

Music in British Films in the 1970s: New Directions

Symphonic music in British films has been fostered from the 1930s to the 1950s mainly by studios such as London Films and Ealing Studios, and by Hammer Film Studios from the 1940s to the 1980s. Composers such as William Alwyn, Malcolm Arnold, William Walton, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Benjamin Frankel, Ron Goodwin, John Barry and Roy Budd have created and maintained a tradition. Hollywood composers such as Bernard Herrmann and Miklos Rozsa, working on British projects, have also contributed. Through the 1970s that tradition continued, and was supplemented by newer forms of music soundtrack, such as those of pop and rock, jazz, and electronic.

A small selection of disparate films made in Britain in the 1970s may be enough to show how various were the directions soundtracks were going in. The films selected to illustrate this formation are *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (Miklos Rozsa), *A Clockwork Orange* (Wendy Carlos), *Get Carter* (Roy Budd) and *O Lucky Man!* (Alan Price) In the background are *The Boy Friend* (Peter Maxwell Davies), *The Last Valley* (John Barry), *Walkabout* (John Barry), *Don't Look Now* (Pino Donnagio), *Gumshoe* (Andrew Lloyd Webber) and *Tommy* (The Who). A third group comprises films that are currently comparatively difficult to access or listen to, and they suggest a path for further research: *And Now the Darkness* (Laurie Johnson), *Figures in a Landscape* (Richard Rodney Bennett), *Lady Caroline Lamb* (Richard Rodney Bennett), and *The Seven Percent Solution* (John Addison), the latter another Sherlock Holmes adventure.

The American director Billy Wilder made two films with British subjects, the first an adaptation of Agatha Christie's play *Witness for the Prosecution* in 1957. Thirteen years later, after much preparation, and with lavish funding, he came to England itself to shoot *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*. This unusual film would not exist, or not in its present form, were it not for a piece of concert music, Miklos Rozsa's Concerto for Violin and Orchestra Opus 24 premiered by Jascha Heifetz in 1956, which Wilder became very familiar with. He had known Rozsa's work previously, for the composer had scored three of his films back in the 1940s, for the war thriller *Five Graves to Cairo* and two noir pictures *Double Indemnity* and *The Lost Weekend*. Rozsa's Concerto for Violin apparently inspired Wilder to develop the Sherlock Holmes film. He asked Rozsa to expand his opus for the project, and include music that Holmes the violinist might have composed. The 'Private Life' of the title was the ingredient missing from the previous genre films and TV series featuring the consulting detective. The most recent filmic antecedents to Wilder's film were Terence Fisher's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1958) for Hammer, and James Hill's *A Study in Terror* (1965). Wilder, the consummate Hollywood professional, with his co-scenarist I.A.L. Diamond, departed from these adaptations of Conan Doyle, by retaining the characters of Holmes and Dr Watson, but creating new adventures for them, too sensitive to be published until 50 years after Watson's death, and subverting the genre and series with a 1970s take on the elegance and decorum of Victorian society. Robert Stephens and Colin Blakely play the famous fictional duo, like a comic double act. The former suggests the languor and wit of Oscar Wilde, and it is interesting to note references to homosexuality surfacing in the film. By 1970, a widening tolerance of gayness was gathering momentum, as was a greater permissiveness regarding sex on stage, for the Lord Chamberlain's powers were abolished, and likewise in literature and on the screen. A decade previously there had been two Wilde biopics in one year: Gregory Ratoff's *Oscar Wilde* and Ken Hughes's *The Trials of Oscar Wilde*. 1960 was also the year that Penguin Books won the right to publish the unexpurgated version of D.H. Lawrence's *Lady*

Chatterley's Lover. By 1966, Joseph Strick was able to film James Joyce's *Ulysses* in Dublin. In 1969, Ken Russell shot a wrestling match between totally nude male actors Alan Bates and Oliver Reed in his film of Lawrence's *Women in Love*, and a lesbian affair was at the heart of Robert Aldrich's *The Killing of Sister George*. Wilder's film has a farcical episode where Holmes disentangles himself from a predatory Russian ballerina, by persuading her that he and Watson are a gay couple. Watson has his doubts about Holmes, anyway. He broaches the subject of Holmes's sexuality: 'I hope I'm not being presumptuous. There have been women in your life?' to which the detective replies, 'The answer is yes. You are being presumptuous.'

Holmes was a British subject with international appeal, made in Britain with American finance, for the Mirisch Company, which was distinguished by largely quality product that also showed a profit. Though *Holmes* flopped, its production signalled a shift in the way films were made in Britain. Pictures were more independently made, almost always in colour, with more location shooting, and fit less easily into definite genres. *Holmes* was classical in conforming to the best Hollywood practice, but also in its use of music, for Rozsa composed in the idiom of the symphonic score, which worked in the concert hall as well it did in the cinema. Hungarian-born, he started his film career working for fellow Hungarian, Alexander Korda, one of Britain's greatest independent producers. During the war, he moved with Korda to Hollywood. He brought to his British films a well-researched local colour, as evidenced in *Holmes* by the pomp of the brief march accompanying the appearance of a snow globe enshrining the head of Queen Victoria in the credit sequence, and with the sprightly piccolo playing the tune 'Loch Lomond' as Holmes, Watson and Gabrielle take the train to Inverness. Rozsa also adapted sections of 'Swan Lake' for the ballet scenes, and can be seen conducting the pit orchestra in the film.

All in all, Rozsa uses a fine array of instruments for colouring and dramatic effect including timpani, marimba, harp, trombone and violin. The latter is key, suggesting Holmes's romantic past, with a thread fine enough to encompass sexual orientation this way or that, or an absence of any, or sheer melancholy, wistfulness or vacancy. His known outlets for relieving stress were the violin or the cocaine needle.

In contrast to *Holmes* which boasted a very solid Baker Street set designed by Alexander Trauner, Mike Hodges's debut feature *Get Carter*, made the following year, was shot almost entirely on location, mainly in Newcastle and County Durham. A gangster film, its hero Jack Carter played by Michael Caine, its violence made *Holmes* look decidedly genteel. It was more reflective of its time. Violence came not just from the London underworld, epitomised by the Kray Twins, which was imported into the north, but also the conflicts in Vietnam and, nearer to home, Northern Ireland. Films such as Ralph Nelson's *Soldier Blue* and Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch*, both westerns released in 1969, echoed atrocities in Vietnam, while films coming out the same year as *Get Carter* such as Peckinpah's *Straw Dogs* and Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* presented the violence in British society, present and future. There was corruption festering in *Get Carter*, as in reality, in politics, the construction industry, and gaming, and discredited figures like T. Dan Smith and John Poulson became symbols of it. There is discreet nudity in *Holmes*, but sex is both more casual and more explicitly depicted in *Get Carter*. Where the realistic surface of *Holmes* is more conspicuously constructed, *Get Carter* is clearly the work of documentary-trained director and cameraman. The latter in this case Wolfgang Suschitzky, equally famous as a still photographer, whose fiction films include two made in Ireland: Paul Rotha's *No Resting Place* (1951) and Strick's *Ulysses*. They are aided by the discreet art direction of Ashetton Gorton, and a minimal but nonetheless resonant jazz score by Roy

Budd, who was just 23 when he was writing it. *Carter* was his second score. His first was for *Soldier Blue*. Budd played the *Carter* score himself on the film's soundtrack with harpsichord, piano and electric organ, accompanied by the other two members of his trio who played double bass and tables. The jazzy title music is plangent and sets the tone through the credit scene set largely on a train running from London to Newcastle. There is a sense of relentlessness, like the train, embedded in the theme. It is modern, urban and, even, cool.

Where there is no music in *Get Carter*, there is invariably natural sound. The horns of tug-boats are heard on the way to Frank's funeral, and after Carter stabs Albert to death, like a moan, both instances bringing out a hunting motif: Carter the hunter is also foxlike. The horns are reminiscent of the basso profundo orchestral ones summoned up by Franz Waxman for the American cut of Jules Dassin's London-set *noir* film *Night and the City* (1950) when Harry Fabian (Richard Widmark) is dumped into the Thames. When Carter is having phone sex with his girlfriend Anna (Britt Ekland), his landlady is seen silently rocking in her chair in the foreground, but listening. We see Anna undressed and arousing, to the tinkle of bells, a touch contributed by sound editor Jim Atkinson. There is also a later frisson provided by a girls' marching drum and kazoo band which punctuates Carter's love-making with his amorous landlady. When Carter is rescued by his 'fairy princess' Glenda, Geraldine Moffat in her sports car, the sounds of her manoeuvring her machine at speed are accompanied by percussion, and inter-cut with tactile shots of them together in bed. We also *hear* the wind around Glenda's flat. Piano and percussion, used sparsely but with relentless rhythm, make Carter seem unstoppable as he moves along the wharf in the pursuit of his quarry, the chauffeur Eric (Ian Hendry). When he finally dispatches Eric, he becomes jaunty, and a brief musical caper comes from the harpsichord, before he tosses his gun into the sea, and is himself picked off by a sniper (first seen on that northward bound train), who carefully dismantles his weapon, and walks away downhill like a huntsman after a day's dispassionate shooting. Carter's theme now seems mournful. The theme has gained a life beyond the film, being reprised by the Sheffield pop group The Human League, also by Sky News, and incorporated into Tyler Bates's score for Stephen Kay's remake in 2000.

Get Carter director Mike Hodges observed that there was a circularity in the film's plot, because Carter sits opposite his eventual killer on the train going north at the film's start. The perpetrator of violence, though justifying himself in the name of family honour, gets his just deserts. In Stanley Kubrick's film of Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*, filmed the same year, the protagonist Alex (played by Malcolm Macdowell) comes full circle, in moving from a disturbing love of perpetrating violence, through 'the Ludovico treatment' which removes his free will, to a state where he is again free to make choices. The Ludovico programme is a form of aversion therapy, in which Alex is forced to watch scenes of violence on film while undergoing drug treatment designed to cause the violence to bring on a reaction of debilitating nausea. The film is futuristic in its use of modern, sometimes brutalist, architecture, costumes and décor, and its use of synthesized music. The composer Wendy Carlos, who had a hit with the album 'Switched on Bach' created for the film electronic arrangements of Beethoven, or Ludwig Van as Alex calls him, who is used a lot, as well as of Rossini and Elgar. The electronic music and voice we can hear are the sounds in Alex's head. Carlos wrote as 'Walter' and after a sex change became 'Wendy', and under that name she contributed to scoring and sound design with voice to Kubrick's 1980 horror film *The Shining*. The song 'Singin' in the Rain' sung by Alex when kicking a tramp is a sign of Alex's *joie de vivre*, and why we are attracted to him, while

repulsed by what he does. The pure original recording by Gene Kelly accompanies the end credits, as a sign that all will be well. The use of a synthesizer on the soundtrack of *A Clockwork Orange* was highly unusual at the time. Harry Robertson employed a Moog synthesizer a year later for a stylish Freudian horror thriller made for Hammer, Peter Sykes's *Demons of the Mind* (1972).

Lindsay Anderson's 1973 *O Lucky Man!* is another film featuring Malcolm Macdowell in the lead, playing for a second time the character Mick Travis, the hero of Anderson's *If...* (1969). Here he is a coffee salesman, travelling all over the country. He has experiences of many kinds, varying from pleasant to harsh. Actors doubling up on the number of characters they play within the film emphasise that 'changes', for good or bad, are a way of life, and that life goes on. Macdowell eventually steps out of character and is himself, and interacts with director Anderson, composer and songwriter Alan Price, and the rest of the cast. The film is based on some of Macdowell's own experiences. Price, previously best known as a pop singer, collaborated with Anderson a number of times. He helps keep the film moving with his infectious songs. Price later progressed to being lead actor *and* composer, in Ken Hughes's sequel to *Alfie* in 1976: *Alfie Darling*. A feature of 1970s cinema was the increasing number of pop stars becoming actors, such as Roger Daltry in Ken Russell's *Tommy* and *Lisztomania* (both 1975) and David Bowie in Nicolas Roeg's *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976). More pop music was used in films to bring back declining audiences, as in Claude Whatham's *That'll be the Day* (1973) and its sequel Michael Apted's *Stardust* (1974). These two pictures were set in the 1950s and 1960s, and singer David Essex starred, with support from such performer-cum-actors as Ringo Starr, Billy Fury and Adam Faith. Keith Moon (of The Who) and Steve Aspinall supervised the music, and Wil Malone provided the original scoring for the former, while rock musician Dave Edmunds was responsible for the soundtrack of the latter. Britain's recent popular culture was being re-packaged, and well received both critically and commercially, and finding a market in America. Ken Russell brought a Pop Art sensibility to his film of the rock opera *Tommy* (1975). The music of Pete Townsend and The Who give it pace, and though innovative, and a forerunner of the pop video, Russell's picture is too throwaway and diffuse.

It is not just in the David Essex/Jim MacLaine films that a strong retro element is at work. In Stephen Frears's debut feature *Gumshoe* (1971) Liverpool detective Eddie Ginley (Albert Finney) fancies himself following in Sam Spade's footsteps. Andrew Lloyd Webber's score captures the 1940's *noir* atmosphere perfectly. Alan Parker's novelty gangster musical *Bugsy Malone* (1976), which featured Jodie Foster and other juveniles playing grown-ups and guns spraying cream not bullets, Paul Williams's score like the whole film references the 1920s. Stanley Donen's musical version of Antoine De Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince* (1974), with its lacklustre score by Frederick Loewe, is rooted in the Second World War. Bryan Forbes's Cinderella story *The Slipper and the Rose* (1976), with memorable songs and music by Robert B. and Richard M. Sherman, evokes a fantasy 18th century world. Ken Russell's film of Sandy Wilson's *The Boy Friend* (1971), with original music by Peter Maxwell Davies, evokes 1920s theatre well, but is overlong. Anthony Page's *The Lady Vanishes* (1979), a Hammer remake of Hitchcock's classic 1938 thriller, looked back to the era of the original, but differently, aided by its soundtrack. As Randall D. Larson says, "Eschewing Hitchcock's quiet, slow-building mystery and farcical character affectations, Hammer's version emphasized colorful scenery, glossy romance, and high adventure. It was provided with an appropriately romantic, adventurous score by Richard Hartley".ⁱ

Two films directed by Nicolas Roeg were innovative in their manner of scoring. *Walkabout* (1970), made in location in the Australian outback, and also stunningly by photographed by Roeg, had a composite score, comprised of original music by John Barry, interspersed with quotations from Stockhausen's 'Hymnen' and some pop songs heard from the radio. The soundtrack is fragmented, in key with the editing style, and a sense of dislocation for the English children (Jenny Agutter and Lucien John) who are stranded after their father's suicide. They wear the clothes of their home life while encountering an Aborigine (David Gumpilil) on his walkabout. Barry's symphonic landscape sound is mixed with sustained passages of didgeridoo, reflecting the meeting of cultures. In the same year Barry wrote, contrastingly, a purely symphonic score for James Clavell's *The Last Valley*, an epic of the 17th century. At the opening of Roeg's *Don't Look Now* (1973), a young girl drowns in a garden pond. Her last moments alive are amplified and made haunting by what sounds like a child doodling on a piano. *Don't Look Now* is effectively scored by the Italian Pino Donnagio, working on his first feature film.

The decade was characterised by a certain maturity in the main films cited, and they are more uncompromisingly British. The scores were diverse: *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (symphonic), *Get Carter* (jazz), *A Clockwork Orange* (classical, electronic), *O Lucky Man!* (pop), *Bugsy Malone*, *Tommy*, *The Boy Friend* and *The Slipper and the Rose* (musicals), and *Walkabout* (composite score).

Against a climate of more overt violence and corruption, and less censorship, British cinema was becoming more adventurous. The films might be fewer in number, but there was greater variation. As well as classically-trained composers, more musicians were coming from the fields of pop and rock (Alan Price, The Who) and jazz (Roy Budd, John Dankworth). Composers also proved to be more versatile (i.e. John Barry with *Walkabout*, *The Last Valley* and the James Bond adventure *Moonraker*; Richard Rodney Bennett with *Figures in a Landscape*, *Lady Caroline Lamb* and *Murder on the Orient Express*; and John Addison with *Sleuth*, *A Bridge Too Far* and *The Seven Percent Solution*). *Get Carter*'s score was augmented by natural sound. In recent years, directors like Anthony Mingella have worked closely on music and sound design as a composite activity, i.e. with composer Gabriel Yared and editor Walter Murch on *The English Patient* (1996) and *The Talented Mr Ripley* (1999). Wendy Carlos's pioneering work with voice as an instrument, too, has born fruit in Lisa Gerrard's collaboration with Hans Zimmer on Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (2000). While films made in Britain were still very dependent on financing from abroad, particularly American, they became more thematically varied and less generic. Rock, pop, jazz and electronic music enlarged the scope of the soundtrack, which was viewed more as a construction which incorporated natural sound and sound effects.

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i Larson, R.D. (1996). *Music from the House of Hammer: music in the Hammer horror films 1950-1980*. Lanham, Md., pp. 143-144.