

## Scoring the Unseen: Composing ‘Film Music’ for Radio Drama

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### Abstract

This chapter recounts the process of commissioning, negotiating and composing an orchestral score to a BBC Radio drama adaptation of John Wyndham's *The Kraken Wakes*. It explores the different types of representation used in music for audio drama, informed by film music theory. The performance and live recording of the project, viewed from a historical perspective, evokes the Golden Age of radio, while the size of the orchestra and composition methods recall the film music of the 1950s. The collaboration process resulted in a hybridised artistic product, straddling the boundaries between live event, radio drama and film score.

In 2015, I was commissioned to write the music for a radio drama to be made by Manchester-based independent production company Savvy Productions for broadcast on BBC Radio 4 the following year. The production was to be a version of the 1953 novel by John Wyndham, *The Kraken Wakes*, in a contemporary adaptation by Val McDermid. The adaptation was studded with terrifying scientifically accurate scenarios of the flooding caused by invading aliens melting the icecaps, clearly showing an unmistakably contemporary resonance with possible scenarios created by climate change. It was recorded live in front of a studio audience in the Philharmonic Studios in MediaCityUK, Salford with well-known TV actors Tamsin Greig (*Black Books*, *Episodes*), Paul Higgins (*Line of Duty*) and Richard Harrington (*Hinterland*) in lead roles, and the production was also notable for the performance (as herself) of Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon.

But the most striking aspect to the production for the purposes of this chapter was the partnership with the BBC Philharmonic orchestra, based in Salford's MediaCityUK, and widely regarded as one of the world's finest broadcast orchestras. Orchestral Director Simon Webb was keen to ensure the orchestra was heard on BBC Radio 4, with its higher number of listeners, in order to

connect with audiences which went beyond that of the UK's main classical music network, BBC Radio 3. From the outset the orchestra had made clear that they wanted to be an equal partner in the drama, which lent a somewhat elevated status to the music and the fortunate composer. The drama ran for roughly 100 minutes in two episodes, for which I composed approximately 28 minutes of music.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the creative process involved in this specific production; to compare this process, the music composition methods employed, and the aesthetic choices made with those of other radio dramas, and those of film music; and to situate the project within the field of music for media more generally. While it is true that, because certain aspects of the project make it relatively unusual, it can in no way be regarded as a 'typical' contribution of music to a radio or audio drama, I want to argue that by occupying a liminal space between live performance, concert and radio play, the project sheds light on all these forms, as well as on music for film, a heritage it draws on heavily.

## 1 Music in Radio Drama

Radio and audio drama, and closely related variants – the feature, the experimental *Hörspiel*, the dramatised reading, radio ballad, and so on – continue to attract passionate adherents, and roughly 600 hours of drama per year is broadcast on the UK's premiere speech radio station, BBC Radio 4. Boris Kremenliev, writing at the height of the US radio era in 1949, estimated that roughly a third of all radio output was drama (which would equate to 4–6 hours per day today, assuming radio stations were not broadcast 24 hours in 1949), but lamented that “the profits of radio go into the development of a wonderful new toy [i.e., television] that may make audio broadcasting obsolete” (1949: 82). Kremenliev was not wholly correct about audio broadcasting, but he was right about the future demise of radio drama in the US. In the UK, radio drama continued to hold an elevated status into the 1960s, with leading writers such as Louis MacNeice, Samuel Beckett and (famously) Dylan Thomas contributing important and highly regarded plays to the genre. The medium also created early opportunities for significant playwrights in the 1960s and 1970s such as Harold Pinter, Joe Orton, Tom Stoppard and Caryl Churchill (see

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1 A short edited video from the live performance can be accessed via the BBC website, and timings in square brackets will refer to this video: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03vlfh3> [14/04/2021].

Rodger 1982). The close relationship between British Radio Drama and theatre is reflected in the relative absence and at best subsidiary role of music in many radio productions – Thomas's *Under Milk Wood* (1954), for example, has only diegetic music. However, there are notable exceptions to this, particularly in dramas composed for the BBC's Third Programme (subsequently Radio 3). Louis MacNeice collaborated prominently with leading composers Benjamin Britten (*The Dark Tower*, 1946) and William Walton (*Christopher Columbus*, 1944), while Harold Pinter's *Voices* in 2000 represented a substantial collaboration with composer James Clarke.

By contrast, film-style composition prevailed in the golden age of radio drama on which Boris Kremenliev was commenting in 1949. Of the 'major' dramas produced when Kremenliev was writing, he believed that roughly half were recorded in Hollywood. The aesthetic of these dramas, and the way they used music, was much more like that of film – indeed his article is entitled "Background Music for Radio Drama", a title which could never have described, for example, Britten's music for *The Dark Tower*. Radio drama from Hollywood often used smaller versions of the film orchestras, with musicians numbering between fifteen and twenty. But while such mixed large chamber ensembles would seem to offer plenty of opportunity for imaginative music, what stopped radio drama music from attaining greater artistic quality in Kremenliev's view was the speed at which composers were expected to work – 1 to 2 days for 4 to 8 minutes of music, probably including part writing and orchestration given that budgets were so much smaller than for the movies. Kremenliev looked enviously across the Atlantic to England and France, noting that Vaughan Williams and Walton (he must have meant the music to MacNeice's radio play *Christopher Columbus*), as well as Honegger and Milhaud were writing full orchestral scores for radio (cf. 1949: 81n4). In fact, such contributions were in the minority.

Kremenliev lists four main functions for music in radio drama: signature music, curtain music (which delineates scene changes), bridge music (to cover scene transitions, especially involving mood changes) and background music. More generally, it "serves essentially to create atmosphere and heighten emotion. It keeps the story moving by giving it color [sic] and holding the attention of the listener", attempting also to "compensate for the missing visual image" (ibid.: 76). More recent terminology is derived from film music – diegetic and non-diegetic, underscore and so on – but specific terms are also used within the industry, such as 'passage of time music' (related to Kremenliev's bridge music), and the more common 'sting' – a short section of less than 2–3 seconds derived from a more extensive music cue. Also missing from Kremenliev's list is the common use of music to indicate, along with sound effects, a time period.

Horses' hooves and carriage noises, as well as a fortepiano might well indicate a Jane Austin adaptation set in the first decade of the nineteenth century.

Richard Hand and Mary Traynor, in *The Radio Drama Handbook*, quote Andrew Crisell in giving four functions very similar to those coined by Kremenliev 50 years earlier: music as link, mood music, music as stylised sound effect (a thunderstorm indicated by a percussion instrument, etc.), music as indexical function (diegetic music) – although later they also add the functions of “locating the drama at a particular point in history, even in a particular place” – and drama gaining extra significance through song lyrics (2011: 57). These texts notwithstanding, by comparison with music in film, music in radio drama seems distinctly under-theorised.

## 2 Film Music versus Radio Drama Music

Because music's presence in film pre-dated audible speech and sound effects, it forms a part of early film theory. Gregg Redner describes the way Vsevolod Illarionovich Pudovkin responded to the new development of sound in 1929 by calling for music and sound to be independent of each other, or to be in “counterpoint” (2011: 7). Although most film music has over the history of the medium generally paralleled the action on screen, there are some notable examples of counterpoint between music and image: Ennio Morricone's quasi-diegetic use of the musical watch theme in Sergio Leone's *A Few Dollars More* (1965); or Martin Scorsese's use of the Intermezzo from Pietro Mascagni's opera *Guglielmo Ratcliff* (1895) over a brutal fight scene in his 1980 *Raging Bull*, for instance. Despite the ever-present tendency for music to be interdependent with the other elements of film (image, character, plot and so on), film theory tends to treat these elements as separate facets which comment on each other; or more precisely, the music comments on the image, since this is mostly the order in which they are produced.

In radio, commentators have tended to emphasise a much more equal collaboration between the creators. For example, composer William Alwyn said that “while working on a feature the collaboration between writer and composer was close and intimate – both script and music were carefully worked out from the inception of the subject” (qtd. in Rodger 1984: 83). This description of the production process of the radio feature – a form peculiar to radio which fuses poetic writing, soundscape, documentary and music (cf. Cleverdon 1969: 17) – applies in large measure to radio drama as well. Rodger gives details of the working process of Louis MacNeice, poet and one of the most important radio dramatists of the middle years of the twentieth century, in particular his notes

to composer Mátyás Seiber for his 1947 play *Grettir the Strong*, which show the play was conceived with specific lengths of music cues, in mind (cf. Rodger 1984: 104). While in practice the difference may not appear to be significant, it can be viewed as an organisational difference, and a difference in ethos. In film, on the whole, music is added late in the process and comes as the result of a division of labour – the musician does his or her job and does not comment on the work of others. By contrast, a much more collaborative ethos prevails (or is held to prevail) in the more intimate medium of radio.

It is important to note that this difference in ethos was not necessarily one observed as a general fact, but more a question of the value ascribed by commentators to that ethos. In fact, as Kremenliev showed, conditions for composers in the Hollywood radio dramas of the 1940s were comparable in principle, though arguably worse in degree, to those found in cinema. Similarly, the idea that most of the 600 or so hours per annum of drama produced for BBC radio in the United Kingdom show this collaborative ethos between composer and writer/producer described by Rodger is unrealistic. Most radio drama generally uses stock music libraries, only involving a composer at arm's length. Ironically, this reproduces a situation described by Kremenliev as prevailing in radio drama before the war, when "radio [...] had finally discarded the stock library music cues" (1949: 76).

Equally, there are examples in cinema of film being produced with music in mind from the outset – Anthony Minghella's close collaboration with composers being a case in point, or Ralph Vaughan Williams's practice of composing the score "as, or prior to, the film being shot, rather than composing to the direct visual stimuli of the finished film" (Redner 2011: 135).

### 3 Commission and Production

To assess the extent to which the commissioning and composition of music for *The Kraken Wakes* corresponded to the Hollywood division of labour model, or to the more collaborative ethos of British Radio drama as described above, we need to examine the process that led to its creation. *The Kraken Wakes* was commissioned as part of BBC Radio 4's substantial 'Dangerous Visions' season, which featured adaptations of science fiction, particularly those stories with a dystopian aspect. Savvy Productions, a small independent production company specialising in location-recorded drama, held an ace up its sleeve: the Radio 4 commissioner wanted more work by the 'Queen of Crime' Val McDermid, whose pacey, well-plotted novels have a huge and loyal following. McDermid had enjoyed collaborating with Savvy founder and producer Justine Potter

on a returning comedy crime drama series (initially entitled *Deadheading*), particularly her ability to create an informal working atmosphere on location while working rapidly and on schedule. Generally tending to the small-scale, Savvy had also explored territory which would more commonly be considered cinematic – e.g., their 2010 series *Amazing Grace* began with a large scale depiction of war in Sudan, employing sound design by Eloise Whitmore and music by film composer Stephen Kilpatrick.

Adapting John Wyndham's *The Kraken Wakes* also appeared to demand something on a huge scale. The plot centres around a journalist couple who observe the impact on the sea of mysterious fireballs while on honeymoon. They become fascinated by these fireball reports, and the subsequent cover-ups by governments. The fireballs turn out to be an alien invasion, and these extraterrestrial beings – called 'xenobaths' in the novel – occupy the seabed in the deepest parts of the ocean. Unexplained technology allows them to initially destroy all shipping, then subsequently to flood the world by melting the polar icecaps. An orchestral score seemed appropriate for two reasons: one is the scale of the events described – cities destroyed, huge population shifts, ships blown up; the second is that, although we see the results of the xenobaths' attacks on humanity, and at one point witness an attack by weird automata ('seatanks'), we never actually see the xenobaths themselves. It is perhaps this unseen aspect that has made *The Kraken Wakes* one of the few novels by Wyndham not to have been televised or filmed, although it has been adapted for radio on at least four occasions.<sup>2</sup> The orchestra, it seemed to the composer and producer, was capable of suggesting powerfully without actually representing directly.

In several ways the production methods returned to the methods of the 1940s. It was performed in the orchestra's own studio recording space in front of a live audience, with the difference that the production team were not

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<sup>2</sup> Three are listed by the BBC Genome website:

- a) *Curtain Up: The Kraken Wakes*. Writ. John Keir Cross. Broadcast 28th April 1954. BBC Light Programme.
- b) *Late Night Theatre: The Kraken Wakes*. Writ. John Constable. Dir. Susan Roberts.. Broadcast 21st February 1998. BBC Radio 4 (FM).
- c) Read in 16 episodes by Stephen Moore. First broadcast 23rd March 2014. BBC Radio 4. ([https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/search/0/20?filt=is\\_radio&q=kraken+wakes+wyndham#top](https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/search/0/20?filt=is_radio&q=kraken+wakes+wyndham#top) [25/04/2022]).

In addition, the website [sffaudio.com](http://sffaudio.com) lists the following radio drama adaptation:

- d) *The Kraken Wakes*. Writ. Eric Cameron. Broadcast 1965 (exact date unknown) CBS Vancouver (<https://www.sffaudio.com/archive-org-cbc-radio-vancouver-the-kraken-wakes-based-on-the-novel-by-john-wyndham/> [25/04/2022]).

able to provide sound effects in addition to the music – which would in the ‘Golden Age of Radio’ have been produced live – as these were to be mixed in post-production. Therefore, the burden of anything ‘unseen’ by the live audience was to be taken by the music alone. A model for this production process preceded *The Kraken Wakes*. Composer Neil Brand had adapted Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol* (1843) in December 2013 with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and the BBC Singers. This production was recorded in front of a live audience, with actors and orchestra in the same space. They chose to use standard voice microphones, and the room reverberation can clearly be heard in the voices on the clips still available on the BBC drama website.<sup>3</sup> But, as Laurence Raw describes, this benefited a production which “consciously drew attention to its artificiality” in a “quasi-Brechtian” manner (2015). Although the combination of live recording with actors in front of the orchestra for *The Kraken Wakes* was more or less the same as in Brand’s earlier production, the production team made efforts to make the experience more immersive and intimate for the broadcast audience: in order to minimise room noise – a problem in the relatively resonant space of the BBC Philharmonic studios – radio microphone headsets were used, allowing for some degree of the close-miked intimate vocal recording typical of studio-based radio dramas. In the event, occasionally some room resonance could be heard, particularly that of Richard Harrington’s powerful baritone.

Despite these efforts, the performance/recording conditions to some degree flew in the face of received wisdom of how radio drama should be made. As Donald McWhinnie noted in 1959: “The radio composer’s main concern is to avoid at all costs any feeling of the concert platform; once we associate sound patterns with rows of dinner jacketed instrumentalists we are faced with the same clash of conventions which often faces us in the theatre.” (qtd. in Rodger 1984: 111) It is interesting to speculate why McWhinnie is so concerned about the perception of artificiality created by the use of the orchestra in relation to radio drama when in films the orchestra was unfailingly used for films during the same period without similar comment. Perhaps this anxiety derives from McWhinnie’s view of radio as a dreamlike fusion of sound, music and language, in which neither element should draw too much attention to itself. I hoped that, by writing music which evoked the music of films – in particular scores by John Barry, Bernard Herrmann and Leonard Rosenman – it would be the visuality of film music that predominated in both the live and the broadcast audience’s reception of the play.

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3 See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02dklq7/p02dkknc> [14/04/2021].

By writing what one might – slightly ironically – call ‘film music for radio drama’, we have the opportunity to compare the two forms. The process throws up questions such as: how can music relate to imagery if there are no accompanying images? Can music be in counterpoint with the narrative if there is no visual content? What does it mean to say that the music is an ‘extra-character’ in the drama, as was required by the terms of the commission? In what follows, I want to analyse particular sections of the music and relate them to concepts which are derived either from analyses of radio drama music, analyses of film music, or both.

#### 4 Collaborative Method

As composer William Alwyn noted, radio is a medium which encourages intimate collaboration from the outset. The small number of people involved in the creation of a radio drama allow for a much greater degree of shared artistic vision compared to the much less collaborative medium of film. We were able to ensure that the music was conceived at the outset, even to the extent of the composer and writer/adaptor agreeing beforehand on which passages in the book should be adapted so that they would be suitable for a musical as well as a dramatic treatment. The initial plan was developed before the script had been written, and most of the music was composed before the script appeared, thus predating the adaptation (see Figure 14.1). The eighteen musical numbers described here eventually became twenty-three of various lengths, with some minor changes to order.

Some of these cues were what Kremenliev calls either ‘bridge music’ or ‘curtain music’, and relatively short; some underscored the dialogue (00' 15"–00' 59" in video); and some were scenes of a few minutes in length with continuous music where the music was driving the action. This last category was the most technically challenging for the actors, and it depended on the musicality and exceptional coordinating abilities of conductor Clark Rundell, as well as the experience of the orchestra to keep dialogue and music together in live performance. These sections needed special attention in the rehearsal room. As time with the orchestra was limited to a 3-hour rehearsal session for the music alone, and another with the actors, we used MIDI versions of the score to rehearse timings, and the timings indicated in the score were adhered to as closely as possible in the live version.



TABLE 14.1 Music cues agreed with writer Val McDermid prior to composition

No.	Title	Text	Page	Length
1	Opening/rationale	"far, far beneath in the abysmal sea, his ancient, dreamless, uninvaded sleep, the Kraken sleepeth."	10	1.30
2	Seascape with fireballs	"The sea stretched in front of us like a silken plain in the moonlight" "a brilliant red light as seen in a fairly thick fog, so there is a strong halation." "a great burst of steam shot up in a great plume."	11 12 13	1
3	information	"a sudden spate of fireball observations"	20	1
4	Interlude 1	Mike and Phyllis		1
5	Descent of the bell with darker sea music	"the quiet drone of the winch" "all black and dead now"...squids again...luminous fish...small shoal, there, see?" "nightmare fishy horror" "the voice cut off dead"	31	3.30
6	Destruction of ships	"if ever lightning were to strike upwards from the sea (in the novel this is reported, and we don't see it –could we?)"	32 39	1
7	Interlude 2	Mike and Phyllis		1
8	The depth bomb	"For a long time, as it seemed, everything was intensely still...Then it came. The placid surface of the sea suddenly belched into a vast white cloud, which spread and boiled, writhing upwards."	43	30"
9	Information (reprise) – more reports of the loss of ships	"There's a rumour running wild"	90	1

10a	Escondida interlude	"Escondida's natural spirit of manana"	131	1.30
10b	Sea tanks	"sounded like the heavy dragging of metal on stone" "the excrescence quivered but went on swelling" ... "seemed to split open, as if it had been burst into instantaneous bloom by a vast number of white cilia which rayed out in all directions."	137 139	2
		"they were dragged along together"	141	
11	Fear of the unknown/ very dark sea (reprise of opening)	"far, far beneath in the abyssal sea"	10	1.30
12	Interlude 3 (Mahlerian)	Mike and Phyllis		1
13	The sea level rises/ construction of embankments	"machinery worked day and night...a superstructure of concrete blocks was rising the original walls...sweating thousands toiled to raise great levees and walls."	211	2
14	(Alternates with sea-tank music) until catastrophic failure of walls	A groan went up from the crowd. Suddenly there was a loud crack and a rumble of falling masonry...water poured through the gap...the wall crumbled before our eyes."	215	2
15	Mass movement of people	"a whole population was trekking southwards"	215	2
16	Inundation/ silencing of information	"towers of Manhattan standing like frozen sentinels while the glittering water lapped at their lower walls..." "the link broke off abruptly. It never worked again."	228 226	1.30
17	Eerie boat journey to safety	"our progress down the river was cautious and slow"	232	2
18	The radio crackles into life/ a frail hope	"I'm coming to life again, Mike"	240	1.30

## 5 Scoring the Unseen

Most film music theory begins with a discussion of the relationship between a narrative that is seen and an additional layer, often consisting of emotional information, that is heard.<sup>4</sup> This would seem initially to present a problem for the composer of ‘film music for radio drama’, since there are no accompanying images to which the music can respond. The response to this is threefold. Firstly, music’s capacity to refer by association or convention to objects beyond itself is well known and became an important aspect of composers’ technique in the form of the nineteenth century symphonic or tone poem. While the actual objects or ideas music was capable of representing were relatively general and restricted in number – such as the pastoral, the military, nature, national associations – these associations were remarkably stable and long-lasting; for example, the pastoral associations of the oboe standing in for the ‘shepherd’s pipe’ persisted into the TV music of the 1970s – think of the theme music to the long-running British soap opera *Emmerdale Farm* (1972). Secondly, as Bonnie M. Miller has recently described how creators of radio drama have viewed it as an “intensely visual experience” – with the qualification that the imagery takes place in the mind of the listener (2018: 323). Thus, if the music is responding to anything, it is a narrative which has an imagined visual content. In fact, as Miller says, in radio drama the pictures are better since the listener is invited “to participate actively in the visualisation process, to formulate mental pictures of characters, settings and scenes through the personalised act of listening” (ibid.: 322). Thirdly, film itself often communicates not through what is seen, but about what is only suggested in the mind of the viewer by the combination of imagery and sound. An obvious example would be the ‘hallway’ scene from Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining* (1980), in which the terrifying denouement of the scene is foreshadowed by the eerie sound world of Béla Bartók’s *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta* (1937). Horror as a genre in particular depends on images which are suggested indirectly in the mind of the audience. In this, film functions like radio, where writers “stoke the imagination with a few visual cues and let the listeners fill in the rest” (ibid.: 326).

The diving bell scene in our production of *The Kraken Wakes* is one of the sections which needed to be carefully coordinated with the actors. In the novel

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4 Prendergast, for example, describes music as “auditory counterpoint to the silent film” (1992: 3); Wierzbicki describes audiences’ early film experiences as linking “purely musical affect with the dynamics of the filmic imagery” (2009: 25). Christopher Morris examines German film music composer Edmund Meisel’s work from the 1930s and his stated attempt at “exact conformity” between music and image (2008: 81).

it is one of the relatively few scenes in which the action is directly witnessed by the protagonists, Mike and Phyllis Watson. They are aboard a navy vessel which is sending a diving bell down to examine the deep-sea site of the impact of a series of 'fireballs' which prove to be extraterrestrial in origin. Two submariners report via an audio cable on what they can see as the bell descends – not much for most of the scene, until towards the end they glimpse something large and ominous, and the line is suddenly cut off. The steel cable of the winch to which the diving bell was attached comes to the surface minus diving bell, and it can be seen to have been fused together as if welded, which is the first concrete proof that 'something' is down there. The score uses the availability of a large string section, with cellos divided in four parts and basses in two to create a dark, opaque texture out of which material – representing half seen 'things' – emerges. At this point, although the main 'Kraken' theme has not yet appeared, the low strings are playing in canon material which prefigures it, and out of this emerge low, dark, ominous dissonant shapes. The first time this happens is just before the first submariner reports: "There's something else out there. Right on the edge of the light." At the end of the scene, the music suddenly cuts off, in line with the submariner's line "Maybe seeing the underside would – (*Beat. Silence*)."

(Williams 2016: 40)<sup>5</sup>

As has already been discussed, music in films does not only show what is on screen, but frequently suggests what is not seen or off screen. This passage both represents the visual obscurity through opaqueness of musical material, providing an audible analogue of the murk which obscures the submariners' view, and the glimpse of the – well, we do not know what – which emerges from the background. This process of representation is facilitated by the clever way McDermid uses the audio feed from the diving bell as a device to embed narration. So, temporarily, we have a narration – which is still within the diegesis – and its musical interpretation. Events within the narration are sometimes preceded by their analogue in the music and sometimes followed by it, depending on whether the function of the music is a representative or an emotionally reactive one. When the submariner glimpses the kraken, the music precedes the observation because the function is a representative one; when the submariner's audio feed is cut off, this is the action, so the music reverts to emotional reaction.

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5 This scene was in fact the first to be written, in August 2015, when I had been offered the opportunity to have it ready to contribute to the BBC Philharmonic's Proms concert with Jarvis Cocker's *Wireless Nights* programme, which also had an undersea theme – ironically it followed an extract by John Williams's score to *Jaws* (1975). Once the script arrived in November 2015, I recomposed it so that it fit the dialogue written by Val McDermid better.

## 6 Music as Action

Rodger states that radio drama music “often had to participate in the dramatic action” (1982: 64). This comment seems to refer back to the 1940s methods related to the Hollywood studio structure for radio drama described by Kremenliev, where it “compensates for the missing visual image” (1949: 76). When music participates in dramatic action, be it accompanying actual visual images in film, or imagined ones in radio drama, it responds to ‘sync points’ – moments of action in a film, for example, where precise synchronisation between music and narrative is called for. In fact, as film composer Hummie Mann points out, there may be a small degree of tolerance in the synchronisation between the musical change accompanying the visual action and the seen action – he gives 0.2 seconds as the maximum tolerance for a musical cue to be perceived as in sync with an action, although it may require greater precision to synchronise to sound effects or repeated predictable action (cf. 2015: 236). Habitually, close synchronisation between visual action and music is known as ‘mickey-mousing’ because of its prominence in animated cartoons, so it remains a point of aesthetic judgement as to how much of the action should be scored using sync points (ibid.: 52).

Bernard Herrmann’s famous high string motive for the shower scene in *Psycho* (1960) is often described as if it alone represents the action – for example, Sullivan says “the slashing glissandos seem to stand in for the stabbing knife”, which is never actually seen by the audience (2006: 255). What confirms for the viewer that the stabbing occurs are the sound effects created by a melon being stabbed. The music precedes the stab – creating a halo of terror around the scene – but the stabs are not synchronised with visual hits, since these shots are not present.

In *The Kraken Wakes*, the production team planned to add in some sound effects in post-production – after the ‘as-live’ recording had been made. In one crucial scene of the drama, the music would have to inform the live audience that an action of some kind was taking place. This is the scene where protagonists Phyllis and Mike are on a fictional Caribbean island, Escondida,<sup>6</sup> hoping to report on the landings of the xenobaths’ ‘seatanks’, weird metallic vehicles which emerge from the depths and capture living creatures using sticky tentacles or ‘cilia’ which drag their unfortunate prey back down to the depths of the sea. This is one of the few cinematically ‘visual’ scenes in the novel. The

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6 It is worth pointing out that ‘Escondida’ means ‘hidden’ in Spanish.

absence of 'live SFX', unlike 1940s production methods, meant that music alone had to convey the actuality of the action.

The conceit of the scene is that Mike and Phyllis are there to record a news report, and therefore we have a real-time narration in Mike's voice as he 'records' his responses – providing both a pragmatic solution to the problem of the lack of visuals alongside a deepening of the 'horror' effect. This is created by the orchestral music 'being the scene', which is interpreted a few seconds later by the real-time narrator, Mike. As the 'seatanks' have never been witnessed, the character Mike struggles to articulate the weirdness and horror of what he is witnessing, and is forced to grasp at unconvincing similes, all the while as the orchestral music is telling the audience that something horrific is happening using the film music language of 1950s B-movies. The musical reference point was Bernard Herrmann's score to *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), particularly with its incorporation of then unusual electronic effects. Thus, in keeping with the principle of horror, the power of the scene is derived from suggestion – the audience's minds race to fill in the information gap created by the slow-arriving explanatory narration. Unlike in *Psycho*, the music *is* the action – the sync points with the imagined visuals occur in the music, even though we have not yet been fully informed what it is that is happening.

A specific example of a sync point where the music is the action occurs as Mike is describing the expansion of a balloon-like structure emerging from the top of one of the 'seatanks'. This 'expansion' is shown (after the narration in this case) by ten-part divisi strings gradually glissando-ing from a mid-range cluster to a widely spaced chord. It should be clear to the audience what is happening here at the moment the 'event' occurs in the score: at the end of this process there is a short pause, then a 'bursting' sound, using a combination of pizzicato glissando clusters in the strings and descending glissando scales on a Hammond organ (02' 30"–02' 40" in the BBC video). The narration follows the action, but the audience (one hopes) infers from the 'bursting' moment in the score that something has burst 'like a balloon', since what else do balloons do? The absence of the visual stimulus here is an advantage for the composer; the music can represent the action without risk of 'mickey-mousing', since this can only occur when there is a real, not the imagined visual image.

## 7 Music as Narrative Commentary

If music is capable of representing the actuality of action, of 'being' the action, it is equally possible for it to step out of the diegesis and comment on the story like a Greek chorus. This is a feature that has been disputed in relation to film

music. Nick Davis denies the possibility of music's being able to narrate, "since it lacks one of the minimal constituents of a narrating act: it does not produce perception of deictically shifted action, taking place in a space-time different from that of communication" (2018: 1). Yet this is exactly what happens in much classical song – Robert Schumann's *Dichterliebe* (1840) continually undercuts the statements made by the poet with ominous foreshadowing of pain and death – a comparison also made by Redner (cf. 2011: 19). This is music with a choric function of commenting on the drama, a key aspect of opera, as well as lied, in fact any classical work with text. Wagnerian *leitmotiv*, much discussed in narratology and semiotics, is a technique allowing dramatic irony to occur on stage; characters and subjects have an associated musical motive which can be referred to even when the character or subject is not visible (see Tarasti 1979). In its basic form, music can inform the audience that what the characters believe is not the case – in the BBC video of the recording of *The Kraken Wakes*, Dr Becker, played by Richard Harrington, says "that's what we want you to get across to your audience: it's exciting, but it's not threatening". This is immediately followed by a musical symbol of ill omen – low strings playing a gathering chromatic line (Williams 2016: 5). Here there can be no doubt that the "it's not threatening" statement is incorrect, or that the music's role is to inform the audience that this is the case.

## 8 Music, Anachronism and Intertextuality

I have previously referred to one of radio drama music's main functions – that of informing listeners of period. For example, Savvy Productions' *Queens of the Coal Age* (BBC Radio 4, 2013) was set in 1993 and begins with Annie Lennox's 1992 hit "Little Bird", initially as title music, then transferring in a favourite radio drama move to the diegesis via a car radio. But both radio drama and film can also use music anachronistically, often to add a layer of intertextual meaning. *Star Wars* (1977, now subtitled *A New Hope*) has a scene in which the protagonists walk into a bar on the planet Tatooine, where a band plays John Williams's version of 1930s jazz (which some may say sounds more like 1920s jazz). Forrest Wickman has discussed the references this scene makes to the scene in Rick's Bar in *Casablanca* (1942), although the music might better link it to the opening speakeasy scene in *Some Like it Hot* (1959). Either way, the music provides a non-narrative link to another cultural context.

In *The Kraken Wakes* a decision was made early on that although the production was to be updated to the contemporary or near future, the sound world of the score would reference film music of the 1950s, the period of the

novel (1953). This proved too much for some audience members – one tweet in response read: “Great production, tho messing w my head – 1950s music, but set in present #DangerousVisions” (Moonmoggy). This decision – what Mann calls the “policy” of the film music (2015) – was made for several reasons. Firstly, it is hard to imagine what genre of music style could have been invoked which would unequivocally have said ‘contemporary’ and yet still be performable by a symphony orchestra. Most media music is now composed using Digital Audio Workstations, which allow simultaneous use of audio recordings manipulated digitally and midi-controlled samples – which are in effect another layer of digital sound. Timbre tends to take a main role rather than melodic theme or harmony. While some music, such as that of ‘spectralist’<sup>7</sup> composers Gérard Grisey and Tristan Murail, has since the 1980s privileged timbre over other aspects of music using purely acoustic sources, I felt that making such a score would prevent the production communicating directly with the audience because of the unfamiliarity of the musical style. Secondly, orchestral film music since the late 1980s has been dominated by non-thematic construction, predominantly driven by multiple percussion tracks, single lines of material, rhythmic ostinato and an absence of recognisable themes, with the addition of ‘ethnic’ instruments and vocals projecting sincerity (for example, most scores by Hans Zimmer). This vocabulary radically reduces the semantic possibilities of film music, and in a production where the music had to do more than just track the adrenaline levels of the main characters, contemporary film scoring would have limited the effectiveness of the project. In addition, much contemporary film music relies on overdubbing to achieve a supercharged orchestral sound – and virtual orchestral libraries reflect this. My music was to be performed live, and I had access to the standard four horns, not the ten of contemporary Hollywood sound.<sup>8</sup> Lastly, I also wanted to pay homage to the great era of film score, to celebrate the skill and craft of Bernard Herrmann, Jerry Goldsmith and John Barry, amongst others.

Whatever the justification, the reference to anachronistic film music styles enabled a level of intertextual reference to take place. I modelled the ‘sea-tanks’ noise on the sound of the robot exiting the flying saucer in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, albeit constructed from the harmony I had used throughout the score, as well as some timbral shifts which rooted it more to the avant-garde than just to Herrmann’s sound world. Secondly, as the couple are en

7 The term ‘spectralism’, while rather disputed, generally refers to composers who explored material derived from the harmonic spectrum.

8 Note that this reliance on massed horns (as an example) for expressive or heroic effect is derived ultimately from late Romanticism, and hence is also in a real sense anachronistic.





FIGURE 14.1 Part of 'La Habana', the original lead sheet with the *Kraken Wakes* theme

route to Escondida – a 'tropical paradise' – I referenced John Barry's lush scores to the James Bond movies, which are often set in desirable locations. Although the adaptation is set in the present day, it is more or less impossible to capture the sense of glamour and pleasure that such a trip would have suggested in the 1950s; this was one of the main sources of appeal of the James Bond movies as the UK moved out of 1950s austerity and conformity, so it seemed irresistible not to include this Latin jazz version of the main theme (see Figure 14.1).<sup>9</sup>

The theme re-appears several times throughout the score, including in the final scene. This is an emotional manifesto by Phyllis bringing in themes of rebuilding, hope and family, and as such it strikes a slightly incongruous tone. Wyndham's novel has two endings – a shorter version of the novel was published in the same year in the US. McDermid has combined elements of the two versions, but in both there is an element of *deus ex machina* in the sudden revelation of an ultrasonic device that defeats the xenobaths. The whole of the final speech has a valedictory quality to it and suggested the clipped RP-delivery of 1950s British films. The underscore here was really a homage to Mahler – it was modelled on the adagietto from Mahler's Symphony No. 5 (1904) – but using the main 'Kraken' theme. The feel of the romantic string-based orchestration under the dialogue is similar to the use of Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto in *Brief Encounter* (1945). These are just two examples which show how the anachronism of the music style allows intertextual references to other stories, and to the world of film itself.

9 I had, in fact, written this theme itself in 2014 on a flight travelling from Cuba to Grand Cayman (a suitably Bond-ish itinerary) and performed it several times as a jazz musician, prior to including it in the score.

## 9 Musical Structure as Driving Force

Redner uses the cinematic, and more generally the aesthetic, philosophy of Gilles Deleuze to demonstrate that music can have a structuring purpose in some film, instead of simply paralleling the image (see Redner 2011). One of his examples is highly relevant to the score for *The Kraken Wakes*: Leonard Rosenman's score for *East of Eden* (1955). From a composer's point of view, Redner's notion that the musical structure could in some way drive the film's narrative (2011: 23), seems uncontroversial, since this is how a great deal of opera works. Opera plots are frequently poorly constructed, and music's role is often to fill in the structural gaps, as well as drive the emotional narrative. Redner's analysis is, to some extent, driven by a need to say something more than the simple observation that the music informs the plot structure. For example, he states in relation to *East of Eden* that the obvious musical structuring device is the existence of two different and separate harmonic worlds, one tonal, representing the "goodness of Cal's brother Aron, while the atonal content represents the internal psychological torment of Cal. Unfortunately, once one has established this, there is little that can be read into the complex structure of the score" (ibid.: 172). However, although the observation that the musical structure drives the narrative may seem simplistic from the point of view of the analyst, for the composer the means of making musical structure drive the plot is not so easily achieved.

On the local level, in *The Kraken Wakes*, montage technique was used to suggest the cutting of one shot to another in order to drive the narrative in the 'seatanks' scene on Escondida. This would have been less effective had there been visual imagery, since the quick following of the changes of viewpoint might have been seen as 'micky mousing'. In film montage sequences the music's function, as Larsen says, is the "musical simplification of the mosaic of film images" (2007: 191). Louis Andriessen claimed that Stravinsky learned montage technique in his own scores from early cinema, and the Stravinskian flavour of this scene's music is certainly not far removed from *The Rite of Spring* (1913) in its construction or sound world (cf. 2006: 160–164). But for Redner this narrative drive comes from music at a deeper structural level. In *East of Eden*, composer Leonard Rosenman, a pupil of Arnold Schoenberg was symbolically opposing dissonant material with more tonal material, and it is the working out of that opposition that drives the narrative forward on some level. Redner (2011: 54) sees in the atonal aspect of Rosenman's score a reflection of Deleuze's "nomad science" and in the more traditional material a "state science" – almost as if Rosenman were recomposing Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*

(1868). While the way in which Redner maps the two aspects of Rosenman's score onto opposing characters in the Cain and Abel story of *East of Eden* may appear simplistic, there can be no doubt that the reconciliation of tonal and atonal material is and often has been a concern of composers, whether in the concert hall or in the cinema.

In *The Kraken Wakes*, there are two broad processes taking place across the music. The first is that the main theme, presented in its entirety first in the John Barry-esque passage underscoring the flight to Escondida, is presented in fragments, sometimes quite obscure prior to that, meaning that much of the thematic material of the score is interrelated. The second is that the theme's atonal – or extended tonal – nature is presented first as jazz in a tonal (more or less) setting, then as truly atonal music in the 'seatanks' scene, then finally the last movement presents the theme in a setting which attempts to reconcile these two aspects, and also brings together all of the themes used in the piece to suggest a resolution. Do these structuring devices, one harmonic, one thematic, succeed in driving forward the narrative? As the composer, I can only say I hoped they would.

## 10 Conclusion

The process of writing and reflecting on overtly cinematic music for a radio drama reveals some differences between the medium of film, where images are provided for the audience, and radio, where listeners are required to supply their own. However, the two media are not so far apart as initially one might think, partly because of cinema's use of visual suggestion or simply non-visual storytelling, and partly because of what Bonnie M. Miller has called radio drama's "intensely visual experience". What differences do exist are related to the music's role in responding and representing the actuality of events – in radio, it can do a great deal to present objects and processes referred to in the narrative and drive the narrative forward; in film it often takes the role of revealing the emotional level of the narrative, rather than reflecting every moment of action on screen. Audience responses to the live performance and to the radio broadcast on the whole showed that the anachronistic aspect of the score was not a problem for most, and that in this way the great era of orchestral film scores established a vocabulary of reference which has not yet lost currency. Perhaps this common heritage is not surprising. After all, as Bernard Herrmann once said: "I learned to become a film composer doing two or three thousand radio dramas" (qtd. in Larsen 2007: 126).

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