Twickenham Films, also made pictures that qualified for quota, and were treated as such by distributors and exhibitors. Musical aspects of these numerous films varied as much as the films themselves; exactly to what extent quickies relied on original music will be explored below.

Contrary to popular belief, the quickies were not a homogenous output of similar pictures, but ranged in subject matter and target audience, since they were generated from several different production companies. Comparable to the ‘Poverty Row’ studios in Hollywood (short-lived businesses whose cheap work contrasted clearly with the lavish spectacles produced by the ‘majors’) these companies operated on a small scale and with meagre budgets, frequently shooting at night to save money whilst ‘prestige’ pictures took daytime studio time. Despite their generic range, according to Steve Chibnall the quickies churned out by these outfits “must be

⁵ There were various revisions to the requirements of the quota, each affecting budgets either directly or indirectly. At first, the ‘pound-per-foot’ cost of a quickie was an approximate costing resulting from the overall budget stipulations. In 1931, the budgetary requirements had settled on a £10,000 minimum budget, or around £150 per 100ft (Low, *Film Making*, 36). To put this in context, *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, Korda’s ‘quality’ success of 1933, cost approximately £65,000. A major Hollywood picture of the same period could cost well over £1m. Later in the decade it was suggested that films costing less than 15/- per foot should not be accepted as quota, implying that many films costing less than £1 per foot were distributed prior to this change.

⁶ A reel of 35mm film of 1000ft in length runs for approximately 11 minutes. The legal definition of a ‘long film’ (a feature) was one of 3,000ft in length.

⁷ Burton and Chibnall, *Historical Dictionary*, 51

⁸ *Ibid.*, 52

⁹ *Ibid.*, 52

treated as part of the lineage of British popular film”, even if they were made with American money, since they were made at British studios and most of the people working on them were necessarily British because of the quota regulations.¹⁰ Furthermore, they famously launched the film careers of several notable British practitioners, Michael Powell, Laurence Olivier and Bernard Vorhaus among them.

The quickies, then, were generally “made more cheaply and featuring less attractive stars, or stars of unproven box-office appeal” than ‘prestige’ features of the time.¹¹ They fast gained a dubious reputation — deserved or otherwise — as flimsy efforts that merely propped up the main (usually American) feature in a typical afternoon’s entertainment. George Perry reminds us that, in a brief atmosphere of optimism following the first Quota Act, “over-confidence had led to over-expansion” and the quickies “contributed to public resentment against British films.”¹² Resentment is a strong word, and to some extent the historian of the period needs to distinguish between disregard for the quickies and general disdain for British filmmaking.

Even though most of the quickies do not survive, they did indeed form a huge portion of films made in the United Kingdom in the 1930s. Expensive pictures produced by the likes of Korda, Michael Balcon, Victor Saville, and other prominent filmmakers, therefore represented merely the tip of the iceberg of total British output. But the quickies might not have existed at all had it not been for the guidelines put down in law for the renters and exhibitors by the State. The State, in short, enabled the film industry in Britain to exist and create output (as much as it oversaw the fledgling BBC) by repeatedly throwing lifelines. However, making a large quantity of films is not the same as making ‘quality’ films, and in surveying the output of the 1930s, it is often the concept of ‘quality’ that needs to be raised.

This problem of ‘quality’ recurs in discussions of the 1927 Act: what it means, how it can be achieved, whether it should be quantified in some way. This difficulty permeates the working lives of the composers who worked on such pictures. But one of the principal objections to the Quota Act, at least from historians like Vincent Porter and Rachael Low, is that it allowed for a significant number of British films to be made but did not ask whether cinema as an art form as practised by British filmmakers was being developed and maintained to a sufficient standard.

¹⁰ Chibnall, *Quota Quickies*, xi

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 93

¹² George Perry, ‘The Great British Picture Show: Boomtime and Slumptime’, in *Popular Culture: Past and Present*, ed. Waites et al. (London & NY: Routledge, 1982), 153

Any realistic considerations in relation to the ultimate ‘quality’ of the production were not considered in a particularly meaningful way by the first instalment of the act; this did not really occur until 1938, with a new Films Act. Some were satisfied that this new motion dealt more directly with ‘quality’ through the raising of the budgetary requirements for British films eligible for the quota.

A debate began around the importance of domestic filmmaking, and the extent to which it must carry aesthetic currency alongside economic potential. The intervening years between the two acts of 1927 and 1938, saw some progress: Lord Moyne set up a committee in March 1936, which included some of those who were to be instrumental in setting up the British Film Institute (BFI). Low criticises the appointments, pointing out that few on the committee had much interest in the development of filmmaking in the UK. This should be borne in mind only alongside the fact that it was clear at least to the Conservative governments of the period that the film industry represented a significant portion of Britain’s entertainment economy which, if exploited, could challenge the dominance of the US.¹³ The problem, according to Low, is that the term ‘quality’

refers to the standard of production rather than to the merit of the film. Many were good but many were not. On the whole, however, the films of the quality producers were as good as their budgets permitted and the British public liked them. Why, then, did people come to believe that British films were rarely any good and why, when British films of the thirties are brought out of the archives for an occasional show, are people surprised to find that many of them are well made and enjoyable? Unfortunately British production was swamped by the boring, badly made and routine work of the quota producers.¹⁴

Low’s truism in the above passage, “many were good but many were not”, applies to musical elements in these pictures. The approach to the soundtracks of the quickies varied from a complete absence of music, to minimal deployment of stock cues, to original music substantially scored and carefully constructed. However, one aspect of the first Quota Act that directly affected quickie music was that budgetary considerations were sufficiently low for composers and music directors to be starved out of productions, and this is the first and most important

¹³ One of the suggestions that arose from the evidence collected by the committee, from filmmakers in the Film Producers’ Group of the Federation of British Industries (FBI) was that films costing less than 15/- per foot would not be eligible for quota. (Low, *Film Making*, 34)

¹⁴ Low, *Film Making*, 115

consideration here. The fact that very few quickies were musicals is illustrative of this: it boils down to the sheer expense of commissioning and recording music. As Steve Chibnall notes, “[t]he lesson was quickly learned that successful musicals relied on star talent and the sort of high production values that second-feature budgets could not afford.”¹⁹ So, most of the quickies were dramas, thrillers, or comedies, with very few opportunities for songs or ambitious dance sequences.

For this reason, the apparent use of stock music, or indeed a complete absence of music, does often characterise the sound-world of the quickies, as might be expected. Furthermore, the actual identity and origin of stock music is frequently near-impossible to ascertain owing to the absence of cue sheets or other documentation that scholars of later generations of filmmaking can sometimes uncover.²⁰ Identifying stock music is one of the most difficult and frustrating endeavours in research into this field. Sometimes a cue can be recognized from another source; more often, however, it is reasonable to suggest that a stock cue has been used when there is opening title music but nothing in the main body of the film. Repeated cues and music which is poorly synchronised should be considered as possible stock music, but again the researcher is frequently unable to positively identify its actual origin. Ernest Irving admitted that “I have known many instances in which the music written for one part of a film could be transferred to another because there was an intrinsic quality which belonged to the film as a whole.”²¹ Sometimes this decision on the part of the music director is the reason for the repeated material, even if it was written specifically for one scene, and therefore by definition not stock music. Bearing this in mind, extensive original music was written, arranged and recorded for quickies, particularly towards the end of the decade, when budgetary requirements became more generous in favour of labour and crew costs. This sense of progression does indeed go some way to supporting Low’s thesis that there was a general improvement.

¹⁹ Chibnall, *Quota Quickies*, 102

²⁰ ‘Stock music’ is a broad term: it usually refers to material held in music libraries or film company archives and made available cheaply for films due to full copyright control by the holders. Here the term implies music owned by the London Films production company; its use in this film was therefore inexpensive compared to a commissioned score.

²¹ Irving, *Cue for Music*, 162

An early cross-cultural quickie: *The Lady of the Lake* and the Dolmetsch family

While Hitchcock's *Blackmail* (1929) remains a landmark in sound cinema, it was just one of many pictures that were released in two versions (although it was indeed a rare and short-lived practice to make silent and talking versions simultaneously, as Hitchcock did on *Blackmail*). The sense of flux during this early period, after the first Quota Act and into the sound transition, occasionally produced some intriguing musical oddities among the early quickies that began to emerge, such as the meeting of early sound film techniques and the first stirrings of the 'early music revival' that was engendered in *The Lady of the Lake* (1928/1931).²²

A now obscure adaptation of Walter Scott's epic poem, *The Lady of the Lake* was one of several British pictures that were released in two versions, silent (in this case, released in 1928) and sound (1931). Written and directed by the American James A. Fitzpatrick, who would soon find a niche making travel films, it was made at Gainsborough under the watch of Michael Balcon (just as the company began its absorption into Gaumont-British). Viewing *The Lady of the Lake*, one is reminded that some have criticized this period of British filmmaking as being out of touch with the European *avant-garde*, and indeed Christine Gledhill opines that the films coming out of British studios at the time had a certain "whimsicality" and "feyness of tone" (set in 16th-century Scotland, the picture does not hold back on lazy cultural stereotyping).²³ Despite its relative obscurity, *The Lady of the Lake* was a unique meeting-point, a collision between two socio-cultural spheres and separate strands of British artistic life; it is a snapshot of the cross-fertilization so integral to the 'cultural crossroads' model of British film music in the 1930s.

The film was not, however, entirely 'British', in common with many of the quota films, having as it did an American director and an American composer/arranger, Nathaniel ('Nat') Shilkret. Fitzpatrick approached Shilkret to work on the film when it became a feasible enterprise to exploit its subject matter for the Stateside audience. Indeed, Shilkret was something of a radio star in the United States and a highly sought-after conductor/arranger.²⁴

It is one of only four Gainsborough projects that were reissued with sound soon after their silent first airings.²⁵ The 1931 version of *The Lady of the Lake* is not technically a part-talkie, or a full

²² Not to be confused with the US *film noir* Raymond Chandler adaptation *The Lady in the Lake* (1947)

²³ Christine Gledhill quoted in *The British Cinema Book*, 163

²⁴ He later collaborated with other composers, among them Stravinsky, Schoenberg and Ernst Toch (whose film music is discussed in Chapter 3) on the *Genesis Suite* in 1945.

²⁵ The others were *Number Seventeen* (1928) — made in collaboration with Gainsborough's German colleagues and released twice in Germany only — *The Return of the Rat* (1929), and *The Crooked Billet* (1929). A fourth,

sound remake, but instead has only an added synchronized soundtrack featuring Shilkret's music and arrangements, singing, crowd noise, and other audio effects. There was clearly no attempt to shoot new scenes to make a 'goat gland' version, nor to add dialogue to replace the onscreen intertitles. However, Gainsborough's decision to re-release the film with Shilkret's new compilation score, peppered as it is with traditional songs and tunes, was a factor it had in common with the other sonorized films from Gainsborough. All four of the company's re-released films were shot within a few months of each other, and in quick succession; there was no effort by the company to re-release older silents during this period.

The plot of *The Lady of the Lake* concerns a jealous squabble between three men over a woman, Ellen Douglas, the daughter of an exiled Scottish chieftain. Scott's original poem contains several musical elements, which all feed into the 1931 version of the film's musical patchwork. The song 'Hail to the Chief' is prominent, and there is a tender moment in which Ellen sings the 'Ave Maria', with Schubert's music for 'Ellen's Dritter Gesang' (1825), inspired by Scott's story ('Hail to the Chief' was also originally inspired by Scott's poem). Shilkret is given charge of the "Musical Interpretation" (as the opening titles state), of the sound version of the film, and he includes the Schubert song and 'Hail to the Chief' as recurring themes in his compilation score, along with several traditional songs like 'The Bonnie Banks o' Loch Lomond' and the 'Skye Boat Song'. In addition, Shilkret's own song, 'Ellen, Sweet Ellen', serves as the heroine's theme.

The Lady of the Lake serves as representative of the kinds of musical supervision that was being undertaken in the early years of the Quota, and by extension the first years of sound. The construction of Shilkret's score by stitching together a series of well-known songs is fully in keeping with the silent film practice of using film-specific cue sheets in live accompaniment. The singing previously referred to occurs in moments directly drawn from Scott's poem: 'Hail to the Chief' sung by the clansmen, and the 'Ave Maria'. Everything else that Shilkret provides alternates between an adventure-idiom orchestral score with strong influences from Rimsky-Korsakov and Dvořák, and light renderings of traditional Scottish tunes like 'Wi' a Hundred Pipers'. There are occasional diegetic sound effects, including crowd noises and a hunting horn.

Balaclava (1928) was never released in its silent version, only in the part-talkie version of 1930. In a bid to capitalise on the rapidly encroaching sound era and save money on new shoots in an economically uncertain patch, Gainsborough's transition window was brief. Incidentally, the 1931 version of *The Lady of the Lake* was not released in the UK as the 1928 version had been, but in the US, unusual for quota films.

In a sense, this is a silent-era compiled score, with the only real difference being that these sounds are mechanically synchronized.

However, there is another layer of musical interest to *Lady of the Lake*, even more remarkable considering its status as a cheap quota picture. During the years in which Gainsborough geared up for the coming of sound (a little later than some of the other companies), a family of musicians, headed by a French immigrant to London, Arnold Dolmetsch, were establishing themselves as pioneering figures in what we now know in its broadest description as the ‘early music revival’. For the best part of thirty years, Dolmetsch had been organising concerts in Bloomsbury, Fitzrovia and West Dulwich, featuring himself, his second and third wives and — as time passed — his children.

His biographer Margaret Campbell notes that Dolmetsch accepted performing work of various kinds to fund his instrument workshop and recitals, although neither she nor Mabel Dolmetsch (in her memoirs) mentions any film work. A passing remark in a footnote by the early music revival historian Harry Haskell leads us to *The Lady of the Lake*, but the implication from Haskell is that Dolmetsch actually recorded the score.²⁶ It is tempting to imagine that Shilkret or Fitzpatrick might have engaged Dolmetsch to record elements of the music but there is no evidence for this. The only non-orchestral instruments on the soundtrack are highland pipes — not an instrument associated with Dolmetsch.

The evidence from the film itself shows that prior to the 1928 shoot, the family were approached by Gainsborough not to play on the soundtrack of the sonORIZED version but to take part as actors on set, representing diegetic on-screen musicians. About two-thirds into the five-reel film, there is a scene set in the great hall of a castle, where a banquet is taking place. In Shilkret’s score, an oboe plays a folk-like melody with full strings accompaniment. On-screen, up in the gallery of the hall, we can clearly see the Dolmetsch family; five of them are playing viols, another plays a recorder, and the last a lute.²⁷ They are dressed in the kind of costume that the family were well-known to have worn regularly during their recitals and functions. The most recognisable figure is Arnold himself, seated second from left and playing the lute (or possibly a theorbo or archlute — the instrument is mostly obscured). The only standing figure appears to be Rudolph, playing the

²⁶ Harry Haskell, *The Early Music Revival: A History* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1996), 124fn

²⁷ The period in which the film is too early for high Renaissance viols, but it is certainly plausible that people in certain circles might have seen similar instruments.

recorder, and the remaining figures are likely to be Cecile, Nathalie, Mabel (Arnold's wife), Millicent (Rudolph's wife) and Carl.



Fig 8. The Dolmetsch family on-screen in *The Lady of the Lake* (1928/31)

The image of the Dolmetsch family on-screen represents a moment of significance in two distinct ways. Primarily, it is the only time that the Dolmetsch family were captured on screen in a feature film. There are fragments of extant footage of informal performances by members of the family, but this example remains the only glimpse of them in a dramatic setting on screen. Secondly, and more pertinent to the ‘cultural crossroads’ outlined in this thesis, it is a historic meeting-point of two circles of British artistic life that were in their infancy in 1928 but are now significant sectors of the cultural life of the UK: the early music movement, and the sound film.

The Lady of the Lake raises other questions, since the process in 1931 of updating the silent version was one of modernizing. This is aesthetically complicated when the picture in question is essentially backward-looking. The fluid identity of historical authenticity (whether purely visual as in this scene, or musical) as “a tendentious journey back to where we have never been” can be interrogated in sequences like this.²⁸ Frederic Jameson, similarly, writes that historicist details in period films immediately “program the spectator to the appropriate ‘nostalgia’ mode of reception”, a process that is at work in the historical dramas and their music, explored elsewhere in this thesis.²⁹ So, the inclusion of the Dolmetsch family on screen here demonstrates an attention to detail that is absent in many attempts to portray early music in film, but is unfortunately counter-balanced by Shilkret’s score, which refuses to engage in the kind of historicism which Dolmetsch was then exploring. Instead, Shilkret looks to the past through the lens of a musician schooled in post-Romanticism and commercial popular music; he chooses to

²⁸ Richard Taruskin, ‘Back to Whom? Neoclassicism as Ideology’, *19th-Century Music* 16, no.3 (1993): 286

²⁹ Frederic Jameson quoted in Butt, *Playing with History: The Historical Approach to Music Performance*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), 20

ignore the visual clues that identify historical performance practice on screen. A similar situation occurs in *The Return of the Rat* (1929), one of Gainsborough's other re-releases, roughly contemporaneous with the Shilkret/Dolmetsch vehicle. In that picture, a pianist and banjo player in the 'White Coffin' club are clearly visible on-screen with no attempt on the soundtrack to match the musical arrangement to them.

Yet the cultural intersection of the early sound film and the first stirrings of what was to become known as the 'early music revival' in *The Lady of the Lake* gives us a glimpse into the scope of vision that some of the quota pictures held early in the decade. Even though the Dolmetsch family are not heard, they are seen; it is an example of how the much-derided quickies can occasionally provide moments of fascination and insight into the musical and artistic circles of the 1930s. Furthermore, as Haskell asserts, "[w]hether good, bad or indifferent, such creations [films which made use of historical performance] attest to early music's gradual absorption into twentieth-century mass culture".³⁰

Music in the films of George King; early Hammer pictures

George King was among the most prominent directors of quickies. Steve Chibnall's work on bookings for his chosen case-study cinema in Leicester shows that King and Leslie Hiscott were the top two most frequently booked directors for supporting features in the period 1930-7.³¹ In attempting to compile a survey of the music written and compiled for some of their films during the period, the most obvious hindrance is the absence of scores, so the primary sources are in all cases the films themselves.

King's melodramas were the only consistently successful costume quickies (as distinct from the celebrated prestige costume dramas of Korda and Wilcox), and their plots, heavy on emotion and suspense, invited some surprisingly rich scoring. His mid-decade *Murder in the Red Barn* (1935) makes significant use of diegetic music, especially in the opening scenes. A ramshackle band of musicians is seen playing, although the rustic nature of their appearance does not quite match the more poised dance music on the soundtrack.³² The deliciously hammy Tod Slaughter (a frequent

³⁰ Haskell, *Early Music Revival*, 124

³¹ Chibnall, *Quota Quickies*, 195

³² The musical director was Leo T. Croke, working under the pseudonym of "Lionel Claff". Croke was a bandleader in South-East London, and former music director at Blackpool's Tower Ballroom, who worked on only a handful of films.

collaborator with King) starred in this typically scrappy picture, which was based on a real-life murder case.³³ But there were, inevitably, quickies made by King which are musically threadbare. *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (1936) misfires significantly, simply repeating the same ill-fitting, bright and breezy cue under several different scenes. Only at the end of the picture does the music redeem itself: the cue for the final struggle finally brings the suspense and terror that the score has been lacking.

Jack Beaver, normally busy working under Louis Levy at Gaumont-British, was a regular collaborator with George King. The attribution given to the composer in the opening titles is informative to a degree regarding the role Beaver undertook on each picture, and to what extent the music he used was written specifically for the picture concerned. In *The Face at the Window* (1939) he is simply listed under ‘music’, but as ‘music director’ on both *Ticket of Leave Man* (1937) and *Sexton Blake and the Hooded Terror* (1938). These attributions should not be taken as hard evidence of his involvement being significantly different, but the scores do contrast in some ways.

All three of these pictures are mystery thrillers starring Slaughter in the villain’s role. *Hooded Terror* is an example of the kind of quickie that uses several dramatic music cues broadly empathetic with onscreen events at certain key moments of tension, but these same sequences have a peculiar laxity in the audio-visual interplay that betrays the probability that stock music was used. This is no more apparent than in the scene wherein Sexton Blake attempts to hold up a secret meeting and finds only mannequins instead of people; the cue is certainly suspenseful, but then bafflingly tender. Blake subsequently falls down a trapdoor, at which point the music abruptly fades out.

The Face at the Window (1939) (itself a remake of a 1932 quickie by the same name) had musical contributions from Eric Ansell, but with most of the score by Beaver. They approach this tale of murder and terror intelligently for the most part, especially sequences involving the ‘Wolf’, a sinister, lupine creature who appears at the window of his victims. There are occasionally sections which are apparently scored with stock cues, not synchronizing particularly

³³ An odd detail that stands out in this example of a quickie with substantial diegetic music is that the antagonist’s name is William Corder. His surname, repeatedly spoken throughout the film, is of course a homonym for “Korda”; it would not have been lost on these filmmakers, struggling on low budgets, at the mercy of big cinema conglomerates, and always in the shadow of companies like London Films, that “Corder/Korda” was the villain of the piece.

effectively. A diegetic Viennese-style waltz played on accordion recurs during scenes set in a Parisian bawdy house.

At the end of the decade *The Case of the Frightened Lady* (released 1940) was the last of Beaver's pre-war projects for King. This film is a rare moment in which the 'quickie' format gets close to a classic Hollywood style, with extensive dialogue scoring and complex thematic treatment. There is, moreover, a far greater *amount* of music here than in many 'quickies' of the time, and substantial diegetic material: the character of Lord Lebanon plays as he composes at the piano, further diegetic music occurs during the dance scenes, and a snippet of a waltz is later revived in an orchestral cue. So, those quickies which involved Beaver as composer or music director — whilst not consistently interesting or musically rich — do lean towards the more ambitious end of the scale than many other quickies. Furthermore, towards the end of the decade the music for these pictures becomes grander in scale and seemingly more fully realized.

A comparison between quickie horrors and generically similar B-pictures made in the US is sometimes informative. *The Old Dark House* (1932), while set in rural Wales and featuring Boris Karloff and Charles Laughton, was nevertheless an entirely American production. It has no music at all except opening and closing titles, but these are almost certainly taken from stock material. Thus, the picture resembles a mid-decade British quickie in all respects except its nationality. Dissenting from the received notions of the quickies being a peculiarly British phenomenon, *The Old Dark House* stands as an example of an American film that lacks musical input where some might have improved it significantly, just like much of the quota pictures in the UK.

Hammer pictures was one of the UK companies whose quickies continue to attract interest significant interest, particularly from horror aficionados and film buffs. Their early effort *The Public Life of Henry the Ninth* (1935), directed by Bernard Mainwaring, is on the 'BFI: Most Wanted' list of lost films. It was made for distribution by MGM at Ealing Studios and capitalised on the success of Korda's *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933). Its score was composed by Eric Ansell, as recalled by sound recordist John Mitchell:

The whole film was shot in two weeks. [...] The background music for the film was recorded on a Saturday with the film being dubbed and re-recorded on the Sunday, taking twenty-four hours of non-stop work. Total production to delivery was three weeks[.]³⁴

Mitchell's brief comment illuminates the rapidity with which quickies completed their production schedules, but also offers rare evidence of the fact that original scores were composed and recorded, and that the use of stock music was not routine. Unfortunately, the music is lost along with this film. Ansell, for his part, is closely associated with these early efforts from Hammer. His music had already gained some exposure due to his involvement in songwriting for two Paul Robeson vehicles for Hammer, *Song of Freedom* (1936) and *Big Fella* (1937), films which were probably raised above quota status by his salary and status. He also acted as musical director for Michael Powell's *The Phantom Ship* (1935), only the second film made by Hammer, and featuring an early appearance of Bela Lugosi. *Sweeney Todd* followed soon afterwards.

Other companies provided platforms for notable music. Lugosi appeared in a later horror, *The Dark Eyes of London* (1939), made by Argyle films. While not qualifying for quota, it had an intriguingly angular and sparse score from the composer Guy Jones, a theatre MD who had worked on a number of quickies in the 1930s. The orchestral overture is tumultuous and bombastic, as might be expected of a picture chronicling the deaths of a series of unfortunates at the hands of a weird creature and his eccentric master, and also reflecting Jones' theatre roots, but much of the scoring thereafter is either diegetic solo violin or diegetic solo organ. In fact, a blind busking violinist plays a key role in the plot; both his haunting violin and the brooding organ give this picture a suitable creepiness, but also provide an economical and sometimes minimal score drawn from a pared-down theatre discourse.

³⁴ John Mitchell quoted in Chibnall, *Quota Quickies*, 22

Twickenham Pictures

Some of the more obscure but intriguing musical names of the period make appearances in the canon of films made by Julius Hagen's production company at Twickenham in the 1930s. For example, Harris Weston, who scored Hagen's early sound remake of *The Flag Lieutenant* (1931), was also the composer of the well-known song 'Knees Up Mother Brown', a song that appears in films across the quality/quota spectrum due to its music hall ubiquity.³⁵ Several quickies were made at Twickenham, some — *Vintage Wine* (1935), explored below, is a mid-decade example — being made for distribution by Gaumont-British. Another musical director who brought the sensibilities of the stage and its associated formats to his screen work was the Dutch-born composer William Trytel, who became the studio's music director for several Twickenham films in this period. In 1925 Trytel had been the music director of the Camberwell Empire. He also occasionally performed on the radio, much like the well-known dance bandleaders. Many of the studio's quickies are musically thin, like the improbably successful *The Ghost Camera* (1933), an early editing job for the young David Lean. Editing is the key skill in this film's music department as well, since the lurking, dissonant opening title music is re-hashed, almost certainly using the same recording, to score a suspenseful scene in the third reel, to accompany a chase and arrest sequence, and finally again at the close of the picture, before being superseded by a stride-like band number for the end titles. Ghosts and other light horror subjects feature frequently in Twickenham's quickies, but many lack musical imagination beyond title sequences. Much of this can be explained by the time restrictions on production. Hagen aimed to shoot six pages of script a day, and was known to tear pages out if production fell behind, a habit that explains the frequent plot holes in his pictures.³⁶ *The Black Abbot* (1934), equal parts thriller and comedy, would certainly have benefited from some suspense cues, but none are forthcoming due to the lack of any musical director or composer; music was frequently the first casualty of rushed production.

Some of Twickenham's — and Trytel's — other efforts are more fully realised, *Vintage Wine* among them. *Vintage Wine*, a light farce about a wealthy wine-producing family squabbling over the estate, has the production values of many quickies of the time (long takes heavy with

³⁵ Harris Weston was the son of Robert Weston, himself a songwriter, one of whose best-known numbers was 'I'm 'Enery the Eight I Am'. That song allegedly gave Korda the idea to make a film about Henry VIII, leading to his hit of 1933.

³⁶ BECTU interview with Bernard Vorhaus, BECTU HP0219

dialogue and stagey acting taking precedence over visual flourish), but in this picture the viewer can discern the imaginative and expressive camerawork that characterised much of Twickenham's output and a more rounded and detailed scoring approach. Although the style Trytel chooses is the ubiquitous light pit band music, some of the cues act to synchronise with changes in mood or visual tempo much more than his other quickies.

Music in Twickenham's late 'prestige' pictures

Twickenham's fortunes briefly changed for the better in the middle part of the decade, when the studio found itself able to make pictures at a bigger budget than previously (although Hagen eventually died disappointed and penniless after the general downturn in the industry after 1937). These mid-1930s films are not classified as quickies for this reason, and the situation placed the company in a rather unusual position of being both 'quota' and 'quality' depending on the picture in question. Trytel's music for Twickenham's *Scrooge* (1935), one of Hagen's early 'prestige' pictures, underscores much of the dialogue in imaginative ways, and rarely does one discern the use of stock music or the unnecessary recycling of cues. There are certain themes that return but with good reason, such as the light-hearted material that accompanies Christmas frivolities in the snow. Diegetic music is used intelligently: 'God Save the Queen', as sung at the Lord Mayor's Banquet, runs through a shot of freezing street urchins as they look through the window, causing a distinctly forward-thinking indifferent, 'anempathetic' effect. Suspenseful and dissonant cues for Scrooge during his encounters with the various supernatural characters are executed delicately. Rachael Low is scathing about Trytel's efforts on the films made by Twickenham in the post-quickie era:

[I]n the early [Twickenham quota] films there was little music, which was regarded as an unnecessary expense and used only at the beginning and end of a film. But after a while W. L. Trytel, who was later made a director of the company, became musical director and a rambling and irrelevant accompaniment, churning on regardless of changes of shot, sequence or mood, became a characteristic feature of Twickenham films.³⁷

³⁷ Low, *Film Making*, 175

She may have seen pictures like Leslie Hiscott's *The Triumph of Sherlock Holmes* (1935) based on Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Valley of Fear*. This contains suspense and hurry sequences, illustrating the murder scenes and the *denouement* section involving the confrontation between Holmes (Arthur Wontner) and Moriarty (Lyn Harding). The prints that survive of this picture render the score rather muffled, but it is possible to discern an element of carelessness regarding the actual appropriateness of each cue to their respective on-screen situations, so the use of stock music should not be ruled out. Indeed, much about this film illustrates some of the major issues that critics have had with the quickies, despite it not technically qualifying as one. Awkward, stagey acting and clumsy *mise-en-scene* with a gloomy and claustrophobic look, heavy passages of thick dialogue, minimal exterior scenes and location work, and an undercooked and unpolished script; all these elements combine to give *The Triumph of Sherlock Holmes* a quickie feel, despite its popularity.

A late-1930's 'quality' quickie: *Law and Disorder* (1940)

The quota necessitated limits in production values, but up until the outbreak of war it continued to enable the making of occasional pictures of a quality that seemed to belie their rather cynical origins. The changes to the act towards the end of the decade meant that pictures were given more budgetary scope if they were to be considered as quota. A more sophisticated approach to social and political commentary became observable at Ealing in several of these late quickies.

David MacDonald's *Law and Disorder*, made in 1939 and released in 1940, acknowledges the growing belligerent political situation of the late-thirties, if only through the filter of a light-hearted cast of characters, led by Alistair Sim and Barry K. Barnes as partners in a law firm.³⁸ Made with new optical audio synchronisation technology developed by RCA, prints of the film have survived well.³⁹ The writing and the *mise-en-scene* carry a style and a wry sense of humour that would arguably reach perfection in the classic Ealing comedies of the following decade. ("You could prove Herr Hitler innocent," says Blight to Preston after a case in which the latter succeeds in acquitting an obvious crook. "That's very nice of you," replies a delighted Preston.) The music of *Law and Disorder* is one of the few quickie scores that remains archived both in

³⁸ Not to be confused with the 1958 film of the same name, directed by Charles Crichton.

³⁹ It is — at the time of writing — one of the few quickies available to stream in high quality via the BFI Player.

manuscript and in the form of (limited) audio recording takes.⁴⁰ Depending on when the beginning of the writing process can be dated from, this can qualify as Francis Chagrin's last pre-war score, before a hiatus during which he worked as a composer/arranger for the French wing of the BBC Overseas Service, or 'Radio Londres', as it came to be known in occupied France. What can be gleaned from Chagrin's manuscripts is how the quota did not necessarily prevent composers from working to their strengths. It must be borne in mind, however, that this film benefitted from the 1938 revisions to the Quota Act, which were intended to increase the scope for 'quality' that Rachael Low felt was missing from the original act.

The score of *Law and Disorder* is notable for its close synchrony (and by implication, Chagrin's careful working out of timings), and a notable instance of the crossing of a diegetic borderline. Several of the cues survive in manuscript, most in fair-copy, with conductor's markings and notes on timing and onscreen action. The example shown below, 'Breaking into the Barber's Shop', clearly indicates the progress of time in seconds marked above the score in squares (these are not bar numbers or rehearsal marks). Later in the manuscript, arrows indicate sync points, and there are markings for other onscreen moments, like "switch on lights" and "switch off lights". Later indications include "they start to move off", "Larry picks up dustbin", "jump down inside shop", "they pause for dialogue", etc.

The cue named 'Larry at the Piano' contains the aforementioned moment of unusual inter-diegetic scoring, and this is acknowledged in the score. The diegetic piano music is sketched out above the orchestral staves to indicate the exact synchronisation of the two musical layers, and with the note, "Piano on the screen".

⁴⁰ Francis Chagrin Collection, British Library & BL Sound Archive

[illegible]

Fig. 9 Francis Chagrin: 'Breaking into the Barber Shop', from *Law and Disorder*.

Courtesy British Library Board

Handwritten musical score for Francis Chagrin's "Piano on the screen" note in top right corner. The score is written on multiple staves, including staves for Piano (P), Organ (O), Bassoon (B.C.), Horn (Horn), Trombone (Tb), Percussion (Perc), Violin 1 (V1), Violin 2 (V2), Viola (Vla), Cello (Cello), and Bass (Bs). The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *p* (piano) and *pp* (pianissimo). A handwritten note "Piano on the screen" is written in the top right corner, with a box around it. The score is dated 1911 and 1912.

Fig. 10 Francis Chagrin: "Piano on the screen" note in top right corner.

From *Law and Disorder*. Courtesy British Library Board.

Despite working on pictures that varied considerably in budget and resources, Chagrin had a generally positive attitude towards collaboration. In 1958, he reminisced that

Although I have spent many nights working by myself, on a film score [...] many hours are spent in discussions with collaborators. To me, these discussions are amongst the most deeply satisfying memories in my professional life. The awareness of being one of a team, of pursuing the same aim [...] ⁴¹

The musically satisfying *Law and Disorder*, among other titles that carried substantial scores, should not be taken as evidence that *all* quickies became more musically lavish as the decade progressed, or indeed that the amendment to the Cinematograph Act in 1938 meant that music budgets suddenly expanded across the sector. In fact, one of the highest grossing films of the latter half the decade, *This Man is News* (1938), was a quickie with few cues provided by musical director Percival Mackey beyond opening and closing credits. This cannot be explained entirely by generic considerations. Granted, that picture, made for Paramount, is a comedy heavy with wordplay (it follows the farcical twists and turns of a news reporter who gets embroiled in a web of murder and intrigue), but there are plenty of moments of drama and suspense that might have benefitted considerably from musical enhancement. Mackey's background in staging revues at the Savoy Hotel, among other West End venues, meant that he was used to presenting musical set pieces which took the aural centre stage; a dialogue-based comedy such as *This Man is News* provided scant opportunity for these. Similar in style to Paramount's *This Man is News* (1938), and indeed starring Alastair Sim in basically the same newspaper editor role as in the later picture, Fox produced *Late Extra* (1935) as a quickie at Wembley Studios. The composer Charles Cowrick provided sections of romantic underscore only at moments of chemistry between the two leads, and very little else.

However, in *Law and Disorder*, another side to quickie scoring can be seen: careful planning, adequate resources, and imaginative scoring ideas. Chagrin, a pragmatic composer whose work in radio gave him experience in making the best of limited resources, delivered a late-decade quickie score that goes some way to debunking the notion that quickies had little to offer musically.

⁴¹ FCC: MS Mus 65:165

US-backed quickie scores; Celtic quickies

It has become something of a cliché to claim that all quickies were made by American companies in disguise. We can see from some of the examples above that this was not true, and that many quota films were entirely British affairs, at least at the production and post-production stages (distribution might subsequently have taken place under American backing). However, it is important to note those scores that *were* written for productions made under Hollywood outfits operating in British studios. Warner Bros. produced a significant number of films in the studios at Teddington, which the company had bought in the early thirties. Many are lost, and are unlikely to be recovered. Some which survive lack music except title cues and diegetic dance numbers, *Crime Unlimited* (1935) being an example. No music accompanies even the most suspenseful or animated moments of action in this thriller about an undercover policeman infiltrating a criminal network. Other films fared much better: *They Drive by Night* (1938), directed by Arthur B. Woods and with a score by Bretton Byrd (as “music director”, assisted by Cecil Milner) is a late-thirties example of the best of the quickies, and indeed contains some of the most arresting music of the sector.⁴² Not to be confused with the 1940 American *noir* of the same name, this nonetheless has some distinctly *noir* characteristics. It is peopled by characters whose moral compass resists easy definition, not least the leading man, Shorty Matthews (Emlyn Williams), recently released from prison and newly accused of a murder he did not commit. Byrd’s score is lavish but subtle, and closely synchronised, especially in two key action sequences. Byrd crafts cues of great fluency for these moments involving the kidnapping of a young woman and Shorty’s flight from the police respectively.

The quickies were an unlikely place for the exploration of non-mainstream musical styles, but there was a sub-genre of quota pictures that utilized various kinds of music from Britain and Ireland. The same Wembley facilities where *Late Extra* was made hosted the production of *Irish and Proud of It* (1938), which Paramount subsequently distributed. About as musical as a non-musical can get, this comedy-thriller was scored by Colin Wark, whose show *Tulip Time* had run to 425 performances in London. Tellingly, *Tulip Time* was described on its posters as “a comedy with music”, which is precisely the kind of entertainment presented in *Irish and Proud of It*.⁴³

⁴² Colin Mackenzie, *Mantovani: A Lifetime in Music* (Ely: Melrose Press, 2005), 148

⁴³ There seems to have been a trend for musicals with similar names. The Schubert film *Blossom Time* (1934) was based on the stage show *Lilac Time*, itself based on a German operetta called *Das Dreimäderlhaus*.

Primarily the vision of leading man Richard Hayward, it made use of actors from his native Northern Ireland, and a great deal of Irish music and song. A lengthy section portraying a kind of sing-off between the protagonist and an Italian gangster features a string of well-known Irish and Italian songs, and the suitably Celtic-tinged score is at times clearly influenced by Ralph Vaughan Williams' folk music adaptations. Wark's charming, folk-inspired work on this picture occasionally recalls John Greenwood's extensive score for *Man of Aran* (1934).

Irish and Proud of It was made after Hayward had attempted film production himself on one of the earliest efforts to bring sound film production to the island of Ireland, *Devil's Rock* (1936). Like the later film, in *Devil's Rock* Hayward used actors from Northern Ireland, and also a range of traditional Irish tunes and songs: a fiddler plays 'Father O'Flynn' for a village ceilidh, Hayward himself sings 'The Rose of Tralee' and 'Let Him Go, Let Him Tarry', and there are sections featuring uilleann pipes and non-diegetic organ music. *Devil's Rock* is a melting-pot of other musical idioms as well, having a variety performance at its centrepiece, with close harmony groups and comedy double acts, and several non-diegetic classical music cues.

So, in corners of the industry composers like Wark and producers such as Hayward wrote or oversaw scores that manifested a degree of individuality and stylistic character that is particularly demonstrative of the cultural crossroads of the British film scoring scene. Indeed the relatively modest production values of films such as *Irish and Proud of It* and *Devil's Rock* allowed a boutique style of musical direction that injected an abundance of musical colours to cinema.

'Prestige' pictures at London Films: Muir Mathieson, Arthur Bliss, and *Things to Come*

At the same time as the quota composers continued to strive on small budgets and short time restrictions, elsewhere Louis Levy, Ernest Irving, and Muir Mathieson worked as music directors for a range of 'quality' productions, with generally generous backing and high production values. These individuals would have been aware of the situation regarding the financing and distribution of pictures at opposite ends of the quality/quota spectrum, but even though all three worked on relatively cheap films from time to time, most of their work throughout the thirties was well above the dividing line between quickie and 'prestige'. Mathieson was the most intellectual of the three, and the least commercially-minded. In the context of this discussion of concepts of 'quality' and respectability in an entertainment industry, he was in many ways a

parallel figure to John Reith, the first director of the BBC. They shared similar backgrounds and personal characteristics, and their careers resonated with one-another. Both were Scots who put their Britishness first, at a time when Britishness as an identity was arguably at its zenith, despite — and perhaps emboldened by — the abdication crisis midway through the decade. Both fought for what they thought was ‘best’ for the listener/viewer, and not necessarily what was obviously marketable; both often clashed with or at least challenged their superiors or the organisations under whom they were employed. Crucially, both Mathieson and Reith asserted their views in practice unilaterally, with an air of somehow ‘knowing’ what was right for the greater good of the organisation (the BBC) or the craft (film music) respectively. The opposition between quality and quota is indeed closely linked with the growing broadcasting culture in the UK, amidst a climate of public improvement and a prevailing attitude of responsibility regarding both art and entertainment.⁴⁴ Their similarities only went so far though, since John Reith was suspicious of the film industry, and saw it as a negative force against which public service broadcasting might be created, whereas Mathieson entered the industry with high ideals but the requisite amount of professional pragmatism.⁴⁵ To the pairing of Mathieson and Reith might be added the figure of the documentary filmmaker John Grierson, another reforming, conscientious Scot who kept the interests of his viewers at the centre of his work.⁴⁶ Grierson was always driven by the mantra that film must tell the ‘truth’ about how people actually lived in Britain at the time. His collaborations with composers on the great GPO documentaries of the 1930s were indicative of a working environment of mutual respect and creative balance between composer and filmmaker. Mathieson’s professional relationships with composers during the decade were similarly integrated, and directly comparable to the working dynamic that Grierson nurtured in dealing with composers at the GPO.

Things to Come (1936) was the epitome of the mid-decade prestige film. Ambitious in scale and subject matter, literary, heavy with special effects and spectacle, it emerged as what might now be called a ‘tentpole’ of the British industry. However, Mathieson’s involvement ensured that the scoring process was undertaken in a manner which contrasted with the *modus operandi* of most

⁴⁴ It is no coincidence that the ‘cultural crossroads’ of film music emerged at the same time as the first initial expansion of the BBC. Broadcasting became a platform for the expression of Britain’s ‘official’ cultural character. Much of the debate around content in BBC programming in the previous decade concerned music: whether to prioritise centralised programmes, usually classical concerts emanating from London, over regional items.

⁴⁵ Tom Burns, cited in Michael Tracey, *The Decline and Fall of Public Service Broadcasting* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), 23

⁴⁶ The film critic David Thomson compares Grierson and Reith in Thomson, *The Big Screen*, 184

screen composers at the time. The British composer Clarence Raybould wrote in an early edition of *Sight and Sound* about the most desirable moment in production when a composer might become involved in a picture:

The musician must be given time and opportunity to get ‘into’ the picture. He should be able to work out all his musical ideas step by step with the progress of the visual sequences and evolve from the tedious process of a mechanical measurement of feet and frames an accompaniment which will not only be an illumination of the camera’s story but a musical entity in itself.⁴⁷

In the age of the quickies, this was an unrealistic ideal: most composers did not begin work until late in the post-production process. But Raybould’s blueprint for successful collaboration aligns with the positive working environment that Mathieson tried to encourage at Denham Studios, where London Films made their home at around the same time as production started on *Things to Come*. Mathieson had an office and access to Denham’s sound stages for recordings, from where he wrote much of the correspondence that survives in his archive.

Working at the top of the ‘prestige’ sector and largely untroubled by budgetary constraints like those imposed on the quota companies, Mathieson was constantly trying to convince Alexander Korda of the value of ‘good’ music in his pictures, and to draw the mogul’s attention away from the purely commercial. “Back in the middle of the storms again & how!” he wrote in a letter home from his offices at Denham Studios during the making of *The Four Feathers* (1939) — an epic and sumptuous picture (roughly contemporaneous to *Law and Disorder*) that was as far away from modest quota values as it was possible to get:

Having considerable difficulty – the Director & myself don’t see eye to eye about what is good music or commercial or popular – all very difficult! I’ll be glad when the preliminary skirmishings are over and we get really down to hard work. This is the nervous period – nobody quite knowing which way the ball is going to roll – avoiding ‘bust-ups’ & trying to keep a clear vision!⁴⁸

At around the same time, Michael Powell was at Denham making *The Spy in Black* (1939), and remembered the layout of the studio: Alexander, Zoltan, and Vincent Korda had offices close to

⁴⁷ Clarence Raybould, ‘Music and the Synchronized Film’, *Sight and Sound* 2, no.7 (1933): 80-1

⁴⁸ Mathieson archive MS Mus.1763/2/1

those of the screenwriters and the composer Miklós Rózsa, whose neighbours could clearly hear his piano as he wrote, “whether they liked it or not.”⁴⁹ It was an environment that was closer to the Hollywood studio model than many of the other British outfits could afford to be. But commerce did not sit easily with Mathieson, and in a sense, it is surprising that he remained under Korda’s employment for so long, considering the often-fractious relationship they seemed to have. The idea that film scoring was seen by some prestige producers like Korda as simply another contribution to a business enterprise was vaguely distasteful to Mathieson, and indeed his letters home betray a slight resistance to authority:

My existence is sure known now – but it’s a risky business – ‘cos if I slip up [...] - it’s not just for £1 – but more £1s than one dares think about. I’m beginning to wonder if I wouldn’t be happier & safer just to do as I’m told & no questions asked. I doubt it, tho’. I loathe having anything to do with a job at which I’m not important. That’s a confession but you probably know it already.⁵⁰

He risked souring his relationships with producers and directors by insisting on developing collaborations that fulfilled his ambitions to bring concert composers into the cinema. Adrian Wright speculated on Mathieson’s approach to choosing composers for projects:

The fine balance of his work, in every case having to reject some composers in favour of another (and he seems to have been on good terms with most), was considerable. It may be that his attitude to each of the composers he took into the film circle was formed early on, a reaction to the first occasion he came across their music, a feeling about the personality as he (perhaps subconsciously) filed his thoughts and lined his composers up in a descending order.⁵¹

Wright’s portrait of Mathieson emphasises the latter’s conviction that the decision to find the right composer for a score relied on a convergence of various factors, and Mathieson’s admiration for their existing concert music was key. When it came to the scoring of *Things to Come*, Arthur Bliss was already established as a composer of international repute, and perhaps Mathieson saw this project as something that could become part of the concert repertoire. Bliss was at the centre of a British music scene that increasingly came to be epitomised by concert

⁴⁹ Powell, *A Life in Movies*, 305-6

⁵⁰ Mathieson archive MS Mus.1763/2/1

⁵¹ Adrian Wright, *The Innumerable Dance: The Life and Work of William Alwyn* (Boydell & Brewer, 2008), 84

series and festivals such as the Promenade concerts, and Mathieson overtly associated himself with these circles.⁵²

Bliss' work on *Things to Come* was advantaged by unusual working conditions, facilitated by Mathieson's protection and support, and the degree to which Bliss was involved from a very early stage in production was rare.⁵³ Amazingly, Bliss and H. G. Wells, the author of the film's source novel, were in correspondence from an early stage in production, and indeed Bliss himself was thoughtful about film as a popular phenomenon, and had written on the subject. In 1922, fourteen years before *Things to Come*, Bliss thought the cinema "primarily for the inert, the exhausted, the feeble minded, the unimaginative."⁵⁴ By the time of the *Things to Come* commission, he had changed his tune somewhat, showing great enthusiasm for the project, and sought to work closely with the celebrated Wells. A letter from the author to Bliss written late in 1934, which draws on John Grierson as a kindred spirit, illuminates the collaborative atmosphere of their correspondence:

I am at issue with Korda and one or two others of the group on the question of where you come in. They say – it is the Hollywood tradition – 'We make the film right up to the cutting then, *when* we have cut, the musician comes in and *puts in his music*.'

I say Balls! (I have the enthusiastic support of Grierson, who makes Post Office films, in *that*). I say 'A film is a composition and the musical composer is an integral part of the design. I want Bliss to be in touch throughout.'

I don't think Korda has much of an ear, but I want the audience at the end not to sever what it sees from what it hears. I want to end on a complete sensuous and emotional synthesis.

So far from regarding the music as trimming to be put in afterwards I am eager to get any suggestions I can from you as to the main design.⁵⁵

It was not plain sailing from that point onwards, at least from Wells' viewpoint. Bliss later described the novelist's gradual disillusionment as the film progressed: Wells wanted the film to be "an educative message to mankind", but

⁵² The intellectualism evident in Mathieson's work might be linked to his educational activities, although he rarely theorized on this aspect of his work. Throughout his career, Mathieson worked closely with youth orchestras and was heavily involved in various concert series aimed at young people. See Appendix B

⁵³ See Nicol William Snedden, 'Sir Arthur Bliss's Music for *Things to Come* (1936): A Study of Contemporaneous Sources and Musical Materials', *Journal of Film Music*, 4 No.2 (2014)

⁵⁴ Bliss, *Musical News and Herald*, 18 February 1922: 220.

⁵⁵ Bliss quoted in Edward Buscombe and Rob White, *British Film Institute Film Classics, Vol 1*. (London & NY: Taylor & Francis, 2001), 329-30

the financial necessity of having to appeal to a vast audience meant a concession here and a concession there, a watering down in one place, a deletion in another, so that, instead of having the impact of a vital parable, it became just an exciting entertainment.⁵⁶

Much like Benjamin Britten's disillusionment with commercial filmmaking following his unhappy experience scoring *Love from a Stranger* (1937), Wells found the fickle, ego- and market-driven processes of show business tedious and disappointing. But it should be borne in mind that Wells was the creator of the source material. Bliss was in a different position, being in a creative role that was responding to the source material; concert music was in any case not Bliss's most comfortable environment:

I have always found it easier to write 'dramatic' music rather than 'pure' music. I like the stimulus of words, or a theatrical setting, a colourful occasion or the collaboration of a great player. There is only a little of the spider about me, spinning his own web from his inner being.⁵⁷

However, in an anonymous article in *Tempo* magazine, some years later, Bliss is discussed in the context of the public reception of concert and film music respectively, and the author claims that Bliss did not feel enthused enough to subsequently pursue the latter:

In his score for *Things to Come* [...] Bliss was fortunate enough to have as collaborator H. G. Wells, who insisted that the composer should be allowed a free hand with the music and not subjected to the whims of technical directors and box-office managers. Although one might think that the resounding success of this music would have encouraged film directors to proceed farther along these lines, this unfortunately does not appear to be the case, and Bliss therefore considers film-music primarily as routine work, and not at present an art-form.⁵⁸

Benjamin Britten, when working unhappily on *Love from a Stranger*, might have appreciated the freedom that Bliss was given on *Things to Come*, and undoubtedly Bliss would have also liked these conditions to extend into further film projects, but he never found the same creative

⁵⁶ Bliss, *As I Remember* (1970) (London: Thames, 1989), 105-6

⁵⁷ Bliss quoted in Palmer, 'Bliss on Stage and Screen' In *Musical Opinion* 94, no.1127 (1971): 558

⁵⁸ Anon., 'Arthur Bliss', 3

balance. Bliss, deeply influenced by Elgar and Vaughan Williams, had turned against modernism in the 1920s with a defiance stronger than any resistance that Walton or Britten displayed, and therefore it is arguable that his approach to locating music in the audio-visual field tended to the conservative as much as his music steered clear of tonal expansion. While Britten was a casualty of the cut-throat atmosphere and deadline-intensive culture of filmmaking that diminished the composer's ability to experiment, Bliss found himself frustrated by trying to write what was essentially ballet music for motion pictures. But he shared with Mathieson a classical training and a peculiar intellectualism that made for positive collaboration, a similarity of outlook that makes it surprising that the pair did not work together more often. In the context of a film industry that was awash with quickies and West End spin-offs, Bliss supported the notion of cultural institutions that unilaterally attempt to bring the tastes of their public to a higher level, "unostentatiously raising the level of musical appreciation," a rather 'Mathiesonian' statement, written three years before work on *Things to Come* began.⁵⁹

Film music and foreign labour: the effect of the European exodus

Several British composers felt undervalued by the concert music establishment, partly due to their involvement in films, whether they worked on 'quality' pictures or not. William Alwyn's ambitions in concert music were frustrated by his film career, and a similar predicament might be said to apply to varying degrees to other composers, Benjamin Frankel and Malcolm Arnold among them.⁶¹ Some of these personal predicaments were verbalised or made clear in print, but usually they have come down through hearsay or the memories of others (it was Susanna Walton who reminisced that her husband wrote film scores for the money, and not because he saw it as an important artistic endeavour).⁶²

Further problematizing this was the tension that existed in the thirties among musicians and composers working at the film studios, brought about by the influx of foreigners being commissioned to compose or work in other musical capacities. The irony of Alexander Korda's rapid rise, alongside that of his other Hungarian colleagues, was that the successive Quota Acts attempted to grapple with the perceived problem of foreign labour in the industry, but it was to

⁵⁹ Bliss quoted in Roscow, *Bliss on Music*, 63-64. He was commenting on the annual BBC Promenade Concerts.

⁶¹ Swynmoe, *The Best Years*, xvi

⁶² Walton, *William Walton*, 87

him — among others — that the Moyne Committee went for evidence when preparing the reports that culminated in the 1938 revision of the Quota Act. It is certainly arguable that without foreign filmmakers or composers the industry would not have been as heterogeneous in style or approach as it was; the musical ‘cultural crossroads’ would not have formed as it did had it not been for the influences from overseas. But there is even evidence of discontent in the cosmopolitan documentary sector: John Grierson complained of pictures being “written, produced, starred, shot, cut and musicked by foreigners.”⁶³

The 1938 Act came in the wake of a slump in ‘quality’ or ‘prestige’ production, caused partly by apprehension leading up to its unknown effects, and partly by hasty over-investment on the part of ‘tramp’ producers (City financiers who had little knowledge of film production).⁶⁴ There was shift in attitude in government regarding the regulation of film production to safeguard British interests, and engage with the idea of ‘quality’ in the context of a film industry that relied on overseas product and labour: “[the] President of the Board of Trade [asked] whether members of parliament would ‘be content for a moment if we depended upon foreign literature or foreign press in this country’”.⁶⁵

There was a running joke at Denham, sparked by Korda’s habit of hiring Hungarians and personnel of other foreign nationalities, that the two Union flags flying over the studio building represented the total number of British people working there. Michael Powell wrote that “[t]he Old House at Denham was a Hungarian enclave transported to Buckinghamshire.”⁶⁶ He had a serious disagreement with Emeric Pressburger over the latter’s initial choice of Miklós Rózsa as the composer for *Contraband* (1940). Perhaps most associated with ‘exotic’ epics from this period, Rózsa was one of Korda’s small cadre of “favoured beings”.⁶⁷ There was a certain amount of gossip-mongering operating between studios at the time:

It was Mickey Rózsa who told Emeric that Alex [Korda] was making a last gigantic effort to get enough money together to start making *The Thief of Bagdad* in Technicolor. I had my first serious difference of opinion with Emeric over the music. [...] Rózsa, the composer of the original music score for *The Thief of*

⁶³ John Grierson quoted in Chibnall, *Quota Quickies*, 251

⁶⁴ Low, *Film Making*, 198

⁶⁵ Porter, *On Cinema*, 77

⁶⁶ Powell, *A Life in Movies*, 305

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 319

Bagdad, who was Hungarian like Alex and Emeric, had also written the music for *The Spy in Black*. Emeric naturally supposed that I would want his friend and compatriot to write the score of *Contraband*, and had assured him of the job. But I felt that we need more English contributors. Miklós Rózsa's future was already assured in Hollywood, and it was time to give an English composer a chance. My decision caused an understandable coolness between Emeric and myself, but I stood firm.⁶⁸

The job eventually went to Richard Addinsell and John Greenwood. The xenophobia articulated by Powell is reflected by Roy Douglas, Addinsell's orchestrator.⁶⁹ He betrays a subtle irritation when reminded of the various foreign composers who began picking up film work in Britain, but Jan Swynnoe's rather leading questioning and Douglas's advancing years (86 at the time of the interview) must be considered:

JS: And what do you think would have been the situation if he [Mathieson] hadn't been on the scene?

RD: I think the Germans were all in it. [...]

JS: I was wondering how he got in so smoothly, because he became assistant at about that time, didn't he, to Kurt Schroeder.

RD: Yes, that's right, and there were quite a few German and Austrian Jewish composers around at that time, but Muir obviously wanted to —

JS: Yes, we could have ended up, given that the British film industry was absolutely overrun with the Korda collection, with a situation like Hollywood, but we didn't.

RD: Yes, you see Brodsky got quite a few films because he was a pal of Joe Pasternak in Hollywood, and he was always talking about his pal Joe Pasternak.

JS: What about Spoliansky?

RD: Yes, he was another. Now, he was a nice chap, I liked him, a very thoroughly competent musician, but some of them were very pushing.

JS: A lot of British films, which, I think, can be distinguished by being very British in their essence, used foreign composers. I'm thinking here, for example, of *Hue and Cry*, which I think is not served by using somebody like Auric. What was your opinion about that?

RD: We all resented it very much.⁷⁰

Despite the unease, the roster of foreign composers who worked on London Films' output, including Schroeder, Spoliansky, Rózsa, and Ernst Toch, all contributed excellent scores to films at the higher end of the budget scale. Later, Allan Gray (Polish-born Józef Żmigrod) made an

⁶⁸ Ibid., 319, 341

⁶⁹ Also copyist to Ralph Vaughan Williams. See Appendix A – Philip Lane interview.

⁷⁰ Swynnoe, *The Best Years*, 197-8

impact on the studio's output through the Powell and Pressburger cycle.⁷¹ But the quota was partly in place to restrict the influence of foreign labour at all levels of the industry. Some composers changed their names to avoid xenophobic discrimination: Walter Goehr worked as a film composer under the name George Walter; Francis Chagrin, on moving to Paris from Romania in the early 1930s before settling in London, changed his name from Alexander Paucker; and the composer behind *Sunshine Susie*, Paul Abraham, started life in Hungary as Pál Ábrahám. Edward Dryhurst, a filmmaker who worked on many British productions in the 1930s, also remarked somewhat negatively on the influx of foreign technicians: "Elstree was [...] almost polyglot you know. I don't think it was particularly a good thing, they were not men who had any great contribution to make to the business".⁷² Meanwhile, Arthur Benjamin was a champion of home-grown orchestral players, admiring their professionalism: "even to those foreign artists who make so many of our British films[,] the orchestral player in this country is a sort of miraculous being."⁷³

Despite the complaints, overseas musicians continued to contribute to the film scoring community throughout the decade. The German composer Ernst Toch, like his Hungarian contemporary Rózsa, spent some time working in London before leaving for the United States, although Toch stayed for little more than a year. The escalating anti-Semitism in the musical establishment had curtailed his growing reputation whilst working in Berlin, and London proved only a brief stopping-off point before his move to Hollywood. In his introduction to Toch's treatise *The Shaping Forces of Music* (1948), Lawrence Weschler wrote that Toch's "early enthusiasm for the artistic cross-fertilization possible in film gradually soured into bitter disillusionment with the insensitivity of the studio heads, and he came to despise the necessary prostitution of his talents."⁷⁴ Despite this, Toch was clearly pragmatic. Losing the platforms that Berlin had offered him, which probably would have more fully exploited his credentials as an esteemed modernist composer ("perfect for chase scenes"), he tried to establish himself in London, writing one of the decade's greatest — but most underappreciated — scores in *Little*

⁷¹ Florian Scheduling claims incorrectly that Allan Gray was Mischa Spoliansky's *nom-de-plume*. Scheduling, 'I Only Need the Good Old Budapest: Hungarian Cabaret in Wartime London' in *Twentieth Century Music and Politics*, ed. Pauline Fairclough (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 228

⁷² BECTU History Project, Interview 36

⁷³ Benjamin, 'Film Music', 95

⁷⁴ Weschler, introduction to Ernst Toch, *The Shaping Forces of Music* (New York: Criterion, 1948), x

Friend (1934).⁷⁵ His work certainly made its mark, but

there wasn't enough work to live on. [...] [H]e would sometimes refer to himself as 'the world's most forgotten composer,' a wistful joke that betrayed a certain painful validity. Perhaps owing to the fierce independence of his creative path (he was a follower of no school), his work got dismissed as too traditional by avant-gardists and too avant-garde by traditionalists.⁷⁶

Max Schach, another Hungarian, who made the most of the great boom in production following Korda's success but later suffered the consequences of the mid-thirties slump, hired several foreign composers for his prestige pictures. Among them were the fiercely intellectual Hanns Eisler, who scored *Abdul the Damned* (1935) and Hans May, who contributed to Schach's filmed operetta *The Lilac Domino* (1937). Rachael Low asserts that the "attention paid to music in Schach's films is their best feature", but in discussing *The Prisoner of Corbal* (1936), scored by Gray among a roster of other foreign cast and crew, Low notes that "[t]he influx of foreigners into the film industry was becoming conspicuous, and Graham Greene poured scorn on the idea that this was a British film."⁷⁷

One of the most significant composers of the period, Mischa Spoliansky, used the name 'Michael' at an early stage in his career, for the same reason as the examples given above. Spoliansky's background was in the cabarets and pits of Weimar Berlin, from which he fled before the decade was out, in the midst of a mass exodus of composers of Jewish descent; he entered Britain shortly after Hitler's rise to power in 1933. In the thriving cabaret scene of Berlin, he had been instrumental in giving Marlene Dietrich a significant break on the stage, in *Es liegt in der Luft*, by insisting that she repeat her audition song at a lower pitch, thus reversing the panel's decision not to cast her.⁷⁸ Dietrich herself traced much of her success to this moment, and Spoliansky's encouragement. Dietrich would later be introduced to Miklós Rózsa in London, the composer apparently oblivious to who she was.⁷⁹

Pygmalion (1938), one of the decade's most internationally successful comedies, engaged

⁷⁵ Weschler, 'Ernest Toch — my grandfather the forgotten composer who fled the Nazis', *The Guardian*, June 18, 2015

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Low, *Film Making*, 204, 202

⁷⁸ A Spoliansky number from this show, 'Auf Wiedersehen' was used by the animator Oscar Fischinger in a work entitled *Studie Nr. 4* (1930). William Moritz, *Optical Poetry: The Life and Work of Oscar Fischinger*. (Eastleigh: John Libbey, 2004), 212

⁷⁹ Miklós Rózsa, *Double Life: The Autobiography of Miklós Rózsa* (Tunbridge Wells: Midas, 1982), 77

directly with issues of snobbery, education, and social mobility through George Bernard Shaw's source material. Initially offered to Walton, who turned it down, it was scored by Arthur Honegger, who experiments with playful ambi-diegetic music for scenes featuring Henry Higgins's recording apparatus. The film's director, Leslie Howard, showed unusual care in the supervision of musical aspects of its production: "[e]ven when he was directing a sequence which involved music he had the music director there."⁸⁰ Howard's good humour and straightforward approach influenced the mood of the score. "Maybe the most remarkable aspect of this joyous but subtle score is how British it sounds," wrote Thomas S. Hischak, "particularly coming from a Swiss composer who lived in France all his life."⁸¹ As a member of *Les Six*, alongside Georges Auric and Darius Milhaud, Honegger eschewed the high modernism of Schoenberg in favour of a fashionable neo-classicism. He was indeed more suited to film scoring than some of his more intellectualised art music contemporaries. Hischak's opinion that his film work tended to be "conventional and efficient" somewhat underplays the effectiveness of Honegger's music for films such as *Pygmalion*.⁸² The witty interaction with Professor Higgins' diegetic xylophone motifs, played to encourage Eliza's vocal phrasing as she struggles to recite a phrase, reaches into the next scene as it is taken up by Honegger's orchestra. Later, a non-diegetic waltz synchronizes with their dancing practice.

Ultimately, the cosmopolitanism of the music departments in Britain only served to enrich the scoring practices of the 1930s, despite the disgruntlement of those who felt that their careers were threatened by the steady flow of visitors. The fact remained that much of the industry was powered by foreign entrepreneurs, producers, and filmmakers, and that without them 'homegrown' composers might have had even fewer opportunities.

⁸⁰ BECTU interview with Sidney Cole, Part 2

⁸¹ Thomas S. Hischak, *Encyclopaedia of Film Composers*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 335

⁸² *Ibid.*, 335

Classical source music and pastiche scoring

In April 1940, Walter J. Turner claimed that none of the music written for Hollywood films was original, but ultimately “stolen from composers of real originality — very largely in fact from the classics: Mozart, Bach, Beethoven, etc., but also profusely from Italian and Viennese opera”, and he writes with barely concealed disgust at the practice of paying composers by the minute of music produced: “[I]t appears that an average figure for ordinary jobs is two hundred dollars a minute.”⁸⁴ This, he opines, is very good pay for slow music but not particularly good for fast music. No Hollywood composers are mentioned by name, except Korngold, who is said to come from the “real world” of music. For the purposes of this thesis, which seeks to reassess a period of film music that is too often defined by the towering figures of concert music who only occasionally worked on pictures, it is notable that Honegger, Walton, Auric, Prokofiev and Britten are later mentioned as “talented” musicians offered commissions in film music.

Turner focuses on the borrowings from concert music that he discerned in film scores. It was not uncommon, though, for soundtracks to feature extant pieces from the classic repertoire, used in their original form, either as a non-diegetic feature or as music used diegetically in set-pieces. However, there was a political sub-plot to the use of classical music in feature films in the UK during the decade that was not as pronounced in the US, since the rise of Fascism wasn’t only a political threat, but a cultural one. Music and film, and their interaction, became entangled with questions of cultural identity and patriotism, especially when Austro-German music was concerned. John Morris has written in depth about these years, the build-up to war and the consequent propaganda struggle that developed in parallel. He identifies a paradox at the heart of this struggle: unlike Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union — where music by composers from ‘enemy’ states was viewed with suspicion at best, and often banned outright — British musical life remained largely in favour of Austro-German music, especially Beethoven, throughout the 1930s and all the way through the war itself. Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony remained a musical representation of freedom for the entire period; the British view, led by the BBC, was that Beethoven’s music rises above political or patriotic allegiances. “Throughout the 1930s the BBC actively pursued a policy of German music, so that the masters of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries ‘reigned’ at the corporation”, writes Morris. Furthermore, “by 1939 there was no

⁸⁴ Turner, untitled article, *The New Statesman and Nation*, April 13, 1940. Paying by the number of minutes of music produced is still a common practice in various kinds of media music, often among orchestrators.

question in the minds of ordinary listeners that the music of Bach, Beethoven and several other composers of the Austro-German tradition belonged to England. [...] By 1941 Beethoven had become a symbol of freedom.”⁸⁵ Indeed the sound of the timpani playing the famous motif from Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony was the calling card of the BBC French Service (“Radio Londres”), where Francis Chagrin worked as a composer and arranger during the war years. The same piece was used for the opening titles of Hitchcock’s *Murder!* (1930), channelling the famous associations that the motif has with the concept of fate; the prelude from Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde* was also used for a key scene later in the picture.

John Huntley’s preferred term for extant music in film was “featured music”, and he took a special interest in its use:

The work of popularising serious music through the medium of the cinema [...] is an excellent scheme and providing that music can occur naturally in the picture, it should be developed as a contribution from the art of cinema to the art of good music.⁸⁶

Maurice Elvey’s sci-fi drama *The Tunnel* (1935) features Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony, in an onscreen performance. This ambitious picture concerns the digging of a great transatlantic tunnel, and the political machinations behind the project. One of its tropes is the class war, in the context of financial corruption and obsessive ambition. Beethoven is here used as a sign of good taste and refined cultural mores, standing out against the insensitive financiers who talk incessantly over the diegetic music in one scene. Music written for the concert hall was indeed closer to the centre of British cultural life during those years than it could plausibly claim to be at any time afterwards, and these characters’ disregard for Beethoven will not have been lost on the film’s contemporary audience. There is a case to be made for a respect for classical music evident at the time that crossed class boundaries in Britain, and which — according to Robert Walker — infiltrated cinema-going habits. Walker asserts that British audiences had a fondness for classical music in films, and that

⁸⁵ Morris, *Culture and Propaganda*, 12-13

⁸⁶ Huntley, *British Film Music*, 18

class had little to do with the attraction people felt for romantic symphonic music in movies. [...] While hearing music at the movies is not exactly the same type of activity as attending a concert [...] it is nevertheless an activity where people make the effort to go out to a movie theatre in order to specifically watch and hear a movie knowing that it contains a great deal of music.⁸⁷

Walker's argument is not entirely convincing. He writes, correctly, that audiences "listened to classical and classical-style music in cinemas because they liked the aesthetic and emotional experiences which the music substantially provides", but he fails to factor in the pull of stars and the intoxication of the visual *in combination with* the classical music.⁸⁸ This view is in contrast to that of Ernest Irving, who has a surprisingly condescending attitude at times, asserting in a faintly snobbish manner that "there are quite a number of film fans who positively dislike music".⁸⁹ Irving's work in the 1930s shows few examples of collaborations with acclaimed concert composers, and he was always at pains to establish that they would simply be another member of the crew, an attitude that chimes with Maurice Jaubert, who wrote that "we do not go to the films to hear music."^{90 91}

Irving's unsentimental pragmatism left his options open for the use of extant music wherever he felt it could go. Muir Mathieson, meanwhile, tended to argue for placing classical music into scenes where there was a particularly strong case to be made, either in the interests of authenticity or for the purposes of character development. To that end, diegetic classical music is used as a character device in a late-thirties thriller supervised by Mathieson, *On the Night of the Fire* (1939). A disc of the 'Air' from J. S. Bach's third orchestral suite is placed on the gramophone by the scheming Pilleger, who is attempting to blackmail the barber Kobling (Ralph Richardson). The piece acts anempathetically under the confrontation scene between the two, culminating in murder. As the killing occurs, a close-up of the stylus on the record draws visual attention from the act but increases the violence of the moment through its encouragement of the viewer's imagination, and the indifferent and incessant nature of the spinning record.⁹² Earlier in

⁸⁷ Robert Walker, *Music Education: Cultural Values, Social Change and Innovation* (Charles C. Thomas, 2007), 231

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 231

⁸⁹ Irving, *Cue for Music*, 163

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁹¹ Maurice Jaubert, 'Music and Film', *World Film News* 1, no.4 (1936): 31

⁹² Michel Chion's discussion of anempathetic sound is relevant here (Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 8-9) The deployment of the image and sound of the indifferent record stylus as an ironic device in a violent context in *On the Night of the Fire* is

the film, Pillegger describes Bach as “real music”, and indeed his love for the composer’s works adds him to the litany of other morally corrupt characters in British and American cinema who have sophisticated musical taste. Both men demonstrate this love for music; contributing to the reputation of the film as a British *noir*, Kobling is both hero and villain simultaneously. He is fond of playing the overture to Wagner’s *Tannhäuser* on his accordion (perhaps a reference to themes of sin, punishment, and atonement that the picture explores). Meanwhile, Miklós Rózsa’s score takes Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Scheherazade* as its clear influence, and shows Rózsa drifting ever more towards a classic Hollywood idiom.

Much of the quota output featured classical music for budgetary reasons. *Devil’s Rock* (1936), whilst featuring much traditional Irish music, also used extensive sections of Beethoven’s *Pastoral Symphony* and Mendelssohn’s *Hebrides Overture*, the latter deemed appropriate for a scene during which two characters become stranded dangerously on the eponymous crag. Water-themed extant music was used two years previously, in Michael Powell’s early quickie feature *Red Ensign* (1934). Smetana’s famous tune ‘Vltava’ from *Ma Vlast* is the film’s recurring musical theme, re-emerging throughout the picture in various montage sequences, which — as Steve Chibnall has pointed out — closely resemble the documentary footage of John Grierson’s GPO documentaries. Chibnall reads the film as a comment on the phenomenon of the quota quickie (a character in the film is named Grierson, and another named Dean – references to John and Basil, respectively). Substitute the film industry for the picture’s subject matter of shipbuilding, and it becomes a clear parable:

perhaps borrowed from a similar moment in the Hollywood picture *A Public Enemy* (1931), and occurs later in others, notably *Journey into Fear* (1941). It finds its way into recent cinema such as Lars von Trier’s *Dancer in the Dark* (2000). For discussion of *A Public Enemy* see James MacDowell, *Irony in Film* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 101; for *Journey into Fear* see Charles Higham, *The Films of Orson Welles* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1971), 75

Many of the modest quota pictures Powell made may be considered disguised films about British cinema: its possibilities and restrictions. They offer a discursive commentary on the hopes and aspirations of the film-maker within an expanding industry reliant on American patronage and hamstrung by conventional ideas. [...] [*Red Ensign*] is virtually a polemic on the need for a new aesthetic cinema that would wed the visual achievements of the documentary movement with the emotional power tapped by narrative film-making. Although it is ostensibly about shipbuilding, its protagonist's argument that protective quota legislation provides a window of opportunity in which new creative ideas could flourish, has evident application to the work of indigenous film-makers.⁹³

Smetana's surging music brings an oddly fitting Slavic flavour to the film's aural landscape, and underscores the montages suitably. Its origin as a work descriptive of water is apt for the seafaring subject of the film. With the deployment of the Smetana, Powell avoided the expense of hiring a composer and music director, and booking recording sessions, and it has the added advantage of music that will have been familiar to many filmgoers, like so much extant music used in the period. Still, many years later, Powell himself was first to admit that

I had been using music for years as a tool, which I pretended to be able to handle. I had never looked on music as a language, a philosophy, or a science. I had used it in my films as just another sound. When Muir Mathieson suggested that we invite Ralph Vaughan Williams to write the music for *49th Parallel* [1941], I had a glimpse of what could be done in our medium by a great composer, but I didn't follow it up. Instead, it was Larry Olivier who commissioned William Walton to write the score for *Henry V* [1944]. These were genuine attempts at enlarging the scope of film.⁹⁴

In the same year as *Red Ensign*, after the significant years of transition to sound had passed, there were oddities among the quota releases that resembled earlier part-talkies, and whose use of classical music came down to budgetary restrictions. *The Tell Tale Heart* (1934), which qualified for the quota if not strictly a 'quickie' in the cynical sense, due to its unusual and rather experimental nature, at first glance seems like a picture that was made at least four years earlier.

⁹³ Chibnall, *Quota Quickies*, 219

⁹⁴ Powell, *A Life in Movies*, 582

This can be partly explained by the fact that it had a semi-professional crew and amateur actors, but mostly because it plays like a part-talkie. Its director, Brian Desmond Hurst, recalled that “I used for music records of Tchaikovsky and what the film people called ‘De-Buss-y’ as we could not afford [a] composer or musician. At the big Elstree Studios nearby, they said, ‘There’s a fellow over at Blattner’s Studio who’s making practically a silent picture.’”⁹⁵ *The Tell Tale Heart*’s extended sequences without dialogue and cues consisting of extant recordings of classical music, recalling the silent era practice of placing well-known pieces over appropriate scenes, represent the hangover from the 1920s that still occasionally manifested itself in the musical treatment of motion pictures.

Opera on film

Ernest Irving, having a solid foundation as a conductor and arranger for the theatre, was naturally inclined to look for ways to bring opera into the cinema. Not always successful, there were nonetheless a number of notable outings of canonical operatic repertoire appearing on screen throughout the decade. At Ealing, Irving found it a frustrating area to pursue, since the producers were resolutely against presenting operas without significant alterations, and musicians — like Thomas Beecham, attempting to bring *The Magic Flute* to the screen with Irving — recoiled at the idea of heavily abridged or adulterated stage works.⁹⁶ Some ideas fared better in graduating from development to production than Irving’s ill-fated *Flute*. Beecham’s contemporary Malcolm Sargent conducted BIP’s screen version of Bizet’s *Carmen* (1932), a bold move so early in the sound era, and before the smooth operation of re-recording technology had fully established itself. Later, the Austrian tenor Richard Tauber appeared in a screen version of Leoncavallo’s *Pagliacci* (1936), whose prologue and epilogue were rendered in an early colour technique.⁹⁷ *Pagliacci* suited film adaptation well, since its ‘backstage’ setting was relatively straightforward to construct.⁹⁸ This was an unusual case though; most operas failed to make the transition successfully. Geoffrey Toye, who had worked on Korda’s *Rembrandt*,

⁹⁵ Brian Desmond Hurst quoted in Wheeler Winston Dixon, *Re-Viewing British Cinema 1900-1992* (New York: State University of New York, 1994), 27

⁹⁶ Irving, *Cue for Music*, 134

⁹⁷ “The process [Chemicolor] used Agfa bipack negatives loaded with the emulsion sides facing and separated by a colour filter. The negatives were printed onto double-coated film and toned with complementary colours. The process was formally demonstrated on 27 August 1936 at Elstree Studios.” Simon Brown, ‘Technical Appendix: Chemicolor’. In Sarah Street, *Colour Films in Britain. The Negotiation of Innovation 1900-55*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 265-266

⁹⁸ Huntley, *British Film Music*, 46

oversaw a screen *Mikado* in 1939, for which he travelled to the US and consulted with Leopold Stokowski in order to achieve the best sound quality. Despite its high production values, it failed to break even at the box office. It exemplified the inevitable awkwardness of the presentation of opera — or operetta — on screen:

Before long it grows obvious that to attempt a straightforward transference of a work like *The Mikado* to the screen is to attempt the impossible. Look at the way in which the continuity of events is broken up and made static by the many song-passages. There is, of course, nothing wrong with them on the stage; they are part of the technique, which is intentionally (and effectively) artificial [...] But conventions of this kind have no place in films, and one is forever having forced on one's notice odd items of stage-machinery which on the screen have lost all meaning.⁹⁹

Compromise, and often failure, characterised these productions. *Mimi* (1935), based on the source material of *La Bohème*, used portions of Puccini's score, but only as "background"; and Basil Dean's Mozart picture, *Whom the Gods Love* (1936), was a flop despite lavish locations and a soundtrack with some high-profile personnel.¹⁰⁰ Huntley asserted that "it was a weak story and the chief interest lay in the music of Mozart which was smoothly recorded", whilst Ernest Irving testified to the attention given to the recording, suggesting that Dean allowed a more generous music budget than was the norm, enabling Irving to use the London Philharmonic Orchestra for the recording.¹⁰¹

The composer Friedrich Feher was more experimental, having emerged from the dark and dynamic expressionist scene in Germany. *The Robber Symphony* (1935), made at Elstree, was particularly unusual for being edited to fit Feher's specially composed operatic score, a method of filmmaking that is still extremely rare for mainstream narrative feature films. Rachael Low notes that *The Robber Symphony* "took almost a year to make, nine months of that in editing, and was very expensive [...] [T]he experiment would have seemed very strange to most audiences."¹⁰² The process behind *Robber Symphony* fascinated Michael Powell when preparing to make *Black Narcissus* (1947):

⁹⁹ A. Vesselo, review of *The Mikado*, October 1939, quoted in Huntley, *British Film Music*, 48

¹⁰⁰ Low, *Film Making*, 124

¹⁰¹ Huntley, *British Film Music*, 42; Irving, *Cue for Music*, 145

¹⁰² Low, *Film Making*, 126)

I never saw this film, but the experiment interested me and stuck with me. I had unconsciously always been interested in the relations between music and film. In the silent days, when we quite often had a three-piece orchestra on set, I had noticed how the music affected the work of the technicians as well as the performance of the actors. When talkies came in [...] I had become accustomed to regarding music as something you brought to the film to increase its theatrical effect, after the actual shooting was finished. [...] But I was still haunted by *The Robber Symphony*, and longed for a film subject where the music was the master. I felt that by working in harness with the composer, I would make a big step forward in the composition of my films. This may seem obvious now, but it wasn't then.¹⁰³

Ultimately, though, opera and other art-music genres provoked anxiety in film producers and the renters who oversaw distribution in the 1930s. It was generally felt that opera was simply not to the taste of most cinemagoers. This, combined with the difficulties of rendering the range of operatic voices and orchestral scores in a way that rivalled the sound of live performances, made the classical repertory problematic source material. This is not to disqualify the effectiveness of using well-known classical 'lollipops' to underscore moments in certain pictures, as explored above. But bringing the opera house into the cinema never caught on.

An additional factor was that while composers like Richard Addinsell found regular work in film and thrived, some others whose natural home was the concert hall sometimes struggled to maintain their composure in the volatile workplace of film. In two cases at least — Britten and Holst — it was the dramatic genre that was both an introduction and professional deal-breaker. Benjamin Britten's score for the psychological thriller *Love from a Stranger* (1936) remains an oddity for several reasons. Firstly, the Basil Rathbone vehicle was Britten's only foray into commercial feature films, and his bad experience in working on it seems to have affected his attitude towards that sector thenceforth. Secondly, the rushed writing and recording process resulted in a lopsided score, which starts out promisingly, its first half featuring an angular and anxious tonal palette and a handful of interesting moments of dialogue underscoring, but the second half completely devoid of cues, even in the most dramatic and critical moments. The filmmakers "kept [Britten] waiting around endlessly" during the early stages, a frustrating

¹⁰³ Powell, *A Life in Movies*, 583

situation that explains the incompleteness of the final work.¹⁰⁴ Colin Matthews, who was responsible for reconstructing the score from sketches (the original manuscript or copies did not survive), recounts the difficulties that Britten had with the film: “a series of frustrating delays meant that the whole score had to be written in a few days [...] and immediately recorded.”¹⁰⁵

Based on Agatha Christie’s short story *Philomel Cottage*, it features Ann Harding as a lottery winner who falls prey to Rathbone’s sinister conman. Probably due to the above circumstances, Britten’s music disappears almost completely halfway through the film. The cues, where they do occur early on, are fresh and thrilling, with melodies and textures that might recall Richard Strauss at his most frenetic, and some intriguing orchestration, especially the use of saxophone. Donald Mitchell hears the opening cue as “a clear anticipation of the ‘Storm’ interlude in *Peter Grimes*”.¹⁰⁶ However despite being paid £200 for *Love from a Stranger*, Britten resolved never to work in commercial cinema again, and soon afterwards returned to working with W. H. Auden on *The Way to the Sea* (1936), a 9-minute documentary for Strand Films.¹⁰⁷ Perhaps John Huntley had Britten in mind when observing that

[t]he man who never goes to the cinema and who arrives to score a film because he thinks it will be a nice rest after his latest Symphony is doomed to disappointment. [...] If he comes for the discipline of film scoring, he may find the teamwork beyond him. Some composers are born individualists, and when it comes to sharing the honours and trials of producing a film, they fail. Without the team spirit, back to chamber music is the only solution.¹⁰⁸

Gustav Holst had a comparable experience working on *The Bells* (1931), a drama of murder and remorse that is now considered lost. It was Holst’s only film score, and he was given a month to write, but “when he was done composing, the recording sessions took place, and Holst was very disappointed when the directors asked him to make changes in his score. He became even more upset when he viewed a private screening of the movie and could not hear anything that was recognizable in his music, with the recording and speakers both being so poor.”¹⁰⁹ So it was not always the case that reputable concert composers turned out enduring scores. It was more likely

¹⁰⁴ Humphrey Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten: A Biography* (London: Faber & Faber 1992), 88

¹⁰⁵ Colin Matthews, Programme note for *Love from a Stranger*. musicsalesclassical.com/composer/work/11020

¹⁰⁶ Donald Mitchell cited in Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten*, 88

¹⁰⁷ Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten*, 89

¹⁰⁸ Huntley, *British Film Music*, 20

¹⁰⁹ Kenric Taylor, ‘The Music of Gustav Holst: *The Bells*’, Gustavholst.info/compositions/listing.php?work=59

that such individuals would be hired to score prestige films, thus giving them a critical head-start in terms of general production values. In fact, as Arthur Bliss wrote, “the dramatic quality of a piece of film music is enhanced by the correspondingly dramatic content of the picture itself. The person watching the film is already in an emotionally responsive condition and will tend to invest the music with wonderful qualities that it doesn’t really possess.”¹¹¹ So the same criticisms that might be often aimed at quickie scores (lack of music, inadequate cues, stock music, poor synchronisation, etc.) can apply to countless prestige films, but it is often the case that the rose-tinted aural spectacles that a ‘quality’ film effects in the audience that causes prestige scores to be critically elevated.

Contrary to expectations, and to received notions of ‘quality v. quota’ as propagated by Rachael Low and others, there was no clear division between the music supplied (specially composed or otherwise) for the ‘quality’, or ‘prestige’ output of the decade, and the scores provided for ‘quota quickies’ of various kinds. Steve Chibnall warns against the simplistic attribution of qualitative factors to the financial support given to pictures: “It was certainly not that quality films aspired to art, while ‘quota’ pictures settled for entertainment.”¹¹³ Musically, while budgets did of course restrict the scale and ambition of quickie scores, often resulting in the use of stock cues, there are examples of quota pictures that contain experimental and imaginative musical ideas, or scores of great subtlety and impressive craftsmanship. The quota had an unexpected effect on the ‘cultural crossroads’ of British scoring precisely because of its restrictions, since solutions to budgetary hindrances often resulted in the use of folk music or extant classical source music. Meanwhile, the ‘prestige’ sector enabled composers to explore strategies by which music could be written with a sense of aesthetic care, using collaborative frameworks that might have seemed unusual to their American counterparts. But just because composers and music directors frequently had enough budgetary power to produce extensive and aesthetically interesting scores, it does not follow that the ‘quality’ output of the decade was always musically flamboyant or intelligently executed.

¹¹¹ Arthur Bliss quoted in Huntley, *British Film Music*, 160

¹¹³ Chibnall, *Quota Quickies*, 92

Chapter 5

Music and Dialogue

Chapters 3 and 4 touched on the notoriously indefinable notion of ‘Britishness’ as applied to film music in the 1930s, both in relation to generic types (historical films, or those with patriotic themes) and to the perception of film scoring as demonstrating a kind of intellectual or aesthetic responsibility towards listeners. This chapter confronts a key subject that can be related to that: the use of music to underscore dialogue, already a common practice in the classical Hollywood film, but hitherto not fully explored in scholarship exploring British filmmaking.¹ In fact, the trend among film historians and critics is to assert that a culture of reticence, reserve, and modesty operated in the aesthetic codes of British filmmaking:

There was certainly a sheepish mood in Britain, disarmed equally by the way American films reached out for fantasy and wide open spaces without an atom of modesty, and then drove their business ahead in the home country as if there were no such thing as showmanship in Britain. [...] In the real age of movies, there always was a battle between decorum and depravity, dutiful devoutness and dreams of disorder.²

David Thomson writes above as a prelude to his extended discussion of Hitchcock, Korda, Grierson, Balcon, Jennings, Lean and Reed in 1930s Britain. His use of language is illuminating: to America he seems to attribute such qualities as “fantasy”, “depravity”, and “showmanship”, whilst British cinema is interpreted as “sheepish”, “modest” and “dutiful”. It is no great leap to link Thomson’s thoughts with the way that Hollywood music — like Wagner’s orchestra — expressed ideas, feelings, and concepts that were not directly depicted on screen, and deftly articulated the passion and abandon of characters and story. Furthermore, the embarrassment or shock that love scenes in particular could cause in audiences are lessened by music, since without it “viewers were more likely to have a dawning awareness of their own voyeurism. The call to

¹ ‘Underscore’ is a term that has now developed a specific meaning in academic circles: the non-diegetic musical accompaniment of dialogue, even if some film music practitioners still refer to non-diegetic music in general as ‘underscore’.

² Thomson, *The Big Screen*, 178

return to the silent film for love making is instructive, for in the silent film such scenes were accompanied with a music that seemed to authorize the presence of the audience.”³

The melodramatic exuberance evinced by Hollywood scores of the 1930s and beyond has been the subject of much academic attention, notably in works by Caryl Flinn and Kathryn Kalinak. The former famously traced connections between the post-Romantic language of American scores and the summoning of a Utopian past, using feminist criticism to identify subconscious nostalgic yearnings. The thorny issue of dialogue is certainly one that is constantly haunted by the spectre of Hollywood; as the decade progressed, the classical Hollywood style developed and matured thanks to the early consolidating efforts of Max Steiner, Erich Korngold, and others. The word “consolidating” is used here pointedly, since recent relevant scholarship on the music of the Golden Age from Michael Slowik challenges the dubious notion that Steiner’s score for *King Kong* (1933) somehow ‘invented’ the classic Hollywood style. Slowik argues that much groundwork had been undertaken in the late silent and transition periods, and that this music was to directly feed into the sensibilities of Steiner and his contemporaries.⁴ Its origins notwithstanding, one of the core characteristics of the classical style was the close underscoring of dialogue: music ebbs and flows with the shape of conversations and speeches, reflecting the subtle changes in emotion and meaning in the words as they are uttered.

Jan Swynnoe claims that this kind of music, which draws on the operatic *recitative* convention, was “almost entirely absent from British film scores, and they are nowhere to be found in scores from the 1930s”.⁵ Swynnoe’s statement betrays a lack of in-depth research into the broad range of pictures and scores, and it can be positively disproved by surveying the many pre-war British pictures that contain extensive and deliberate underscoring.

Several notions prevail about the music composed for British films in the 1930s. One (espoused by Swynnoe) is that underscoring of any kind was kept to an absolute minimum as a matter of course. Within this apparent restriction, according to the received notion, the closely synchronized recitative-style of underscoring so prevalent in Hollywood was very unusual in films produced in the United Kingdom. Another — and directly related — issue is the tendency for critics to analyse British film music alongside the ‘production line’ system already

³ Buhler and Neumeyer, ‘Music and the Ontology of the Sound Film’, 31

⁴ See Michael Slowik, *After the Silents*

⁵ Swynnoe, *The Best Years*, 127

established in the Hollywood studios, the most common conclusion of this comparison being that there was no real equivalent in the UK film industry (and usually this implies London and the associated studios in the vicinity of the capital: London Films at Denham, ATP (later Ealing), Gaumont/Gainsborough, and so on). Composers themselves would often argue along similar lines, Arthur Benjamin writing that “[f]ilm directors and producers in England (one excepted) show little feeling for the music in films. But to them Publicity is God and the box-office the Ark of the Covenant.”⁶ (Benjamin’s “one excepted” is Hitchcock; the passage was written in 1937). British scoring is therefore implicated as an under-developed craft due to the comparison being made, even though the context of the respective infrastructures of the two cinemas should rule out any such parallel analysis.

What can emerge from a return to primary sources, including a wealth of contemporaneous British film industry journalism on the subject, is that there were significant trends in opinion of how music should be used in narrative film, especially concerning the use of music with dialogue, and that those views tended to show distaste for the Hollywood style. The process of uncovering the views of individuals from a period who were vehemently opposed to a certain practice can show quite plausibly that such a practice was commonplace enough to be noticed.

This chapter will examine some such sources alongside discussions of film scores from the period, in order to engage with the subject in two ways: first, to challenge assumptions and generalisations about British film music in the thirties; and second, to demonstrate that musical diversity, versatility and flexibility were the touchstones of the British scene.

Sound and its consequences

There were already those who had made comparisons between film and opera in the silent era, including Constant Lambert, who maintained that “D. W. Griffith is our Puccini”, a statement that might rest uncomfortably today, considering the reassessment that Griffith’s work has undergone, but which makes a valid point about how those two artists painted emotions on a grand scale.⁷ However, as Fred Steiner asserted, there was a palpable sense in the 1930s, in both Europe and the US, that the “old forms” and idioms of silent film accompaniment, deeply influenced by operatic conventions in themselves, had to be eschewed in the age of dialogue:

⁶ Benjamin, ‘Film Music’, 93

⁷ Constant Lambert quoted in cited in Steiner, ‘What were musicians saying...?’ 89.

[A]s the search for an ideal film music style went on, one of the most frequent subjects of debate was that of musical illustration. This technique, denoting a style of film music that closely follows changes of scene or mood (sometimes to the extent of changing with every shot) or that attempts to imitate and synchronize with actions on the screen, was to become a frequent target of scorn in the coming decade and even beyond.⁸

Many in the trade press and in critical literature of the 1930s felt that sound had been a wholly negative development for cinema. Some took the view that the excitement surrounding the introduction of sound meant that spoken dialogue was becoming too important at the expense of the image, and undermining the purpose of music; this was the beginning of a critical literature that still grapples with the question of whether film music can have inherent meaning of its own. If the novelty of sound enabled characters to converse naturally on screen, giving voice to their emotions, then the need for emotions as expressed through music running concurrent with the scene had now to be questioned.

One of those contributing to the debate was Alberto Cavalcanti, who bewailed the influx of stage professionals into films in the early sound era, claiming that it caused some pictures to be little more than filmed theatre at the expense of the cinematic crafts that he championed at the GPO Film Unit, including music. Drawing from the experience of working with John Grierson, Stuart Legg and others at the GPO, Cavalcanti declared that “when the early talkie directors put whole plays on the screen, they were forgetting the lesson which the barker had taught them — that the continuous utterance of words in the cinema is monotonous. More important, the preponderance of the speech element in the resulting film crushed out the other elements — visual interest, noise, and music.”⁹ On re-watching *Night Mail* (1936) and other GPO classics such as Cavalcanti’s own directorial project *Coal Face* (1935), what is striking is the economical use of W. H. Auden’s narration, which allows enough space for the visuals and non-verbal sound elements to find full expression. Cavalcanti’s argument becomes confused when he mentions that many early sound pictures contained uninterrupted music. It is not clear which films, or which national cinema, he was referring to here, but it is likely that he had in mind those part-talkies

⁸ Ibid., 86

⁹ Cavalcanti, ‘Sound in Films’, *Film*, (November 1939). ‘Barkers’ were live commentators in certain kinds of early film exhibition, much like the Japanese *benshi*.

which were little more than silent films with occasional dialogue.

Cavalcanti's anxiety was detectable in the wider film music profession, among composers, performers, and music directors nervous about the perceived redundancy of music now that dialogue was possible. Maurice Jaubert connected the problem with a new-found movement towards realism that surfaced with the coming of sound. Music, he asserts, enhanced the process of phenomenological transport in the silent cinema:

Moreover, since the [silent] cinema lacked that quality of literal accuracy represented by sound (human speech, real noises justified by the visual image, etc.) it avoided much more than it does to-day the *realism* now demanded of it. It was natural that music should have been required to accentuate still further this flight from the actual[.]¹⁰

Jaubert's implication is that there was a shift of outlook in the cinema from escapism and immersion in music and image, to a new mode of storytelling more grounded in real experience. It was this change that resulted in the initial reluctance to include extensive scores in many of the early sound pictures. Thus, an atmosphere of suspicion developed towards the use of any kind of music at all, noted by the jazz musician and journalist Spike Hughes, writing in 1936:

Music, in the commercial film, has played the part of a glorified Master of Ceremonies, keeping the audience amused during the long credit titles, adding a little atmosphere here and there to shots of landscape that should be accompanied by nothing but natural background sounds, if any. Perhaps this reluctance on the part of directors to use music in a big way is due to a fear of its distracting the audience's attention.¹¹

Hughes goes on to discuss the "rare pictures" in which music plays a more prominent role, and cites René Clair's *Le Million* (1931), Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936) and "a couple of Lubitsch pictures" as examples of this. In each of these, Hughes asserts, music was used for its comedy potential, "to give added point to comic situations, to enhance the speed of action unaccompanied by dialogue, to comment satirically, to stress some gag or other".¹² Clearly none of these examples are British productions, and *Le Million* and *Modern Times* are somewhat bizarre

¹⁰ Jaubert quoted in Davy, *Footnotes to the Film*, 101-2.

¹¹ Spike Hughes, 'Music in Films', *World Film News* 1, no.1 (1936): 26

¹² Ibid.

examples to draw upon. They hardly bear comparison, the latter having no dialogue and the former being a musical, a genre which carries its own musical codes and conventions and which should be discussed separately. Furthermore, Hughes's inclusion of *Modern Times* is curious since it appeared well into the middle of the decade, by which time the initial reluctance to use extensive scores was losing out to a more liberal attitude in both the US and Britain. Arthur Benjamin's take, meanwhile, was more pragmatic. Time consideration being a major factor in the development of scores under typically fraught post-production schedules, he noted that "[a]s much as thirty-five minutes (almost the length of a symphony) of music has been composed *and* scored for full orchestra in six days! So a symphonically complicated score is out of the question."¹³ If music could be produced in large quantities under tight deadlines, their musical complexity and sophistication might necessarily be compromised. Benjamin's assertion offers an alternative explanation to that which implicates dialogue as the principle hindrance to full musical expression.

More recently, Caryl Flinn asked whether dialogue might have given an unexpected new lease of life to music. Quoting Irwin Bazelon, she performs something of a conceptual somersault when she asks whether film music, in being used to enhance emotions as presented in image and dialogue — and therefore potentially being "*almost* composing" — might endow the music itself with significant meaning, otherwise its use would indeed be entirely redundant:¹⁴

[I]n the end, it is hard to consider the classical musical score to be as passive and inactive as these claims suggest. For at the same time that the score conveys a sense of deficiency or lack to its classical proponents, so too does it also offer them the promise of making good this lack.¹⁵

If music in the new sound era was so disposable, this argument seems to say, its rapidly-established ubiquity in the classic American scores makes no sense; its continued use verified its value. So, at the heart of the debate around dialogue scoring in Britain was whether the emotions running underneath dialogue needed musical expression. The issue confronts the 'added value' — to adapt Michel Chion's term — that might be brought to a sequence of spoken material when

¹³ Benjamin, 'Film Music', 95

¹⁴ Irwin Bazelon quoted in Caryl Flinn, *Strains of Utopia* (Princeton: PUP, 1992), 39

¹⁵ Flinn *Strains of Utopia*, 39

a dynamic score is placed under it, a synergy that was fast being embraced in mainstream Hollywood as the *lingua franca*.¹⁶

‘Mickey-mousing’ and close synchronisation: the US model and its critics

There are of course many examples of pictures that support Swynnoe’s contention that Hollywood-style underscoring is “nowhere to be found” in British films of the 1930s.¹⁷ However, seeking aesthetic deficiencies in the reticence of composers working in British films in the 1930s, especially in regard to dialogue (which is what is implied in much similar criticism, either intentionally or not), is problematic because it tends to suggest that the Hollywood model was somehow superior artistically, and more commercially and critically desirable. In fact, the evidence from other contemporary journalistic and critical writing points to quite the contrary, even among US critics. Fred Steiner observed of the film music criticism of the period,

[A]s the search for an ideal film music style went on, one of the most frequent subjects of debate was that of musical illustration. This technique, denoting a style of film music that closely follows changes of scene or mood (sometimes to the extent of changing with every shot) or that attempts to imitate and synchronize with actions on the screen, was to become a frequent target of scorn in the coming decade and even beyond.¹⁸

Steiner exposed the enormous antagonism among musicians towards the practice of ‘mickey-mousing’ in the sound film (“illustration” is the term he seems to prefer). Citing M.D. Calvorcoressi, George Antheil, Leonid Sabaneev, Maurice Jaubert and others, he produces an impressive chorus of voices against the practice. But after finally summoning Paul Bowles to testify (“To ask that music be synchronized as exactly as sound-effects is the same thing as asking that the execution of the dancer’s steps and gestures exist in some sort of fixed relation to the beat of the music, and not that they should merely come to pass during a given section of it”¹⁹), Steiner makes the crucial point, which is that where a practice is apparently frowned upon in contemporaneous journalistic or academic discourse, one can only assume that it was sufficiently common to be noted:

¹⁶ Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 221

¹⁷ Swynnoe, *The Best Years*, 127

¹⁸ Steiner, ‘What were musicians saying...?’, 86

¹⁹ Paul Bowles quoted in Steiner, ‘What were musicians saying...?’, 97

It is interesting to discover from Bowles that the polemics against synchronized or ‘illustrative’ music, which had begun during the infancy of the sound film, were still continuing at the end of the decade. This clearly indicates that the much-decried type of scoring was still being used in some quarters, despite the many declarations against it.²⁰

A respected music critic, Walter J. Turner wrote one such ‘declaration’ as late as 1940. On viewing an animated film, Turner was struck by the “badness of the music for a subject which to a composer of taste and some invention offered exceptional opportunities...But those who know the conditions under which music is manufactured for films will not be surprised at opportunities missed. The wonder is that anything tolerable in the way of music is ever produced at Hollywood.”²¹ When describing Hollywood’s musical culture Turner uses unflinchingly ‘industrial’ language, for example when he describes the convention of composers working with orchestrators: “This division of labour has proved extremely successful as a practical method of manufacture, and has resulted in a formidable degree of specialisation which is already proving a barrier to all further development. Like most efficient manufacturing methods it produces standardisation.”²² Standardisation is a dirty word for Turner: it means the removal of the individual artist and his or her own mode of expression and creative freedom. Perhaps the really alarming aspect of the Hollywood system for Turner was the irony that the development of Hollywood’s musical style was drawn from a late-19th century tradition that fetishized the individual artist; the very cornerstone of artistic endeavour for which Turner grieves. In this opinion he is joined by others, notably the dance historian Marian Hannah Winter, who hears in Hollywood an “exaggerated respect for the ‘symphonic’ approach — a concept that continues to account for some of the most exasperating and persistent atrocities in film music.”²³ These are unashamed critiques which penetrate the infrastructure of the business, and less than a decade later Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler’s Marxist treatise *Composing for the Films* again points a scornful finger directly at the close-synchrony of the Hollywood underscore. Music should not be required to provide emotion for a scene that is properly presented, because the emotion should

²⁰ Ibid., 97

²¹ Walter J. Turner, untitled article in *The New Statesman and Nation*, April 13, 1940. He is describing *Honeyland* (1935), an animated film about bees in the MGM *Happy Harmonies* series.

²² Ibid.

²³ Marian Hannah Winter, ‘The Function of Music in Sound Film’, *Musical Quarterly* 27, no.2. (1941): 164

already be there:

Illustrative use of music today results in unfortunate duplication. It is uneconomical, except where specific effects are intended, or minute interpretation of the action of the picture. The old operas left a certain amount of elbow room in their scenic arrangements for what is vague and indefinite; this could be filled out with tone painting. The music of the Wagnerian era was actually a means of elucidation. But in the cinema, both picture and dialogue are hyperexplicit. Conventional music can add nothing to the explicitness, but instead may detract from it, since even in the worst pictures standardized musical effects fail to keep up with the concrete elaboration of the screen action.²⁴

Eisler was famously furious at many of the practices that became habitual in the music departments of Hollywood studios, and this truculence informs the tone of the whole book.

Fragmentation

As American cinema consolidated its reliance on dialogue underscoring in the thirties, filmmakers and critics alike noticed a rapid divergence between the US and Britain in the field of film music as the decade drew on. But it was not simply that Hollywood developed the classic scoring system, seemingly fixated on dialogue underscore, while Britain stayed away. A more accurate description of the situation is that while American film composers underwent a process of homogenisation and stylistic concurrence that had begun well before the sound period, Britain's film music fragmented into a range of practices.²⁵

Budgetary considerations are always pertinent: compare the musicality and interdisciplinary nature of a well-funded film such as *Things to Come* (1936) with Michael Powell's near-contemporaneous quickie *The Phantom Light* (1935). The latter features only opening and closing title music, and nothing in between, despite several sequences of high tension and action in and around the 'haunted' lighthouse on the Welsh coast. These are examples of films that reward multiple views, that have artistic merit and longevity, and yet contrast significantly in the ways that music was budgeted and therefore utilised.

However, financial factors only go so far to explain the use of underscoring. Research into the views of critics, musicologists, and practitioners, reveals that in British scoring, composers had a

²⁴ Adorno and Eisler, *Composing for the Films*, 13

²⁵ See Slowik, *After the Silents*

remarkable degree of choice about how they approached a project. Leslie Perkoff, late in the decade, wrote on the subject of what he saw as the role of the film composer:

Music in its most profound use in the cinema must be in its rôle as an integral part of the cinematic scheme, in creating atmosphere and in developing emotional content. The success of this depends chiefly on the composer's willingness and initiative to throw overboard many of his orthodox methods of composition in the same way that the novelist-turned-scenarist might have to give up lengthy polemics and descriptive embellishments for the economic *tempo* of the film.²⁶

Perkoff takes aim at those composers whose techniques were learned in the tradition of European concert music. Indeed, the policy of hiring 'art' composers at the prestigious London Films nurtured links with the musical establishment and raised the status of film music, but their music chief Muir Mathieson's stance on the actual aesthetic *raison d'être* of the craft remained ambiguous. While he constantly lobbied for major concert composers to write for the medium, he also felt that their music should not rise above its station. Writing from London Films' recording facility at Denham Studios, he took a pragmatic, audience-aware approach when he stated that "[a]s things are now, pictures are designed to be seen only once".²⁷ Here the implication is that Mathieson's views lie in sympathy with the commonly held notion, interrogated by a wide range of critics, composers and filmmakers (Roy Webb, Hanns Eisler and, more recently, Claudia Gorbman among them) that film music should remain 'unheard'; that a movie score must not distract the audio-viewer's attention.²⁸ Mathieson, crucially, writes as a filmmaker and not as a musician, since he places himself in the shoes of the cinema-goer, whose sensibilities and priorities are generally not focused on the development of musical material but on narrative driven by the visual. Sound fidelity — or lack of it — was a major consideration for Arthur Benjamin, one of Mathieson's collaborators:

²⁶ Leslie Perkoff, 'Notes and Theories', *World Film News* (April 1937): 41

²⁷ Muir Mathieson, introduction to Huntley, *British Film Music*, 7

²⁸ Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films* (1947) (London: Athlone, 1994); Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (London: BFI & Bloomington: IUP, 1987)

The composer should put away any idea of using an orchestra in the Straussian, Elgarian, or even in the Debussian sense. Concert scoring and microphone scoring are vastly different. And although the latter would ‘come off’ in the concert-room, the former would often be muddy and dull through the ‘mike’. [...] Elaborate counterpoint or symphonic writing is entirely lost. Counterpoint, if used, should be extremely simple and clearly scored.²⁹

However, there were those who might have argued that dialogue underscoring, done with skill and sensitivity, does remain ‘unheard’ in a conscious sense. Ernest Irving, head of music at Ealing, allowed for the possibility of such techniques but only when done with subtlety and delicacy:

Now music to sound films is quite a different affair to the setting needed for the silent variety. It does not have to act as a substitute for dialogue, but, on the contrary, has to be kept down to a low level so that the words can be heard. What it can do, however, is to indicate the thoughts and emotions of the players and the essence of their emotional surroundings, and that is where the good composer comes in.³⁰

By placing commentary from journalists, composers, and music directors side-by-side as presented above, a common thread emerges. Composers had to eschew much of what they thought they knew about writing dramatic music if they were to write for film. The extent to which they embraced dialogue underscoring, however, remained varied.

Hitchcock and music

Several high-profile figures, some of whom later embraced dialogue underscoring as a key element of the film experience, were anything but supportive of the practice in the early thirties. Alfred Hitchcock’s name tends to return repeatedly to any discussion of the respective scoring styles in this period; he established himself in Britain in the thirties and fully matured in Hollywood, which makes him an intriguing figure from a musical point of view. Speaking as early as 1933, the director discussed what he saw as the rather reserved character of British film scores in the wake of the sound revolution. He was, as late as 1936, already known as a director

²⁹ Benjamin, ‘Film Music’, 95

³⁰ Irving, *Cue for Music*, 162

“who rarely depends on music, [yet] has a genius for using sound which many composers might envy.”³¹ However in an interview coinciding with the release of *Waltzes from Vienna* (1933) — a self-consciously musical film and now regarded as a minor work — Hitchcock demonstrated a clear enthusiasm for musical accompaniment:

The arrival of the talkies, as you know, temporarily killed action in pictures [...] but it did just as much damage to music. Producers and directors were obsessed by words. They forgot that one of the greatest emotional factors in the silent cinema was the musical accompaniment. They have gradually realised that action should still come first – that, talkies or not, they are still making motion pictures. But music as an artistic asset of the film is still sadly neglected.³²

Hitchcock’s remarks are interesting considering the musical approach adopted in his next two projects. Arthur Benjamin’s score for *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934) features atmospheric orchestral items for crowd and party scenes and very little non-diegetic accompaniment to moments of acute dramatic import (the famous Albert Hall sequence is a case of *diegetic* music providing dramatic energy, therefore taking an ambi-diegetic role). The violent and drawn-out denouement, containing several shifts in point-of-view and verbal exchanges, has no musical material until the end titles. Similarly, *The 39 Steps* (1935) — with probable musical contributions from Jack Beaver, Charles Williams, and Hubert Bath — features one exterior chase sequence cue, one moment of romantic underscore, and one other diegetic cue for an interior scene with little dialogue.³³ These disarmingly silent moments of high tension or action were so frequent in Hitchcock’s early sound films that they became something of a hallmark of his British style. In championing music as an “artistic asset”, on the evidence of these films Hitchcock largely fell shy of encouraging the non-diegetic underscoring of dialogue in the early 1930s, even though he apparently contradicts his own practice in suggesting that music can heighten mood:

[T]he first and obvious use [of music] is atmospheric. To create excitement. To heighten intensity. In a scene of action, for instance, when the aim is to build up

³¹ Winter, ‘Music in Sound Film’, 161

³² Stephen Watts, interview with Alfred Hitchcock, *Cinema Quarterly* 2, no.2 (1933)

³³ See Alexander Gleason’s comments in Appendix E. Gleason is one of the few researchers who has attempted to seriously ascertain the actual composers on these pictures.

to a physical climax, music adds excitement just as effectively as cutting [...]

Music can also be a background to a scene in any mood and a commentary on dialogue, but, frankly, I have not made up my mind about the function of music in relation to dialogue in general. I can only give specific instances where I think it might be profitably used.³⁴

Hitchcock was interested in the kinship between music and editing, and liked to emphasise that these processes should be ‘invisible’, so that storytelling is enabled and not inhibited. His vocabulary is self-consciously ‘musical’, making an analogy between editing and music: “[t]he purpose of both is to create the *tempo* and mood of the scene. And, just as the ideal cutting is the kind you don’t notice *as* cutting, so with music.”³⁵

Hitchcock’s works in the decade were key to establishing an atmosphere of experimentation, and thus contributing to the culture of pluralism that emerged in British scoring.³⁶ One moment in Hitchcock’s *Secret Agent* (1936) stands out as particularly subversive. During the second reel of the picture, two British spies (John Gielgud and Peter Lorre) enter a church to the sound of a low, sustained, dissonant cluster chord. Its disarming effect is increased by the fact that the audience is not given a full explanation of the sound for 2 minutes and 15 seconds, during which time it simply continues without change in dynamic level or otherwise. The source of the sound is hinted at when we see the back of the organist seated at his instrument. The two agents only realise that he is in fact dead when they approach and try to surprise him, at which point his hands fall limply off the keyboard, bringing the sound to an abrupt end. Hitchcock and his musical director Louis Levy generate here a quasi-musical effect which acts as underscore and sound design simultaneously, and whose ambi-diegetic location unnerves the audience. Similarly unsettling is the sequence late in the picture when the sounds of factory machinery completely dominate the *mise-en-bande*, breaking any expectation of chase music that might be conventionally appropriate, and thus placing the passage into the trend of early Hitchcock suspense moments that are devoid of music.³⁷

The Lady Vanishes (1938), with a score overseen by Levy but probably written by Charles

³⁴ Watts, interview with Alfred Hitchcock, *Cinema Quarterly*

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ See Jack Sullivan, *Hitchcock’s Music*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) and Elisabeth Weis, *The Silent Scream: Hitchcock’s Soundtrack* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1981)

³⁷ Arthur Benjamin judges the *Secret Agent* moment as an example of film music that “[t]he intelligent film-goer will remember”. Ironically, he seems to recall it inaccurately, implying that we see and hear the murdered man fall on to the keys. Benjamin, ‘Film Music’, 93

Williams, seems to show comparable ambivalence towards the underscoring of dialogue. Like similar moments in *The 39 Steps* and *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, Hitchcock and Levy choose not to score certain ‘sting’ points which arguably would have been integrated with music had the film been produced in the US at the time. The rediscovery of Miss Froy’s writing on the windowpane in the train’s buffet car, the appearance of the tea label, and the unveiling of the wrong woman under the bandages, are moments of dramatic import with dialogue which positively invite musical augmentation, yet are denied such assistance. Instead, music is used diegetically elsewhere, like the musicians rehearsing in the hotel during the first third of the picture, or Miss Froy’s spy-code melody, at first whistled by various characters and later reprised onscreen at the piano in the final scene. This theme is expanded for the closing flourishes, but there is no music at all in the great action showdown, the tension instead allowed to build through silences punctuated by gunshots and smatterings of dialogue.

Influences from France

The standpoint of those practitioners and critics addressing the risk of music’s interference in narrative was not a uniquely British one, but can be discerned in other European cinema traditions. Leonid Sabaneev wrote at length on what he viewed as the tasteful way to approach dialogue, opining that “[If] dialogue is divided into isolated phrases interrupted by silences of fairly long duration (three or four seconds), recourse may be had to the recitativo system: between the phrases little scraps of music of a similar fragmentary nature may be inserted.”³⁸ Meanwhile, French musicians working in film may have had an influence on many of the composers writing in Britain. In fact, the stance of a continental musician is perhaps an easier route into the psychology behind British film scoring of the period, since it often demonstrates a more experimental attitude that infiltrated not only the documentary sector (through the work of figures like Alberto Cavalcanti and Maurice Jaubert), but also those French directors who made pictures in Britain, even if those pictures were frequently comedies (both Marcel Carné and Marcel Varnel made light-hearted films in the UK in the thirties). French composers also wrote frequently in trade papers and other publications. Darius Milhaud, writing for an English-language journal, favoured a chamber music sound-world when approaching his scoring projects:

³⁸ Leonid L. Sabaneev, *Music for the Films*, trans. Pring (London: Pitman, 1935), 40

Film music must never be obtrusive. It should be a necessary function of the film, simple and sparing. Therefore I always use a small orchestra for film work. Too many instruments sound thick and confused when reproduced in the cinema.³⁹

Milhaud's remarks are indicative of the fact that French composers tended towards the low-key in their scores at the time: Milhaud's music has been described as "generally unobtrusive, except when the intention was that of satirical comment, and fitted to various situations very aptly", a sensibility that characterised much of the French output.⁴⁰ In 1936 Maurice Jaubert made the case for silence as an effective tool, but also seemed to associate what he calls the 'visuals' with sections that might contain dialogue as well:

In *The Lost Patrol* – otherwise an admirable film – the director was apparently alarmed by the silence of the desert in which the story was laid. He might well have realised the dramatic possibilities of silence, but instead he assaulted the ear – without a moment's pause – with a gratuitous orchestral accompaniment which nearly destroyed the reality of the visuals.

Another attitude was well illustrated in *The Informer* where music was used to imitate the noise of coins falling and even the gurgling of beer in a man's throat. This is not merely puerile, but a misconception of what music is, for it takes away its continuity and reduces it to the level of raw sound...[composers] should be reminded that we do not go to the films to hear music. We want music to give greater depth to our impressions of the visuals, but to add to them by *differing from them*. In other words, it should not be *expressive*, in the sense of adding its quota to the sentiments expressed by the actors or the director, but *decorative* in the sense of adding its own design to that proper to the screen.⁴¹

Jaubert does not fully distinguish between the 'visual' and dialogue: long stretches of a film can of course contain no vocalisation whatsoever but plenty of visual development. He makes a subtle distinction between the close alignment with, and consequent subordination of music to the onscreen action (including dialogue), and the *augmentation* of the scene by musical means.⁴² Jaubert's work on Marcel Carné's *Le Quai des Brumes* (1938) gives strength to his argument,

³⁹ Milhaud, interview in *World Film News* 1, no.1 (1936): 26

⁴⁰ Hubert Clifford, 'Music from the Films', *Tempo* 10 (1945): 11

⁴¹ Maurice Jaubert, 'Music and Film', *World Film News* 1, no.4 (1936): 31

⁴² Davy, *Footnotes to the Film*, 107

being a score that operates largely as a horizontal expression of underlying tensions and moods, and not in the vertical, close-synchrony mode. Music under dialogue does occur, but it does not illustrate specific conversational turns, which results in a score that “perfectly but undemonstratively heightens the dark, tense atmosphere.”⁴³

Jaubert called diegetic music “the ‘real’ music of a film (jazz in a night club, organ in a church) whose function is obvious”.⁴⁴ Indeed, some French scores from the period made intriguing use of the diegetic mode. In Jean Renoir’s *La Grande Illusion* (1935) Joseph Kosma and the music director Émile Vuillermoz provided a varied palette of musical ideas, with an unusual amount of diegetic material occurring even in the first reel (records playing in the bar, and even one playing at the wrong speed) after the march-like opening titles, and occasional transitional and action cues, but dialogue scoring kept to a minimum. In light of these examples from the practice of French film music, Jaubert’s article is, curiously, one of the most effective passages in terms of describing the *British* situation in the 1930s: a general tendency away from dialogue scoring but an inclusivity and sense of scope for experimentation.

Theory and practice in Britain

British views frequently concurred with those intellectual voices abroad railing against the musical habits developing in Hollywood. Even some of those seemingly at the forefront of mainstream commercial film production took a guarded stance on overly flamboyant scoring. Ealing’s music head, Ernest Irving, wrote that the composer’s art

must not be allowed to be a stumbling block or to prevent the enjoyment of the pictorial side by people who are not in sympathy with him. That implies that the music must always be subsidiary and ancillary and cannot be allowed to develop on formal lines for musical reasons only; it is not being played at a concert, its principle effect should be upon the subconscious mind, and if the film is a good film the music will be felt rather than listened to.⁴⁶

⁴³ Mark Brill, ‘Maurice Jaubert’ in *New Grove Dictionary*, XII/902

⁴⁴ Jaubert quoted in Davy, *Footnotes*, 107

⁴⁶ Irving, *Cue for Music*, 163

In a 1948 letter, during the scoring of *Scott of the Antarctic* (1948), Irving even wrote a poem to this effect, concerning the clumsy combination of vocal material in music with similar voices in dialogue. It humorously admonishes Ralph Vaughan Williams for not choosing contrasting orchestral tones in order to allow the spoken voices to be heard:

I very much regret to state
Your scheme for treating number 8
Has pulled us up with quite a jerk
Because we fear it will not work. [...]

Failure they meet, and ruin black
Who mix two voices on one track.
Choose then a horn or cello, which
Have different timbres, weight and pitch.⁴⁷

This is a rare glimpse into the audio-visual techniques of a major music director, and is also a fascinating moment of light-hearted and ultimately constructive criticism between an industry professional and a highly-respected composer of national-treasure status. Irving was a practitioner first and foremost, but others whose professional lives were almost entirely spent away from the scoring stage agreed. Kurt London expressed his opinion on the drawbacks of Hollywood-style underscoring by suggesting that if a scene cannot stand up on its own without music, then a composer can have limited impact: “It is an abuse of music to obtain with it any dramatic effect which should be achieved in any case, provided the situation be well founded, well acted, and well staged.”⁴⁸ It is notable that London, one of the few prominent writers on film music in Britain in the decade, was so vehemently against overblown underscoring of dialogue. London was a critic who, in largely ignoring Hollywood and writing about British film music, advocated a restrained approach: “As in the silent film, so in the sound-film, most of the traditional musical forms are useless. Yet it is much easier to have single detached pieces of music in the sound-film than in the silent film.”⁴⁹ It is a straightforward leap from this theoretical stance to the kinds of practices in scoring that encouraged the use of short set-piece cues rather

⁴⁷ Letter from Irving to Vaughan Williams, quoted by Hugh Cobbe, *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1895-1958* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), 423-4

⁴⁸ London, *Film Music*, 123

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 154

than extended passages of music moulded to the contours of dialogue.⁵⁰

Examples from the field serve to demonstrate some possible sources of London's discomfort. *The Divorce of Lady X* (1938) gave the young — and London-based — Miklós Rózsa an early opportunity for a Hollywood-style leitmotivic approach, assigning specific themes to each of the two main protagonists. In the comic scene during which Laurence Olivier's barrister meets Merle Oberon's mysterious young lady for the first time, Rózsa's music see-saws between the two characters quite clearly according to their respective onscreen time. John Huntley proclaimed his enthusiasm for Rózsa's approach, calling it "a light, witty and humorous score, delightfully offsetting the slick comedy of the long, opening, bedroom sequence with wailing brass, grunting bassoons and trilling flutes in the Walt Disney style."⁵¹ Mervyn Cooke has noted Rózsa's tendency toward angular rhythm and a high level of dissonance, betraying a close kinship with his fellow Hungarians Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály.⁵² Certainly, his music for *Knight Without Armour* (1937) exploits these characteristics in cues imitating Siberian winds and the ghostly arrival of a non-existent train. It might be suggested further that even in the context of light-hearted moments such as the bedroom scene in *The Divorce of Lady X*, Rózsa engineers a subtle language of comedic dissonance while maintaining thematic precision, a system that would inform the development of his mature style. Thus, in Zoltan Korda's war epic *The Four Feathers* (1939) he imbued the desert scenes with imaginative eerie symphonic textures, and hinted at a Hollywood sensibility that, from the perspective of a modern audience, matches the sweep and scope of the picture. In *Thunder in the City* (1937), as Edward G. Robinson's advertising executive negotiates the grand staircase of the English castle he has come to visit, Rózsa indulges in the kind of 'mickey-mousing' that had already become ubiquitous in US scoring. His music mirrors Robinson's descent down the staircase and his pauses on the landings, and continues to reflect his exploration of various rooms and doorways as he tries to get back to the family gathering downstairs.

But his work on *Thunder in the City* taught Rózsa that sound reproduction was anything but perfect, and while recordists famously struggled to capture clean dialogue on set, composers

⁵⁰ Jan Swynnoe's interview with Roy Douglas is enlightening in its exposure of Douglas's surprising lack of awareness of the Hollywood style and its contrasting treatment of dialogue when set alongside many of the films on which Douglas worked. Swynnoe brings up the subject of American *recitative*-style underscoring and Douglas seems not to have thought about this before (Douglas's advanced age at the time of the interview should be born in mind). See Swynnoe, *The Best Years*, Appendix.

⁵¹ Huntley, *British Film Music*, 41

⁵² Cooke, *A History*, 111

found themselves in the frustrating position of having to write their scores with the eccentricities of recording apparatus in mind; indeed, sound quality was a key factor in the difficulties surrounding dialogue scoring. Rózsa described his naivety regarding these considerations, and how he occasionally had to check the prominence of his underscoring:

When I came to do the music for *Thunder in the City* I made any number of novice's 'howlers'. In one scene an English family was taking tea outside on the lawn, all talking animatedly. This I underscored with an energetic scherzo for full orchestra. The director patiently explained to me that in order to allow the dialogue to be heard the music would need to be dubbed at such a low level that all we would hear would be a vague irritation of upper frequencies, principally the piccolo. So, far from enhancing the scene, the music would merely distract the audience.⁵³

So for Rózsa, technical factors regarding the avoidance of an overcrowded sound-strip contributed to the development of his approach to dialogue. But the characteristics of voices depend on the actors, and in some pictures like *Things to Come*, as Jan Swynnoe notes, “the extraordinary, grand rhetorical style of the actors’ delivery [...] gives an opportunity for a far more extravagant underscoring than would be possible for most dialogue scenes even from that period of British film making, when vocal inflection was generally less realistic than it came to be in subsequent decades.”⁵⁵ In an industry wherein sound technology was advancing at a rapid rate, composers had to negotiate the constantly shifting sands of sound fidelity on the one hand and the variables of voice characteristics on the other.

Rózsa was one of the more Hollywood-inclined composers working in the UK, and his subsequent move to the US confirmed his sensibilities, but other British composers made integrated efforts to bring music into the fabric of the narrative via dialogue underscoring. Richard Addinsell’s scores for *Dark Journey* (1937) and *Fire Over England* (1937) are valuable additions to the British portfolio of work that gave a nod to Golden Era aesthetics.⁵⁶ An

⁵³ Rózsa, *Double Life*, 81

⁵⁵ Swynnoe, *The Best Years*, xiii

⁵⁶ Addinsell incorporates the German national anthem in scenes featuring German soldiers and diplomats in a manner that was to become commonplace in Hollywood war films. (In the same year as *Dark Journey*, Miklós Rózsa did the same with the US and British anthems in *Thunder in the City*, in a transitional sequence during which the protagonist travels from America to Britain. The ‘Star Spangled Banner’ is repeated in a manner that implies disintegration or a fading-away, and it is triumphantly replaced by ‘Rule Britannia’ as he arrives.) At the end of the decade, Ealing released *The Four Just Men* (1939), a First World War thriller that exploits recognisable nation-specific musical themes in much the same way.

espionage thriller starring Vivien Leigh and Conrad Veidt as two spies who fall in love, *Dark Journey* begins with boldly experimental opening titles: contrasting themes compete against one other with a jarring quality that is clearly intentional. In one sense this takes the stage-overture form as its blueprint (offsetting different themes is standard in show openers, and was a routine device in film) but like the plight of the characters in the story, one feels that this sequence lacks a secure identity. Just when a musical phrase is settling down, it is replaced by another seemingly unrelated piece, with no effort to create a smooth transition. Frequent diegetic cues — dance bands, concerts, singing sailors — embellish the soundtrack. *Dark Journey* certainly raises the dialogue-scoring game, risking long passages of music under important spoken exchanges. In a key late revelation scene, the music is mixed low, but Addinsell's music recapitulates themes from earlier in the picture, which draws his sensibilities closer to the American model of a unified work. This material develops through the whole conversation until the end of the scene, when a visual cut introduces diegetic material. However, again Addinsell stops just short of punctuating key sentences or words. The underscore is just shy of the recitative style referred to by Sabaneev above.

There is a particularly daring moment in the historical drama *Fire Over England* when the character of Elizabeth I seems to break the diegetic boundary and interrupt Addinsell's score. Flora Robson's Queen walks in on a romantic encounter and the music is cut mid-phrase, clearly intentionally. Furthermore, Addinsell's music showed a tendency to mark dialogue scenes with a personal touch. In *Goodbye, Mr Chips* (1939), his music directly imitates Robert Donat's vocal intonation when the actor calls "Are you in danger?" during the mountainside scene. The score also demonstrates skill at manipulating montage sequences that show the passing of time and the flow of memories during the eponymous character's daydreams. The film and its music are infused with the gathering storm of late-1930s politics; Mr Chips looks on helplessly as his former pupils leave school only to be slaughtered in the Great War, and the contemporary significance is not lost in Addinsell's more solemn moments. The richness of its score could be attributed to the American influence in the screening room, but it is more likely that Addinsell felt that he wanted to write with slightly broader brushstrokes because of the subject matter.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ *Goodbye, Mr Chips*, like the appropriately titled *A Yank at Oxford* (1938), was made in Britain but bankrolled by M-G-M. See Thomson, *The Big Screen*, 182

A notable mid-thirties sci-fi picture, Maurice Elvey's *The Tunnel* (1935) features a significant amount of underscoring by Hubert Bath, for example in the section depicting the deadly 'tunnel sickness' that befalls workers on an Atlantic tunnel project, and there are clear sync points with onscreen physical events. Bath, a member of Louis Levy's stable at Gaumont who had written dramatic photoplay music during the silent era, interweaves well-known tunes into his score in a manner that would not seem out of place in US productions of the time (the 'Star Spangled Banner' is used in the opening titles). Bath's material throughout the picture is on a grand scale, and utilises a sinewy tonal palette influenced by Richard Strauss. He turned out a similar score in *The Great Barrier* (1937) (a great engineering project, this time the construction of a railroad across Canada, forms the backbone of the plot). There is a great deal of intricately orchestrated music, often of a 'Western' generic flavour, and substantial underscoring. This follows on from earlier efforts such as *Doctor Syn* (1937) which also features extensive underscoring by Bath and Jack Beaver.

Meanwhile, at Ealing, the scope for complex dramatic scoring was broader than might be supposed in light of its reputation as a comedy stable. Early works like *Escape!* (1930) feature only title music and occasional cues, but as the decade progressed, musical exploration became more pronounced. The studio was the training ground for Carol Reed, whose work for Ealing included the romantic drama *Brief Ecstasy* (1937). Its resemblance to *Brief Encounter* (1945) is notable: not only are their titles strikingly similar, but they also narrate how an illicit affair plays out in the context of respectable English society. Lawrence Napper wrote of the tendency to view films as cultural and moral guardians through analysing pictures such as *Little Friend* (1934):

British films of the interwar period have enjoyed a particularly dolorous reputation over the years, not only in terms of their status as effective cinema, but also in the assumption that they are ideologically concerned only to maintain the social and cultural *status quo*. Even sympathetic critics view the British cinema of these years as performing a broadly conservative function. [...] ⁵⁸

Music is used in these films as an expressive conduit for love, guilt, torment, and ultimately some form of moral awakening and closure. The music is also complicit in having a role in the

⁵⁸ Lawrence Napper, *British Cinema and Middlebrow Culture in the Interwar Years* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2009), 6-7

process Napper describes above. While *Brief Encounter* famously used Rachmaninov as its sonic backdrop to great effect, *Brief Ecstasy* relies on some careful and delicately judged original scoring. The central action sequence, a plane crash, is not scored, in a decision reminiscent of much of Hitchcock's output of the time, but the moment of crisis for Mr Bernady (Paul Lukas), whose wife (Linden Travers) is in love with another man, is carefully and sensitively underscored. *Brief Ecstasy* reminds us that in the thirties, the development of what has later been identified by Molly Haskell and others as the 'woman's film' can be discerned in this and others like it, such as the critically acclaimed *Little Friend* (1934).⁵⁹ Ernst Toch's work on *Little Friend* was unashamedly modernist. Chromatic and sinewy, it emphasised the anxiety and horror in the mind of Felicity, whose parents' relationship is breaking down, and remains one of the finest examples of modernist dramatic scoring from the decade.⁶⁰

Pragmatism and experimentation

While Kurt London, Adorno and Eisler raged against over-cooked dialogue scoring, others took a more philosophical, optimistic approach, asking how film music might find maturity beyond the underscoring issue. A more nuanced assessment thus becomes possible when one finds critics who neither dismiss wholeheartedly the British approach nor embrace it as the only alternative to the Hollywood model. This was key to the development of a varied aesthetic scoring scene in the decade, and of the creation of a space where experimentation was possible. The British composer Walter Leigh found in film music the potential for a unified art form that raises the standards of both music and film:

Now that synchronized sound is no longer a novelty, there are signs of the development of a new technique in the use of sound, not merely as an explanation to the ear of what the eye is watching, or as a background to keep the ear pleasantly occupied while the eye devotes itself to the action, but as a part of the action itself, as expressive in its own way as the visuals, and a necessary complement to them. And it is in this field that the musician can prove of direct use in the making of a film, and take a more responsible part than hitherto.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Altman, *Film/Genre*, 73. Controversial and disputed, and often a term used disparagingly, at its most basic the 'woman's film' has a female character at its centre; she engages in some kind of longing, or attempts at wish-fulfilment, sometimes sacrificing something in the process.

⁶⁰ *Little Friend*, and Christopher Isherwood's experience working on its script, was the inspiration for his 1945 novel about the film industry, *Prater Violet*.

⁶¹ Walter Leigh quoted in Steiner, 89

Although Leigh was one of the composers who had a freer hand, and was fortunate in having significant clout in the formation of audio-visual material, he was famously pragmatic and far from anti-populist. Furthermore, while much critical opinion seemed to argue against the Hollywood idiom, it did not at all preclude versatility or pragmatism in British film scoring. Britain's melting pot offered some pictures that aligned themselves with US scoring, and other approaches antithetical or in conflict with it, including films wherein music became a *more* prominent character than dialogue. In a letter written in 1937, the poet Roderic Papineau wrote about the use of music in *Moonlight Sonata* (1937), a film in which the pianist (and later politician) Ignacy Jan Paderewski plays himself:

Incredible though it may seem, the first twenty minutes of this picture contain no dialogue and no natural sound, only the post-recorded piano music. This becomes a fault when, as here, there is no visual development of story, emotion, atmosphere or even incident. [...] The trade-show audience applauded dutifully each routine portion of genius as it was doled out, but they should have been hissing these monied charlatans who call themselves film makers. [...] Has it occurred to Pall Mall Productions that Paderewski was once prime minister of Poland? That the melody of his music should be moulded as an epic undertone to the strife of his life?⁶²

Moonlight Sonata is an unusual case, but is indicative of the kind of picture that took its own audio-visual course, untroubled by any consideration of what might be considered 'mainstream'. Indeed, the fragmentation and dispersal of production companies, budget structures, and skillsets within crews that existed in Britain meant that no single style prospered over any other.

Experiment was evident in unexpected places. Jack Beaver collaborated with Hubert Bath on several horror scores under Louis Levy throughout the decade (it will probably never be known exactly which cues should be attributed to whom). One critically-praised work, Gainsborough's *The Man Who Changed His Mind* (1936), features some of the longest and most detailed cues to be found in the whole pre-war sound period. The picture stars Boris Karloff as an eccentric scientist who discovers how to transplant the mind and personality of one person into another's body. The score is vast and intricately synchronized, and features an intriguing section of ambi-

⁶² Roderic Papineau, letter in *World Film News* (July 1937): 31

diegetic scoring during the monkey experiment scene.⁶³ Two monkeys of contrasting temperaments have their minds swapped, proving the scientist's predictions correct. As the first monkey — good-natured — is brought into the laboratory, Clayton (Donald Calthrop) sits at a nearby piano and clearly responds musically to the scene, his head turned towards the animal and the actors. It is a striking moment, for a number of reasons. The subtext of the film is an ontological investigation into human identity. In having a character 'score' this scene (ambi-) diegetically, we understand that character to be doing something essentially human, aesthetic, subjective, and unscientific. After the first monkey has been placed on the apparatus, the second monkey is introduced, and this animal has an angry, unpredictable nature. The non-diegetic orchestral score begins, as if the real essence of the scene is to be musically framed. The casual and informal nature of the piano score is supplanted by serious and authorial orchestral narrative. Bath and Beaver were already experienced in a range of scoring challenges, and provide a score for *The Man Who Changed His Mind* that works on several levels: it functions firstly as a convincing and complex, classically-inclined horror score, complete with leitmotivic development and effective underscoring; but it also manipulates diegetic levels to a degree of sophistication that denotes the composers' skill in audio-visual response.



Fig 11a, 11b Ambi-diegetic scoring: *The Man Who Changed His Mind* (1936)

⁶³ 'Ambi-diegetic' can be used to describe music that goes beyond its diegetic mode to comment on or further the narrative, much as non-diegetic music might.

Gainsborough (and Gaumont, its affiliated company) was indeed one of the few companies to make horror pictures.⁶⁴ *The Ghoul* (1933) features a substantial contribution from the composer Leighton Lucas; Maurice Elvey's *The Clairvoyant* (1935), a supernatural drama about a showman (Claude Rains) who discovers he can predict the future, was scored more sparingly by Arthur Benjamin. Both scores were completed under Levy's watch, but Lucas' score is the more interesting for its size and scope. Stravinskian gestures to denote paganism and exotic dissonances to underscore the scenes concerning an Egyptian deity are woven into a leitmotivic scheme.

William Walton experimented with ambi-diegetic dramatic scoring in *Escape Me Never* (1935), comparable to that described in *The Man Who Changed His Mind* above. Paul Czinner's film concerns the relationship between Gemma (Elisabeth Bergner) and a young composer, Sebastian (Hugh Sinclair). As Gemma returns to their flat after discovering Sebastian's affair, he is playing one of his compositions at the piano. The music closely shadows her mood and the slowness of her movements, and neatly straddles the diegetic divide.⁶⁵ Walton later developed this technique of anchoring music diegetically but allowing it to infiltrate the non-diegetic sphere in the play scene in Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet* (1948); there he fashioned a cue which merged on-stage/on-screen music with non-diegetic orchestral material, a scene which inspired articles from Mathieson, Hans Keller and others.⁶⁶ Susana Walton confided in her memoirs that the composer's work on *Escape Me Never* "helped to pay the mortgage during the composition of the First Symphony, but, as [William] would say, it nearly drove him to a lunatic asylum."⁶⁷

Contrasting productions made simultaneously by another major company, London Films, serve to demonstrate that there was a significant amount of variation in musical approach even within the same studio's remit. Here, Muir Mathieson oversaw a constantly shifting series of collaborations between composers and directors who responded in unique ways to each project. *Action for Slander* (1937) and *Elephant Boy* (1937) could not be more different either in their subject matter or their scoring. The former, a legal drama about a soldier trying to clear his name after he is accused of cheating at cards, restricts itself to music only at transition points. Cues are

⁶⁴ Adam Burton and Steve Chibnall, *Historical Dictionary of British Cinema* (Plymouth: Scarecrow, 2013), 181

⁶⁵ Conducting the score for *Escape Me Never* was Hyam Greenbaum (husband of Sidonie Goosens), who died of alcoholism seven years later at the age of 41, after losing a child.

⁶⁶ See Alexis Bennett, 'The Ghost of Early Music in Walton's *Hamlet*', *Historični Seminar* 9 (2011): 131-146

⁶⁷ Susana Walton, *William Walton: Behind the Façade* (Oxford: OUP, 1988), 87

placed to accompany title cards for new locations: Paris, Monte Carlo, etc. Some diegetic cues occur in party scenes where a dance band is called for. There is no composer credit on *Action for Slander*, but Mathieson is named as Musical Director, implying that he used stock music or rearranged existing music himself. John Greenwood's score for *Elephant Boy*, in contrast, contains extensive mickey-mousing and expressive illustration of onscreen events. The exotic story of an Indian boy who has a close connection with elephants (from Rudyard Kipling) set in rural India, and with long sections that serve as little more than wildlife footage, *Elephant Boy* is an oddity whose 'otherness' seems to have opened up musical possibilities. In transplanting the action from the familiar to the far-away, the composer is allowed, or allows himself, a flamboyance that stands in contrast to more restrained work such as *Action for Slander*. Later in the decade, the same company's *Q Planes* (1939) boasts more music than *Action for Slander* but there is again no composer credit. Stock music by various British-based composers, including Addinsell, is used to minimise budget pressure. Interestingly though there is room for instances of romantic comedy underscore but predictably there are no sting points because the music was not written for these scenes specifically.

While Hollywood's classical style of underscoring consolidated itself into something akin to a standard practice, the British scene departed from homogeneity largely through its reluctance to treat dialogue in quite the same manner 'across the board'. The purpose in this chapter has been to show that this situation should not necessarily invite a judgement based on apparent aesthetic inferiority simply because there was *less* music, or *less* 'illustration' of the spoken word in the early sound film. Furthermore, in some films there was in fact a quantity of music comparable to any given contemporaneous US production, but its craft was palpably different, and its sense of purpose formulated from a slightly different set of priorities. Critical and journalistic writing of the decade and the years immediately following it was overwhelmingly sceptical of the merits of the dialogue scoring style that had already established itself in the US industry; this reflected the practice of many in the UK who chose to score films in a variety of ways appropriate to the material in hand.

Chapter 6

Documentary Scores from the Archives

Much of this thesis has been concerned with music written for theatrical feature films, both ‘quality’ and ‘quota’, in their wide variety of generic forms. However, a vibrant and pioneering movement had been developing alongside widely distributed cinema, motivated by the aesthetic drive and leftist politics of documentary makers, many of whom found funding from State institutions like the General Post Office (GPO). Their films and music were to have wide-reaching impact. Indeed, the academic bias against British dramatic film music in the thirties comes partly from an ingrained habit of setting it against documentaries. The consensus was setting in early, as evidenced by Marian Hannah Winter in 1941:

British film music would be an almost negligible factor were it not for the British documentary film. Government subsidized, John Grierson and Alberto Cavalcanti have directed vigorous, exciting, and beautiful fact pictures. Here the composer's grasp of all the component sound-track elements can create effects far beyond those imposed by a story film.⁶⁸

Documentaries of the 1930s, often shorter in length than the main features they frequently supported in cinema exhibition, provided directors and composers with more scope for experimentation. The companies that produced them were smaller, more autonomous, and less reliant on box office returns as a measure of success. The field attracted composers and other creatives from leftist, bohemian circles, those whose approach to film prioritised artistic expression and social commentary over financial gain.

This chapter takes as its case studies two pictures in this genre, one of which is a lesser-known example. Their manuscript scores survive, alongside substantial archives of correspondence and documentation. The discussion that follows demonstrates the importance of audio-visual archives in tracing the working methods of composers in the field. The films and their scores engage in

⁶⁸ Winter, ‘Music in Sound Film’, 161

the documenting of foreign cultures, exotic peoples who lived under the auspices of the British Empire. *Five Faces* (1938) and *Song of Ceylon* (1934) are representative examples of this kind of documentary, featuring scores by Francis Chagrin and Walter Leigh respectively. As examples of musical ‘orientalism’ in practice, they act as key illustrations of colonial discourse in film music. The chapter opens with a discussion of some of the other significant figures working in documentaries, assessing their impact on the British scoring scene.

Context: Grierson, Britten, Cavalcanti, Jaubert

Documentary films were made on small budgets, distributed as support for main features, and screened alongside news reels or animated shorts. John Grierson, a major figure in the movement, and one whose work will be discussed at length here, fought hard to get them made and seen:

The market (particularly the British market) is stacked against [documentaries]. With two-feature programmes the rule, there is neither the space for the [documentary] short and the Disney and the magazine, nor money left to pay for the short. But by good grace, some of the renters throw in the short with the feature. This considerable branch of cinematic illumination tends, therefore, to be the gift that goes with the pound of tea; and like all gestures of the grocery mind it is not very liable to cost much.⁶⁹

Grierson did not distrust the ability of dramatic filmmakers to make great films so much as suspect their lowbrow intentions: “There is nothing (except the Woolworth intentions of the people who run them) to prevent the studios going really high in the manner of theatre or the manner of the fairy tale.”⁷⁰ But what really interested Grierson was the portrayal of ‘real life’, something which narrative film would always compromise. He attempted a definition of the documentary process, calling it “the creative interpretation of actuality”,⁷¹ and in the titles discussed below the use of music does indeed help to elevate the real into the dramatic, the quotidian into the poetic. In studying 1930s documentary films and their music, it must be borne in mind that many practitioners involved in their making were just as suspicious as Grierson of

⁶⁹ John Grierson quoted in *The Documentary Film Movement: An Anthology*, ed. Ian Aitken (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 82

⁷⁰ Grierson, *ibid.*, 84

⁷¹ Grierson, ‘The Documentary Producer’, *Cinema Quarterly*, 2, no.1 (1933): 8

the perceived decadence of narrative cinema and its subsidiary culture. Andrew Higson notes the importance of the documentary-realist tradition in this context:

In order to make further sense of the documentary idea, it is necessary to relate its development to another ideological struggle taking place on the terrain of cinema: the struggle to establish an authentic, indigenous national cinema in response to the dominance of Hollywood, or rather to the idea of Hollywood as an irresponsible cinema of spectacle and 'escapism'. In part, this is bound up with the more generalised fear of an encroaching mass culture, against which must be erected, in this case, a responsible and artistically respectable cinema.⁷²

Considering the discussion of quota quickies in Chapter 4, the discourse of what Higson here calls "artistically respectable" cinema, is relevant to the tension between 'high' and 'low' forms of cinema. The modernist sensibilities that characterised much European art, concert music, and some sections of filmmaking of the 1920s, infiltrated British documentary cinema in the following decade, resulting in an aesthetic field that positively encouraged the intensification of music's authorial voice in a more equal relationship with visual elements. This is a development that will be explored below. But despite the perceived divide between high and low cinema, those who made dramatic feature films for the larger studios were sometimes inspired by the efforts of documentarians, particularly the young Michael Powell, whose *Red Ensign* (1934) is clearly inspired by Grierson's work.⁷³

The United Kingdom was not the only centre of documentary excellence. A comparably rich, but far more sinister, body of work was building up in Germany, led by Leni Riefenstahl and funded by the Nazis; music was used there as a rousing support for the propagandist agenda of the filmmakers. The British critic David Thomson reminds us of Riefenstahl's *Triumph des Willens* (1935), and of Herbert Windt's music, "as rousing as any score by Hollywood's Max Steiner."⁷⁴ However, while Thomson finds common ground between music used for direct political persuasion through post-Wagnerian scoring of films of ideological indoctrination, and the manipulative musical accompaniment of classic Hollywood, British documentary located its

⁷² Andrew Higson, "'Britain's outstanding contribution to the film': the documentary realist tradition", in *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema*, ed. Charles Barr, (London: British Film Institute, 1986), 74

⁷³ The author J. B. Priestley saw the documentarians as the superior tribe: "Grierson and his young men, with their contempt for easy big prizes and soft living, their taut social conscience, their rather Marxist sense of the contemporary scene always seemed to me at least a generation ahead of the dramatic film people." J. B. Priestley quoted in Scott Anthony, 'GPO Film Unit: 1933-1940', screenonline.org.uk/film/id/464254/

⁷⁴ Thomson, *The Big Screen*, 102

own audio-visual territory, finding its influences in the political left and the artistic *avant-garde*. Perhaps ironically, the films they made were often State-funded and with a propagandist impulse. For composers, working under John Grierson was always going to be a different experience to that of scoring for commercial studios like Gaumont, London, or Ealing. When building the company in the 1920s Grierson sought young, university educated, socialist-leaning thinkers, not necessarily those who were film-literate or skilled in filmmaking. He wanted his ‘documentaries’ (a term he coined in 1926 when reviewing Robert Flaherty’s *Moana*) to tell the ‘truth’, and that usually meant exposing the inherent interdependency of the working class and the ruling classes in Britain in a society of great inequality, and under social circumstances in which there existed a massive wealth gap: that the format emerged in the depressed 1930s is no coincidence.⁷⁵ Grierson aimed to subvert the familiar tropes of narrative film by portraying the ‘working man’ as heroic. Harry Watt, a key figure in Grierson’s staff who joined shortly after *Drifters* (1929) was completed, remarked that they were “putting the British working man, the backbone of the country, on to the screen. Before that he was the comic relief in these ghastly British films.”⁷⁶ But crucially, Grierson was concerned that his films must not be negative in tone. His films are characterised by optimistic and respectful depictions of everyday working life. This was partly dictated by the guidance of the Empire Film Board, and later the GPO, whose remit was ultimately to fund pictures that celebrated British industry.

From the outset, Grierson took music seriously as a key element in the filmmaking process. His interest in music as a craft that could be practised in close alignment with other arts can be discerned in his early visit to the USA. There he became close to the painter Rudolph Weisenborn, whose eclectic outlook led to the creation of a movement called ‘neo-Arlimusic’ (art-literature-music), in which Grierson showed great interest.⁷⁷ He began recruiting composers later, when the GPO’s move to premises in Blackheath coincided with the company’s full exploitation of the potential of sound. Composers had “fewer limitations placed on them by the documentary form than by the plot and dialogue of feature films; and they work[ed] in greater equality with the other creative members of the crew.”⁷⁸ Rachael Low admires the GPO’s

⁷⁵ Jack C. Ellis, *John Grierson: Life, Contributions, Influence* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 28

⁷⁶ Harry Watt, interviewed in *Britain Through a Lens: The Documentary Film Mob* (2011)

⁷⁷ Ellis, *John Grierson*, 23

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 80

“enterprising choice of musicians”, which “continued to be unusual and adventurous” into the latter part of the decade.⁷⁹ Low reserves special praise for composers such as Ernest H. Meyer, recently arrived from Berlin, whose score for *Roadways* (1937) “made an important contribution to the film with its dissonances and odd rhythms [...] [Meyer] had a special interest in the combination of music and sound effects”, much like Alberto Cavalcanti, Walter Leigh, and the British composer most famously associated with the GPO, Benjamin Britten.⁸⁰

Britten’s well-known music written for GPO pictures such as *Coal Face* (1935) and *Night Mail* (1936) delighted in the poetic intertwining of text, music and images of working life. Accounts vary as to how Britten became involved in the GPO Film Unit. Low claims that “it was Grierson who found Britten by the simple expedient of asking at the Royal College of Music for a promising young composer.”⁸¹ This is a completely feasible explanation, as is the suggestion that he was recommended by a contemporary music specialist at the BBC.⁸² Whatever the circumstances, he was drawn to the progressive values enshrined in the company, and his music became integral to the pictures he scored.

The close alignment of music and image, in parallel with W. H. Auden’s words, in the Britten/Grierson projects is best understood in the context of the latter’s essentially *musical* manner of thinking about film. A significant formal influence on Grierson was Walter Ruttmann’s silent *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (1927), whose juxtapositions and editing rhythms were in turn informed by the exciting innovations associated with Soviet montage. Grierson’s admiration of Ruttmann’s work, taking a cue from its title, is peppered with musical terms translated to film:

Insofar as the film was principally concerned with movements and the building of separate images into movements, Ruttmann was justified in calling it a symphony. It meant a break away from the story borrowed from literature, and from the play borrowed from the stage. [...] The symphonists have found a way of building such matters of common reality into very pleasant sequences. By uses of tempo and rhythm, and by the large-scale integration of single effects, they capture the eye and impress the mind [...] The symphonic form is concerned with the orchestration of movement. It sees the screen in terms of flow and does not permit the flow to be broken.⁸³

⁷⁹ Rachael Low, *Documentary and Educational Films of the 1930s*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979), 103, 143

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 115

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 79

⁸² Miguel Mera, Programme note for *Coal Face*, *The King’s Stamp*, and *Night Mail*. May 20, 2009.

⁸³ Grierson quoted in Aitken, *The Documentary Film Movement*, 89

In the films scored by Benjamin Britten at the GPO, one can hear and see a sense of intimate chemistry between the rhythm of editing and the flow of music that was directly inspired by the ‘musical’ visual composition of *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt*. Britten’s contribution to *Coal Face* enhances the kinaesthetic effect that the filmmakers are striving to achieve: his score is sufficiently entangled with the images and the narration that the hard edges of the rhythmic material and orchestration are vividly descriptive of the daily toils of the miners. Crucially, once Britten had dabbled in narrative feature film scores he was sufficiently disillusioned by the experience to cause him to focus exclusively on documentaries as the only film work he completed for the rest of his career. Yet even these were a formidable challenge: “I spend the whole blessed day slogging at the film music in my room with a watch in one hand and a pencil in the other trying to make what little ideas I have synchronise with the seconds.”⁸⁴

Other key figures emerged alongside Grierson and Britten. Brazilian-born Alberto Cavalcanti (who was prominently involved in *Coal Face*) was one of the pioneering craftsmen in documentaries. A director and editor in addition to his ground-breaking sound work, he was, according to Basil Wright, “fed up with the low-grade talkies being made in Paris [and] had come over to London and tied in with Grierson.”⁸⁵ But his impact on the GPO was of a slightly different hue to that of the Scot. An association with the surrealists and background in architecture meant that while Grierson’s creative choices were often political and polemic, Cavalcanti brought a purer aesthetic sensibility:

To this day, people who care about such things debate whether his undeniable influence on the Film Unit was for good or ill. In broad terms, the young directors who came under his sway felt freed to move away from the earnest, didactic, socially engaged spirit that Grierson had fostered, and were encouraged towards both formal experimentation and towards a spirit that might best be summed up as “poetic”.⁸⁶

Certainly, Cavalcanti’s association with the experimental animator and kinetic artist Len Lye, on one of the latter’s short films, *Rainbow Dance* (1936) exposed Cavalcanti to a form in which

⁸⁴ Benjamin Britten diary entry, May 1, 1935. Quoted in Mera, programme note for *Coal Face*.

⁸⁵ Basil Wright, BCW 1 / 4:9

⁸⁶ Kevin Jackson, ‘Our Debt to Alberton Cavalcanti’, *The Guardian*, July 3, 2010

music and image are presented alone, with little or no spoken element.⁸⁷ Cavalcanti, an unusual figure due to a career which straddled surrealist fiction and hyper-realist documentary, felt that music had lost its way after the introduction of sound precisely because it no longer held the monopoly, with facial expression, on the ability to emote directly.⁸⁸ So, with minds like Cavalcanti working in its midst, this mid-decade period was a fruitful one across the documentary genre and for some composers the sector represented a space where ideas that might have withered in feature films could flourish.

Others came into the international atmosphere of collaboration, including the French composer Maurice Jaubert.⁸⁹ In December 1936 Jaubert arrived in London and gave a talk on film music, “which remains to this day a definitive text on the subject”, and his music for Cavalcanti’s documentary *We Live in Two Worlds* (1937) was one of the works that he composed and recorded during his stay.⁹⁰ The kind of picture that Grierson might have described as a ‘lecture film’, it is based around a talk by J. B. Priestley focusing on Switzerland and the national character that Priestley observed in that country. Patrick Russell’s programme note for the BFI’s screening of the picture looks back on how it crystalized some of the documentary movement’s key traits:

Continuity and change: the theme recurs across the documentary movement's output — but mainly painted, before now, on a domestic canvas. Here it takes on not merely global but cosmic implications. Cavalcanti’s weird experiments with echo, repetition and amplification take the film to the edge of science fiction: a contrast with lovely quieter moments earlier on, in which pastoral scenes unfold beneath Maurice Jaubert’s lyrical score.⁹¹

It was a geographical excursion for Jaubert — he was in London only briefly, during which time *Zéro de conduit* (1933), featuring one of Jaubert’s best-known scores, was released in London — but not a stylistic one; *We Live in Two Worlds* is compared to other Jaubert works by his biographer François Porcile:

⁸⁷ Lye’s short films, consisting of colourful images painted directly onto celluloid and synched with lively Cuban music, were bought by Grierson at the GPO and used as advertisements.

⁸⁸ Alberto Cavalcanti, ‘Sound in Films’, *Film* (November 1939): 25-39

⁸⁹ Jaubert’s death during the war at the age of forty was described by Mark Brill as “arguably the greatest loss sustained by the French cinema during the war.” His small contribution to British documentaries is often overlooked. Mark Brill, ‘Maurice Jaubert’, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 2001)

⁹⁰ “Il part à Londres le lendemain, où il prononce le 10 la fameuse conférence sur la musique de film, qui reste à ce jour un texte définitif sur la sujet.” François Porcile, *Maurice Jaubert: Musicien populaire ou maudit?* (Paris: Les Éditions françaises réunies, 1972), 64

⁹¹ Russell, programme note for *We Live in Two Worlds*, screenonline.org.uk/film/id/1301267

In *We Live in Two Worlds*, the documentary by Alberto Cavalcanti about Switzerland, there is a resistance to simplistic folk styles, and the mark of a very specific language: a rustic clarinet theme suddenly rendering the spirit of *Ode à la Montagne*, or a piano ostinato which is reminiscent of *L'Atalante*.⁹²

Jaubert and Cavalcanti had worked together before, one of the earliest of their partnerships being on *Le Chaperon Rouge* (1930), described in publicity material of the time as “full of charm and spirit”.⁹³ We can glean something of the relationship between Cavalcanti and Jaubert from their correspondence in April and October 1937. It has a friendly tone, rather in contrast to the more professional distancing that seems to emanate from the Chagrin-Shaw letters (explored later in this chapter). An example is a postcard from Cavalcanti to Jaubert with news of a programme of GPO films, including *We Live in Two Worlds*, that was due to take place in Brussels that November, and telling him of a similar event in Paris.⁹⁴ The postcard mentions London Films’ docu-drama *Conquest of the Air* and suggests that Jaubert sees this film; perhaps Cavalcanti admired Arthur Bliss’s work.

⁹² “Dans *We Live in Two Worlds*, documentaire d’Alberto Cavalcanti sur la Suisse, on trouve un même refus du folklorisme élémentaire, et la marque d’un langage bien spécifique: un thème agreste de clarinette qui restitue soudain le climat de l’*Ode à la montagne*, ou un ostinato de piano dont le dessin rappelle celui de *L’Atalante*.” Porcile, *Maurice Jaubert*, 214

⁹³ “[U]ne pochade française pleine de charme et d’esprit.” Fonds Maurice Jaubert, Mn-138(5)

⁹⁴ FMJ: Mn-138(4)

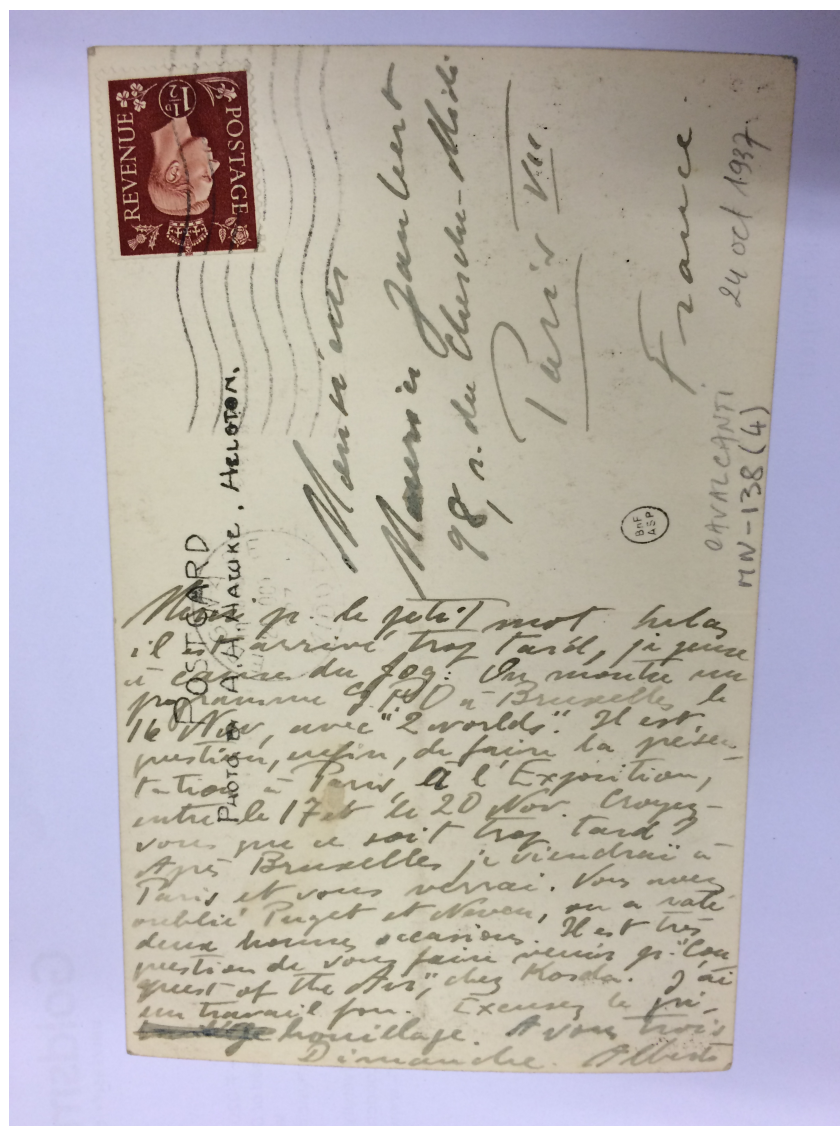


Fig. 12 Postcard from Cavalcanti to Jaubert, October 1937.

Bibliothèque National, Paris.⁹⁵

That Jaubert would become so involved and aligned with the artistic outlook of his director/producer colleagues, and so personally close to them, is indicative of a culture in documentary-making that was characterized by a sense of passion and a refusal to compromise aesthetic vision and ambition.⁹⁶ But Jaubert's work in the UK was short-lived. He returned to France, where among his scores was *Le Jour se Lève* (1939), a dark and disturbing picture whose poetic realist style, and mixture of elements of romance and crime, anticipated *film noir*.

⁹⁵ *Merci pour le petit mot, hélas il est arrivé trop tard, je pense à cause du fog. On montre un programme GPO à Bruxelles le 16 Nov, avec "2 Worlds". Il est question, enfin, de faire la présentation à Paris a exposition entre le 17 et le 20 Nov. Croyez-vous qu'il soit trop tard ? Après Bruxelles, je viendrai à Paris, et vous verrai. [...] Il est très question de vous faire venir pour "Conquest of the Air" chez Korda. J'ai un travail fou ! Excusez le gribouillage [...]*

"Thank you for your note, alas it arrived too late, I think because of the fog. A GPO program will be shown in Brussels on November 16th, with '2 Worlds'. Finally, there is the question of the screening between the 17th and the 20th of Nov. Do you think it is too late? After Brussels, I will come to Paris to see you. [...] I want to show you "Conquest of the Air" from Korda. I have a crazy job! Excuse the scribble [...]" Fonds Maurice Jaubert, Mn-138 (4).

⁹⁶ Jaubert, Cavalcanti and Grierson were outspoken defenders of Vigo, who had died in his twenties in 1934.

Jaubert left behind him a Britain that was leading the way in establishing documentary as a thriving art form, as chronicled in the pages of the arthouse journals. The breadth of experience and distinctly cosmopolitan outlook that thrived in the documentary sector, built and energized by those discussed above, laid the groundwork for a fertile environment that could deal with subjects not usually tackled by mainstream dramatic filmmaking. Among the points of focus was the lives and cultures of people in distant places that must have seemed completely out of reach to the average cinema-goer. The popular travelogues being produced in the United States at the time was testament to this, but Britain was developing its own body of work that dealt with the same kinds of material.

Orientalism: *Song of Ceylon* and *Five Faces*⁹⁷

The works of factual exotica made by documentarians attracted those cinemagoers for whom the far- or middle-East might be an exciting escape, even in a non-dramatic form, but they were brought about by means of an unreconstructed orientalism which can sit uneasily on the modern screen. Furthermore, they carried the colours of empire proudly, being made as they were in the shadow of a growing propaganda war — at first *de facto* and subsequently official and State-sponsored — with an increasingly belligerent Germany. Produced by John Grierson and scored by Walter Leigh, *Song of Ceylon* (1934) was a far cry from mainstream narrative features in most respects, but prestige films such as London Films' *Elephant Boy* (1937), or even the controversial *Sanders of the River* (1935) carry the same sense of transport and wonderment despite their differences in actual content and purpose.⁹⁸

Music and sound take a central role in *Song of Ceylon*. Documentaries during the decade frequently used cheap stock music, material often owned by the production company and sometimes recycled from other films, or at least unidentified material that is highly likely to have been extant before the film went into production. In contrast, Alexander Shaw and Basil Wright,

⁹⁷ For further elaboration on the term 'orientalism', and its use in the context of post-colonial criticism, see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Pantheon, 1978)

⁹⁸ American contemporaries in travel documentaries share these orientalist characteristics: Andre de la Varre's *Screen Traveller: Damascus and Jerusalem* (1936), one of a series of similar travelogues from that director, gazes at the relative strangeness of the eponymous middle-Eastern cities as seen from a Western perspective, and the American James A. Fitzpatrick's *Tropical Ceylon* (1932), an example among his many travel films, engages with similar geographic and demographic subject matter. De la Varre's film features an apparently improvised organ accompaniment with *faux* Arabic and Jewish sections. His film documenting a visit to the south of France, *Along the French Riviera* (1937) is closer in style to Fitzpatrick, using stock western orchestral music, including arrangements of Beethoven piano sonatas.

the directors of the films under examination here, shared a creative and budgetary freedom that enabled them to commission music; it was an atmosphere of creative alliance that was emerging as a key characteristic of the GPO studios. Cavalcanti and Grierson had seen their first film *Pett and Pott* (1934) as an opportunity to put into practice unusual techniques with regard to sound and music that might not usually be undertaken in mainstream filmmaking. This led directly to *Song of Ceylon*. It was, for Wright,

a wonderful opening for experiment, for putting new theories to the test. [Grierson] and Cavalcanti decided the whole film unit should be thrown in at the deep end and it was decided to make our first film backwards. That is, to shoot the sound first and the picture second, with Cavalcanti as director. Music was needed, and as ever with Grierson, he turned to me for advice and as usual in this and other problems, I turned to Cambridge. As I have already said elsewhere, Walter Leigh was a musician of brilliant talent and I recommended him to Grierson and Cavalcanti.⁹⁹

Walter Leigh, unlike more experimental figures like Cavalcanti at the GPO, and despite his training, was a staunch populist. Much of his works betray a desire to write music that he hoped audiences would enjoy, rather than over-intellectualised music that might have been applauded by the musical establishment. It made Walter Leigh a natural choice for film work. Thomas Irvine asserts that, “[a]t every turn, Leigh’s main objective was to write for the widest audience appropriate to the genre in which he was composing. Some likened this populism to anti-intellectual conservatism.”¹⁰⁰ However, Leigh had studied in Berlin with Hindemith and thus — paradoxically in the context of his relative accessibility and suitability for commercial enterprises — brought home with him a modernist sensibility.¹⁰¹ He started working for the GPO in 1934 with *Under the City*, *John Atkins Saves Up*, and *Pett and Pott* among his assignments, and continuing to compose for documentaries throughout the decade.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Wright BCW 1 / 4:9-10

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Irvine, ‘Hindemith’s Disciple in London: Walter Leigh on Modern Music 1932-40’ in Riley, M. (ed.) *British Music and Modernism*, 197

¹⁰¹ A letter from Hindemith to Leigh, sent in late 1941, only seven months before the latter was killed, attests to the closeness of the pair: “Dear old boy from better times, I was awfully glad to have your letter. It sounded like a message from a good spirit. Send me again a few lines, if you find time to do so. [...] And tell me whether I can do anything for you or whether there is anything I can send you.” Walter Leigh Collection, Add 65132 Vol XVIII

¹⁰² A letter from the Realist Film Unit gives evidence of Leigh’s £50 fee for scoring *The Face of Scotland* (1938). He also acted as a music consultant for other film companies, including Shell, who paid him £2.2.0 for “musical advice”. Letter from Realist Film Unit, dated July 29, 1938. Walter Leigh Collection Add 65132 Vol XVIII; Letter from Shell Refining and Marketing Co. Ltd., dated 24 May, 1940. Walter Leigh Collection Add 65132 Vol XVIII

Leigh was sometimes described as a ‘second Sullivan’, appropriate despite his awareness of the latest excursions in art music: he had a fondness for melodies and conventional harmony.¹⁰³ He had also inherited his mentor’s unpretentious attitude. Hindemith “didn’t affect a formal German diction: he spoke in the rough cadences of his working-class origins. He wrote his music in the dining car of the express train, on the way to the concert.”¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, Hindemith “impress[ed] on his students, including Leigh, the necessity of approaching the most artificial of media with the highest ‘authentic’ standards of craft. This imperative runs throughout Leigh’s writings on music.”¹⁰⁵

Song of Ceylon is a 37-minute documentary directed by Basil Wright that marks a meeting point between the wealth of the British colonial tea companies and the documentary film scene in Britain. Sponsored by the Ceylon Tea Propaganda Bureau and the Empire Tea Marketing Board, the film examines the lives and customs of the Sinhalese people. At a length of 3,500 feet and split into four sections, 'The Buddha', 'The Virgin Island', 'The Voices of Commerce' and 'The Apparel of a God', the film is long enough to explore at length an experimental style; it is frequently abstract and oblique, with startlingly forward-thinking camera work and a *mise-en-bande* that merges music and sound design in a constantly intriguing fashion. The diegetic sounds of drumming, singing, chanting, and percussion instruments, were recreated in London by Leigh and Alberto Cavalcanti, since recording synchronised sound was too problematical during filming in Sri Lanka (then called Ceylon). Wright recalled that, despite trying to minimise difficulties in this way, and in the process of attempting to invent the entire sonic field in post-production, “[t]he sound track was much more complicated to construct than it appears to be to the ear of the viewer.”¹⁰⁶

Wright took with him a camera assistant, John Taylor, fresh from working on *Man of Aran* (1934).¹⁰⁷ Taylor recalls the making of *Song of Ceylon* and its soundtrack:

¹⁰³ Irvine, ‘Hindemith’s Disciple’, 197

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 199

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 202

¹⁰⁶ Wright, BCW /1/3 Reel 2, p.5

¹⁰⁷ “[S]till barely out of his teens, he [Taylor] had set up a laboratory on the island and processed all the thousands and thousands of feet shot by Bob Flaherty on the spot.” Wright, *Song of Ceylon* memoir BCW 1 / 4: 1

It was practically the first sound film he made and he evolved that technique of contrapuntal sound or whatever you call it, which sound really played a very important part in. It's completely forgotten now, no one uses sound in any way but straight forwarded [*sic*], or music or straight sound. But that kind of sound played as important a part as the picture to it. And the equipment was very crude, I suppose you could only mix two or three tracks [...]¹⁰⁸

Compounding the problem, the sound apparatus was not portable so Wright concluded that everything had to be assembled in post-production, although the GPO had started to use location sound recording equipment two years previously.¹⁰⁹ Prior to this, Basil Wright had found it immensely frustrating: their films were sold without sound, leaving it to be dubbed on without much thought by the distributors.¹¹⁰ *Song of Ceylon* presented a different challenge:

[W]e had shot no sound in Ceylon. In those far-off days sound apparatus was far too cumbersome to take on location and of course there were no recording facilities in Colombo or Kandy, so the first thing I had to do was to make a silent cutting copy of the film, putting shots and sequences in the right order [...] All we had to do now was to put sound to it. This involved a detailed analysis of the material and it became clear that what we must have was, (1) genuine Sinhalese sounds, (2) orchestral score by Walter, (3) natural sounds, (4) synthetic sounds, (5) a not too elaborate narration.¹¹¹

Grierson and Wright invited Ukkuwa, the 'chief dancer' of a group they had filmed, to come to London along with a drummer named Suramba and the film's narrator, the musician and photographer Lionel Wendt (at first, he was meant to arrive as a chaperone for Ukkuwa and Suramba, but Wright convinced him late in production to try the voiceovers). Wendt's narration, intoned in a prayer-like fashion, is reminiscent of that which accompanies other GPO films such as *Night Mail*. It contrasts with the more journalistic voiceover style of filmmakers such as James A. Fitzpatrick, whose *Tropical Ceylon* (1932) covered similar territory. Indeed, the score for the latter, and others like it, even though present throughout most of the running time and placed roughly to correspond to changes in mood and subject-matter, consists entirely of stock

¹⁰⁸ BECTU Interview with John Taylor

¹⁰⁹ Ian Johnson, *William Alwyn: The Art of Film Music* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), 17

¹¹⁰ Wright, BCW 1/4 p.9

¹¹¹ Wright, BCW 1 / 4 10-11

orchestral cues, whilst the Wright/Leigh collaboration remains a key original documentary score from the decade.

Travel films of the thirties usually adopted a tone of wonderment at the strangeness of exotic lands and peoples. Only *Song of Ceylon* attempts to reflect that strangeness in its sonic discourse, by weaving music and sound effects in such a way as to produce discomfort or at least unease in the listener, and create a sense of foreignness suitable for the subject. It works therefore to alienate its audience at the same time as informing and educating. The text recited by Wendt is not patronising to modern ears, like Fitzpatrick's, and does not carry a touristic flair like the voiceover narration of André de la Varre.

Leigh was keenly aware of the potential for creating a soundtrack that exploited the potential interplay of natural, diegetic sounds, and music. His handwritten notes on the craft of the film composer, apparently in preparation for a lecture or an article, give some insight into how he approached and thought about scoring assignments, and indeed into *Song of Ceylon*:

Natural sounds can be heard for their, as one might say, musical value: if the recorded sound of tea being poured out is not satisfactory realistically it may nevertheless be effective as a noise over some other pictorial sequence unrelated to the tea table. But before the wealth of the sound-world can be thus happily exploited by the sound-composer, audiences must learn to listen, not only to jokes, but sensitively to all the sound, as at the opera. Mechanical reproduction prevents [the] possibility (at present) of huge orchestral climaxes, but brings instead great possibilities of varieties of sounds, of which music is only one.¹¹²

Leigh therefore consolidates his sense of what Rick Altman would later call the *mise-en-bande*: an overall conception of the soundtrack built on interplay between the various elements, rather than a more conventional separation of music, sound, and dialogue. Leigh was not only interested in 'musical' sounds, but all sonic elements: "[Emotion] is communicated also by allusions to things, and by juxtaposition of ideas – as for example the distant barking of a dog used atmospherically, or the sound of a train to indicate energy. [...] [E]ffects can be produced by judicious use of sounds intrinsically: not merely interpreting sense of visuals [*sic*]."¹¹³

The score for *Song of Ceylon*, which survives in manuscript, both fair copy and short-score, in

¹¹² Undated lecture notes, Walter Leigh Collection Add 65132 Vol XVIII

¹¹³ Ibid.

addition to the final orchestral parts rendered by a copyist, attests to the eclectic way he approached the material. It mixes an array of colours: sitar-like sounds, xylophone, harp, oboe, and fiddle. There is material for several unusual instruments, including ‘war drum’, Hawaiian guitar, and muted trumpet in C, alongside more conventional orchestral instruments. However, according to Wright, “Walter used a very small orchestra which, [...] he sometimes managed to make sound very much louder than its size.”¹¹⁴ The pages of score, marked simply “CEYLON”, are divided into numbered cues, e.g. “No. 1 & 2 Opening and Devil-Dance”, “No.3 Dawn”, “No.4 Water-drawing”, “No.5 Priest”, and so on. Notable is the ninth cue, “Laughter”, in which Leigh attempts to paint the sound of laughter using a violin and tom-toms in a 6/8 *Allegro*. No.12, “Offering to Buddha”, can be seen in both short score and full score; the short score is written in two staves, and clearly marks the instrumentation of various sections. The short score for “Dawn” contains a note directing the use of small tubular bells to imitate the sound of cowbells, and “Dawn” was also sketched in three staves to include the vocal parts, in contrast to the two staves found in the other cues. By cross-referencing Basil Wright’s own account a line can be traced between the written scores and the eventual manner in which the material was recorded:

The microphone was placed in one corner of the studio; on its right was a small group of Sinhalese gentlemen whom we found in the East End of London, chanting a religious song pianissimo. Opposite the microphone was a collection of percussion instruments including chromatic tubular bells. On the left of the microphone was the orchestra and the choir from the local church. The choir had no words, but just sang ‘Aah’ and were integrated with the orchestra. The percussion was bell-like in effect and when we saw the bell being rung by a pilgrim its synthetic sound was synchronised with it.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Wright BCW 1 / 4:11

¹¹⁵ Wright, BCW 1 / 4:12-13

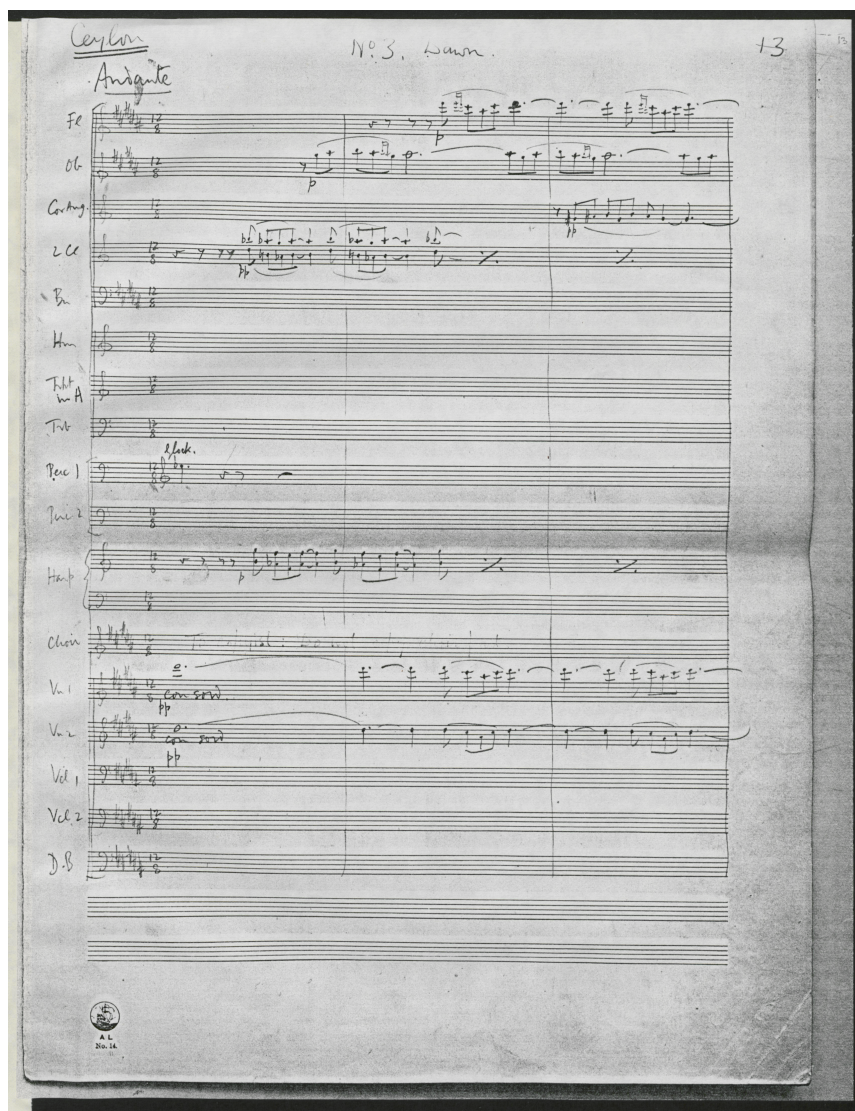


Fig. 13 Walter Leigh: “Dawn”, from *Song of Ceylon*. Courtesy British Library Board

What is noteworthy about the manuscripts for *Song of Ceylon* is that there is no apparent working-out of film timings, footage, minutes and seconds. We know from much of the other material in the Leigh archive that he performed these kinds of calculations on most films, but none are found in these scores. One distinct possibility is that the film was not locked at the time of writing this music, and that the score was recorded during the editing phase of the film; it is thus entirely possible that sections were edited to Leigh’s music. In 1941, Leigh’s score was celebrated as “probably the most noted documentary film score”: testament to the care that went into its creation.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Winter, ‘Music in Sound Film’, 161

Francis Chagrin: *Five Faces*

Francis Chagrin's concert music, and indeed much of his media work, bears the hallmarks of the vigorous training and attention to detail instilled through his studies with Nadia Boulanger and Paul Dukas in Paris, but he was also a stylistic magpie whose complete works span a substantial aesthetic and generic palette. Located in a tonal but extended harmonic range and with an acknowledgement of neo-classicism alongside an apparent rejection of serialism, Chagrin's music betrays the influence of Ravel, Poulenc, and mid-to-late Stravinsky. Often within a single film score he would explore several idioms.

In the 1930s he wrote a substantial body of music for documentaries and commercials, and later scored several major pictures including *An Inspector Calls* (1954), *The Colditz Story* (1955), and *Greyfriars Bobby* (1961). These above works are all represented by various items in the Chagrin manuscripts collection. The archive contains items of interest such as original harmony and counterpoint worksheets from Nadia Boulanger's classes in Paris, and subsections relating to 'Public and Commercial Films and Television Broadcasts' – documentaries, commercials, etc. A collection held separately by the British Library Sound Archive consists of hundreds of discs of a wide variety of music, mostly master recordings from sessions for films (features, documentaries and short public information pieces), radio broadcasts, and television commercials.¹¹⁷

In 1952, Chagrin gave a talk at the Hampstead Film Society, a London cinema enthusiasts' group, and a little of what he spoke about can be gleaned from notes he made at the time. He discussed the craft of the film composer, the respective stages of scoring a picture, the aesthetics of film music, and various practical considerations. The lecture is introduced with the question of why films should have music written for them at all, and he poses aesthetic questions about the different nuances that the scoring approach can take. Indeed, Chagrin's musicological thought processes are in evidence throughout his archive. In one of the various autobiographical notes in the collection, he explores the art/commercial dilemma facing the composer seeking to make a living:

¹¹⁷ Francis Chagrin Collection, British Library Sound Archive

But ‘serious’ as opposed to ‘light’ is — to my mind — an artificial and misleading division of music; I prefer to make a distinction between — ‘applied’ music (songs, theatre, radio, film, television, etc., operetta, and in some cases even opera) where historical period, national characteristics, required atmosphere etc. are frequent ingredients demanded by extra-musical necessities; and ‘pure’ music, such as a symphony, where only the pursuit of the musical thought matters. In such cases one is the sum total of all ones [*sic*] previous musical experience.¹¹⁸

He is careful not to impose a qualitative aesthetic judgement on the commercial side of the divide. But seeking an ontological explanation, and attempting to codify a methodology for media music of various kinds, Chagrin aligns himself with the handful of film musicological pioneers who had projected their ideas into the public arena only a few years before, among them Kurt London, Leonid Sabaneev and Hans Keller.¹¹⁹ Whether he had read these authors remains unknown, and is not clear from these materials, but like his contemporary in British film music, Muir Mathieson, Chagrin’s rigorous musical training and concert-hall background helped to form an intellectualized approach to the craft in practice.

Five Faces, a relatively unknown 36-minute Strand Films documentary from 1938, was among the first film assignments Chagrin undertook shortly after moving to the UK in the 1930s.¹²⁰ A three-reel documentary, it was one of a handful produced by Alexander Shaw. Known in some versions as *The Five Faces of Malaya*, it examines the various ethnic groups in that country. Like other documentaries at the time, it will have played as a supporting film to a main feature (or two), alongside news items and other shorts.

Five Faces features “Malay music performed by the Kuala Lumpur Police Band, recorded in Malaya” (as declared in the opening titles) alongside Chagrin’s score, and passages of traditional music recorded on location. In an introductory letter dated 9 December 1937, which asks Chagrin if he might be interested in writing music for Shaw’s new documentary, the tone is strikingly formal and trusting of the composer’s abilities despite Shaw seemingly having not met Chagrin

¹¹⁸ FCC, MS Mus 65.

¹¹⁹ See London, *Film Music* (1936); Sabaneev, *Music for the Films* (1935); and Keller, ed. Wintle, *Film Music and Beyond* (2006).

¹²⁰ Chagrin continued to work on documentaries, at least until Pathé’s *Wealth of the World: Congo Harvest* (1950). An orchestral concert piece produced later in Chagrin’s career, *Yugoslav Sketches*, was adapted and arranged from music composed for *The Bridge* (1946), which tackled the complexities of post-war reconstruction in Bosnia.

or heard his music:

I have been given your name by Mr. [Stuart] Legg, who tells me that you might be willing to write music for Documentary Films.

I am at the moment finishing a film on Malaya and require some music for this film. I have a certain amount of Malayan music already recorded, but want some more music written specially to cover Chinese, Indian and historical sequences.

If you are free and at all interested I should be very glad if you would come along and see me as soon as possible.¹²¹

The “already recorded” music that Shaw refers to included certain kinds of location-specific singing, drumming and other instrumental playing as captured by the film team during the shoot. Another letter follows, dated 13 December, enclosing more information, and the “rough outline” that Chagrin receives shows the stylistic challenge of writing this score.

Dear Shagrin, [sic]

I enclose herewith a rough outline of “Five Faces” and hope that it will be enough for you to start working out some ideas. As soon as I can arrange it I will fix for you to hear the Malayan records and see the film again.¹²²

The column on the right of the “rough outline” details the variety of cues that Chagrin was being asked to compose for the film, and exhibits an awareness of the imaginative interplay of music and sound design that the finished film was to have. The document is evidently written with Chagrin personally in mind as the recipient, hence the last comment directed at Chagrin:

¹²¹ FCC: MS.MUS 38

¹²² FCC: MS.MUS 38

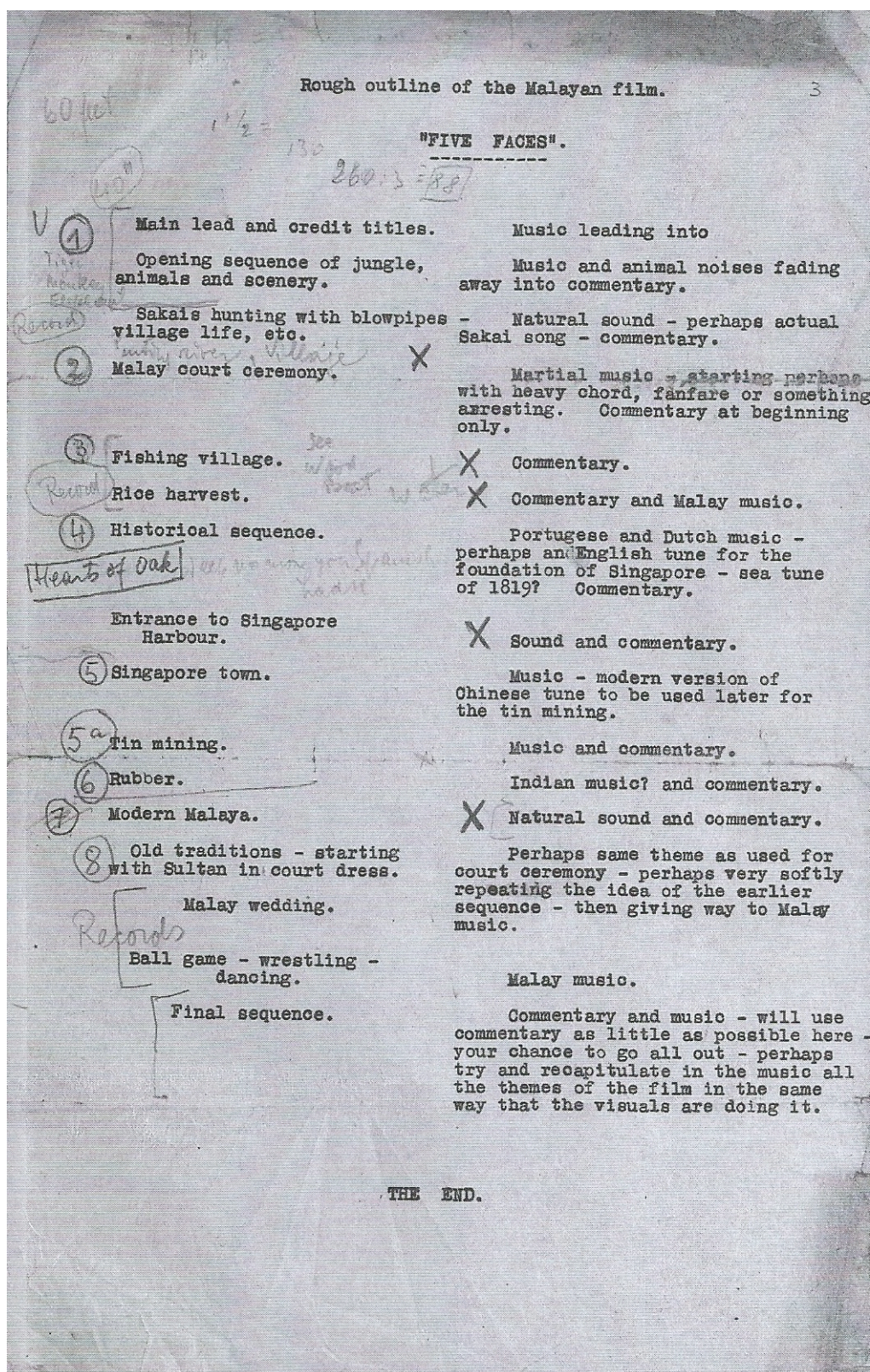


Fig. 14 "Rough outline" of *Five Faces* sent to Francis Chagrin. Courtesy British Library Board

"Commentary and music — will use commentary as little as possible here — your chance to go all out — perhaps try and recapitulate in the music all the themes of the film in the same way that the visuals are doing it."

The film was intended to present a portrait of five ethnic groups – the Semang, the Chinese, the Europeans, the Tamil, and the Malaysians – all living in the same collection of states on the Malay Peninsula (known then as British Malaya), which included present-day Singapore. Shaw's intention was that Chagrin's music should reflect these groups and their contrasting cultures and identities whilst promoting a sense of inter-racial harmony. Notes from an initial meeting, apparently held on the same day as the letter containing the "rough outline" give a brief outline of the proposed chronology of music production.

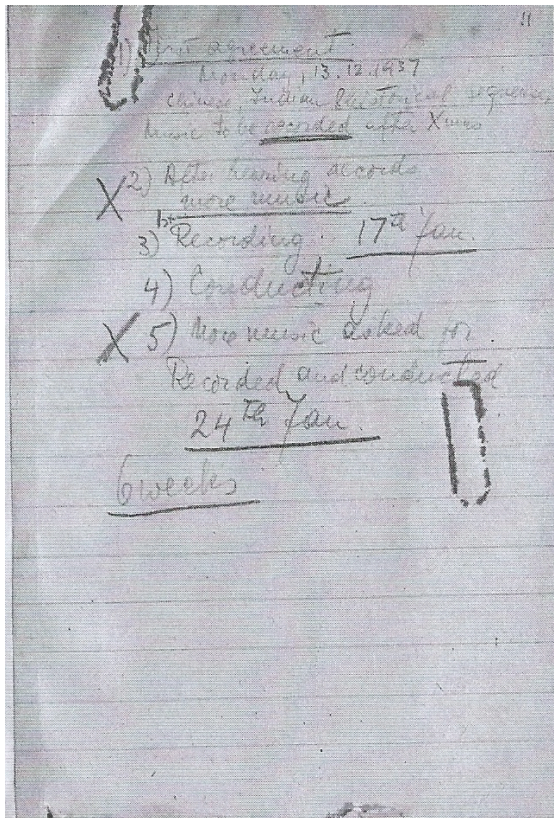


Fig. 15 Notes from an initial meeting for *Five Faces*, 13 December 1937.

Courtesy British Library Board

The composer's notes from the aforementioned lecture function as a guide to the scoring process, and observe that it is imperative at an early stage for the composer to know the lengths of time that the cues will eventually run to. After receiving this rough outline, Chagrin must have written to Shaw requesting this information, the evidence for this assumption coming in the reply he received, which informs him that the footage figures are not quite ready — clearly the film was still being edited, that process being overseen by the director — Chagrin must wait:

Mr Shaw regrets that he will be unable to let you have the exact music lengths of the Malay Film until he has himself seen the film in its present state. This he hopes to do to-morrow and will communicate you [*sic*] as soon as possible.

The composer was eventually provided with timings, and the cue sheets for each reel were compiled. The title of the film is not fixed, since in some of the letters and on the cue sheet for the first reel it is referred to as “Malay Film” or “Malayan Film”, whilst the letter dated 13 December uses the eventual title “Five Faces”. The reel 1 cue sheet shows the names of the sections of the film on the left, named after subjects referred to in the narration (mountain, elephant, monkey, etc.) and the length of film in feet on the right. A total footage is given at the bottom of the chart. The pencil markings at the far right are Chagrin’s initial calculations for how the length in feet might translate into duration in minutes and seconds. Throughout these documents, Chagrin repeatedly uses a reasonably reliable and accurate formula for calculating this: he takes the length of film in feet, doubles it, then divides by three, although the number he ends up with is always rounded up or down.

Elsewhere, in handwritten notes and a typed script of an article about “cartoon music”, Chagrin explains the importance of knowing the cue lengths for a particular project:¹²³

The composer should always insist on being given lengths for each detailed sequence, as well as the total length, of the section from the beginning of it up to and including the latest sequence. [...] Unnecessary mistakes and time can be avoided if the composer knows: a) how many seconds the sequence lasts (it may be a wild race which has to stop dead); b) at which moment during the sequence there should be a special effect, or climax, or pause; c) the total timing from the beginning of the full section (a section being a part of the music which is recorded by itself).¹²⁴

¹²³ The article was commissioned by John Halas, co-creator of the CIA-funded animated version of George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (1954)

¹²⁴ FCC, MS Mus 65.

83 8013413
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10

MALAYAN FILM.

Reel 1.

Mountain.	22 ft.	40"	15"	51	10"
1st Elephant.	14	9"	1m 4		
1st Monkey.	4	3"	1m 7		
2nd Elephant.	2	1 1/3	1m 16		
Jungle scene.	12	8"			
1st Tiger.	4	3"	1m 19		
2nd Monkey.	4	3"	1m 22	V	①
2nd Tiger.	2	1 1/3	1m 23		
Jungle scene.	10	7"	1m 30 90" = 1m 30"		
Hunting.	100				
X Punting.	66	56	12 37s	44"	V ② 44"
Saksi. Village	176	252	117 s	157	
Investiture.	124	83			V ③ 1' 23"
Fishing. Village	80	62	53"	41s	3
Swamp. Village	99	66"			4
Water wheel	44	29"			V ④ 4' 44"
X Rice.	204	136"	284		
X History.	228	152			V ⑤ 2' 32"
Total.....	1,595 ft.				10' 33"

History 51
Dutch 100 → 200
British 78
229
Total 13,425.

Rice Wide swamp
Women
41 3
66 3
4
41 21
12
127
110' 9" = 4 1/2
36
Margin 525 622

Fig. 16 *Five Faces* Reel 1 Cuesheet. Courtesy British Library Board

Chagrin told his audience in Hampstead — according to the lecture notes — that the next consideration, after securing the “lengths” is less mathematical and more aesthetic. Ideas for orchestration, colour, and texture are considered, and the interaction with commentary and dialogue is taken into consideration. The opening of *Five Faces*, in manuscript full score at fair

copy stage, shows a modal approach clearly intended to evoke the exotic; the “national characteristics”, as he noted.¹²⁵ Chagrin’s orchestration attempts to reflect a certain local colour in the use of winds for the melody and strings for the answering phrase, alongside percussion gestures.

The image shows a handwritten musical score for the opening of 'Five Faces' by Chagrin. The score is written on multiple staves for various instruments including Flute (Fl), Oboe (Ob), Clarinet in B-flat (Cl Bb), Bassoon (Bsn), Percussion (Percussion), Violin 1 (Vl 1), Violin 2 (Vl 2), Viola, Violoncello (Vcl), and Piano (Piano). The score includes dynamic markings such as *f*, *p*, *pp*, and *mf*, and tempo markings like 'Cresc.' and 'Rit.'. The title 'Credit title of Jungle' is written at the top, and the composer's name 'Chagrin' is in the top right corner. The page number '30' is also visible.

Fig. 17 Opening of *Five Faces* at fair copy stage. Courtesy British Library Board

¹²⁵ See autobiographical note, FCC: MS Mus 65

The way in which documentaries were approached by composers was often experimental and highly collaborative, as explored in these case studies. The close personal relationship between Walter Leigh and Basil Wright brought vibrancy to the score produced for *Song of Ceylon*. Furthermore, the materials in their respective archives document their efficient professional arrangement, as well as that between Chagrin and Shaw. While Leigh did not find the success that Chagrin did in mainstream narrative features, both figures are central to the development of the melting-pot of British film music in the thirties, and their archives are testament to the availability of research materials on such individuals and their work.

Conclusions

This project started with Altman's concept of "crisis historiography": in writing about the silent era he emphasized that the industry in the US — the makers, exhibitors, and audiences — "lacked a clear model" for the use of new and still-maturing technology.¹ It is evident from this thesis that British sound filmmaking, in a comparable way, did not reach fluency in its musical or sound practices until the mid-1930s. Even then, budgetary considerations, a diversity of approaches to genre, and a heterogeneous set of attitudes to collaboration and composition resulted in methodological and stylistic fragmentation in the writing of film music.

Much of the music, however, does not survive in any form beyond its embedding in the pictures themselves. This has been the principal reason behind the choice to restrict this thesis to research methods most commonly associated with historical musicology: an emphasis on written sources, both primary and secondary, with some discussion of composers' manuscripts, but limited close musical analysis. By filtering the films of the 1930s and their scores through carefully chosen lenses — genre, budget, questions of 'quality', and musical response to dialogue — and the arguments consolidated by detailed reference to historical sources, this thesis takes Altman's work as an influence in order to illuminate the rich body of scores the British early sound era offers. It should be acknowledged that there is an inherent risk in taking a stance that emphasises variety rather than homogeneity: clear conclusions become more difficult to draw out from the primary material. In addition, British film brought fewer key works to the fore than other national cinemas. Michael Slowik, a key contemporary scholar working in a related field, argued against the habitual citation of *King Kong* (1933) as the text that — it is frequently claimed — formed the template for the classical Hollywood score. In this project, I have demonstrated that, not only did American scoring have limited relevance to British work, but there was indeed no 'British *King Kong*' that could be used as an influential landmark in the way that Slowik so comprehensively dismantled.

Film music studies has matured beyond its initial phase into a range of approaches. Much of this broadening has been a reaction against a prevailing bias towards American cinema and, within that orbit, a tendency to wield the classical Hollywood score as a signifier of exactly what the term 'classical' implies: a form of scoring that emerged from deep musical tradition that

¹ Altman, *Silent Film Sound*, 21

became an exemplary and hugely influential standard. Meanwhile, great advances have been made into the study of silent film practices in both American and British cinema, and even the way that American sound film in the late 1920s and early 1930s drew from the silent era. Furthermore, film historians have in recent years extended the scope of interest into the 1930s in Britain so that the films themselves — hitherto somewhat neglected in the academy — now have more scholarly attention. These advances lay the groundwork for this thesis, so that it can provide an essential source-based historical study of the early sound years in Britain. Crucially, it takes a stance as a piece of research that can leave the field open for further work with a music-analytical method that applies to individual scores, or groups of scores.

There have been some clear aims behind this project. Firstly, it was designed to challenge received opinion about the period. The lack of prior scholarship is self-perpetuating, since it gives the impression that there is not enough material or few scores of much interest. The view of the war years and the late 1940s is clearer, since British filmmaking and film scoring fell into a more defined set of generic identities that remain in the broader cultural consciousness. Whilst there is undeniably limited primary source material — particularly written scores — and the regrettable loss of many films from the thirties compared to other decades and perhaps other national cinemas, the dearth is not as extreme as some might assume, and this thesis explores corners of the filmmaking landscape that often bring surprising results, such as music for the sizeable number of surviving ‘quickies’. In short, the complex strata of filmmaking in the decade must be taken into account when exploring its musical craft. The tendency, observed in other research whose remit covers the period at all, to retreat towards studying the music of a select few ‘canonical’ films without placing them in the context of other, smaller or lesser-known works, is something that this thesis has confronted.

Secondly, the thesis has emphasised that many of these pictures were platforms for unusual and highly creative combinations of personnel; the title, *Cultural Crossroads*, frames the arguments that run through it, and informs the content. Music from a range of traditions and composers from surprisingly contrasting backgrounds came together on pictures, and those composers entered the field during a time of experiment and flux. What emerged is a scene wherein different musical cultures and styles met, competed, and collaborated. Far from restricting the creation of this environment, the unique economic conditions and fragmented business landscape

in the film industry enhanced it.

One of the striking conclusions that can be drawn from the research, particularly when focusing on generic considerations, is that a variety of musical approaches was applied to comparable syntactic and semantic templates. There was no consensus, and the array of results produced attests to the relative freedom that composers and music directors evidently felt they had. The growth of the dance band and associated popular idioms in the decade was a major factor in this, since bandleaders found a status comparable to that of the music directors and composers who came from more conventional backgrounds. But the atmosphere of inclusivity in terms of musical style, fostered in those years, helped to build a body of work that embraced folk music, historical performance, and styles directly imported from the West End stage.

A further observation that the thesis has articulated is the sense of artistic ‘responsibility’ that — in some sectors — frequently characterized attitudes to scoring and music direction. Led by individuals like Mathieson and Irving, and consolidated by composers such as Bliss, Leigh, Chagrin, or Addinsell, the sense of wanting to write music of ‘quality’, even under difficult budgetary conditions, was a common phenomenon. Crucially, these individuals were stylistically distinct from one another, so that any attempt to impose a taxonomy that collects these composers into one movement would be counterintuitive. They emerged as composers for film during a process of British cultural change and consolidation, manifested particularly in the development of broadcasting as a standard for the way that British artistic activity was moderated and filtered for a mixed demographic. Film composers, working in a boom-and-bust economy, had to grapple with a tension between discourses of entertainment and improvement.

While several film critics have opined that the pictures themselves were so often about British stories (“If there was an essential British cinema it was an observation of the British people in close-up”), the range of backgrounds and nationalities working in music departments demonstrated film music’s essential cosmopolitanism.² That paradoxical situation is a theme throughout this thesis, which seeks to show that while the semantics of the films being made — the meanings behind the stories, people, and places depicted on screen — were so frequently concerned with British themes, their musical interpreters brought influences from other cultures and traditions.

² Perry, *The Great British Picture Show*, 160

APPENDIX A

Interview with Philip Lane

Philip Lane is a British composer, arranger, researcher, and educator. He has worked on reconstructions of various scores from the period, and has overseen new recordings, which include the following, invaluable during the course of this project:

Addinsell: British Light Music. BBC Concert Orchestra / Kenneth Alwyn (1994).
CD/Download/Stream. Marco Polo 8.223732.

The Film Music of Mischa Spoliansky. BBC Concert Orchestra / Rumon Gamba (2009)
CD/Download/Stream. CHAN 10543.

The Film Music of Francis Chagrin. BBC Philharmonic / Rumon Gamba (2005)
CD/Download/Stream. CHAN 10323.

PL: It just occurred to me – as we’re doing the 30s - that there were almost more British composers who were writing just for films and the commercial side of things then, than there were later on when it became very much the field for so-called ‘serious’ composers. You had the Louis Levy school — people like Bretton Byrd and Jack Beaver and people like that — Clive Richardson — who were not concert composers, which allied them a bit to the Americans all the way through. There had been the odd concert composer who had written for the American screen, like Aaron Copland and people like that, but very few, and very infrequently. But once we get to the 40s and you’ve got William Alwyn and Malcolm Arnold, they sort of dominated the field rather. That’s a point I’ve never seen written down in print anywhere.

AB: To what extent do you think Muir Mathieson influenced that?

PL: Well that’s from Arthur Bliss really.

AB: Mathieson was keen to get concert composers in.

PL: Oh, entirely. Things may have gone a different way had he not been around. Louis Levy hardly ever employed concert composers. I think many of those films — I don’t know whether

you've managed to get the cuesheets for things like *The Lady Vanishes* or *The 39 Steps* have you?

AB: Not yet, no.

PL: I haven't been able to get hold of too many of them, but they tend to be cues by different composers, because the only credit on the screen is Louis Levy.

AB: As MD.

PL: As MD. I've worked out — done a bit of research — that for example, *The Lady Vanishes* — most of that is Charles Williams, and most of *39 Steps* is Jack Beaver, all uncredited. Somebody told me that Louis Levy wasn't a great musician, certainly wasn't a composer, but they think he wrote the music hall jingle in *39 Steps*, that the pit band play — they think that was Louis Levy.

AB: I don't know if you've read Louis Levy's autobiography?

PL: *Music at the Movies* — yes I have it next door but I haven't looked at it for years.

AB: It's a strange one because a) he doesn't mention Muir Mathieson at all...

PL: That's not a surprise.

AB: And b) when he does mention Jack Beaver, he calls him 'Jack Beavers'.

PL: How strange.

AB: So I wonder whether there might have been a certain amount of ghost-writing going on in the autobiography. I feel that it would be unlikely for him to get that name wrong.

PL: Well, people do get mistakes ingrained in them sometimes.

AB: Can I ask you about your own work — your reconstructions of scores, being one of the strings to your bow — did it come after your interest in light music, or before?

PL: Well I was teaching at the time, and I thought that the school song from *Goodbye Mr Chips* would make a good hymn tune, because we had prayers every morning, with music, and I thought it would make a good hymn tune, so I wrote to the estate and got a reply back saying yes, fine, and by the way, our musical executor has just died, would you like to take on the job.

AB: This is Addinsell's estate?

PL: Yes. I said yes I'd love to, went up for a meeting, met the two trustees. I was appointed, and part of my brief — and I'm still on a monthly retainer — was to show people that Addinsell wrote more than the Warsaw Concerto. So I thought the best way to get started would be to do a

radio documentary which I wrote, and linked it to a CD of the film music. We discovered that there weren't — well we had to have *Goodbye Mr Chips* on it — and so I got the video, put it onto cassette, played it over and over again, because all we had in print was the school song written out with piano. And that's how Silver Screen — Marco Polo, Naxos — heard it, and asked me to do the Hitchcock album, the early Hitchcock, which included *The Lady Vanishes* and *39 Steps*, and lots of others. And they asked me to do more and more, and I think I did over 100 titles for them.

AB: And at the Addinsell estate was it obvious from the outset that a lot of those early scores had disappeared?

PL: Oh yes, just the odd one or two survived.

AB: And did anyone give you, first hand, any reasons why this might be?

PL: John Huntley.

AB: Who wrote the book.

PL: Yes, we spoke on the phone quite a lot and I've got broadcasts of him talking. And he said that he was as guilty as anybody that the music didn't survive because, after recording sessions he himself would walk around the orchestra picking up the parts and then put them on the skip. And remember there wasn't photocopying in those days, and often, if you've got a really strong-minded film company they'll say, "by the way, the score is ours". And so if a composer wasn't quick enough to do some kind of copy of some sort, he lost it. Documentary films are a bit better because there was no financial interest from the documentary companies, they couldn't exploit the music beyond the film. So you find that 75 percent plus of documentary scores survive because the composers wanted them to. I found a few about five years ago, when one of the producers of British transport films actually had several in his possession, including *This is York*, which I've just recorded, and a few others which I've given back to the estate — William Matthias was one — I gave that back to his family. But this is by sheer chance. And this is not particularly applicable to the 1930s, but it shows how things go: I went to see the widow of Dock Mathieson, Muir's brother, who was at Ealing from '53 until they closed. And at the end of our lunch she said, "by the way there's a lot of manuscript paper over there, can you use it?" and I said yes, and I thought it was all blank, so I just picked it up in a pile and put it in a box and brought it home.

And I was just unloading it and it fell on the floor, and there were pages that were written on. There were about five or six, mainly opening titles, to Ealing films. Full scores. And there were bits of films, they weren't main titles, and I had to work out what they were, and one was Walton's *Went the Day Well*? I only worked that one out because I recognised the dialogue — there was some dialogue written at the bottom of the page.

AB: And was Susanna Walton still around at this point?

PL: She was — I sent the scores back to their estate, not before taking photocopies, and I thought well if Lady Susanna can stay in the Savoy Hotel for several months at a time I think she can afford to pay my expenses. So I took the score up to her and sold it to her, and I'm sure she sold it on for even more.

AB: And you did some work on *Kind Hearts and Coronets*.

PL: Well that was an easy one because of course we got Mozart, so I just did a mock Mozart overture, just using the two themes.

AB: But there was something from *Don Giovanni*.

PL: Yes — but then for the opening titles, I thought — is that really Mozart or is that Ernest Irving trying to be Mozart? It wasn't something I knew, so by sheer chance, at the college I was teaching at, we had visiting one day H.G. Robbins-Landon, the Mozart/Haydn scholar. I got myself seating next to him at lunch, showed him the piece of paper. I thought it might be one of the serenades. He told me the piece, the K number and the movement.

AB: Going back to Addinsell — there are some films I've been looking at, like *Fire Over England*, *Dark Journey* etc. On *Fire Over England* — almost certainly Roy Douglas played on that?

PL: Yes he admits to it — in that programme I did. They were his hands playing the spinet. Vivien Leigh is sitting there but he is underneath the harpsichord and they are his hands playing it. You know he's still with us?

AB: Yes he's extremely old.

PL: He will be 106 in a month's time. [Roy Douglas died in 2015 at the age of 107]

AB: I did at one point consider talking to him but I think it's too late.

PL: I interviewed him eighteen months ago, and he looks about 70, he still puffs on his pipe, he's

allowed two whiskies a day, and he's extremely happy. But he can't remember things as well as he did when I interviewed him in 1996. He wasn't involved in *Goodbye Mr Chips* strangely enough.

AB: But he maintained that he was Addinsell's orchestrator for pretty much the whole lot.

PL: Yes — well he went up to about 1945. But he didn't do *Goodbye Mr Chips*, and I'm just trying to remember who did. Then a chap called Leonard Isaacs took over for a few years, and he did one of my favourite Addinsell scores, *Blithe Spirit*. And *Passionate Friends*. Then there's a bit of a gap, late 40s, early 50s. I think Leighton Lucas might have been involved. And then in '56 Douglas Gamley (?) takes over, and he does it right up until the end, and that was *Life at the Top*.

AB: Something I admire about Addinsell is the playful way he scores things, particularly how he riffs on dialogue, and how he engages with it. In *Goodbye Mr Chips* he actually imitates the intonation of Robert Donat's voice as he calls across the mountains.

PL: I included that in my suite — it's on the Chandos one. It's a bit like a yodel — “where are you?”

AB: Yes exactly. I find that a lot of his scores have this extra care taken over them, often with regard to dialogue.

PL: Well there are two reasons why he's so good. One is that he had a fantastic sense of melody, and an ability to gauge the style of every scene, and he employed the best orchestrators of the time. I remember talking to Douglas Gamley, about Susannah York's first film, with Kenneth More, he said that he would meet Addinsell, and Addinsell would say, “where are we today — provincial France”, and sit down at the piano and off he went.

AB: Throughout his work there is a strain of what we would now call light music. Do you have any thoughts on this?

PL: He maintained an interest in the theatre all the way through, and this is important. The only time I ever appeared on the stage, I was playing a part — longer than Hamlet, incidentally — and it was rather spooky, it was a production of *Ring Round the Moon* by Jean Anouilh. I played identical twins, and within four years I had twins of my own, and not only that, but the music for the original production was by Addinsell.

AB: So Addinsell has been a huge part of your work for some time now.

PL: I think we did the documentary in 95 or 96, with Daniel Massey — it was going to be Dirk Bogarde but he was busy finishing a book. We wanted somebody who had been associated with a film — Bogarde was in *Tale of Two Cities* — or a show. Massey had been in one of the last reviews on the London stage called *Living For Pleasure*.

AB: What are your thoughts on light music and its place in popular entertainment since that period?

PL: I don't like the title 'light music'. I don't feel that most of my music is light music, just as Malcolm Arnold didn't feel that his *English Dances* or *Scottish Dances* were light music. I think there are two sorts of light music — in the old days we'd say Radio 2 and Radio 3. Mine is distinctly Radio 3, apart from a few odd and ends. If you take someone like Robert Farnon, his little 2 or 3-minute pieces, that's what I call 'Radio 2'. It's fantastic but I couldn't live on a diet of that kind of music. There are lots of anorak types who can, but I can't. But you see, people know a lot of old TV and radio programmes which used library pieces which were 'light music' and if you watch a programme like *Antiques Road Show* there are little cues on there which are straight out of that period. Having said that, sometimes the anoraks will not recognise them so they must be specially written. It's still around, and still has a big following. [Back to film composers] John Huntley said, these composers of the 40s and 50s would be absolutely astounded that not only are people interested in this music, but they are re-recording in in tip-top sound. They would be absolutely gobsmacked. Up until about 1950, the life of a film was about six months. It's only when television came in, with an insatiable appetite to fill time, that these films were dug out and shown again. If you were writing for these films, you would say, well there's the job, I've done that, and it will never be needed again so I will throw it away. Unless you were writing something like *Things to Come*.

AB: You mention in your article that there is an argument to say that the so-called "serious composers" might have had more of a sense of wanting to keep their scores.

PL: But you see in *Things to Come*, he wrote the music before the film was made. Did I mention Lionel Salter? Lionel Salter was Muir Mathieson's assistant at that time, 1935. Bliss had written all this music for the film, which he'd never seen, so it was up to Salter to pick out the bits that

would fit the picture, because all the timings were all over the place. So he had to link the bits together, and he did it mostly by putting in tam-tam strikes. A tam-tam strike unsettles your ear in terms of tonality. So you can stick two pieces together that are not related harmonically. I'm told that it was recorded in a cinema in Charlotte Street.

AB: They used to use one of the theatres, I think it was the Cambridge Theatre.

PL: Way into the 50s and 60s, on a film session you always got paid in cash at the end.

On Spoliansky:

PL: If you listen to my Chandos disc of Spoliansky, everything on there exists in score. I compiled suites from existing scores, and I arranged the songs from *Sanders of the River*. But all the scores were looked after by somebody quite near me in Malvern, and then he moved up to Scotland, and he did copies of them for me. A lot of it was put onto Sibelius and is owned by Music Sales. All the information is on the disc.

AB: Spoliansky was very much in that early Mathieson era.

PL: Yes I never met Mathieson face-to-face, I met his widow and his children, because they came along when I recorded his *Grampian Suite* for a Scottish album I did some years ago. But I spoke to him on the phone not long before he died and he told me that they were knocking down the library at Pinewood, where all these scores were kept. They were bulldozing the place down, with all the music inside. He rushed down there and rescued *Henry V* and a couple of other things. Just goes to show how things have changed. If I had got a whiff of that, we would all be hiring transit vans and going and helping him out.

AB: It happened at one of the major Hollywood studios I seem to remember.

PL: MGM were the only studio to keep a copy of every film they made, and Warner Bros kept a copy of every score and parts. I did a disc of Max Steiner, and I got all the material from all of those pieces.

AB: Do you have any thoughts on the difference in style between the US and UK?

PL: Well all of those guys came over from Eastern Europe sounding like Mahler and Richard Strauss, and we didn't. Our composers were in the realms of Vaughan Williams on one side say,

and other composers on the other. There are two different schools and they sound it.

AB: Rozsa only lasted a few years here before he went to America.

PL: He kept his style all through. Nine times out of ten, you can always recognise a Rozsa score, main titles particularly, because he's so fond of canons. There's always a canon in there. The other one is Alan Rawsthorne — this is later of course. I once bet someone £10 that a piece was by him, and it turned out to be by Gerard Sherman, who was a pupil of Rawsthorne. He actually ghosted some of *The Cruel Sea*, and it got him some work.

AB: Roy Douglas seemed to suggest in an interview with Jan Swynnoe, that there was a bit of animosity against immigrant composers like Rozsa. Spoliansky called himself "Michael" for a bit.

PL: I can understand that. We're talking about anybody who was ever so slightly Germanic. That's why Allan Gray changed his name, and why Francis Chagrin changed his name.

APPENDIX B

Interview with Shuna Rendel, artist, daughter of Muir Mathieson, with contributions from her husband Richard Rendel.

SR: Have you read Sheila Hetherington's book? We gave a copy to the British Library because apparently they didn't have it. I met Sheila once, when she came down to see my mother.

AB: Your mother was a dancer.

SR: My mother was a dancer and she danced in *Winds of the Morning*, which is I think 1937. And she was the gipsy girl in that, and my father's brother Dock was playing the viola in that, and was dressed up as a gipsy. There was a little group of musicians and Dock was playing the viola.

AB: Dock also worked in films.

SR: Yes, a bit later, he was younger. He sort of followed my father. I think it says in some of the letters, or maybe not — my cousin Alison could tell you about that but they moved a lot and didn't keep much stuff. There are one or two letters that are pertinent to the archive but very few.

AB: There are lots of interesting letters about your family holidays. I wonder if you remember any of that.

SR: Well no, I was quite young, I was born in '44. I think my older sister, who's in South Africa, and whom you could certainly get in touch with, she remembers a bit more. She's seven years older than me. The only holidays I remember — my father was a very keen fisherman, like his father, and we went up to Scotland, to the west coast. I remember it as fairly miserable. We borrowed a caravan from a cousin who was in Falkirk, and my older brother and sister took a friend. But although I was seven years older than my younger sister, and seven years younger than my older sister — I was right in the middle and had a brother two years older than me, and we were very close — my older brother and sister could take a friend and I was lumped together with my younger sister in the caravan with my parents, so I was always slightly miffed about that. But what I do remember was that it was absolutely freezing cold. We weren't allowed breakfast until we'd been for a swim, and this was my father's Scottish fierceness! I was

obviously very stropky about the whole thing. My father was a great fisherman. He caught these trout, we were going to have them for breakfast — they were under the caravan and in the morning the gulls had come and taken them. So I was very pleased.

AB: I sympathise — I'm one of four as well.

SR: Later on, we went to more or less the same place. My mother, when she was dancing, had a friend called Bobby, who was married to Ferranti [?]. They had a big estate there, and later on, when we went up there I remember we went fishing, and I remember I got a fish and I didn't know what to do, and my father was shouting at me from the other side, "play it, play it!" and I didn't know what "play it" meant, and of course it disappeared. And he was not very pleased, and I was obviously miserable. But as children, he was very busy. My eldest sister turned out to be a continuity girl and went to the studios with him. She was probably closest to him. My youngest sister was so much younger that it was a different sort of relationship. We were very much — it was very busy, and reading all of these letters, getting the archive together was a huge sort of enlightenment to me.

AB: Where had all of that material come from — was it with you the whole time?

SR: It had been with my mother. But they moved from Denham in '47, and so there's nothing there really apart from these letters, from the Royal College of Music to home.

AB: The early student ones.

SR: Yes, and they had been sent to his parents, his mother in particular. They came down from Stirling with the papers and the stuff came down from there, which is where he was brought up. But all the film stuff was probably chucked out when they moved in '47. And that was all in a terrible muddle, I mean he had a study, his music room, on a farm in the Chilterns. And he had one of the barns, a studio there, but a lot of this stuff was in different places. We certainly didn't know half of it existed and it was very enlightening. But as children, it was an incredibly busy time, at Denham. And we were slightly children seen-and-not-heard. First of all they lived up on the golf club at a house called the Little House at Denham, and that's where my sister was born, and my brother was born. And I think they then moved when my mother was pregnant with me. They needed somewhere bigger, and so they moved again. I don't know if it was a tax thing, he was still at Denham, but anyway they then bought the farm in the Chilterns.

AB: Your early memories — do you remember being with him when he was working on films?

SR: Well always in the holidays, the treat was to go to the studio for the day. We always went to Denham studios. Ken Cameron was there. That was great, seeing that. For me there are very visual memories of the clapper-boy doing 1M1, take one, and then going up and seeing the rushes. It was very exciting.

AB: From the letters it seems that he had an office there, a building — a music department at Denham.

SR: Yes he did, earlier on. And of course he was at Pinewood and Elstree a lot, he went to different studios. It was only later on that he was at Denham the whole time. But he used to go to Shepperton and Elstree.

AB: Have you seen all of his films?

SR: No absolutely not. But the thing is, it was part of life. I was a bit of a rebel too, I was a terrific rebel. The house was full of amazing people, Laurence Olivier and all these people. [...] I was driven to school by a chauffeur. I don't really remember but I was told I was taken by a chauffeur. And maybe they moved because it was a tax thing. I do know that Alan Grogan, who was an agent, and they suggested that my parents farmed. They knew nothing about farming but my mother sort of ran the farm. They had 250 acres and a Channel Island herd that turned out to have foot-and-mouth — or TB. When we then moved, there weren't all these chauffeurs and people around. It was quite different, donkey and trap, you know, it was great. We had all these people come and stay. My father was incredibly generous, warm-hearted, generous person. Not in a grand way, he loved people, and in fact it must have been quite tough on my mother — she had quite a muddled life. One minute she was dolled up for a premiere and the next she was working on the farm and the next she was cooking meals, but it's fine and it's what everybody does now but then it was different. But my father was an incredible enthusiast, and almost never satisfied. Some of us got that from him. I'm sort of arty, and some of my students say that I'm never satisfied.

AB: Perfectionism.

SR: Yes and that was very much in him, and it's there in reading his letters, and I find that reading those letters he comes across as very arrogant, but he wasn't like that at all, he was

incredibly modest. He just wasn't arrogant at all. But he was very ambitious and determined. He had to prove himself — his mother — he came from a Presbyterian household, and his mother was very musical. And they didn't want him to come to London and he had to prove himself all the time, to his mother. The scholarship to the RCM and all that. But not to his father, who was a plumber then a painter. He came from a very poor background. He used to say how he and Dock were allowed to pick the kipper bones on a Sunday night. So he came from this very modest background and rose to earning this fortune. I don't know whether it changed him or not, but certainly he was quite modest at the end. Very generous and very modest.

AB: Those student letters reminded me of the letters I would write home as a student. You're thrown into this world of knowledge and adulthood, and you want your parents to know everything that's going on. It might read as arrogance, but it's not, it's just trying to impress your parents.

SR: I was absolutely horrified, I was embarrassed by those letters. This was not the person that I knew and remembered. I was shocked at reading these.

AB: It seems like just student-y enthusiasm to me.

SR: That's really interesting.

AB: Did he want you to become musicians?

SR: That's what's interesting about the youth orchestra stuff. He did, and we all learnt instruments. Always at Christmas he wrote something and we'd all play it, but none of us were very good. Funnily enough we've got a grand-daughter who does seem to be extraordinarily musical. She sings perfectly in tune. There's obviously something there. My younger sister, who was an actress, she was musical and played instruments and wrote things. We all played instruments, but I was probably the worst, I played the piano and the violin, my elder sister played the oboe and the drums, and my brother played the euphonium and the bassoon. At Christmas, I hated it, my father would write something, and we'd have this excruciating sort of playing at Christmas. I just hated anything like that. I was a real teenage rebel.

AB: Visual arts was always your thing?

SR: Visual arts yes — his father was an artist, so I probably got it from there. My father actually did a lot of painting and drawing. Personally, I was rebelling against this 'famous' world, and

everybody telling me how lucky I was, and all of that, so you're talking to the wrong person. If you talk to my sister, and I suspect my brother a bit the same, certainly my younger sister, she would have said, absolutely it was her life. She loved all that. Also I was very, very shy. And we had all these visitors for supper, and it was just excruciating to get up from the table and say goodnight to everybody and go up to bed. I would rather not have been there at all. I was just very shy. My younger sister was exactly the opposite. I realise now what an incredibly rich life we had. People always say that he was always so enthusiastic with young people, and I don't deny that in any way, but I think that life was so busy that we didn't see very much of him because he had so little time to do things with us, because when we were young, he was really, really busy. It sounds dreadful, because I realise in reading all this, what an amazing person he was, but —

[request to pause the recording]

[resumed]

SR: He was a hugely enthusiastic person.

AB: I understand that the last professional thing he did was to conduct a youth orchestra.

SR: Yes he did — that was the last thing he did, in Oxford. In fact one of my students.

AB: So he was an educator.

SR: Yes he did a massive amount of education stuff. Do you know about the Harrow orchestras? From 1947 there is every programme there. They had all the Harrow schools, all the Middlesex schools. There was a big cinema in Harrow that held millions of people, and every term he did a junior and a senior orchestra concert with professional orchestras, he said he wanted children, young people, to hear real music. All his programme notes are there. And I had an amazingly complicated time finding all the programme notes in different places — “good afternoon, you'll be hearing *William Tell*” etc — and trying to put the programme notes together. That was a massive thing, he did that until it stopped. I can't remember when it stopped. It went on a huge number of years.

AB: I wonder if this is linked in an indirect way to his desire to bring so-called ‘serious’ concert composers into film, in a sort of public education kind of way.

SR: Well — serious composers — they were British. He was incredibly about Britain. He was

asked to go to Hollywood several times, but he wouldn't go because he felt he would be a traitor to his country. So he only took on Korda's music department if he could — when Korda said would he take on this department, he said, I will but only if I can commission the greatest British composers to do it. And 'British' was very important in that sentence. My brother then went off to the States, which was not ideal in my father's eyes.

AB: Would you go as far as to say your father was anti-Hollywood?

SR: No, not at all, but he just felt for the British film industry. No not at all. He recorded things like *Gone with the Wind*, but he did it here, not over there.

AB: I often think that the variety of the British approach was partly down to his desire to get different composers in to match each film.

SR: It was Bliss I think, who wasn't keen for a long time. There wasn't really music written for films then — my father got music written especially for films in their own right. That's what he wanted. Before that, they tended to pluck any music and put it with the film, but he wanted music to be as important as what was said, and to be just right.

AB: *Things to Come* was a landmark because the music was written as part of the production process of the film rather than an afterthought.

SR: Exactly — he wanted scores to be a significant part of the experience.

AB: You mentioned his modesty. He was always 'music director'.

SR: Because he said to Korda, "I won't compose - there are composers much better than me." He did do a bit of composing towards the end of his life, but nothing major. For that very reason he respected each area. That's why he wanted to commission the great composers. He was terribly keen. That was something he talked about. Very much so.

Richard: His mother had been a music teacher and he himself had been involved in the youth orchestra in Stirling from about the age of fifteen. He wanted everybody to enjoy the best music they possibly could. You couldn't take an orchestra there — the BBC had only just got underway — so this was a way of getting music out to people, by making music an integral part of the films that many people would see.

AB: Interesting that you should mention the BBC because right from the start with the BBC there was a sense of responsibility towards the public, almost like a guardian of moral standards. I

wonder if he might have spoken about that kind of thing.

Richard: He didn't intellectualise that kind of thing at all. Not to me, anyway. That sort of discussion he didn't really go in for, did he?

SR: No he didn't but reading some of those interviews, and some of those BBC programmes — have you seen those?

AB: I've seen transcripts — Desert Island Discs, things like that.

SR: Oh no, not Desert Island Discs, that was ghastly. He kept saying, "you choose, you choose!" — he sounded really belligerent. No there were ones with various people, John Huntley, a lot of radio programmes. Film programmes. There were papers he's written about the 'musical director'. They're very interesting, I found them fascinating some of them. There seemed to be quite a lot — they might have been on Sunday afternoons. But talking about the education again — he did a lot of Ernest Read concerts. And a letter from Ernest Read saying he'd heard a programme on the radio and he was looking for someone to take over. With the youth orchestras, he did a huge amount all over the country, Nottingham, he started with Harrow. He did Oxford, there's boxes of stuff there. And also he did some teacher training too. Then there were things like *We Make Music*, and *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*, and *Steps of the Ballet*. And he did a lot of Unesco films, he did various ones there.

AB: One of the problems with my thesis is that there aren't very many scores. Composers like Richard Addinsell...

SR: He was my younger sister's godfather, Dick Addinsell.

AB: All of the scores are gone, at least from the 30s. Philip Lane has done excellent work reconstructing some.

SR: Yes — he did the disc.

AB: There were a couple of instances of studios throwing libraries out.

SR: Was it Pinewood?

AB: Yes and there was one in the States. When you were growing up, did he have a place where he kept scores?

SR: Yes in the barn, which we now live in some of the time. My mother died three years ago, and it was only after she died that we got all of this together for the British Library.

AB: There are a couple of scores, but not much.

SR: Not of his, no. The Bliss one went to Cambridge I think. Actually there was a Vaughan Williams one, which apparently had been missing, and there it was, sitting there the whole time.

APPENDIX C

Extract from Jeffrey Dell's novel *Nobody Ordered Wolves* (London: Heinemann, 1939), 84-5

The boy with the board held it in front of the camera.

As the pianist thumped out a mazurka on the harsh and tuneless piano, the crowd began to pirouette and whirl in what Phillip considered a most unstately measure. Mr. Gutzenheimer evidently thought the same, for after a few moments he clapped his hands and cried: "No! No! No! Cut it!"

"Cut!" shouted First.

The music ceased in the middle of a phrase and the crowd waited expectantly where they had stopped.

The director climbed on a box and addressed the dancers. [...]

At length, Mr. Gutzenheimer, after consulting with the ballet master, professed himself ready to shoot.

"Positions, please! This is a take!" called First, through his megaphone.

"This is a take!" echoed Second and Third superfluously.

Suddenly the whole building vibrated to the booming of a colossal voice, eerie and inhuman, which seemed to come from space. Philip started violently.

"Do you want the play-back for this?" it thundered.

It was as if God had spoken.

First stepped up to the microphone.

"Yes," he said. "Give us the play-back when I wave my hand like this."

He waved his hand about, apparently showing God what he meant.

"Oke," [sic] thundered God surprisingly.

Scanning the roof Phillip saw for the first time a row of enormous loudspeaker horns; while high up in one of the walls was a lighted window through which a man could just be made out, sitting at a table.

"What is a play-back?" Phillip asked Miss Carr, who explained that the music for the dance had

already been recorded on the sound-track by the London Symphony Orchestra and could now be repeated as many times as required.

“You see, it saves having the L.S.O. down here all the time we’re shooting this sequence,” she said.

Phillip nearly leapt from his seat a second time when the play-back started. There was a deep rumbling growl which sounded like a gigantic gramophone being run very slowly. As the pace gradually quickened, some semblance of music could be detected, rising in a chromatic progression through several keys. It was an excruciating performance; an affront to the ear, which caused Phillip to grind his teeth and writhe in his seat.

Presently the music showed signs of coming to rest on a particular key and became slightly more pleasant to listen to. The crowd revolved; but Phillip could discover little of the dignity that Mr. Gutzenheimer had demanded. At the conclusion of the scene the procedure was reversed, the music descending slowly to a thunderous growl and dying with a moan of anguish.

“What do you think of it?” asked Miss Carr, with a smile.

“Well, I shouldn’t have known it was the L.S.O.” confessed Phillip.

“It never sounds quite as good on the play-back. You ought to have been here for the recording session. It’s a lovely scene though, isn’t it?”

Phillip thought it was an appalling muddle[.]

APPENDIX D

Ernest Irving, from a paper given at the Royal Musical Association, March 9, 1950.

Reproduced in Irving, *Cue for Music: An Autobiography* (London: Dobson, 1959), 164

Eventually all is completed and an orchestra of fifty to eighty players is engaged and assembled in the recording theatre. The players sit in tiers, as at a symphony concert, though the groups are more widely separated; bright banks of light illumine the scene; there are four or five microphones on booms, stands and slings. At the back is a celluloid screen on to which the picture will be projected when called for by the conductor, moving at the immutable rate of 90 feet per minute. The conductor will rehearse the music with the composer at hand to make corrections, suggestions, additions and cuts; and a musical assistant will be listening in the recording booth to the sound as it comes over the monitor from the floor. This sound differs from that heard by the conductor and is a truer index of what will go on the film.

When all has been tonally adjusted the composer and conductor will go into the booth, and the musical assistant will mount the rostrum, a procedure which generally leads to more adjustments of microphones and positions by the recording and sound engineer. At some of the rehearsals the picture will be run, the music each time being brought a little nearer to synchronisation, and if any instrumentalist is concerned in a special effect, it is explained to him, and he is shown the 'mute' if necessary. The final rehearsal is recorded upon a glass disc and played back to all concerned. The musicians hear their work, any necessary corrections are made and a 'take' is announced.

Now vanishes anything in the nature of experiment or improvisation, everyone is taut, concentrated and careful. This is where the value of a first-rate orchestra is shown; like a famous regiment going into action, it combines dash with experience, and confidence with caution. Mistakes are sometimes made; the conductor gets out of time with the picture, or, following it too closely, gives an undecided or faulty beat; a player misses an entry, plays a wrong note, or 'breaks' a right one. Such mistakes are never regarded as blameworthy, the conductor simply

says 'cut', and when the 'mute' has been rewound, the shot is started again. It may have to be restarted five or six times; there are so many to be satisfied, the composer and conductor as to the music, the director as to the effects, the recordist as to the modulation of his 'track' and the balance of the various microphones employed. When one is right another may be wrong, but patience is the order of the day and sooner or later a 'take' is obtained which satisfies all concerned.

All is not yet over. A 'cover take' has to be made in case anything should happen to the negative in its passage through the laboratory. And so the day proceeds, 90 minutes recording, 10 minutes for coffee, 70 minutes more and then an hour for lunch. If things do not go smoothly — and there are many annoying things that may happen to a film, sound-camera, microphones, amplifiers, and projection machines which have nothing to do with technicians or players — time may press hardly at the end of the afternoon and completion of the day's schedule may be in doubt. That is another occasion when the tried warrior is worth his weight in gold; speed without hurry, tension without excitement, mutual confidence, and, above all, unflagging concentration have been known to work miracles against the clock. Next morning the protagonists hear their work when the 'prints' come in from the laboratory; comment is quite free and no criticism is resented, but it is seldom nowadays that anything has to be re-made, as manipulative surgery serves to correct errors of incidence and timing; gross mistakes of balance may be rectified mechanically by re-recording from the track; and small musical flaws, however annoying, are seldom of sufficient importance to call for drastic measures.

APPENDIX E

Email exchange with Alexander Gleason, independent researcher

AB: On one website forum, you mention your certainty that Levy wrote no music for most of the films at Gaumont. How do you know this for certain? Have you seen scores / letters / other evidence; or have your investigations been based on aesthetic analysis of the musical material, or interviews? So, for instance, if Charles Williams worked on several early Hitchcock films under Levy, how do you know it was Williams?

AG: Well, I've been very fortunate over the last few years, to have met up with a variety of enthusiasts and composers (& their families) who have helped me piece together this amazingly complex (& secretive) jigsaw. Firstly there was the irascible Frank Jones in Manchester — he managed to get cue-sheets out of the PRS in the 70s — which of course is the holy grail for all researchers. [...] Then there was the neurotic Jack Docherty in Scotland — his speciality was orchestrators (he may still be alive — but needs handling with kid-gloves!) In addition there have been some very handy in-depth pieces of research by insanely dedicated enthusiasts in the Robert Farnon Society.

Plus, I was amazingly fortunate to meet and talk to Clive Richardson — the very last survivor of the 'Golden Era' + thanks to his family, I got to see Jack Beaver's PRS returns (another source of Pure Gold) - oh yes, and I also got to meet Philip Lane — remarkable (and shrewd) bloke.

So in my small way, I've acted as a kind of clearing house for materials from umpteen different sources — and then, thanks to some amazing friends in or affiliated to the BFI I've managed to SEE many of the films in question (God knows there are still gaps — but I've got through a lot!) and now thanks to Network DVDs & Talking Pictures TV a shedful of question marks have been resolved.

I'm enclosing an attachment of my Levyography — it's a fairly rudimentary title list, which I compiled quite a few years ago. Subsequently I've covered most of the films in far greater detail-musical content songs artistes choreographers et al (so don't think for one minute this list is

definitive — I'm sure you'll spot mistakes).

There's always one question I put to any Levy & Hitchcock enthusiasts, which has bugged me for 40+ years — what's the dance music playing during the 1st shooting sequence in *The Man who Knew too Much* — it's undoubtedly a Campbell Connelly / Cinephonic quickstep (from their back catalogue) but in all these years, I've never cracked it — and believe me I've identified a lot of music in my time!

Filmography

The films listed below were viewed and studied during this research (except those listed as “lost”, which are simply referred to in the thesis).

Each entry shows:

Title (Director, year of first release)
(*Alternative or US release title*)
Genre. Production company (country)
Running time
s = starring
m = composer
md = music director
lyr = lyricist

? = indicates an individual likely to have worked on a film, but little hard evidence exists, or their involvement is disputed or uncertain.

QQ = indicates that the film can be classed as a ‘quota quickie’

LOST = indicates that the film is lost

The 39 Steps (Alfred Hitchcock, 1935)
Thriller. Gaumont-British (UK)
86 mins
s. Robert Donat, Lucie Mannheim
m. ?Jack Beaver; Louis Levy

Abdul the Damned (Karl Grune, 1935)
Historical drama. Alliance-Capital (UK)
111 mins
s. Nils Asther, Fritz Kortner, Adrienne Ames
m. Hanns Eisler
lyr. Clifford Grey

Action for Slander (Tim Whelan, 1937)
Drama. London Films (UK)
83 mins
s. Clive Brook, Ann Todd, Margaretta Scott
md. Muir Mathieson

The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes
(Alfred Werker, 1939)
Mystery. 20th Century Fox (USA)
85 mins
s. Basil Rathbone, Nigel Bruce, Ida Lupino
md. Cyril J. Mockridge

L’Age d’Or (Luis Buñuel, 1930)
Surrealist satire. Vicomte de Noailles (France)
63 mins
s. Gaston Madot, Lya Lys, Caribad de Laberdesque
m. Georges van Parys

Along the French Riviera (André de la Varre, 1937)
Documentary (travelogue). André de la Varre (USA)
12 mins

Air Outpost (Ralph Keene & John Taylor, 1937)
Documentary short. Strand (UK)
15 mins
m. William Alwyn

Animal Farm (John Halas & Joy Batchelor, 1954)
Animated drama. Halas & Batchelor (UK)
72 mins
s. Gordon Heath, Maurice Denham
m. Mátyás Seiber

As You Like It (Paul Czinner, 1936)
Shakespeare comedy. 20th Century Fox (UK)

96 mins
s. Laurence Olivier, Elisabeth Bergner, Sophie Stewart
m. William Walton

Ask a Policeman (Marcel Varnel, 1939)
Comedy. Gainsborough (UK)
83 mins
s. Will Hay, Graham Moffatt, Moore Marriott
m. ?Louis Levy, ?Clive Richardson, ?Charles Williams
md. Louis Levy

BBC: The Voice of Britain (Stuart Legg, 1935)
Documentary. GPO Film Unit (UK)
56 mins

The Bells
(Harcourt Templeman & Oscar Werndorff, 1931)
LOST
Drama. British Sound Film Productions (UK)
75 mins
s. Donald Calthrop, Jane Welsh, Edward Sinclair
m. Gustav Holst

Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt (Walter Ruttmann, 1927)
‘City symphony’ film. Deutsche Vereins-Film (Germany)
65 mins
m. Edmund Meisel

Big Fella (J. Elder Wills, 1937)
Musical comedy. Beaconsfield Productions (UK)
85 mins
s. Paul Robeson, Elisabeth Welch
m. Eric Ansell, ?Jack Beaver

Blackmail (Alfred Hitchcock, 1929)
Thriller. British International Pictures (UK)
85 mins
s. Anny Ondra, John Longden, Cyril Ritchard
m. Jimmy Campbell, Reginald Connelly, ?Hubert Bath

Boys Will Be Boys (William Beaudine, 1935)
Comedy. Gainsborough (UK)
80 mins
s. Will Hay, Gordon Harker, Jimmy Hanley
m. Louis Levy, ?Jack Beaver, ?Bretton Byrd, ?Charles Williams
md. Louis Levy

The Bridge (J.D. Chambers, 1946)
Documentary short. Data Film Productions (UK)
m. Francis Chagrin

Brief Ecstasy (Edmund Greville, 1937)
(*Dangerous Secrets*)
Romantic drama. Phoenix Films (UK)
72 mins
s. Paul Lukas, Hugh Williams, Linden Travers, Marie Ney
m. George Walter (aka Walter Goehr)

Brief Encounter (David Lean, 1945)
Romantic drama. Cineguild (UK)
86 mins
s. Celia Johnson, Trevor Howard, Stanley Holloway
m. Sergey Rachmaninov (compiled from extant music),
?Percival Mackey, ?Muir Matheson

Britain’s Youth (Jack Elliott, 1940)
Documentary short. Strand (UK)
13 mins
s. C.B. Fry
Britannia of Billingsgate (Sinclair Hill, 1933)
Musical comedy. Gaumont-British (UK)
80 mins
s. Violet Loraine, Gordon Harker, Kay Hammond
m. George Posford, Bretton Byrd, ?Leighton Lucas, ?Jack

Beaver, ?Noel Gay, ?Walter R. Collins
lyr. Holt Marvel

Britain Through a Lens: The Documentary Film Mob
(Chris Durlacher, 2011)
Documentary. Lambent (UK)
60 mins

The Broadway Melody (Harry Beaumont, 1929)
Musical. MGM (USA)
100 mins
s. Bessie Love, Anita Page, Charles King
m. Nacio Herb Brown, George M. Cohan, Willard Robison
lyr. Arthur Freed

Carmen (Cecil Lewis, 1932)
Opera adaptation. British International Pictures (UK)
s. Marguerite Namara
m. Georges Bizet

The Case of the Frightened Lady (George King, 1940)
Mystery. George King Productions (UK)
81 mins
s. Marius Goring, Penelope Dudley-Ward, Helen Haye
m. Jack Beaver

Casablanca (Michael Curtiz, 1942)
Thriller. Warner Bros. (USA)
102 mins
s. Humphrey Bogart, Ingrid Bergman
m. Max Steiner

Le Petit Chaperon Rouge (Alberto Cavalcanti, 1930)
Comedy. Société Française de gestion cinématographique
(France)
60 mins
s. Catherine Hessling, Jean Renoir, André Cerf
m. Maurice Jaubert
lyr. Claude-André Puget

Cheer Up! (Leo Mittler, 1936)
QQ Musical comedy. ATP / Ealing (UK)
72 mins
s. Stanley Lupino, Sally Gray, Roddy Hughes
m. Billy Mayerl, Val Guest, Noel Gay
lyr. Desmond Carter, Frank Eyton

Chu Chin Chow (Walter Forde, 1934)
Musical. Gaumont-British (UK)
95 mins
s. George Robey, Fritz Kortner, Anna May Wong
m. Frederic Norton
lyr. Oscar Asche

Citizen Kane (Orson Wells, 1941)
Drama. RKO Radio Pictures (USA)
119 mins
s. Orson Welles, Joseph Cotton, Dorothy Comingore
m. Bernard Herrmann

The Clairvoyant (Maurice Elvey, 1935)
(*The Evil Mind*)
Supernatural drama. Gaumont-British (UK)
81 mins
s. Claude Rains, Fay Wray, Mary Clare
m. Arthur Benjamin
md. Louis Levy

The Clue of the New Pin (Arthur Maude, 1929)
Crime drama. British Lion (UK)
81 mins
s. Anita Hume, Kim Peacock, Donald Calthrop

Coal Face (Alberto Cavalcanti, 1935)
Documentary short. GPO Film Unit (UK)
12 mins
m. Benjamin Britten

The Colditz Story (Guy Hamilton, 1955)
Action/Drama. Ivan Foxwell Productions (UK)
94 mins
s. John Mills, Eric Portman, Christopher Rhodes
m. Francis Chagrin

Contraband (Michael Powell, 1940)
Thriller. British National (UK)
92 mins
s. Conrad Veidt, Valerie Hobson
m. Richard Addinsell, John Greenwood

Conquest of the Air (Zoltan Korda, 1936)
Docudrama. London Films (UK)
71 mins
m. Arthur Bliss
md. Muir Mathieson

Crime Unlimited (Ralph Ince, 1935)
QQ Thriller. Warner Bros First National (UK)
71 mins
s. Esmond Knight, Lilli Palmer, Cecil Parker

A Cuckoo in the Nest (Tom Walls, 1933)
Comedy. Gaumont-British (UK)
85 mins
s. Tom Walls, Ralph Lynn, Grace Edwin
md. Louis Levy

Dangerous Moonlight (Brian Desmond Hurst, 1941)
(*Suicide Squadron*)
Drama. RKO Radio Pictures (UK/USA)
94 mins
m. Richard Addinsell
md. Muir Mathieson

The Dark Angel (Sidney Franklin, 1935)
Drama. Samuel Goldwyn (USA)
106 mins
s. Fredric March, Merle Oberon, Herbert Marshall
m. ?Alfred Newman
md. Alfred Newman

The Dark Eyes of London (Walter Summers, 1939)
(*The Human Monster*)
Horror. John Argyle (UK)
76 mins
s. Bela Lugosi, Hugh Williams, Greta Gynt
m. Guy Jones, C. King Palmer

Dark Journey (Victor Saville, 1937)
Spy thriller. London Films (UK)
77 mins
s. Conrad Veidt, Vivien Leigh, Joan Gardner
m. Richard Addinsell
md. Muir Mathieson

Devil's Rock (Germain Burger, 1938)
Musical. Germain Burger Productions (UK)
51 mins
s. Richard Hayward, Geraldine Mitchell, Gloria Grainger
md. Richard Hayward

Doctor Syn (Roy William Neill, 1937)
Adventure. Gaumont-British (UK)
78 mins
s. George Arliss, Margaret Lockwood, John Loder
m. ?Louis Levy, ?Charles Williams
md. Louis Levy

Drifters (John Grierson, 1929)
Documentary. New Era (UK)
60 mins

The Divorce of Lady X (Tim Whelan, 1938)

Drama. London Films (UK)

92 mins

s. Laurence Olivier, Merle Oberon, Binnie Barnes
 m. Miklós Rózsa, ?Lionel Salter, Vivian Ellis
 md. Muir Mathieson

Don't Take it to Heart (Jeffrey Dell, 1944)

Comedy. Two Cities (UK)

90 mins

s. Richard Bird, Edward Rigby, Esma Cannon
 m. Mischa Spoliansky

The Drum (Zoltan Korda, 1938)

Adventure. London Films (UK)

104 mins

s. Sabu, Raymond Massey, Roger Livesey
 m. John Greenwood, ?Miklós Rózsa
 md. Muir Mathieson

Elephant Boy (Robert Flaherty and Zoltan Korda, 1937)

Adventure. London Films (UK)

80 mins

s. Sabu, W.E. Holloway, Walter Hudd
 m. John Greenwood
 md. Muir Mathieson

Elstree Calling (André Charlot, Jack Hulbert, Paul Murray & Alfred Hitchcock, 1930)

Musical comedy. British International Pictures (UK)

86 mins

s. Tommy Handley, Gordon Begg, Teddy Brown
 m. Reg Casson, Vivian Ellis, Chick Endor, Ivor Novello,
 Jack Strachey, ?Idris Lewis
 md. Sydney Baynes, Teddy Brown, John Reynders
 lyr. Douglas Furber, Rowland Leigh, Donovan Parsons

Emil and the Detectives (Milton Rosmer, 1935)

Adventure. Richard Wainwright (UK)

71 mins

s. John Williams, George Hayes, Mary Glynne
 m. Allan Gray

Emil und die Detektive (Gerhard Lamprecht, 1931)

Adventure. Werner Brandes (Germany)

75 mins

s. Rolf Wenckhaus, Käthe Haack, Fritz Rasp
 m. Allan Gray

The Epic That Never Was (Bill Duncalfe, 1965)

Documentary. BBC (UK)

75 mins

m. Richard Strauss (excerpt: *Also sprach Zarathustra*,
 'Einleitung')

Escape (Basil Dean, 1930)

Crime drama. Ealing/ARP (UK)

70 mins

s. Gerald du Maurier, Edna Best, Gordon Harker
 m. ?Ernest Irving
 md. ?Ernest Irving

Escape Me Never (Paul Czinner, 1935)

Drama. British & Dominions (UK)

95 mins

s. Elisabeth Bergner, Hugh Sinclair, Griffith Jones
 m. William Walton

Evergreen (Victor Saville, 1934)

Musical / Revue. Gaumont-British (UK)

94 mins

s. Jessie Matthews, Sonnie Hale, Betty Balfour
 m. Richard Rodgers, Lorenz Hart, Harry M. Woods
 md. Louis Levy
 (Conductor: Bretton Byrd)

The Faithful Heart (Victor Saville, 1932)*(Faithful Hearts)*

Romance. Gainsborough (UK)

83 mins

s. Herbert Marshall, Edna Best, Mignon O'Doherty
 md. Louis Levy

The Face at the Window (George King, 1939)

QQ Horror. George King Productions / Pennant (UK)

70 mins

s. Tod Slaughter, John Warwick, Aubrey Mallalieu
 m. Jack Beaver, ?Eric Ansell

Face of Scotland (Basil Wright, 1938)

Documentary. Realist Films (UK)

14 mins

m. Walter Leigh

Falling for You (Robert Stevenson & Jack Hulbert, 1933)

Musical. Gainsborough (UK)

88 mins

s. Jack Hulbert, Cicely Courtneidge, Tamara Desni
 m. Vivian Ellis
 md. Louis Levy

The First Mrs. Fraser (Thorold Dickinson & Sinclair Hill, 1932)

Musical. Sterling (UK)

95 mins

s. Henry Ainley, Joan Barry, Dorothy Dix
 m. Colin Wark
 md. Philip Braham

French Without Tears (Anthony Asquith, 1940)

Comedy. Two Cities Films (UK)

86 mins

s. Ray Milland, Ellen Drew, Janine Darcey
 m. Nicholas Brodsky, ?Clive Richardson

The Frog (Jack Raymond, 1937)

Crime. Herbert Wilcox Productions (UK)

75 mins

s. Noah Beery, Jack Hawkins, Richard Ainley
 md. Gerald Walcan Bright (aka Geraldo)

The Flag Lieutenant (Henry Edwards, 1932)

War drama. British & Dominions (UK)

85 mins

s. Henry Edwards, Anna Neagle, Joyce Bland
 m. Harris Weston
 md. Lew Stone
 lyr. Bert Lee, R.P. Weston

Five Faces (Alexander Shaw, 1938)*(The Five Faces of Malaya)*

Documentary. Strand (UK)

36 mins

m. Francis Chagrin

Fire Over England (William K. Howard, 1937)

Historical drama. London Films (UK)

92 mins

s. Laurence Olivier, Flora Robson, Vivien Leigh
 m. Richard Addinsell
 md. Muir Mathieson

The Four Feathers (Zoltan Korda, 1939)

War drama. London Films (UK)

129 mins

s. John Clements, Ralph Richardson, C. Aubrey Smith
 m. Miklós Rózsa
 md. Muir Mathieson

The Four Just Men (Walter Forde, 1939)*(The Secret Four)*

Drama. Ealing (UK)

85 mins

s. Hugh Sinclair, Griffith Jones, Francis L. Sullivan

m. Ernest Irving

md. ?Ernest Irving

Friday the Thirteenth (Victor Saville, 1933)

Drama. Gainsborough (UK)

89 mins

s. Jessie Matthews, Sonnie Hale, Muriel Aked

m. ?Bretton Byrd, ?Louis Levy

The Future's in the Air (Alexander Shaw, 1937)

Documentary short. Strand (UK)

40 mins

m. William Alwyn

The Ghost Camera (Bernard Vorhaus, 1933)

Comedy/Thriller. Twickenham (UK)

66 mins

s. Henry Kendall, Victor Stanley, John Mills

m. ?Percival Mackey

md. ?W.L. Trytel

The Ghost Goes West (René Clair, 1935)

Comedy. London Films (UK)

95 mins

s. Robert Donat, Jean Parker, Eugene Pallette

m. Mischa Spoliansky

md. Muir Mathieson

The Ghoul (T. Hayes Hunter, 1933)

Horror. Gaumont-British (UK)

77 mins

s. Boris Karloff, Cedric Hardwicke, Ernest Thesiger

m. Leighton Lucas

md. Louis Levy

The Good Companions (Victor Saville, 1933)

Comedy. Gaumont-British (UK)

113 mins

s. Jessie Matthews, Edmund Gwenn, John Gielgud

m. George Posford, ?Bretton Byrd, ?Leighton Lucas,

?Walter Collins

md. Louis Levy

lyr. Douglas Furber

Goodbye, Mr Chips (Sam Wood, 1939)

Drama. MGM British (UK)

114 mins

s. Robert Donat, Greer Garson, Terry Kilburn

m. Richard Addinsell

md. Louis Levy

Goodnight Vienna (Herbert Wilcox, 1932)*(Magic Night)*

Musical comedy. British & Dominions (UK)

75 mins

s. Jack Buchanan, Anna Neagle, Gina Malo

md. Tony Lowry, Harry Perritt

La Grande Illusion (Jean Renoir, 1937)

War drama. RAC (France)

113 mins

s. Jean Gabin, Dita Parlo, Pierre Fresnay

m. Joseph Kosma

md. ?Emile Vuillermoz

The Great Barrier

(Milton Rosmer & Geoffrey Barkas, 1937)

Historical drama. Gaumont-British (UK)

83 mins

s. Richard Arlen, Antoinette Cellier, Barry MacKay

m. Hubert Bath, ?Jack Beaver

md. Louis Levy

Hamlet (Laurence Olivier, 1948)

Drama. Two Cities (UK)

154 mins

s. Laurence Olivier, Jean Simmons, John Laurie

m. William Walton

Hindle Wakes (Maurice Elvey, 1927)

Drama. Gaumont-British (UK)

115 mins

s. Estelle Brody, John Stuart, Norman McKinnel

His Lordship (Michael Powell, 1932)

Musical comedy. Westminster (UK)

79 mins

s. Jerry Verno, Janet McGrew, Ben Welden

m. Richard Addinsell, Paul Bergen, V.C. Clinton-Baddeley,

Ronald Hill, Walter Leigh

md. Maurice Winnick

Honeyland (Rudolf Ising, 1935)

Animated short. MGM (USA)

10 mins

m. Scott Bradley, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (excerpt, 'Flight of the Bumblebee')

Hue and Cry (Charles Crichton, 1947)

Comedy thriller. Ealing (UK)

82 mins

s. Alastair Sim, Frederick Piper, Harry Fowler

m. Georges Auric

md. Ernest Irving

Industrial Britain (Robert J. Flaherty, 1931)

Documentary short. Empire Marketing Board (UK)

21 mins

The Informer (John Ford, 1935)

Crime drama. RKO Radio Pictures (USA)

91 mins

s. Victor McLaglen, Heather Angel, Preston Foster

m. Max Steiner

Inspector Hornleigh (Eugene Forde, 1939)

Detective. Argyle Television Films (UK)

s. Gordon Harker, Alastair Sim, Miki Hood

72 mins

m. ?Bretton Byrd

md. Bretton Byrd

Irish and Proud of It (Donovan Pedelty, 1936)

QQ Comedy / Crime. Crusade (UK/Ireland)

78 mins

s. Richard Hayward, Dinah Sheridan, Gwenllian Gill

md. Colin Wark

Jack's the Boy (Walter Ford, 1932)*(Night and Day)*

Comedy. Gainsborough (UK)

91 mins

s. Jack Hulbert, Cicely Courtneidge, Winifred Shotter

m. ?Jack Beaver, ?Bretton Byrd, ?Leighton Lucas

md: Louis Levy

Jamaica Inn (Alfred Hitchcock, 1939)
Adventure. Mayflower Pictures (UK)
108 mins
s. Maureen O'Hara, Robert Newton, Charles Laughton
m. Eric Fenby
md. Frederick Lewis

The Jazz Singer (Alan Crosland, 1927)
Part-talkie musical. Warner Bros. (USA)
86/96 mins
s. Al Jolson, May McAvoy, Warner Oland
m. Louis Silvers

John Atkins Saves Up (Arthur Elton, 1934)
Information film. GPO (UK)
18 mins
s. V.C. Clinton-Baddeley, Leslie Higgins, Eileen Lee
m. Walter Leigh

Jump for Glory (Raoul Walsh, 1937)
(*When Thief Meets Thief*)
Drama. Criterion (UK)
85 mins
s. Douglas Fairbanks Jr., Valerie Hobson
m. Percival Mackey

Kate Plus Ten (1938)
(*Queen of Crime*)
Comedy thriller. Wainwright (UK)
81 mins
s. Jack Hulbert, Genevieve Tobin, Noel Madison
m. Allan Gray

Knight Without Armour (Jacques Feyder, 1937)
Historical drama. London Films (UK)
107 mins
s. Marlene Dietrich, Robert Donat, Irene Vanbrugh
m. Miklós Rózsa, P.I. Tchaikovsky (excerpts)
md. Muir Mathieson

Kind Hearts and Coronets (Robert Hamer, 1949)
Comedy/crime. Ealing (UK)
106 mins
s. Dennis Price, Alec Guinness, Valerie Hobson
m. ?Ernest Irving, W.A. Mozart (*Don Giovanni*: 'Il mio tesoro intanto')
md. Ernest Irving

King Solomon's Mines (Robert Stevenson, 1937)
Adventure. Gaumont-British, UK.
77 mins
s. Paul Robeson, Cedric Hardwicke, Roland Young
m. Mischa Spoliansky
md. Louis Levy
lyr. Eric Maschwitz

The Little Princess (Walter Lang, 1939)
Drama. 20th Century Fox (USA)
93 mins
s. Shirley Temple, Richard Greene, Anita Louise
m. Walter Bullock, Samuel Pokrass, ?Charles Maxwell,
?Cyril J. Mockridge, ?Herbert W. Spencer
md. Louis Silvers
lyr. Walter Bullock, Samuel Pokrass

The Lady of the Lake (James A. Fitzpatrick, 1928)
QQ Silent historical adventure, sound added 1931.
Gainsborough (UK)
57 mins
s. Percy Marmont, Benita Hume, Lawson Butt
m. Nathaniel Shilkret

The Lady Vanishes (Alfred Hitchcock, 1938)
Comedy thriller. Gainsborough (UK)
96 mins
s. Margaret Lockwood, Michael Redgrave, Paul Lukas
m. ?Louis Levy, ?Charles Williams
md. Louis Levy

The Ladykillers (Alexander Macendrick, 1955)
Comedy. Ealing (UK)
91 mins
s. Alec Guinness, Peter Sellers, Cecil Parker
m. Tristram Cary, Luigi Boccherini ('Minuet in E major')

A Lady Surrenders (See *Love Story*)

Late Extra (Albert Parker, 1935)
QQ Thriller. Fox (UK)
69 mins
s. Alastair Sim, James Mason, Virginia Cherrill
m. ?Charles Cowdrick

Law and Disorder (David MacDonald, 1940)
QQ Comedy. British Consolidated / Highbury (UK)
71 mins
s. Alastair Sim, Barry K. Barnes, Diana Churchill
m. Francis Chagrin

The Lilac Domino (Frederic Zelnik, 1937)
Operetta. Capitol (UK)
79 mins
s. Michael Bartlett, June Knight, S.Z. Sakall
m. Charles Cuvillier, Hans May
md. Harry Acres
lyr. Clifford Grey

Looking on the Bright Side
(Graham Cutts & Basil Dean, 1932)
Musical comedy. Associated Talking Pictures (UK)
81 mins
s. Gracie Fields, Richard Dolman, Julian Rose
m. ?Carroll Gibbons, ?J.S. Zamecnik,
md. ?Ernest Irving

Lorna Doone (Basil Dean, 1935)
Adventure. Associated Talking Pictures (UK)
90 mins
s. Victoria Hopper, John Loder, Margaret Lockwood
m. C. Armstrong Gibbs
md. ?Ernest Irving

Love From a Stranger (Rowland V. Lee, 1937)
(*A Night of Terror*)
Mystery. Trafalgar Films (UK)
86 mins
s. Ann Harding, Basil Rathbone, Binnie Hale
m. Benjamin Britten
md. Boyd Neel

Love Story (Leslie Arliss, 1944)
(*A Lady Surrenders*)
Romantic drama. Gainsborough (UK)
113 mins
s. Margaret Lockwood, Stewart Granger, Patricia Roc
m. ?Hubert Bath
md. Louis Levy

Man of Aran (Robert J. Flaherty, 1934)
Fictional documentary (ethnofiction)
Gaumont-British (Ireland/UK)
76 mins
s. Colman 'Tiger' King, Maggie Derrane, Michael Derrane
m. John Greenwood

The Man Who Changed His Mind

(Robert Stevenson, 1936)

(The Man Who Lived Again)

Science fiction. Gainsborough (UK)

66 mins

s. Boris Karloff, Anna Lee, John Loder

md. Louis Levy

m. ?Jack Beaver, ?Hubert Bath

The Man Who Could Work Miracles

(Lothar Mendes, 1936)

Comedy. London Films (UK)

82 mins

s. Roland Young, Ralph Richardson, Edward Chapman

m. Mischa Spoliansky

md. Muir Mathieson

The Man Who Knew Too Much (Alfred Hitchcock, 1934)

Thriller. Gaumont-British (UK)

75 mins

s. Leslie Banks, Edna Best, Peter Lorre

m. Arthur Benjamin, ?Charles Williams

md. Louis Levy

Mary Poppins

(Robert Stevenson, 1964)

Fantasy musical. Disney (US/UK)

139 mins

s. Julie Andrews, Dick Van Dyke

m. Richard M. Sherman, Robert B. Sherman

lyr. Richard M. Sherman, Robert B. Sherman

A Matter of Life and Death*(Stairway to Heaven)*

(Michael Powell & Emeric Pressburger, 1946)

Drama. The Archers (UK)

104 mins

s. David Niven, Roger Livesey, Raymond Massey

m. Allan Gray

Midshipman Easy (Carol Reed, 1935)

Adventure. Associated Talking Pictures/Ealing (UK)

70 mins

s. Hughie Green, Margaret Lockwood, Harry Tate

m. Frederic Austin

md. Ernest Irving

Le Million (René Clair, 1931)

Musical comedy. Films Sonores Tobis (France)

81 mins

s. Annabella, René Lefèvre, Jean-Louis Allibert

m. Armand Bernard, Philippe Parès, Georges Van Parys

Moana (Robert J. Flaherty, 1926)

Docufiction. Famous Players-Lasky (USA)

77 mins

s. Ta'avale, Fa'amgase, T'ugaita

Modern Times (Charles Chaplin, 1936)

Comedy. Charles Chaplin Productions (USA)

87 mins

s. Charles Chaplin, Paulette Goddard, Henry Bergmann

m. Charles Chaplin

Moonlight Sonata (Lothar Mendes, 1937)

Music drama. Pall Mall (UK)

86 mins

s. Ignacy Jan Paderewski, Charles Farrell, Marie Tempest

m. Ignacy Jan Paderewski, L.v. Beethoven (*Piano Sonata* op.27, no.2, First mvt. 'Moonlight'), F. Chopin (*Polonaise*op.53), F. Liszt (*Hungarian Rhapsody* no.2)***Music Hath Charms*** (Thomas Bentley et al, 1935)

Musical. British International (UK)

70 mins

s. Henry Hall, W.H. Berry, Carol Goodner

Murder! (Alfred Hitchcock, 1930)

Thriller. British International (UK)

98 mins

s. Herbert Marshall, Norah Baring, Phyllis Konstam

md. John Reynders

Murder in Soho (Norman Lee, 1939)*(Murder in the Night)*

Crime. ABPC (UK)

70 mins

s. Jack La Rue, Sandra Storme, Bernard Lee

m. ?Harry Acres, ?Kenneth Leslie-Smith

md. Harry Acres

Nell Gwyn (Herbert Wilcox, 1934)

Historical. British & Dominions (UK)

85 mins

s. Anna Neagle, Cedric Hardwicke, Jeanne De Casalis

m. Philip Braham

A Night Like This (Tom Walls, 1932)

Comedy. British & Dominions (UK)

72 mins

s. Tom Walls, Ralph Lynn, Winifred Shotter

md. Roy Fox, Lew Stone

Night Mail (Harry Watt & Basil Wright, 1936)

Documentary. GPO (UK)

24 mins

m. Benjamin Britten

Oh, Mr. Porter! (Marcel Varnel, 1937)

Comedy. Gaumont-British (UK)

85 mins

s. Will Hay, Moore Marriott, Graham Moffatt

m. ?Charles Williams, ?Louis Levy, ?Jack Beaver

md. Louis Levy

O-Kay for Sound (Marcel Varnel, 1937)

Musical comedy. Gainsborough (UK)

86 mins

s. Jimmy Nervo, Teddy Knox, Bud Flanagan

m. ?Louis Levy

md. Louis Levy

lyr. Bert Lee, R.P. Weston

The Old Dark House (James Whale, 1932)

Horror. Universal (USA)

72 mins

s. Boris Karloff, Melvyn Douglas, Charles Laughton

m. ?David Broekman, ?Bernhard Kaun, ?Heinz Roemheld

On the Night of the Fire (Brian Desmond Hurst, 1939)*(The Fugitive)*

Thriller. Greenspan & Seligman Enterprises (USA)

94 mins

s. Ralph Richardson, Diana Wynyard, Romney Brent

m. Miklós Rózsa

md. Muir Mathieson

Les Otages (Raymond Bernard, 1938)

Drama. Nero Film – AG (France)

105 mins

s. Saturnin Fabre, Fernand Charpin, Annie Vernay

m. Darius Milhaud

Partie de Campagne (Jean Renoir, 1936)

Romance. Panthéon (France)

40 mins

s. Sylvia Bataille, Georges d'Arnoux, Jane Marken
m. Joseph Kosma**Passenger to London** (Lawrence Huntington, 1937)

QQ Comedy thriller. Fox British (UK)

57 mins

s. John Warwick, Jenny Laird, Paul Neville
md. ?Charles Cowlrick**Passing of the Third Floor Back** (Berthold Viertel, 1935)

Drama. Gaumont-British (UK)

90 mins

s. Conrad Veidt, René Ray, Frank Cellier
m. Hubert Bath
md. Louis Levy**Passport to Pimlico** (Henry Cornelius, 1949)

Comedy. Ealing (UK)

84 mins

s. Stanley Holloway, Betty Warren, Barbara Murray
m. Georges Auric**Penny Paradise** (Carol Reed, 1938)

Musical comedy. Ealing (UK)

72 mins

s. Edmund Gwenn, Betty Driver, Jimmy O'Dea
m. Harry Parr-Davies, Harry O'Donovan
md. ?Ernest Irving
lyr. Harry Parr-Davies, Harry O'Donovan**Pett and Pott** (Alberto Cavalcanti, 1934)

Comedy. GPO (UK)

29 mins

s. J.M. Reeves, Marjorie Fone, June Godfrey
m. Walter Leigh**The Phantom Light** (Michael Powell, 1935)

QQ Thriller. Ealing (UK)

76 mins

s. Binnie Hale, Gordon Harker, Donald Calthrop
m. Charles Williams
md. Louis Levy**The Phantom Ship** (Denison Clift, 1935)*(The Mystery of the Mary Celeste)*

Horror. Hammer (UK)

80 mins

s. Bela Lugosi, Shirley Grey, Arthur Margetson
md. Eric Ansell**The Private Life of Henry VIII** (Alexander Korda, 1933)

Historical drama. London Films (UK)

97 mins

s. Charles Laughton, Robert Donat, Franklin Dyall
m. Kurt Schroeder**The Private Life of Don Juan** (Alexander Korda, 1934)

Adventure/Drama. London Films (UK)

89 mins

s. Douglas Fairbanks, Merle Oberon, Bruce Winston
m. Ernst Toch
md. Muir Mathieson**Die Privatsekretärin** (William Thiele, 1931)

Musical comedy. Greenbaum-Film (Germany)

100 mins

s. Renate Müller, Hermann Thimig, Felix Bressart
m. Paul Abraham**Psycho** (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960)

Horror. Shamley (USA)

109 mins

s. Janet Leigh, Anthony Perkins, Vera Miles
m. Bernard Herrmann**Pygmalion**

(Anthony Asquith & Leslie Howard, 1938)

Comedy. Gabriel Pascal Productions (UK)

96 mins

s. Leslie Howard, Wendy Hiller, Winifred Lawson
m. Arthur Honneger
md. Louis Levy**Q Planes** (Tim Whelan, 1939)*(Clouds Over Europe)*

Comedy thriller. London Films (UK)

82 mins

s. Laurence Olivier, Ralph Richardson, Valerie Hobson
md. Muir Mathieson**Le Quai Des Brumes** (Marcel Carné, 1938)*(Port of Shadows)*

Drama. Franco London Films (France)

91 mins

s. Jean Gabin, Michel Simon, Michèle Morgan
m. Maurice Jaubert**Rainbow Dance** (Len Lye, 1936)

Animated short. GPO (UK)

4 mins

m. Burton Lane

The Rat (Graham Cutts, 1925)

Silent drama. Gainsborough (UK)

74 mins

s. Ivor Novello, Mae Marsh, Isabel Jeans

The Rat (Jack Raymond, 1937)

Drama. Herbert Wilcox Productions (UK)

72 mins

s. Ruth Chatterton, Anton Walbrook, René Ray
m. Anthony Collins
md. Muir Mathieson**Red Ensign** (Michael Powell, 1934)*(Strike!)*

QQ Drama. Gaumont-British (UK)

69 mins

s. Leslie Banks, Carol Goodner, Frank Vosper

La règle du jeu (Jean Renoir, 1939)

Comedy. Nouvelle Édition Française (France)

106 mins

s. Marcel Dalio, Nora Gregor, Paulette Goddard
m. Joseph Kosma, Léopold Gangloff, Pierre-Alexandre
Mosigny, W.A. Mozart
lyr. Jules Baldran, Eugène Rimbault**Rembrandt** (Alexander Korda, 1936)

Biographical drama. London Films (UK)

85 mins

s. Charles Laughton, Gertrude Lawrence, Elsa Lanchester
m. Geoffrey Tye
md. Muir Mathieson**Rhodes of Africa** (Berthold Viertel & Geoffrey Barkas, 1936)

Adventure. Gaumont-British (UK)

90 mins

s. Walter Huston, Oskar Homolka, Basil Sydney
m. Hubert Bath
md. Louis Levy

The Rise of Catherine the Great (Paul Czinner, 1934)
Historical drama. London Films (UK)
95 mins
s. Douglas Fairbanks Jr., Elisabeth Bergner, Flora Robson
m. Ernst Toch
md. ?Muir Mathieson

Roadways (William Coldstream, 1937)
Documentary short. GPO Film Unit (UK)
15 mins
m. Ernest H. Meyer

Road House (Maurice Elvey, 1934)
Musical/crime. Gaumont-British (UK)
76 mins
s. Violet Loraine, Gordon Harker, Aileen Marson
m. ?Bretton Byrd, Harry M. Woods
md. Louis Levy
lyr. Harry M. Woods

Sanders of the River (Zoltan Korda, 1935)
Adventure. London Films (UK)
98 mins
s. Paul Robeson, Leslie Banks, Jeffrey Dell
m. Mischa Spoliansky ("Michael" Spoliansky)
md. Muir Mathieson

Sally in Our Alley (Maurice Elvey, 1931)
Musical comedy. ATP (UK)
74 mins
s. Gracie Fields, Ian Hunter, Florence Desmond
m. ?Ernest Irving
md. ?Ernest Irving

The Scarlet Pimpernel (Harold Young, 1934)
Historical adventure. London Films (UK)
97 mins
s. Leslie Howards, Merle Oberon, Raymond Massey
m. Arthur Benjamin
md. Muir Mathieson

Scott of the Antarctic (Charles Frend, 1948)
Historical adventure. Ealing (UK)
111 mins
s. John Mills, Derek Bond, Diana Churchill
m. Ralph Vaughan Williams
md. Ernest Irving

The Screen Traveller: Damascus and Jerusalem
(André de la Varre, 1936)
Documentary (travelogue). André de la Varre (USA)
11 mins

Scrooge (Henry Edwards, 1935)
Dickens adaptation. Twickenham (UK)
78 mins
s. Seymour Hicks, Donald Calthrop, Robert Cochran
m. W.L. Trytel
md. W.L. Trytel

Secret Agent (Alfred Hitchcock, 1936)
Thriller. Gaumont-British (UK)
86 mins
s. John Gielgud, Madeleine Carroll, Robert Young
m. ?Charles Williams
md. Louis Levy

Sexton Blake and the Hooded Terror
(George King, 1938)
QQ Detective. George King Productions (UK)
s. George Curzon, Tod Slaughter, Greta Gynt
m. ?Jack Beaver
md. Jack Beaver

The Silent Passenger (Reginald Denham, 1935)
Thriller. Associated Talking Pictures at Ealing (UK)
75 mins
s. John Loder, Peter Haddon, Lilian Oldland
md. ?Percival Mackey

Silver Blaze (Thomas Bentley, 1937)
(*Murder at the Baskervilles*)
QQ Crime. ABPC (UK)
71 mins
s. Arthur Wontner, Ian Fleming, Lyn Harding
m. ?H. Baynton Power
md. Marcus de Wolfe, ?W.L. Trytel

Sing As We Go (Basil Dean, 1934)
Musical. ATP (UK)
80 mins
s. Gracie Fields, John Loder
md. Ernest Irving
lyr. Harry Parr Davies

Singin' in the Rain
(Gene Kelly & Stanley Donen, 1952)
Musical. MGM (USA)
103 min
s. Gene Kelly, Donald O'Connor, Debbie Reynolds
m. Nacio Herb Brown
lyr. Arthur Freed

Sixty Glorious Years (Herbert Wilcox, 1938)
(*Queen of Destiny*)
Historical biopic. Herbert Wilcox Productions (UK)
95 mins
s. Anna Neagle, Anton Walbrook, C. Aubrey Smith
m. Anthony Collins, ?Lionel Salter
md. Muir Mathieson

The Sleeping Cardinal (Leslie S. Hiscott, 1931)
(*Sherlock Holmes' Fatal Hour*)
Crime thriller. Julius Hagen Productions (UK)
84 mins
s. Arthur Wontner, Ian Fleming, Minnie Rayner
m. ?John Greenwood

Song of Ceylon (Basil Wright, 1934)
Documentary short. GPO (UK)
38 mins
m. Walter Leigh

Song of Freedom (J. Elder Wills, 1936)
Drama. Hammer (UK)
80 mins
s. Paul Robeson, Elisabeth Welch, Esme Percy
m. Eric Ansell, ?Jack Beaver

Spies of the Air (David MacDonald, 1939)
Thriller. British National Pictures (UK)
77 mins
s. Barry K. Barnes, Joan Marion, Roger Livesey
m. Ronnie Munro

The Spy in Black (Michael Powell, 1939)
Thriller. London Films (UK)
82 mins
s. Conrad Veidt, Valerie Hobson, Sebastian Shaw
m. Miklós Rózsa
md. Muir Mathieson

St Martin's Lane (Tim Whelan, 1938)
(*London After Dark; Partners of the Night; Sidewalks of London*)
Comedy. Mayflower (UK)
85 mins
s. Charles Laughton, Vivien Leigh, Rex Harrison
m. Arthur Johnston, ?Jack Beaver, ?Frederick Lewis, ?Lionel Salter
md. Muir Mathieson

Strange Boarders (Herbert Mason, 1938)

Comedy thriller. Gainsborough (UK)

74 mins

s. Tom Walls, Renée St Cyr, Googie Withers

md. Louis Levy

m. ?Charles Williams

Studie Nr.4 (Oskar Fischinger, 1930)

Animated short. Fischinger Studio (Germany)

LOST

m. Mischa Spoliansky ('Auf wiedersehen')

Sunshine Susie (Victor Saville, 1931)*(The Office Girl)*

Musical comedy. Gainsborough (UK)

80 mins

s. Renate Müller, Jack Hulbert, Owen Nares

m. Paul Abraham

md. Louis Levy

Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street

(George King, 1936)

QQ Horror. George King Productions (UK)

67 mins

s. Tod Slaughter, Stella Rho, John Singer

m. Eric Ansell

Swing Time (George Stevens, 1936)

Musical. RKO Radio Pictures (USA)

103 mins

s. Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Victor Moore

m. Jerome Kern, ?Robert Russell Bennett

md. Nathaniel Shilkret

lyr. Dorothy Fields

The Tell-Tale Heart (Brian Desmond Hurst, 1934)*(Bucket of Blood)*

QQ Drama. Blattner (UK)

55 mins

s. Norman Dryden, John Kelt, Yolande Terrell

md. John Reynders

They Drive by Night

(Arthur B. Woods, 1938)

QQ Crime thriller. Warner Bros. First National (UK)

84 mins

s. Emlyn Williams, Anna Konstam, Allan Jeayes

m. ?Bretton Byrd

md. Bretton Byrd

The Thief of Bagdad (Michael Powell et al., 1940)

Fantasy. (London Films, UK)

106 mins

s. Conrad Veidt, Sabu

m. Miklós Rózsa

md. Muir Mathieson

Things to Come (William Cameron Menzies, 1936)

Drama. London Films (UK)

113 mins

s. Raymond Massey, Edward Chapman, Ralph Richardson

m: Arthur Bliss

md: Muir Mathieson

This Man is News (David MacDonald, 1938)

QQ Crime/Comedy. Pinebrook (UK)

63 mins

s. Barry K. Barnes, Valeries Hobson, Alastair Sim

m. ?Percival Mackey

md. Percival Mackey

The Third Man (Carol Reed, 1949)

Thriller. London Films (UK)

104 mins

s. Orson Welles, Joseph Cotton, Alida Valli

m. ?Anton Karas

Thunder in the City (Marion Gering, 1937)

Drama. Atlantic (UK)

88 mins

s. Edward G. Robinson, Nigel Bruce, Constance Collier

m. Miklós Rózsa

The Ticket of Leave Man (George King, 1937)

QQ Thriller. George King Productions (UK)

71 mins

s. Tod Slaughter, John Warwick, Marjorie Taylor

m. ?Jack Beaver

md. Jack Beaver

Top Hat (Mark Sandrich, 1935)

Musical. RKO Radio Pictures (USA)

101 mins

s. Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Edward Everett Horton

m. Irving Berlin, ?Max Steiner

lyr. Irving Berlin

The Triumph of Sherlock Holmes

(Leslie S. Hiscott, 1935)

Detective. Twickenham (UK)

84 mins

s. Arthur Wontner, Lyn Harding, Leslie Perrins

md. W.L.Trytel

Triumph des Willens (Leni Riefenstahl, 1934)*(Triumph of the Will)*

Propaganda. Reichsparteitag-Film (Germany)

114 min

m. Herbert Windt

Tropical Ceylon (James A. Fitzpatrick, 1932)

Documentary (travelogue). MGM (USA)

9 mins

Tudor Rose (Robert Stevenson, 1936)*(Nine Days a Queen)*

Historical drama. London Films (UK)

78 mins

s. Nova Pilbeam, Cedric Hardwicke, John Mills

m. ?Hubert Bath, ?Louis Levy

md. Louis Levy

The Tunnel (Maurice Elvey, 1935)*(Transatlantic Tunnel)*

Science fiction drama. Gaumont-British (UK)

94 mins

s. Richard Dix, Leslie Banks, Madge Evans

m. ?Hubert Bath

md. Louis Levy

Under the City (Alexander Shaw, 1934)

Documentary. GPO (UK)

8 mins

The Vampire Bat (Frank R. Strayer, 1933)

Horror. Majestic Pictures (USA)

65 mins

s. Lionel Atwill, Fay Wray, Melvyn Douglas

m. Charles Dunworth (? stock music)

md. ?Abe Meyer

The Vicar of Bray (Henry Edwards, 1937)

QQ Historical drama. Julius Hagen Productions (UK)

68 mins

s. Stanley Holloway, Hugh Miller, K. Hamilton Price

m. ?H. Brayton Power

md. Marcus de Wolfe

Victoria the Great (Herbert Wilcox, 1937)

Historical drama. London Films (UK)

112 mins

s. Anna Neagle, Anton Walbrook, Walter Rilla.

m. Anthony Collins

md. Muir Mathieson

Vintage Wine (Henry Edwards, 1935)
 QQ Comedy. Twickenham (UK)
 81 mins
 s. Seymour Hicks, Claire Luce, Eva Moore
 md. W.L.Trytel

Waltzes from Vienna (Alfred Hitchcock, 1933)
(Strauss' Great Waltz)
 Operetta. Gaumont-British (UK)
 81 mins
 s. Edmund Gwenn, Esmond Knight, Jessie Matthews
 Arrangements: Hubert Bath, Erich Wolfgang Korngold,
 Julius Bittner
 md. Louis Levy

The Way to the Sea (J.B. Holmes, 1936)
 Documentary short. Strand Films (UK)
 9 mins
 m. Benjamin Britten

We Live in Two Worlds (Alberto Cavalcanti, 1937)
 Information short. GPO (UK)
 13 mins
 s. J.B. Priestley
 m. Maurice Jaubert

Whom the Gods Love (Basil Dean, 1936)
 Mozart biopic. Associated Talking Pictures (UK)
 82 mins
 s. Stephen Haggard
 md. Ernest Irving

Windbag the Sailor (William Beaudine, 1936)
 Comedy. Gainsborough (UK)
 87 mins
 s. Will Hay, Moore Marriott, Graham Moffatt
 m. ?Charles Williams, ?Bretton Byrd
 md. Louis Levy

The Woman From China (Edward Dryhurst, 1930)
 Crime (silent). Edward G. Whiting Productions (UK)
 76 mins
 s. Julie Suedo, Gibb McLaughlin, Frances Cuyler

A Yank at Oxford (Jack Conway, 1938)
 Comedy. MGM (USA/UK)
 102 mins
 s. Robert Taylor, Vivien Leigh, Lionel Barrymore
 m. Hubert Bath, Edward Ward

Zéro de conduite (Jean Vigo, 1933)
 Featurette drama. Gaumont (France)
 41 mins
 s. Jean Dasté, Robert le Flon, Louis Lefebvre
 m. Maurice Jaubert

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