



**TRABAJO FIN DE MÁSTER**  
**MÁSTER EN ESTUDIOS LITERARIOS Y CULTURALES**  
**INGLESES Y SU PROYECCIÓN SOCIAL**

INTERMEDIALITY OF MUSIC AND LITERATURE  
ECHOES OF INTERWAR BRITISH MUSIC IN WORKS OF  
J.B. PRIESTLEY

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CURSO ACADÉMICO: 2022-23 Convocatoria: Septiembre

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TÍTULO DEL TRABAJO:

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## Abstract

J.B. Priestley was a prolific writer over a long life as well as a multi-faceted personality. In recent years, studies have focused on his time plays, his views on politics, Englishness and on national identity, but seldom on Priestley's close connections with and involvement in the world of music, which intersected with his literary writing on so many occasions. The aim of this essay is to offer an analysis of Priestley's employment of music as a literary device enhancing both his works' entertainment value and the social messages carried by his plays and novels produced during the interwar and post-Second World War years. A special focus is applied to two pivotal works in this respect: the novel *The Good Companions* (1929) and the play *Music at Night* (1938). Furthermore, since recent decades have seen the appearance of studies in intermediality of music and literature, this dissertation will explore the theories of Wolf and Scher, and how they may apply to Priestley's works. The whole is set within the cultural scene of 1918 to 1939 and into the Second World War, in particular the genres of popular music and other forms of popular entertainment, and classical music.

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## List of abbreviations

All books by J.B. Priestley except where specified.

*BD.- Bright Day.*

*LAWM.- Literature and Western Man.*

*LMT.- “Literature and Music: Theory” (Wolf).*

*LNHL.- Low Notes on a High Level*

*LTPS.- Let the People Sing*

*MAN.- Music at Night*

*P’s Eng.- Priestley’s England (Baxendale)*

*Rain.- Rain upon Godshill*

*TGC.- The Good Companions*

*TLT.- The Linden Tree*

*TMNS.- Three Men in New Suits*

*TMOF.- The Musicalization of Fiction. (Wolf)*

All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music.

(Walter Pater)

*"Hvor ord svigter, taler musikken!"*

Where words fail, music speaks.

(Hans Christian Andersen)

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 State of the Art

For this Master's thesis of the Master of English Literature and Culture and their Social Impact I have chosen a twentieth-century writer, J.B. Priestley, who not only integrated music into his literary works but also used this music to enhance the message he was endeavouring to direct at society.

Until recently, Priestley has been set aside in the academic world and only studied and discussed primarily in relation to his 'time plays' and literary values. Notwithstanding this, he is increasingly being considered as a weighty ambassador of Englishness, reflecting popular culture, in particular in relation to politics. However, my intention is to focus on the connection between music and literature in Priestley's works, a topic that has scarcely been researched. I have found a comprehensive article on this connection by Roger Fagge, "'Let the People Sing': J.B. Priestley and the Significance of Music" (2015) as well as several references in *The Vision of J.B. Priestley* (2012) by the same author. In order to characterise the social musical culture of the time, the book *Music for the People* (2002), by James Nott provides an all-inclusive study about the music industry, music-making and dance in the interwar years. *Popular Music of the 20's* (1976) by Ronald Pearsall also has useful information. Another article by John Baxendale, "'...into Another Kind of Life in Which Anything Might Happen...' Popular Music and Late Modernity" (1995) gives very valuable material for an understanding of the popular culture of the time. With regards to classical music, in addition to Nott's book, Grove Music Online through *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* has also been a source of information. For the intermediality theories, I have followed Werner Wolf *The Musicalization of Fiction. A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality* (1999) and a later article from 2015, "Literature and Music: Theory". I have also taken into account Scher's theories, as well as other authors such as Stephen Benson.

I have also read several extensive fragments from Priestley's copious autobiographical output as well as some of his essays, novels and plays, which give a good picture of how Priestley viewed music and why it was important for him, and how he used music as a literary device. With such background material, I have compared and contrasted the state of the music culture of the time with Priestley's portrayal in his works. In addition, my aim is to analyse both primary sources from the point of view of the current theories of intermediality to examine the degree of musicalization of literature achieved by Priestley in his novel *The Good Companions* and particularly in his play *Music at Night*, about which I have not found any previous studies.

## 1.2 Thesis Statement

J.B. Priestley consistently employs music as a literary device in order to enhance the entertainment and/or social messages embedded in his plays and novels from the interwar and post-Second World War years, as exemplified by the novel *The Good Companions* (1929) and the play *Music at Night* (1937).

## 1.3 Objectives

- 1) To explore the cultural context in the UK of the interwar and post-Second World War years; in particular, the music of the time, so as to identify the place of J.B. Priestley's works within this context.
- 2) To apply the theories of intermediality of music and literature by Wolf, Sher and others to analyse Priestley's use of music in his oeuvre; more specifically, to understand the different concepts of "musicalization" of fiction and drama focusing on the novel *The Good Companions* and the play *Music at Night*.
- 3) To explore how Priestley's relationship and involvement with the world of music translates into a literary device in his plays and novels.



## 1.4 Methodology

To interrogate the above thesis, I have consulted books and articles that reflect the musical culture and values in the society of the British interwar years to establish a historical and cultural context. My aim has been to evaluate how much of Priestley's writing was a reaction to the cultural and/or to the historical conditions of the time. I have been taking an interest in Priestley for some few years now and I have noticed that Priestley's writings are frequently enriched by musical references. As I also have a general interest in music, I was curious to study this subject.

In a parallel way, regarding the choice of primary sources, I have chosen to consider works by J.B. Priestley in which music can be regarded as an essential and structural element of the work. In particular those works presenting musical performances and the audiences' reactions to them, such as *Angel Pavement*, *Music at Night* and *The Good Companions*; specific musical forms or music pieces, in *Music at Night*, *The Linden Tree*, *Time and the Conways* and *Three Men in New Suits*. I have also considered those works which depict a musical language in the text, where *Music at Night* is a prime example, as well as examining other works where music is present in different ways, such as *Let the People Sing*, *Lost Empires* or *Low Notes on a High Level*. I have analysed how Priestley has used music as a literary device to enhance his messages, as well as studying how Priestley has portrayed the musical culture of the time.

In addition, I have delved into the intermediality studies and theories of music and literature propounded by Scher, Wolf and Benson. In the absence of direct coverage of any J.B. Priestley novels or plays by any of these writers I have worked out how their theories might apply to the works covered in this thesis, in particular the primary sources, guided by their definitions. Whilst their theories have been applied to poetry and fiction, I have chosen to extend those theories to Priestley's play *Music at Night*.

The analysis differs in both of the primary sources as they belong to different genres, novel and drama, primarily because the language of each is different. In the play, the dialogues and monologues together with the stage directions allow for more musical embellishment. In the novel, in addition to the dialogues, the narrative and descriptions are very significant factors. In general terms, however, the analysis seeks to identify, categorise and exemplify the roles of music in Priestley's works, considering their historical and cultural background.

## 2. Historical context. Popular music in the interwar years (1919-1939)

A substantial growth in the British economy during the nineteenth century and the start of the twentieth century provided the foundation of important changes in all aspects of the social system, including popular music and entertainment.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, performances were organized in the public houses, which the working classes frequented, by the patrons of the pubs themselves. In some of these establishments, their owners began to engage professional entertainers, but in many instances, amateurs performed; such places were called ‘free-and-easies’, and on these occasions there was no charge for admission. A chairman – who was usually a good singer, often accompanied by a pianist – officiated, and anyone who wished to perform (for free) handed their name in to the chairman (Baker 13). Many artists of music halls commenced their careers from these premises. The British Music Hall was developed in the 1830s and 1840s occupying separate rooms in public houses and swiftly developed, expanding sufficiently to take the lead in commercialized popular culture by the last decades of the century. The first music hall to open in London was the Canterbury Hall in 1852. Improvements in working class living standards, commencing in the 1870s, through shortening of working hours and rises in wages, enabled more time to be devoted to leisure activities (Bailey 18).

In the nineteenth century and particularly in the Victorian era, the middle classes placed a heavy focus on their time at work, and the hours of leisure that such people could enjoy were very limited. With the economy beginning to improve in the middle of the century there was a proliferation of new and successful businesses; a consequence of this was that the second generation of businessmen had more free time available such that they could benefit from alternative modes of entertainment. At that time, the music halls were considered by middle-class reporters to be immoral and perverted largely on account of the rowdy and boisterous behaviour displayed by the audiences, not because of the music itself, even though some of the songs had bawdy lyrics. In 1889, the London County Council created a committee with the aim of policing the music halls and, in particular, the lyrics of many of the songs performed there. Several of the members of the appointed committee were puritanical by nature and, according to Barker, there was apprehension from the middle classes that music halls were becoming too powerful and would help working classes to climb up the social scale (Bailey 100). The music halls became less vulgar, bars were separated from the concert halls and audience singing was

increasingly curbed in order to encourage the presence of a greater number of middle-class and more female customers towards the end of the Victorian period.

The higher classes had almost a total disregard for this type of entertainment. During the reign of the former 'Playboy Prince', Edward VII, some entertainers were, however, summoned to the Palace to perform, but it was not until 1912 and the time of his successor, George V, that the monarch attended the Palace Theatre in London; this was what initially was called the Royal Command Performance, and now has become the Royal Variety Performance taking place every year to this day. It continues to be very popular to the extent that, in addition to receiving a cash prize, the winners of the modern yearly talent show, Britain's Got Talent, gain the opportunity to take part in the Royal Variety Performance in the presence of members of the British royal family.

With regard to market relations towards the end of the nineteenth century, music was performed by professionals in music halls and theatres to paying audiences. Songs were composed and revenue also was obtained from the sheet music that was sold for people to perform at home or for professional musicians. This type of music was only heard when performed either professionally or in many cases by amateurs, so the tunes had to be simple, with easy chorus and harmonic forms so the public in the theatres could sing along and the amateurs at home could learn the simple melodies. Music in Victorian times was generally speaking quite uniform, and this embraced church music, songs for the music hall, brass bands, light opera and parlour ballads, with a "common emphasis on tunefulness and sentimentality" (Baxendale, "Another Kind of Life" 139)

The performances in the music halls were given mainly by singers and comedians; in concert parties or variety shows other types of entertainers might additionally take part: dancers, magicians, jugglers and acrobats. Music was central to the show, in part given the individual performances from stars, plus a special atmosphere which was created by the singalong. It was thought that this helped to engender a 'sense of community', which along with 'intensity' and 'abundance', were three of the factors that Richard Dyer has described as 'utopian elements' of musicals as popular entertainments in contrast to 'scarcity', 'dreariness' and 'fragmentation' of the working classes' social standing and existence (Dyer 26). A good example of the creation of a special atmosphere and sense of community can be understood with the figure of Marie Lloyd, portrayed by T.S. Eliot in an article written after her death. She was recognized as "the greatest music-hall artist of her time in England" (418), not only because of her perfect performances but she was also the most popular artist, actress and comedian because she had "this capacity for expressing the soul of the people" (418) and did

not just made them laugh but made them happy when the audience joined the choruses. Eliot considered that the lower classes related to music-hall comedians, and in particular Marie Lloyd, as “they find the expression and dignity of their own lives” (419), something that he thought the middle classes and aristocracy did not possess, as this popular expression was lacking in more sophisticated revues.

At the end of the nineteenth century there was a generalized financial investment in all kinds of popular leisure activities. The small music halls were gradually replaced by chains of luxurious new variety theatres. Some new entrepreneurs copied the American market approach in order to gain more control over the performers and to diminish the power of their competitors. There were new methods of mass production and distribution with the adoption of central publishing systems, first in New York by Tin Pan Alley (a group of songwriters and music publishers) and a few years later at the time of the First World War, in London and centred on Denmark Street (Middleton 14).

In the decade of the 1910s, a new type of popular music emerged from America. In *Margin Released* (1962), the first of his autobiographical books, Priestley describes how he discovered ragtime in Leeds with his friends at a concert given by the Alexander's Ragtime Band. He relates how different it was from the music-hall performances of the nineteenth century: “suddenly found the twentieth [century] glaring and screaming at us”; “the syncopated frenzy of these three young Americans was something quite different” (66). Following this event he wrote a fictional interview, “Secrets of the Ragtime King”, which became his first paid publication by the *London Opinion* in 1912. Writing about it 50 years later in *Margin Released*, he visualized this concert as the beginning of the dominance of America’s culture and society in England and Europe. In Priestley’s novel *Angel Pavement* (1930), talking about one of the character’s children aged 17 and 20, the omniscient narrator talks about them as “a younger generation that existed in a different world” (72), referring to the post-war world, with more cars and moving pictures, “less English, more cosmopolitan” (72), explaining the influence of the American culture.

This ragtime music displayed an innovative approach to the prominence of rhythm, syncopation and the music itself rather than the lyrics, as the case was with music-hall songs. This developed into jazz. In Britain, initial contact with this music came in the variety theatres. In 1919 the Dixieland Jazz Band performed in London and British bands commenced copying them in the belief that they were playing real jazz.

As well as with the development of the music halls in the period before the First World War, the popular music industry was in the process of coming into existence by means of the efforts of the musical instrument manufacturers and the sheet music publishers.

The confident and constructive commercial spirit which followed from the end of the war onwards facilitated the promotion of popular music and dance. Such a positive approach occurred not only in music and dance but in other arts also, including theatre and variety. There was the thought that “there is enough sadness in life already without having to pay for it” (Lambert 89). The interwar years were decisive for the massive growth of the popular music industry. This was due to the rapid progress of technologies which allowed the swift diffusion of popular music and its commercialization by the gramophone, record producers, wireless and film studios. It was also brought about by the huge increase in the audience for music. Once more, there was a shortening of the working week and an increase in wages. Despite the fact that this interwar era has been considered to be a period of industrial depression and mass unemployment, there were considerable regional differences: the north of England and South Wales saw a decline in their coal, iron and steel industries as well as shipbuilding; meanwhile, in the south of the country, electrical, technological and car industries experienced a large expansion. The annual industrial growth rate was 3.1% between 1920 and 1937 (Jones 5). Between 1914 and 1938, 42% of workers had paid holidays and their salaries saw a threefold increase (Nott 3). With these life improvements the working classes were able to broaden the choice of their leisure activities, which included visiting not only public houses and music halls, but also encompassed the cinema, sports and dance halls. For example, football crowds reached 31.43 million attendances to matches in the English Football League season of 1937/38 (Jones 38).

The music hall was gradually being taken over by revues, which for many people was just the old music hall modernized and made fashionable. Initially revue came from America, but the British revue became popular very quickly. In the 1920s, Noël Coward – a playwright contemporary with Priestley – was one of the most successful writers with several of his revues being performed in London: *London Calling* (1923), *On with the Dance* (1925) and *This Year of Grace* (1928) (Pearsall 32).

The gramophone and the record industry were essential factors in the expansion of the leisure industry and in particular the popular music industry. In its early stages, the gramophone was popular with typically middle-class men. Its marketing was oriented towards males (Nott 35) and the records were expensive. In the following years, the sound quality improved remarkably especially with the advent of electrical recording. By the end of the First World

War, some record companies created new labels specialized in popular music with affordable prices. There ensued a rapid development in the mass production of both gramophones and records, which enabled a significant reduction in prices by 1930. The gramophone became an important piece of furniture in the front room of the homes which was shown off to visitors, something that was repeated later on with the radio (38). Not only did this bring music into the home, but dancing also became fashionable in homes, the new dancing halls and in public parks, especially for young people.

In 1939, in a survey about musical interests which involved both middle and working classes, 89% of working-class and 95% of middle-class respondents indicated that they liked some sort of music. A third of middle-class people responded that they liked any sort of music, followed by classical music and then light music. For working-class respondents, jazz came first followed by light music. In both classes women liked classical music more than men (Nott 195).

Cinema, which had started at the turn of the century, became very popular, consisting of 'silent films' until 1929. Professional musicians were employed by the cinema orchestras for which they played light music, and on occasion, some works of classical music. In 1928 the journalist Hannen Swaffer saw the first talkie film, *The Singing Fool*, and he declared "The theatre is dead. I have just seen it die" (qtd. in Pearsall 38). Eliot foretold this change of life entertainments into cinema and gramophones in seeing it as causing a loss of "some of his [the working man's] interest in life" (420) as when attending music-hall performances they sang along and were part of the community. In this Priestley would have agreed with Eliot, since he was a defender of live music concerts, variety and music hall.

Music hall suffered from the rise of the cinema, although there was less impact on variety and revue, which were directed more towards the middle classes. Music halls had been transformed into cinemas and many were demolished. In 1917 there were three and a half million cinema tickets sold every day (Pearsall 20); in 1934, Simon Rowson, a statistician and first president of the British Phonographic Society, presented a statistical survey that showed 963 million total admissions in British cinemas (Jones 37). Nevertheless, the most crucial musical development was the popularization of the radio or wireless, which brought music to homes, working men's clubs, and offered variety to people who would not go to a music hall.

There was a huge boom of music with the wireless. As Pearsall notes:

Unquestionably more music was played during the 1920s than throughout the previous history of mankind. A popular song broadcast on the radio could reach a bigger audience in one night than a

music-hall song of the Victorian age could get to in half a century. By 1926 there were two million wireless license holders (13).

The British Broadcasting Company (BBC) – changed soon after to British Broadcasting Corporation – was created in 1922 and depended on licence fees to be independent from the artistic point of view. The radio was initially led by the monopoly of the BBC as radio broadcasting was barred from commercial sources. To circumvent this hindrance, radio entrepreneurs launched stations from continental Europe whose emissions could be listened to in Britain, so the stations could finance themselves through advertising and in many cases, from popular music products. Radio sets were initially regarded as luxury items but as their design and production methods were simplified, they became more affordable and nearly three quarters of households owned a radio receiver by 1939 (Nott 59). Music dominated the programme schedules of the BBC from the beginning. By 1927, popular music programmes which included ‘light music’ and ‘dance music’ covered 46 per cent of the radio emissions (Nott 60). ‘Light music’ included ballads and sentimental songs, cinema organ music, orchestral music, operetta, musical comedy; it was played by small orchestral ensembles called ‘light orchestras’, trios or solo performances as well as military bands. The radio also broadcasted outside live performances from bars, restaurants or seaside resorts all across Britain.

This new system of popular music and entertainment was well established by the end of the 1920s due to the expansion of the economy, the rise of the living standards, the development of new technologies and mass production of gramophones, records, radios and films, as well as the corporate cultural industries in charge of music and dance halls and cinemas.

### 3. Theoretical Framework: Musicalization of literature

In the last few decades there has been an increased interest in intermediality and how different aspects of art or media combine or connect with each other. Intermediality is defined as the relation between media (the term ‘medium’ being understood as a channel of communication) and in the case that I am going to discuss here, literature and music are considered as two ‘media of expression’. Both use a semiotic system “for the transmission of cultural messages” (Wolf, *TMOF* 35). Other media involved in intermediality include film, visual arts and photography.

W.J.T. Mitchell defines the modern concept of ekphrasis as ‘verbal representation of visual representation’ to describe the relationship between literature and visual arts. In a parallel way, in 1993, Edgecombe proposes a new term for musical representation in literature as ‘*melophrasis*’, changing the preposition *ek* (out) for *melos* (melody) (2). This term has not become fully established in the academic world. The musicologist Siglind Bruhn uses the term ‘musical ekphrasis’, although this can create confusion as it has also been used as the musical representation of visual arts in her essay “A Concert of Paintings: ‘Musical Ekphrasis’ in the Twentieth Century”. Wolf, on the other hand, borrows a term from a novel by Aldous Huxley, *Point Counter Point*: ‘the musicalization of fiction’ (Wolf, *TMOF* 3).

Steven Paul Scher in 1982 describes three kinds of connection between music and literature (two of which were directed from the point of view of music). The first of this trio, ‘literature in music,’ embraces texts which help to understand a musical event, such as programme music: a term introduced by Franz Liszt that describes instrumental music carrying a description or a narrative contained in a poetical idea. His symphonic poems are examples of programme music (e.g. *Hamlet* or *Die Ideale*, the latter based on a poem by Friedrich Schiller). This type of music was particularly popular in the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth. Scher describes ‘literature in music’ as “instrumental music inspired by or based on a non-musical idea” (228) (e.g., *Don Juan* by Richard Strauss after a play by Nikolaus Lenau, *Harold en Italie* by Hector Berlioz, based on Lord Byron’s *Childe Harold*). Also known as ‘literary music’, its usage was particularly prevalent amongst composers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The second correlation is ‘music and literature’, for the setting of text, which Scher calls ‘vocal music’ (226). Despite its being presented chiefly as a musical genre, both arts render equal importance, and the work is not able to forgo the literary side. Works in this category include opera, songs, masques, masses, etc. (e.g., *Macbeth* opera by Verdi or a song by Benjamin Britten, *Canticle IV: The Journey of the Magi*, based on a poem by T.S. Eliot).

Although Scher avers the virtual impossibility of literature to present the exact acoustic texture of music, he identifies a third group, called ‘music in literature’ or ‘musicalization’ of literature. Scher distinguishes three main categories in this group: ‘word music’ (230), more common in poetry, the words aiming to achieve the acoustic quality of music through stress, timbre, rhythm or through onomatopoeic sounds; the second is achieved by ‘standard musical devices and features’ (233), such as counterpoint (e.g. Aldous Huxley’s *Point Counter Point* or Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves*); and finally, ‘verbal music’, in literary works with a theme based on a piece of music which could be fictitious or real, as well as “musical performance or



subjective response to music” (235) (e.g. the first volume of Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu*, or in Priestley’s *Music at Night*). This can be achieved with some literary techniques which include a mixture of “rhetorical, syntactical and stylistic strategies” (235).

In his work, Wolf investigates the model of ‘music in literature’ in narrative fiction. Firstly, he provides an example involving a Bach fugue and a poem by William Blake, “Laughing Song”, in order to identify the similarities of music with poetry in terms of rhythm, timbre, pitch and volume. Other similarities shared by literature and music are that both develop in an axis of time and are dynamic, in contrast with visual arts – painting and sculpture – which utilize space, and in contrast to music, they are static. Both literature and music can be transmitted by a written text, one by language and the other by musical notation and, in this manner, they can have a number of reproductions. Here is where controversy arises: some scholars, such as Harweg, and Adorno in his essay “Music, Language and Composition” (1956), consider that the comparison is not possible and regards that music is not a language, “it does not form a system of signs” (401). Music only shows “primitive concepts” in the form of tonality, chords and other symbols, but does not communicate meanings (402). Wolf does not agree with those statements as the contrast is between a non-artistic semiotic system (language) with an art which is non-semiotic (music) – that is from the linguistics point of view (qtd. in Wolf, *TMOF* 12). In more recent times there has been a lot of discussion about music semiotics. For example, Marshall Brown explains that the different “elements of a musical composition are pitches, rhythms, instruments, dynamic levels, and types of articulation” (76). The reason why music can be notated is because these elements are limited. Other authors, particularly in the German academia, support the music semiotic system, such as Vladimir Karbuzki or Adam Schaff (Brown 76).

Alternatively one could compare the power of communication, which music can possess, to express emotions: “The music sings of memories and hopes”, said Sir Edward Elgar about his violin concerto (McVeagh, “Elgar”). In an article from 1983 entitled “Music and Literature”, Anthony Burgess (writer and composer) defends the ability of musical phrases to express meanings comparable to that achieved by language, and he gave several examples from the music of Wagner (leitmotifs) Berlioz (who transformed Romeo into an oboe and Juliet into a clarinet) and Richard Strauss, who asserted that “anything could be represented in music” (93). Deryck Cooke, a British musician and musicologist, is very assertive in his book *The Language of Music*, advocating:

The 'literary' aspect of music is to be found, to a greater or lesser extent, in most Western music written between 1400 and the present day, since music is, properly speaking, a language of the emotions, akin to speech... Music is, in fact, 'extra-musical' in the sense that poetry is 'extra-verbal', since notes, like words, have emotional connotations (qtd. in Scher 229).

In his book, *Literary Music*, Stephen Benson defends the use of this term – “literary music” (4) – by explaining that music is represented in literary form embedded in the text. He supports this concept by recognizing that as one experiences a musical event, there is a need to transmit it through words. He is keen for writing about music to be encouraged as it helps to understand and increase the knowledge about the music and emphasizes the importance of “how and why music is staged and to what desired end” (4), as well as considering the type of music represented. Benson has a less formalist approach than Wolf, and rather than in the “how”, he is more interested in the “why” and, in particular, which idea of music is represented and how it relates to other discourses of music. In the last few years, the studies of music in literature from the literature point of view and the musicology point of view have drawn closer to each other. Benson’s argument that all writing about music is important is strengthened by Carolyn Abbate, a musicologist, who states in her book *Unsung Voices*: “any attempt to separate writing about music from music itself is futile because interpretative writing on a given work becomes in some sense part of that work as it travels through history” (qtd. in Benson 3). This is quite important with nineteenth century music as many interpretations have been written of musical works. In his essay, Benson draws attention to the fact that it is Classical and Romantic Western kinds of art music which are of interest to contemporary novelists rather than popular music. We shall see that Priestley used all kinds of music in his works, classical and contemporary (of his time), popular and some jazz.

Wolf contends that what should be being compared is both arts: music and literature (rather than language). Other similarities presented by Wolf in both arts include the presence of a theme, which in music consists of a succession of notes grouped in phrases; in literature this is achieved by different lexical and semantic elements which are to be abstracted, and are not explicit. With regards to the differences between both arts, in music there are several simultaneous parts (when we are considering polyphony) whilst in narrative literature there is just a single chain of words. Wolf suggests that one way of creating polyphony in literature would be the case where “a plurality of characters are to be imagined as simultaneously present and acting or speaking” (*TMOF* 21). For example, in Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves* there are multiple narrative voices, alternating and coming together, which imitate polyphony.

In fiction, there are three kinds of time: not just the present, but also future and past (analepsis and prolepsis). On many occasions there are jumps between them, in contrast to music where there is only one time corresponding to the listening time, with no possibility of the future being portrayed and with the possibility of evoking the past only being available in a limited manner. This is possible to achieve through a repetition of a previous theme, the use of the *da capo* instruction to return to an earlier section or introducing a motif or theme in an overture that will be fully developed later.

In order to assess intermediality, Wolf identifies several aspects to take into account. These include the media involved, the establishment of ‘medial dominants’ – if both media are equally dominant as in opera, or if one of the media becomes the dominant one, for example in programme music –; and the quantity of the intermediate parts, which can be total if it involves the whole work, or partial, for example, just as in one chapter in a novel. Nevertheless, he considers that the most significant aspect is the quality of the connection of the media, which can be direct or indirect.

In ‘overt’ or ‘direct intermediality’, both media are directly present with the typical or conventional signifiers. If consequently each medium remains distinct, it is in principle quotable separately (39). Some examples can be given of this. Cinema is a combination of three media: visual elements, text and music; opera –according to Wolf– is a mixture of drama and music (e.g., *Salome* by Richard Strauss based on the play by Oscar Wilde); a song where poetry and music are combined (e.g., Britten’s songs with lyrics to poems by Wilfred Owen). On occasions, one of the media is dominant, for example, illustrations of a novel (e.g., *Oliver Twist* with George Cruikshank as the illustrator).

In contrast to this, in ‘covert’ or ‘indirect intermediality’, there are at least two media with one being the dominant medium whilst the second does not appear with its signifiers; it is included within the first one as a signified. Both media cannot be detached, the non-dominant medium is contained within the dominant one. For example, in visual arts and music, “The Green Violinist” by Chagall, with the figure of the violinist as the musical medium; or in visual arts and literature, the phenomenon of ekphrasis, “Landscape with the Fall of Icarus”, a poem by William Carlos Williams about a painting by Pieter Brueghel the Elder. In the case of music and literature, Wolf’s ‘covert intermediality’ corresponds to Scher’s ‘music in literature’ (musical ekphrasis or melophrasis or musicalization of music) and ‘literature in music’ (programme music) (43).

Wolf defines musicalization of fiction as “a form of covert or indirect intermediality occurring in literature” (51) where he states that there must be an imitation of music within the discourse or the story in such a way that the reader experiences the presence of music. He stresses that it is not enough just talking about music (“mode of telling”). What is required is that “the language, the imagery and/or the narrative structure and content show similarities to or affinities with music (in the mode of ‘showing’)” (52). These similarities should be operative as music on reading the work, the reader should feel the presence of music. This is also called ‘verbal music’.

Wolf has reviewed his formalistic theories several times, and in a chapter included in *Handbook of Intermediality: Literature, Image, Sound* (2015) he gives a new classification of intermediality called extracompositional and intracompositional intermediality, and within this section includes implicit and explicit reference which correspond to different aspects of Scher’s ‘music in literature’ and his previous ‘covert intermediality’. The following figure summarizes his theory:

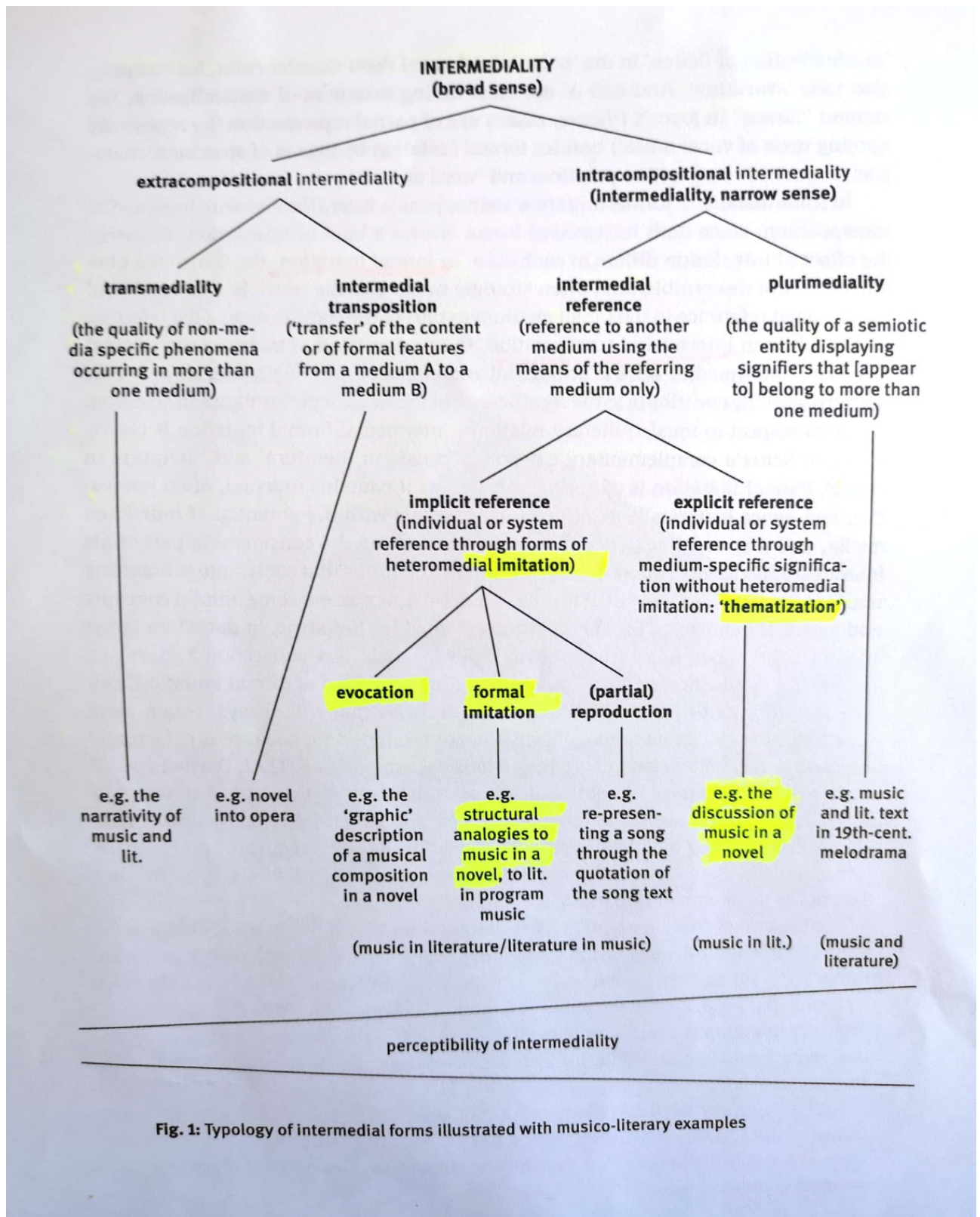


Fig.1 Wolf 2015 summary of intermediality (LMT 468)

There are several ways of music ‘telling’ in fiction. It can occur in the title of the work (Burgess’s *Napoleon Symphony*) or discussed and/or described by the characters or the narrator. The means of music ‘showing’ – or verbal music – include imitation with onomatopoeias, evocation, or techniques which use pitch, timbre and rhythm. It can show replication of polyphony by creating several actions which run simultaneously. Imitation can be achieved on the phonological, the syntactic or the semantic level. It can also be realised by the imitation of a musical form, a fugue or sonata form (‘Syrens’ in *Ulysses* is an episode which imitates a fugue).

All these essays found through my research debate the musicalization of fiction, that is, narrative fiction. In his 1999 book, Wolf dismisses theatre in this context since he considers that drama has already music in its performance. This concept is debatable, as incidental music in theatre is not essential by definition. However, in his essay from 2015 Wolf suggests that the musicalization of drama is a field waiting to be discovered, mentioning late Samuel Beckett’s plays as a possible source for such study (*LMT* 471), something that he had already explored. In two essays within the book *Words and Music Studies: Essays on Music and the Spoken Word and on Surveying the Field* (2005), both Wolf and Stephen Benson analyse different aspects of Beckett’s radio play *Words and Music* (1962). In spite of the numerous essays and books that have been produced in the last few years about intermediality which include theatre as one of the media, there are few studies on intermediality of music and drama in English, being more abundant in the German academic world. An essay by Claudia Georgi is centred on Wolf’s theories of intermediality and discusses two contemporary examples of drama combined with film and cartoons and a production of pre-recorded videos with the characters’ performance. Ivana Brozic considers how theatre has introduced technology across time. She also underlines the importance of the spectator’s role “to see a staged event as theater” and presents a remarkable performance of *The Noise of Time* (2001) where the “theater stage is seen against the musical stage, and music, as constituent of theater’s multimediality, against that of language” (144). This production includes film, radio, staging by actors, and finally, music performed by the Emerson String Quartet in order to bring to the stage the life and work of Dmitri Shostakovich, transforming a theatre performance into a musical concert. Brozic suggests that “theater has left a space for the spectator to decide if the music speaks and what it says” (148).

The next table summarizes the theories of intermediality by Scher and Wolf and the equivalents between them:

Intermediality theories by Scher and Wolf

Scher	Wolf	Examples
<p>1. <b>Literature in music</b></p>	<p>‘covert’ or indirect intermediality</p>	<p>Programme music: Liszt Symphonic poems <i>Don Juan</i>, Richard Strauss</p>
<p>2. <b>Music and literature</b></p> <p>‘Vocal music’</p>	<p>‘overt’ or ‘direct intermediality’ (both media are equal.)</p>	<p>Songs and opera: <i>Macbeth</i>, Verdi <i>The Olympians</i>, Bliss and Priestley</p>
<p>3. <b>Music in literature</b></p> <p>3a. ‘Word music’</p> <p>“Poetic practice that aims primarily at imitation in words of the acoustic quality of music (onomatopoeia, rhythm, stress, pitch and timbre”. (Scher 230)</p> <p>3b. ‘musical structures and techniques’</p> <p>3c. ‘Verbal music’</p> <p>“Any literary presentation of existing or fictitious musical compositions, any poetic texture which has a piece of music as its ‘theme’. In addition, such poems or passages often suggest characterization of a musical performance or of subjective response to music”. (235)</p>	<p>‘Covert’ or ‘indirect intermediality’ (one of the media is dominant)</p> <p><b>Thematization or ‘telling’</b> of music (1999) Explicit reference: ‘thematization’ (2015) (e.g. the discussion of a piece of music)</p> <p><b>Musicalization or ‘showing’</b> of music (1999) Implicit reference: ‘imitation’ (2015)</p>	<p>Poems “Syrens” <i>Ulysses</i>, Joyce</p> <p><i>Music at Night</i>, Priestley <i>The Waves</i>, Woolf</p> <p><i>The Good Companions</i></p> <p><i>Music at Night</i> <i>The Waves</i>, Woolf</p>



My aim is to analyse *The Good Companions* and *Music at Night* and compare and contrast how J.B. Priestley introduced music in his works from the point of view of intermediality according to the theories of Wolf and Scher in particular. At the same time, I am intending to analyse how Priestley depicted the musical culture of the time in his novels and plays and how he used music as a literary device.

#### 4. J. B. Priestley: Music, Politics and Society.

John Boynton Priestley (1894-1984) was a novelist, playwright, essayist, critic, screenwriter, social commentator and broadcaster. Born in Bradford into a lower middle-class family, he left school early and went into the wool trade, fought at the front in the First World War and, with an officer grant, studied History and Politics in Cambridge University. He briskly made his way to London to follow a journalistic and writing career and had great success with his novel *The Good Companions* in 1929, together with its play adaptation which allowed him to create his own theatre company from the early 1930s onwards. Within a versatile, prolific, and long career of over 50 years – his last novel was published in 1976 — and in addition to his success with *The Good Companions*, he is most well-known for his time plays written in the 1930s and 1940s, and for his broadcasts on the BBC radio during the war in 1940 and 1941, the *Postscripts* directed to the people of the UK, when he had 10 million listeners every Sunday night. He was described as “the voice of the 1940s, second only to Churchill in the public's imagination” (qtd. in Bluemel 93)

Priestley played the piano from childhood and used to perform both chamber music (he played piano and violin duets with his first wife, who had previously been his neighbour) and in accompanying singers at house parties He bought a grand piano as soon as he went to live in London, such was the importance of music-making to him. He used to attend classical music concerts as well as concert parties or revues, composed music for the plays he organized for his children and ran a Chamber Music Festival on the Isle of Wight for over ten years. In his autobiographical book *Instead of the Trees* (1977) he recollected how, in 1910-11, at the age of 16 or 17 he was pondering whether to become a writer, a musician or an actor, and the thought of becoming a conductor of a symphony orchestra crossed his mind, but he did not have either the patience to practice or the enthusiasm to study other subjects such as harmony and counterpoint. So, he summarized this musical idea as “the most idiotic” of the three (72). Nevertheless, he was comfortable writing about music from an early age. He believed that arts



at the production and consumption level were valuable for both society and the individual. He also defended that art should be accessible and not restricted to highbrows. In *Margin Released*, Priestley recalls the cultural opportunities available in Bradford, which not only high-class people, but middle-class people like him enjoyed often enough. There were two theatres and two music halls, and it was a “musical town” (28) with the important orchestras and conductors of the time: The Hallé from Manchester, the London Symphony and chamber concerts with world-famous musicians such as the cellist Pablo Casals, the pianist Harold Bauer and the violinist Fritz Kreisler.

J.B. Priestley introduced music in his writing many times. In *Delight* (1949), a book consisting of very short essays about the things that he enjoyed, several of these were about his liking for music, whether chamber music, orchestras and their conductors, going to concerts and all the atmosphere around them or even buying sheet music to play tunes at the piano. In addition to describing his love of music in his autobiographies and his vision of the magical aspect of music, he went, on a commission, to a Festival in Daytona Beach, Florida in 1967 with the London Symphony Orchestra and wrote a book about the experience, *Trumpets over the Sea* (1967). He collaborated with Sir Arthur Bliss and wrote the libretto of the opera *The Olympians*. For his play *Johnson and Jordan*, he appointed a young Benjamin Britten to write the incidental music. But he also blended music - both classical and popular - into his novels and his plays, where in many cases he used music not only as an entertainment tool but also as a literary device. I will be assessing these practices in some of his works. Popular music was a main theme in novels such as *The Good Companions*, *Lost Empires*, and classical music in the novels *Angel Pavement*, *Three Men in New Suits*, *Bright Day*, the comedy novel *Low Notes in a High Level* and more often in his most serious plays, *The Linden Tree*, *Time and the Conways* and the most experimental of all, *Music at Night*. In some works, he mixed classical with popular music; in *Festival at Farbridge*, *Let the People Sing* and even in the opera *The Olympians*, he introduced elements from popular culture.

In addition to music, Priestley brought his thoughts of politics and society into his writing. His background as a northerner (England) coming from a lower middle-class family influenced his position about politics and society. His views were those of (British) liberal socialism, with an updated form of nineteenth-century radicalism, and he was against the divisions caused by class. These ideas were introduced not only in his essays but also in his fiction. The novel *Angel Pavement* (1930) is a critical portrait of the London of the Depression. *English Journey* (1933), an account of Priestley’s travels around England, describes the state of the nation at the time, and in particular the difficulties experienced in the industrial north of

England depicting the consequences of the Depression, a theme also developed in the novels *Wonder Hero* (1933) and *They Walk in a City* (1936). In *The Good Companions*, the hardship and destitution of people from the working classes is found not only in the town of Bruddersford, but also when the concert party arrives in Tewborough, a derelict Midlands town described by means of a series of comparisons and metaphors:

Tewsborough was like an engine with a burst boiler lying on the side of the road... it was a factory that could now show you nothing but broken windows and litter and mouldering ledgers and a mumbling caretaker, it was nothing but an old cash-box containing only dust and cobwebs and a few forgotten pence. (*TGC* 376)

Other authors held similar views and also used their fiction to clamour for social and political change. George Orwell's *The Lion and the Unicorn* (1940) expresses his thoughts on national identity and radicalism. In *Coming Up for Air* (1939), he presents a similar picture to Priestley with regards to a mass culture, just before the onset of the Second World War, discussing themes very similar to those in *Let the People Sing* (published in the same year): both works identify a countryside in a degraded condition, the impact of American influences in society and culture, and the threat coming from totalitarian ideologies. In a similar way to Priestley, Orwell displays nostalgia for past times: "the old life we're used to is being sawn off at the roots" (qtd. in Fagge 53). Orwell died in 1950. He was lauded for being a "radical English intellectual" (56), praise not offered to Priestley. Instead he was derided by the intellectuals and the academy of the time: Virginia Woolf had jibed at him as being a "tradesman of letters" (qtd. in Brome 133, Fagge 2) despite the fact that she recognised she had not read any of Priestley's works and had no intention of doing so: "Yet I have not read, & I daresay shall never read, a book by Priestley" (Woolf 11900), whilst F.R. Leavis was of the opinion that no time should be spent on reading Priestley's works. Right-wing critics were also quick to show disdain for his novels and his plays.

Priestley was never a member of the Labour Party nor of the Fabian Society but during the war he became a member of the 1941 Committee, a progressive grouping that advocated for social change and socialist ideas and attracted members of the left and radical liberals. The Common Wealth Party, created shortly afterwards, briefly counted on Priestley for a few months. It held idealistic views of common ownership, morality in politics and democratic governance. It gained three Members of Parliament. The party gradually dissolved, with some of the members joining the Labour and Liberal parties. Priestley never joined a political party

again but continued advocating his ideas. He was also a leading member in the initial Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, from 1958 together with Bertrand Russell, Michael Foot and A.J.P. Taylor, the renowned historian and broadcaster.

Priestley published a 127-page pamphlet for the 1941 Committee, *Out of the People* (1941), in which he outlined his ideas of liberal socialism within a war context. In it he claimed that the reason why individuals are linked to their communities is their social conscience, and this is what brings them together. He encouraged the people to make changes, avoid committing the errors of continuing the passive mood of the interwar years that had led them into the current war situation, and advocated that the people should be active in democracy. Priestley had quite a mystical idea of the word ‘community’: “the community consists of living persons...some of us would declare that the community is something more than the sum of the people in it... (it) might have a sort of mind or soul of his own.” (qtd. in Fagge 50)

This notion of the people, who as individuals form parts of communities and achieve improvements in society, was a recurrent theme in books where music features prominently: he explored and developed these ideas in *The Good Companions*, *Let the People Sing*, *Festival at Farbridge* and even in his libretto for *The Olympians*.

This belief in ‘the people’ has made him one of the authors covered in the relatively new twentieth-century British literature category called ‘Intermodernism’— a term introduced by Kristin Bluemel that focuses on authors whose 1929 Depression-to-Second World War writings have been neglected. In addition to having ‘the people’ as their main target and subject, the writers share other common characteristics, often representing middle or working-class people (usually radical from the political point of view) and, from the literary aspect, using “non-canonical, even ‘middlebrow’ or ‘mass’ genres” (Bluemel 1). Other authors included are George Orwell, Rebecca West or Storm Jameson.

*The Good Companions* and *Music at Night* are the two works I have chosen to analyse in greater detail: *TGC*, as an example of the inclusion of different aspects of the popular culture of the period (music in particular) as well as the role of music in the community and the literary work. *MAN* is an example of Priestley’s experimentation with time but also with music. In this play, we can appreciate a higher degree of musicalization of drama throughout the work.

The following selection of works of Priestley show how he used different styles of music for different purposes.

## 5. Music in Priestley's Works

### 5.1 *Lost Empires* (1965)

Regardless of being a later novel, *Lost Empires* narrates life in the music hall from 1913 to September 1914 at the beginning of World War One. To make the jump in time, in the prologue of the novel, J.B. Priestley – as himself – visits Richard Herncastle, a water-colour painter who lives in the Yorkshire Dales. Herncastle gives Priestley papers about his reminiscences of music hall, in decline when he worked as the assistant to his uncle Nick – an illusionist – before enlisting in the war. Priestley reaffirms these days of decline at the end of the novel through the Herncastle character: “My belief is that by 1913 when it was organized like big business, the variety stage was already well on the decline. It wasn't any longer a kind of explosion of popular talent. That was already going into films. Like Chaplin and Stan Laurel...” (298). This decline is depicted with the bleak atmosphere of the narrative, the cold winter, the shabby and dilapidated accommodation, the dysfunctional relationships and the depression of the pre-war ambience. With this description, the sense of community of the music hall is lost, the artists are selfish, only thinking about themselves and their own careers and performances, there is no unity, and all is dismantled at the beginning of the war.

The central characters in this novel are magicians and comedians. However, numerous details about music and musicians are encountered: some fictional ones imitating real artists, such as Lily Farrier (a singer in the novel) but also some real musicians and entertainers of music hall referred to, such as Florrie Forde (an Australian music-hall singer), Dan Leno (comedian), Dutch Daly (comedian and concertinist) and Lottie Collins (singer) (60). The ragtime group Hedges Brothers and Jacobson, the ensemble Priestley saw in his teens and about whom he wrote his first paid article, is also referenced in the novel: “I shared a bill for months a year ago with Hedges Brothers and Jacobsen, who brought ‘em here” (200). A trio of Americans forms part of the troupe with the name “*The Ragtime Three*” (199) and Priestley wastes no time in showing his dislike for this form of music: “The three ragtimers – all youngish Americans, a plump one playing the piano, a tall one playing the saxophone, a medium-sized one doing the singing or shouting. ‘What a bloody din!’ And uncle Nick didn't say it, he shouted it” (199). A similar episode showing dislike for ragtime can be seen in *Bright Day* in an episode set at a party where the narrator describes “a fat man at the piano rattling out ragtime” (156). In this case, Priestley derides the lyrics “*Dog-gone, yew'd better begin – an' play a leetle tune upon your vi-o-lin.*” (156). An interesting aspect of the culture of the time

was the interaction that, as it changed from city to city, the troupe had with the local hall orchestras, or as it is called in the novel the “band call” (94, 102). This is described by Priestley a number of times in the book. The routine was to arrive on Sunday and on Monday morning they used to rehearse the numbers needed in each performance with the local orchestras which varied according to the quality of the theatre hall. The narrator comments on the quality of the orchestras, the number of musicians and the interest or not that the conductor and the orchestras displayed.

The novel was adapted by ITV in 1986 for a short TV series with a young Colin Firth playing Richard Herncastle, John Castle as Uncle Nick and Laurence Olivier making an end-of-career appearance as an old comedian.

### 5.2 *Angel Pavement* (1930)

This novel shows London metropolitan life during the Depression of 1929. Within the atmosphere of bleakness and dreariness, Mr Smeeth, a working-class cashier, declares a liking for classical music. At one point when he is worried about work, he listens in the wireless to the Overture *Hebrides* by Mendelssohn. Priestley describes how Mr Smeeth listens and imagines the sound of the sea, the waves and the birds, and how the music produces calmness and happiness: “He sank into his chair, and the sharp lines on his face softened ... And Mr. Smeeth... worried no longer, and for a brief space was happy” (81). Later on, when he receives a pay rise, he decides to go to an “expensive and highbrow” concert in the Queen’s Hall<sup>1</sup> where he listens to some contemporary pieces which he does not enjoy, but the orchestra also plays a piano concerto and the Brahms First Symphony. It is interesting to note how Priestley portrays the piano concerto from the point of view of a person from the audience who has not been to this type of concert before, including some onomatopoeic sounds imitating the musical phrase, and particularly the rhythm as well as describing the emotions that the music caused in Mr. Smeeth:

A little dark chap played the piano and there could be no doubt about it, he *could* play the piano. Terrum, ter-*rum*, terrum, terrum, trum, trum trrrrr, the orchestra would go, and the little chap would lean back, looking idly at the conductor. ...and then Mr. Smeeth would feel himself very quiet and happy and sad all at the same time. (244)

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<sup>1</sup> The Queen’s Hall was a concert hall that opened in 1893 and was destroyed by enemy bombs in the Second World War in 1941.

There is a similar description and reaction to the Brahms, and on leaving the concert, “odd bits of the magic kept floating back into his mind” and he feels happier than when he received the pay rise that day (247). Priestley uses music in *Angel Pavement* both as a therapeutic tool acting on emotions, to calm Mr. Smeeth and distract him from his daily problems as well as a celebratory means, in both cases causing a very positive reaction of joy in Mr Smeeth, a man suffering from stress due to work and home worries. Priestley also shows the different access that working people had to classical music, whether with the gramophone, wireless or by attending concerts. In this manner, he was also vindicating the right of the working classes to access classical music.

### 5.3 *Bright Day* (1946)

Classical music and the memories that music can produce are an important matter in *Bright Day*. In this novel, time is an important theme as in many of Priestley’s plays. Gregory Dawson, a film screenwriter, is staying in a hotel in Cornwall working on a new script. On listening to the slow movement of Schubert’s B flat major Trio played by the hotel live entertainment musicians, Dawson’s memories take him back to Bruddersford, where he lived before the First World War.

...when the ‘cello went wandering to murmur its regret and the violin with its piercing sweetness curved and rocked in the same little tune, I was far away, deep in a lost world and a lost time. I was back again – young Gregory Dawson, eighteen, shy but sprawling – in the Alingtons’ drawing-room in Bruddersford, before the first World War, years and years ago, half a good lifetime away. (41)

This is an experience Priestley described years later – as happening to his own self – in *Margin Released* (1962) as he reminisces on the open concerts in the park given by military bands and how, when he hears some of the light pieces played by the band, this creates the effect of “magically recapturing, some exact moments of our past” (60), and he compares the effect that music has for him to “Proust’s *madeleine*”<sup>2</sup> (60). Dawson recalls a house party when

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<sup>2</sup> Proust’s *madeleine* refers to memories evoked unintentionally by a sensory trigger such as smells, tastes or sounds, bringing back emotions or recollections of events from long ago. This comes from an episode of *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-1927) by Marcel Proust.

this music was performed. The music helps him to recognize an elderly couple lodged in the Cornwall hotel whom he had met on a much earlier occasion back in his youth. In the novel, the main character Gregory Dawson is a young man who lives in Bruddersford (Bradford), works in the wool trade business, aspires to be a writer, likes music and then enlists to go to war, replicating what Priestley did between 1912 and 1914. Nevertheless, JBP denied that this novel was autobiographical in his memoir *Margin Released*: “the story is not autobiographical... both his [Dawson] work and his attitude towards it are quite different from mine” (195). Dawson meets a local family (the Alingtons) who host house parties where they play classical music, play charades and with them he attends classical music concerts and a pantomime. All those cultural activities were entertainments that people – including Priestley – took part in at the time, something that he has recounted in his autobiographies. In his book of essays *Delight*, he explains that “In *Bright Day* I made a musical family a symbol of magical attraction” (73).

It is noticeable that Priestley is very meticulous when talking about classical music, he lists the concert programmes through his characters in detail: “I could remember the very programme: Prelude to the Third Act of the *Meistersingers*; Strauss’s *Don Quixote* tone poem; and Brahms’s *Fourth Symphony*” (BD 68). He also introduces into the text important real musicians of the time, such as the conductor Arthur Nikisch (69) or the violinist and conductor Eugène Ysaÿe (100). It is remarkable how Priestley feels the music and makes his characters feel it: “Yes, it was the group most formidably arrayed, with a hundred orchestral players below tuning up, and Brahms, Wagner and Richard Strauss waiting in the wings, so to speak, to heighten the magic” (69). In *Midnight in the Desert* (1937), one of his autobiographies, he describes what music means to him: “To this day, although I have given more time and patient attention to other things, music still seems the most potent and magical of the arts” (163). Despite recognizing that music is “non-utilitarian”, he finds it “larger than life” (163), feeling great joy or anguish and he states: “Instead of diminishing life, as so much knowledge seems to do now, music magnifies it until we feel like the travellers in the Harz Mountains who see the vast shadows moving in the mist” (164).

#### 5.4 *Three Men in New Suits* (1945)

This novel deals with the demobilization of three Second World War British soldiers and their difficulties in returning to civilian life. One sergeant, Alan Strete, encounters his uncle

Rodney ensconced in his room in the family home listening to “The Farewell”, the final movement from Gustav Mahler’s *Das Lied von der Erde*. This musical work is a series of six songs with lyrics from a German translation of old Chinese poems by Li Tai Po which talk about mortality, one of the abiding themes in Mahler’s compositions, as a reflection of his mental health, with frequent depressions and a family history of early deaths. The music scholar Deryck Cooke, a specialist in Mahler, analysed this last *Adagio* movement and considered it to have an atmosphere that is “sombre and tragic” (108), describing the emotional playing of the instruments as “a deep moving tam-tam, a stab of pain on the oboe, a melancholy ‘marching away’ rhythm on horns and clarinets. A lonely narrative passage” (108). Herbert Glass, a music journalist, has described this work as “an embracing of death, then, finally, an exquisitely lyrical outpouring of faith in life’s renewal” (Glass, “Das Lied”). In the song, a traveller returns to the homeland to rest. However, Mahler added some lines himself which talk about the beauty of nature:

Die liebe Erde allüberall  
Blüht auf im Lenz und grünt aufs neu!  
Allüberall und ewig blauen licht die Fernen!  
Ewig...Ewig...

*(The dear earth everywhere  
Blossoms in spring and grows green again!  
Everywhere and eternally the distance shines  
Bright and blue!  
Eternally...eternally...)* (Cooke 105)

In the novel, Priestley first depicts the human voice and the instruments, moves into describing what the music inspires and then moves to the topic of the recent war:

The soft silver hammering of a celesta, scattered in the deepening silences, was like some dawn, far-off, pearly, indifferent to men in its pure beauty, stealing over a scene of ruined hearths and dead cities. “*Ewig, ewig!*” cried the woman softly, out of a lost Vienna. The last instruments murmured and died. The silences grew. “*Ewig, ewig!*” The blue brightens; the earth awakes in Spring; but the last whispering farewell is heard no more, because man has gone to find his far long-lost home... (TMNS 25-26)



Sergeant Strete finds himself thinking about the war as an officer because of the music: “‘Steady, boys, steady’, Alan muttered, more moved than he cared to admit even to himself” (26). Priestley has chosen Mahler’s work very carefully creating a parallel picture to the argument of the novel.

In this work, Priestley is sending out a socio-political message about these soldiers who have been in the disaster of the war and who, once they return to civilian life (which they initially find difficult adapting back to), wish for a new, better and more equal society. This is foreshadowed by the musical work chosen. After a talk with his uncle about the family and the world, Uncle Rodney suggests listening to the Elgar Cello Concerto, a work which Priestley considered the epitome of Britishness (and which will be discussed later on).

### *5.5 Let the People Sing (1939)*

This comedy novel also seen as social satire was programmed to be broadcasted on the BBC radio and the first chapter was aired on the first day of the Second World War. In this novel, an old comedian from the music-hall era, Timmy Tiverton and a Czech professor fleeing from the Nazis end up in Dunbury, a small market town in the Midlands. Once there, they join a street seller and his niece, Hope. They learn that the market hall that generations back had been given to the people of Dunbury – who used it for the local band to play music in – has now lost its licence for music, has been put up for sale and is going to be sold either to a factory of *United Plastics* to set up a showroom or to open a Dunbury Museum dedicated to the history of the town. Tiverton and the professor get involved with several of the people of the town and the local music band in an attempt to regain the market hall for the people. In the vicinity of Dunbury there is a pub run by an old music-hall singer who has employed other old artists of the trade and will help Tiverton in his crusade. They gain the help of Sir George who acts as a mediator after they help him to become merry with good food, music and drink. The interesting factor in this novel is that Priestley uses music as a unifying factor for the people: it creates the sense of community. Music is also used as a metaphor for freedom, which is expressed in a marching song composed by the conductor of the local band, who suggests waking people up with music:

*Let the people sing  
And freedom bring*

*An end to a sad old story;  
When the people sing  
Their voices ring  
In the dawn of the people's glory. (LPS 153)*

The band conductor explains what he wishes to achieve: “We’re marching into a new life, boys... The last tyrant is dead. All the chains are off. The darkness has gone, and the people – you and I and our wives and kids...are coming out in the sunshine” (153). Especially given that this programme was broadcast during the war, Priestley wanted to unite the home front into positive community activities: “The people should have joy” as the professor said (81). In Priestley’s biography, Brome affirms that the “emotional climate of the book fitted the mood of the moment” (242). His ideas and critique of British society were addressed in a more direct way by a series of articles that he wrote at the time for the *News Chronicle*, a newspaper in the 1930s, with the title of the series “Britain wake up!” (Baxendale, *P’s Eng* loc 3466)

Priestley manifests his thoughts about music through the professor: “music nourishes the mind and the spirit” (*LTPS* 144). To the managers in the factory, the professor defends that work is important, but the mind and the spirit must also be attended to, whether at work or in leisure time. ““There is not time and then spare time”, said the Professor, raising his voice to meet the other’s tone. “There is only time”” (145-146).

In addition to plenty of music-hall references with popular songs – on a couple of occasions free entertainment is organized, involving music-hall numbers as well as audience participation – there is also classical music. The professor plays classical music at the piano and on one occasion before Dunbury, Tiverton and the professor spend a music evening with a drunken Sir George who plays the violin, and together they play sonatas for piano and violin by Mozart.

### *5.6 Time and the Conways (1937)*

*Time and the Conways* has become one of Priestley’s most popular time plays (see below in section about *Music at Night* for description of ‘time plays’). In the first act, set in 1919, the Conway family (a widowed mother, four daughters and two sons) are celebrating Kay’s twenty-first birthday along with some friends of theirs. The children are in their twenties or younger, and they hold discussions about the brightness of their futures. The second act runs

in 1937, the Conways getting together again for Kay's birthday, as well as to discuss Mrs. Conway's finances which – by now – are in dire straits. The different characters are now disappointed with their lives. For the final act, the play jumps back to 1919, to the continuation of that initial birthday party. It can be observed in act two that some of the friends present at the original celebration will go on to become spouses of the Conway children. In act three, the behaviour and choices of the different characters will help to understand the failures in their lives presented in the previous act.

The opening stage directions contain the phrase: “*a piano [is] playing popular music of that period*” (11) and a number of characters start singing up the music's tune, in order to set the cheerful mood of the party. The time of this first act – 1919 – is efficiently established by the singing of a popular song from the period, the assemblage of a variety of clothes for a game of charades played very frequently at that time and the mentioning of the recent Great War. To link the first and the third act to express continuity, Mrs. Conway sings Schumann's lied *Der Nussbaum* at the end of Act One and beginning of Act Three. The selection of this lied by Priestley cannot be considered as arbitrary. The tempo is an *Allegretto* suitable for a birthday party, but the lyrics are particularly thought-provoking as they convey a metaphorical transposition of the play's situation, and perhaps from the mother's point of view: the Walnut tree (the mother) with its branches (her children) and a maiden (Kay) lost in dreams about the future.

The Walnut Tree (*The Nussbaum*) Robert Schumann

A nut tree blossoms outside the house,  
Fragrantly,  
Airily,  
It spreads its leafy boughs.

Many lovely blossoms it bears,  
Gentle  
Winds  
Come to caress them tenderly.

Paired together, they whisper,  
Inclining,  
Bending

Gracefully their delicate heads to kiss.

They whisper of a maiden who  
Dreamed  
For nights  
And days of, alas, she knew not what.

They whisper—who can understand  
So soft  
A song?  
Whisper of a bridegroom and next year.

The maiden listens, the tree rustles;  
Yearning,  
Musing  
She drifts smiling into sleep and dreams. (English translation Richard Stokes) (“Der Nussbaum”)

*Der Nussbaum* in *Time and the Conways* has a linking role of time between the first and third act to indicate they are still at the party, as well as a facilitator into the change of time from the first act into the 1937 time setting of the second act. At the end of Act One, Kay listens to the lied and “*she seems to stare not at but into something*” (33), that is the future, 1937, as is indicated in the fourth and last stanzas of the song. There is no music in Act Two. Furthermore, the lyrics of the lied serve as a reinforcement of the plot of the play.

There is an additional musical reference in the play. In the second act, Priestley makes a glancing citation of the Hubert Parry hymn (to words by William Blake) “Jerusalem”, written in the middle of the First World War to bolster British confidence:

I will not cease from mental fight,  
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,  
Till we have built Jerusalem  
In England’s green and pleasant land. (“What are the lyrics...”)

The hymn was immediately popular in Great Britain, went on to be orchestrated by Edward Elgar, before later becoming a staple of the annual Last Night of the Proms concert organized by the BBC: “KAY. What about you Madge? Are you building Jerusalem? – in

England's green and pleasant land?" (39). Kay is answering her sister Madge in a hyperbolic form when Madge says it is a pity Kay is not writing another book. In this poem and hymn, Jerusalem represents the perfect city, a paradise or heaven, and "green and pleasant land" has become to mean England. This is a different use of music as a literary device, in this case used as a hyperbolic sarcastic answer from Kay to her hostile sister Madge, who used to be an idealistic socialist.

### 5.7 *The Linden Tree* (1947)

Priestley wrote several "professional plays", a type of play that was quite popular in the West End in the interwar and post-war years. The themes concerned the patterns and philosophy of work ethics. *The Linden Tree* was Priestley's most successful play of this kind. Its first production it run over 400 performances in the West End. This is one of the neglected Priestley plays: according to the J.B. Priestley Society, it has only been performed professionally twice, both in smaller theatres of the Greater London area. One of these two productions took place in 2006 in the Orange Tree Theatre in Richmond, Surrey. Michael Billington, the renowned theatre critic from *The Guardian* maintained that the subject matter continued to be very pertinent for present times: "most topical play on the London stage" (Billington). whilst Kieron Quirke in the *Evening Standard* found that "all the anxieties of our modern, progressive middle class are probed, laid bare and finally justified" (Quirke).

The play presents Dr. Robert Linden, a university professor in a northern provincial town by the name of Burmanley. He has traditional thoughts about education and dedication to work, offering students individual teaching and giving them the confidence to think for themselves. This runs against the theories of Dr. Lidley the Vice-Chancellor of the university, who endorses non-individualised learning. There is a family reunion with Dr. Linden's wife and their four children for his sixty-fifth birthday. The Vice-Chancellor and all of his family (except for his youngest daughter Dinah) wish Linden to retire, but he chooses to stay on in order to maintain good educational policies. His wife leaves him so as to live with their wealthy businessman son.

This play is also considered a "family play" as one of the themes developed is the relationships between different relatives, with each child representing different choices, politics and attitudes to life, something that Priestley depicts and underlines with the title of the play.

The surname of the family carries a lot of symbolism. In Greek mythology, linden trees were sacred trees; in Celtic mythology, the tree was a symbol of altruism. In other cultures, it has represented a symbol of prosperity, friendship, peace, justice, fidelity, as well as a role of protection, healing and keeping away evil spirits and disease. With this name, Priestley was showing the positiveness of the play, rooted in the integrity and the essence of the professor, his thoughts and ethics. Having “tree” in the title evokes the family, the trunk and different branches, as in the song “The Walnut Tree” in *Time and the Conways*.

In this play, two iconic classical music works are present, and together with the linden symbolism, they carry some meaning into the play. Dinah, the youngest daughter, plays the violoncello and when she appears in the play, she explains that she is rehearsing Dvorak’s Symphony No. 9, “From the New World”, with an orchestra. The stage directions that introduce Dinah state that “*she is eighteen, ... and a very eager personality quite different from anybody else in the play, as if she belonged to another race* (236)”. This symphony has been very popular since it was premiered in 1893 in New York, commissioned by the Carnegie Hall when Dvorak was in the United States for a couple of years. For a 1932 UK broadcast performance of the work played by the BBC Symphony Orchestra and conducted by Sir Henry Wood, the *Radio Times* (the BBC’s weekly programme schedule magazine) commented of the “New World”, “Indeed, outside the recognized ultra-classical symphonies, it is perhaps the most popular of all” (*BBC*). In a letter to a friend, Dvorak wrote:

The Americans expect great things of me. I am to show them the way into the Promised Land, the realm of a new, independent art, in short a national style of music! ... This will certainly be a great and lofty task, and I hope that with God’s help I shall succeed in it. I have plenty of encouragement to do so. (Döge)

Priestley wishes to show Dinah as the fresh spirit, the new world, the open future which will clash with the rest of the family, in particular with her siblings. In Act Two, the stage directions indicate that Dinah is heard “*practising bits of the cello part of Elgar’s cello concerto*” (268). It becomes more specific in the middle of a discussion of Professor Linden’s children, when he tells them to listen to Dinah and the directions specify “*we hear quite clearly, though at some distance, the cello playing the rich melancholy second subject of the first movement of the Elgar concerto*” (273). The piece now is introduced directly into the dialogue. One of the other daughters remarks: “It sounds a sad piece” (273). In the professor’s reply, Priestley amalgamates Elgar’s life and his own interpretation of the work, together with a

forewarning of what is going to happen in the play (the farewell from his wife and family) and the identification of the professor with Elgar's intentions (the nostalgia from the past which is connected with the places where Elgar lived, in the case of the professor with the previous educational system and his previous family life). As in *Time and the Conways*, music brings us back to an idealised pre-war time:

PROFESSOR. (*quietly*) A kind of long farewell. An elderly man remembers his world before the war of 1914, some of it years and years before perhaps – being a boy at Worcester – or Germany in the 'Nineties – long days on the Malvern Hills – smiling Edwardian afternoons ...all gone, gone, lost for ever – and so he distils his tenderness and regret, drop by drop, and seals the sweet melancholy in a Concerto for 'cello. (273)

Nevertheless, the professor then presents Dinah as the opening of the bright future, the "miracle" through the magic of music:

PROFESSOR. ...But then what happens? Why, a little miracle. You heard it.

JEAN. (*softly*) Dinah playing?

PROFESSOR. Why yes. Young Dinah Linden, all youth, all eagerness, saying hello and not farewell to anything, who knows and cares nothing about Bavaria in the 'Nineties or the secure and golden Edwardian afternoons, here in Burmanley, this very afternoon, the moment we stop shouting at each other, unseals for us the precious distillation, uncovers the tenderness and regret, which are ours now as well as his, and our lives and Elgar's, Burmanley today and the Malvern Hills in a lost sunlight, are all magically intertwined...

In this way Priestley confronts the idealism of the young, paralleled with a musical composition and depicted by Dinah's playing, in contrast to the experiences of the older generation.

Priestley was an admirer of Sir Edward Elgar (1857-1934). In his book, *The Edwardians* he describes how he finds Elgar to be an epitome of Englishness and the Edwardian Era: "There is in him and his music the rich confusion of this age, the deepening doubt, the melancholy whispers from the unconscious as well as all that hope and glory" (138). In addition, when referring to the cello concerto in the same book, he illustrates it further: "The cello concerto in 1919, is more or less a lament, in which we catch him looking back, not merely with nostalgia but often with anguish, at the Edwardian years, gone for ever" (138).

Later on in *The Linden Tree*, Priestley becomes even more precise when he mentions Pablo Casals' recording of the Elgar Cello Concerto from 1945 in the stage directions:

*(As if the door is now wide open, the gramophone can now be heard, clearly but still distantly. It is the Casals recording of the final movement of the Elgar 'Cello Concerto – the passage, before the very end, in which earlier themes are recalled poignantly.) (TLT 296-297)*

In a *Gramophone* magazine historical article about the review of the Casals recording, Lionel Salter, a musician, writer and music critic specialized in Spanish music, explained that there was controversy when Casals played the cello concerto in London before the Second World War as he was being “over-emotional (un-English)”. However, the recording was made in 1945 and performed in a similar way: “in the deeply meditative sections...it reached an Elgarian mood of wistfulness that few artists understand” (Salter).

The professor and Dinah comment on this section of the concerto. Dinah is recognizing how Elgar's music recalls the previous themes of the concerto and “saying goodbye to them” (TLT 297) as the music, according to the stage direction, “comes through poignantly” (297). Dr. Linden reiterates:

PROFESSOR. *(quietly, almost to the music)* Wandering through the darkening house of life – Touching all the things he loved – crying Farewell – for ever – for ever – (TLT 297)

The Elgar Cello Concerto is a favourite piece of Priestley, mentioned in other works such as in *Three Men in New Suits*, *Music at Night* and *Festival at Farbridge*. In the case of *The Linden Tree*, Priestley uses music as a method of reinforcement of the plot, identifying the evocation of the original piece of music with the life of the professor, the signifier of Englishness with the values that the professor embodies and also recalling the nostalgia of the pre-war years.

### 5.8 *The Olympians* (1948)

The composer Sir Arthur Bliss approached Priestley during the Cheltenham Music Festival in 1945 and asked him to write the libretto for his first opera. Bliss and Priestley had been friends and neighbours for a few years in the 1920s – including playing games of tennis



and billiards, musical evenings and good discussions – and got on well over the years. Bliss, a Classics scholar from Cambridge, initially had thought about a subject related to *The Odyssey*. Priestley, taking up the subject of mythology, suggested an adaptation of the old legend of gods and goddesses who lived in a modest way after the advent of Christianity. Priestley transformed these gods into his own terms, a troupe of strolling players travelling all around Europe over the centuries, and once in a hundred years on Midsummer Night they regained their godly powers. This plot is reminiscent of *The Good Companions* written in 1929 as well as having some echoes of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. By now, it was the end of the Second World War and both Bliss and Priestley wished to create a positive and entertaining opera coupled with some comedy traits. Both in memoirs and interviews Priestley asserted the primacy of composer over librettist. In his correspondence with Bliss, he insists that if anything needs to be changed, Bliss is free to do so, and he is happy to adapt the text to the music (Bliss 176). This collaboration of Priestley and Bliss in an opera is an example of the intermediality of music and literature, what Scher called vocal music, where music and literature have similar importance and one element cannot exist without the other.

Priestley included his own favourite subjects of time, community and social activities as can be appreciated from the plot. In addition, he wished to provide a joyful entertainment:

LAVATTE. Let them sing, let them dance, the whole night long till the dawn.

MME. B. Let them drink, let them dance,

Let them eat, let them sing, yes, let them eat, yes, let them dance.

For Lavatte pays the bill,

CURÉ. Let them eat, let them sing, let them drink, let them dance, yes, let him drink,

Yes, let them sing, for Lavatte pays the bill, Lavatte, (nkoda.com)

The opera is set in the midsummer of 1836 in Provence in the south of France. Lavatte, a wealthy and miserly bourgeois of the neighbourhood wishes to marry his daughter Madeleine to a rich old man. The landlady of a local inn tells the Curé that she owes money to Lavatte and the Curé promises to intervene if she would treat a group of travelling players staying in the inn. They are hired to perform, at a party organised by Lavatte, a play called *The Comedy of Olympus*. Madeleine encounters Hector, a poet who is staying in the inn and is on his way to Paris where a play of his is to be performed. He asks Madeleine to rehearse a love scene of his play and they fall in love with each other. The troupe consists of Mercury, Venus, Diana, Mars, Bacchus and Jupiter who is the manager of the players. In Act Two, Hector and

Madeleine declare their love for each other and the players – it now being midsummer – appear as gods with their own powers. They bewitch the young lovers and through an exorcism executed by the Curé, Lavatte is convinced to allow them to marry. The Curé also convinces Lavatte to pay the troupe a decent salary (which he tried to avoid) and give some money to the poor.

The opera had mixed reactions from the critics, even though the audiences were receptive and enjoyed the work. *The Olympians* was withdrawn after fourteen performances in London and a few concerts in cities in the north of England. In 1972, a shorter version was adapted to commemorate Sir Arthur Bliss' eightieth birthday.

The relative failure of the opera was due to a range of factors which included the company's ill-preparedness for new productions, the actual stage production provided for the opera (including the unsuitability of the conductor for such music) and the work itself. This opera was premiered on 29th September 1949 during the immediate postwar years when the Royal Opera House (formed in 1946 as the Covent Garden Opera Company) was endeavouring to find its role as a public subsidized theatre and was reluctant to bring to stage a brand-new work due to the high cost of a new production; *The Olympians* was the first new British opera in Covent Garden (the theatre that houses the Royal Opera) since 1923. There was a massive problem between the producer and the conductor who were not on speaking terms with each other. The second and particularly the third act were under-rehearsed, the main tenor who played Hector was only appointed ten days before the first performance – although he was one of the successes of the debut. The ballet was composed of students from the Sadler Wells school who were not suitable for opera performance, but the main dancers were on tour. In addition, there were flaws in the libretto, the music and especially the opera as a final work.

From the point of view of the opera itself, when Priestley and Bliss finished the composition of the opera, the first one for both of them, it was nearly five hours long and they were obliged to cut characters and scenes, which left some gaps in the story, for example, the essential fragment when Mercury gives a letter to Hector announcing the power that the gods acquire in midsummer; this is crucial to understanding the plot. Moreover, Arthur Bliss allowed the critics to attend the dress rehearsal which was “disastrous” according to Bliss's words (Bliss 179). The BBC and the wireless soon said that the opera was “poor stuff” (180) which reduced the numbers in the audiences, but most of the public in subsequent performances enjoyed the show.

It is remarkable indeed that Priestley used some of this experience in his fiction. In *Festival at Farbridge* (1951), written two years after the performance of *The Olympians* in

1949, a comic novel in which a festival is organized in the town of Farbridge, a pageant telling the history of England is commissioned as part of the celebrations. When rehearsals begin, it transpires that the pageant is going to last for five hours and one of the organizers tells the author and the producer that it should not last more than two, so characters and scenes are cut from the pageant such as the Saxons, or the druid performances. The weather spoils the rehearsals but after intense practice the following day the show ends up with great success.

As ever, some critics were very derisive about Priestley's involvement in the opera, but some others praised his libretto. In the 1972 version, Michael Oliver, the Polyphonia Chairman, appreciates "the dual characterization of the Gods", as set up by Priestley's text for Bliss to follow musically:

Their entry music in Act I places them firmly in the world of pier pavilions and provincial music halls, but the transformation of this music a few pages later for Jupiter's entrance tells us that these are no ordinary third-rate strolling players. (Dunnett 67)

Edward Dent, a musicologist, opera translator and critic, wrote a letter to Bliss with his criticisms after the 1949 première. In it, he talked about Priestley:

Everybody has fallen foul of Priestley's libretto, even if they did not fall foul of your music; but I thought it extremely good, and after reading it very carefully more than once I have the greatest admiration for it. It is just idiotic to say that it is too colloquial and commonplace; look at Da Ponte or the authors of *Carmen*! Priestley has merely used the right words in the right situations. Some of it is deeply poetical, with far-reaching thoughts and ideas which don't always come through in the music. One might, after very careful analysis, find places where the libretto is not well laid out for the stage and for musical composition, but I cannot at this moment lay my finger on them (Bliss 181)

In his letter, Dent continues analysing some aspects of Bliss' music, and in his final thought his belief was that the opera was too long and exhausting as there was "too much stuff", and "too grand" and it should have been handled more as opera comique (181).

Priestley was dismissive of the critics that complained of poor operatic material:

others who promptly pooh-poohed it...I can only say they were the same types who have been hastily dismissing or ignoring me for nearly half a century. I ought to have been pooh-poohed off the scene years ago, but somehow I am still around – like Bliss. (qtd. in Craggs 82)

In this opera Priestley intermingles popular characters and his positive social ideas about community with classical music. This attention to community spirit commenced with *The Good Companions* but more examples of this appeared during the war in *Let the People Sing* and *Three Men in New Suits*. In these Priestley was promoting the notion of creating a better, more socially positive world. He does likewise with his opera libretto for *The Olympians* using the Curé character who convinces the pub landlady to deal in a generous way with the troupe of travellers as well as succeeding by an exorcism to get rid of the gods' powers to get Lavatte to pay the players a decent payment for their performance, provide money to the poor and allowing the lovers to marry each other.

### 5.9 *Low Notes on a High Level* (1954)

This comic novel – Priestley called it a frolic – is a satire on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the functioning of management in high spheres. It demonstrates Priestley's ability to direct a witty social commentary for a contemporary readership, using his deep knowledge of music – here classical music – to accentuate the comic element: “Comedy, we, may say, is society protecting itself – with a smile” (qtd. in Shilling and Fuller 106), he wrote, as early as 1926, in his biography of George Meredith, the Victorian-era novelist and playwright and, incidentally, a Radical Liberal in his politics. The BBC has for long been the target of criticism from both establishment and anti-establishment fronts, as much as from far-right, right-wing, liberal, and left-wing political position takers.

In the novel, Sir Lancelot Telly, the classical music director of the English Broadcasting Company (EBC) is delighted because Stannsen, the world's ‘best living composer’ from Norroland, has commissioned the orchestra of the EBC to première his new tenth symphony on condition that the last movement sees the participation of an instrument invented by a Mr Dobbs – the dobbophone.

In terms of a ‘new tenth symphony’, Priestley is plausibly making use of the ‘curse of the ninth symphony’ (a superstition akin to that of actors naming Shakespeare's *Macbeth* ‘The Scottish Play’ within a theatre), which, in the classical music world, has been believed to affect – and kill off – composers who have written that number of symphonies, but fail to complete

a tenth. Beethoven, Mahler, Bruckner, Dvořák, Vaughan Williams, Arnold and Schubert are amongst those believed to have been affected. Priestley is showing his irreverence for such thinking here.

The dobbophone is described as a ridiculously oversized orchestral instrument somewhere between a large contra-bass bassoon and a sousaphone. Stannsen and Mr Dobbs are old friends, but currently not on speaking terms owing to a Norrolandish card game wrangle. Mr Dobbs refuses to play the instrument unless there is an apology from his friend the composer. Sir Lancelot sends his assistant musical director, Alan Applerose (also a composer of classical music) to try and convince Dobbs to play the instrument. Alan gets embroiled with Inga, Dobbs's niece, and the culture of Norroland, as well as with Mr Dobbs, who sets up an illegal commercial radio in the middle of London and hacks into the television service – usually in the middle of political information – to give his very left-wing views against the government (the Conservative party had returned to power in 1951). At one point in the novel, Alan is sacked from the EBC for confronting the managers, but he is reinstated again towards the end of the novel as he is a key member of the musical department. Dobbs and Stannsen sort out their disagreements and the symphony is played with immense success and with the dobbophone in the orchestra.

This novel is an unremitting satire of the BBC and in particular of its management approach (as seen in the early 1950s): Priestley gives a good depiction of the running about in the corridors, offices and meetings of a large radio and television corporation. With the illegal radio station, he derides the way in which the BBC would seem to be unquestioningly following the government line. Once more, JBP is wishing to mobilise people, wake them up: “‘My idea’, said Dobbs ... ‘I’ll cut into the EBC programmes for a few nights. I can do it in the London area with this transmitter of mine. Waken people up. Do ‘em good’” (*LNHL* 76). When a Minister appears on an EBC television broadcast to explain about some Economic Adjustment card, Dobb interrupts with his illegal “Freedom radio” (91) and tells the people “tear it up [the card] ... Ministries and their officials exist for our convenience, ... We don’t exist for their convenience” (91). Priestley also voices his opposition to the UK’s nuclear armament policy through Mr Dobbs: “it was ruinous folly for this country to enter the race for atomic armaments” (32).

To portray the machinations of the BBC, Priestley chooses the classical music department. He depicts the management of the BBC as members of a fortress, using metaphors for their names. The president of the EBC is called Air Marshal Block, “his ignorance of all forms of culture and his dislike of popular entertainment were all in his favour” (16), that is,

he will ‘block’ all culture<sup>3</sup>, but being the Air Marshal, that is the law enforcer as in the military way, his plans will be achieved as he dictates. Sir Lancelot Telly is the director of the EBC orchestra and musical director: “Sir Lancelot came bounding across. Although large and stout, this famous conductor could bound and bounce. At a first glance he suggested a squire in an old-fashioned musical comedy” (13). Legend claims that Sir Lancelot du Lac, the knight in the medieval realm of King Arthur, was the greatest knight of the Round Table, a hero of many quests. In Priestley’s book, Sir Lancelot is mocked, given that he comes across to others as a buffoon, a pompous individual, thinking that he is a very important person, a knight with a title, and that *he* was the reason why the composer Stanssen had chosen the EBC orchestra, when that was evidently not the case. In connection with British titles and honours and the mockery that Priestley directs at the figure of Sir Lancelot, it may be mentioned here that Priestley himself was one of a select band of creative individuals who have been rather dismissive of the UK honours system: he rejected a knighthood, a life peerage, and the membership of the Companion of Honour. Only late on in life did he accept a national honour, the Order of Merit. He deemed that this last had no political connotation and was in the gift of the sovereign.

In *LNHL*, two other members are mentioned in that Policy meeting: Westfort, also meaning a fortified building and Porton, an unpleasant character whom Alan Applerose did not like: “[Alan] disliked Porton and all his mysterious intrigues, winks and nudges (40)”. It is possible that Priestley took the name from Porton Down, a governmental defence experimental campus which had important roles in both world wars, becoming a chemical weapons research centre. Priestley describes him as a sly, treacherous individual: “He [Alan] was then visited by Porton, the Civil Service type, who came creeping in to make a little quiet mischief (39)”.

Priestley had ample experience himself of dealing with the BBC, which established and developed its individual form of control as a state broadcasting concern, precisely at the time when Priestley was establishing and developing his own career as a writer. In 1933, he had a current events programme, *I’ll Tell You Everything*, in which he expressed his opinions. More particularly, he spent long periods of time during the Second World War involved with the BBC, not only broadcasting the Sunday *Postscripts* addressing the nation (talks designed to bolster the home morale), but also permitting the serialization of his novel *Let the People Sing*, addressing overseas listeners via the BBC World Service in early morning broadcasts, as well

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<sup>3</sup> A word in common usage in the UK is ‘blockhead’ –stupid, dunce –, it enjoyed further popular awareness from the late 1970s by being the name singer Ian Dury chose for his band.

as through many other instances of journalism. In 1940, Graham Greene –who was no fan of Priestley’s plays and novels – described him in *The Spectator* as “a leader second in importance only to Mr Churchill (qtd. in Baxendale, *P’s Eng.* loc 3426)”. He was considered “a bridge between middle and working classes” (qtd. in Baxendale, *P’s Eng.* loc 3557), which he achieved by his northern accent, his assertiveness, knowledge of the people and the closeness to the listeners, and as he said in one of his *Postscripts*: “He [the broadcaster] must talk as if he were among serious friends (qtd. in Baxendale, *P’s Eng.* loc 3603)”. Nevertheless, Priestley disliked the stuffiness and rigidity of the BBC where somebody would feel that “just around the corner, in his orderly-room, is some tremendous ex naval or military big-wig, who is bound to disapprove of all that is being said and done (Priestley, *Rain* 128)”; an attitude which he projected on the EBC board management of *Low Notes on a High Level*.

In the novel, Alan Applerose, the assistant musical director attends one of the EBC Policy meetings in a drunken albeit serene state. Despite Alan providing information about the facts of the problem of the Stannsen symphony and Mr Dobbs, the board discounted his views utterly. After opposing the managers, he is fired. This type of management style depicted by Priestley in his novel – issued as though from a fortress and not communicating with the workers – has continued over the decades. On March 13th, 2023, a leaked letter was circulated from Jonathan Manners and Rob Johnston, co-directors of the BBC Singers, addressed to Richard Sharp, the Chair of the BBC, and other members of the board, condemning the closing down of the BBC Singers, the only professional choir in the United Kingdom. In the letter, they criticised the route that the senior management team took to decide the closure without proper previous consultation. Furthermore, they exposed the ‘toxic culture’ of the BBC and the ‘aggressive and confrontational dialogue’ (qtd. in Lebrecht), as well as reproaching the fact that only two people from the senior team had ever listened to the BBC Singers. This decision of the BBC was taken in conjunction with a voluntary redundancy programme in the three BBC orchestras to decrease their costs by 20%. Following a vast outcry (from the public, including a petition in change.org, from musicians and politicians), only one month later, the BBC backtracked and announced that it will look for alternatives in order to decrease that 20%. (Khomami), In a similar – and earlier – fashion, the EBC, towards the end of the novel, backtracked and re-contracted Alan Applerose, acknowledging that he was an asset to the EBC.

After Alan is fired, he is called by Dobbs to supply music for his illegal radio station: “organize some music for my programme. Must have some good music. That and a few home truths are the only things worth listening in the radio” (*LNHL* 76). Applerose provides him with music recorded by live musicians. In the novel Priestley provides further evidence of his

knowledge of music. At one point, Sir Lancelot and Alan are examining the score and the page where the dobbophone has to be played, Priestley shows he knows how to read a score and the extra messages that composers add to the music:

“You see? Even a contrabassoon couldn’t find its way down there.”

“It must be a joke,” said Alan, staring at the lowest notes he had ever seen in a score.

“Yes, but look at this remark by the composer, who says that these notes, essential to the score, can only be played on a Dobbophone.” (23)

In this satirical novel, Priestley uses music in a more direct form than in other novels to express his left-of-centre political views, his rejection of nuclear armament in addition to his main aim here, which is to criticize the BBC’s management structure. In *Rain Upon Godshill* (1939), another of his autobiographical books and published in same year as *Let the People Sing*, Priestley states:

I am a bitter opponent of the view that politics can be entirely separated from any notions of a general culture ...I mistrust the politician who is indifferent to the full life of the mind and the spirit, who shrugs his shoulders at any mention of literature, painting, music, the drama and philosophy. He is the man that has no music in himself. (270)

Perhaps this is the reason why he introduced music into his works. In addition to entertainment, it helps to convey his message to society, to mobilise them and wake them up as he saw that politics, society and art should not be separated.

## 6. Musicalization of literature

### 6.1 *The Good Companions* (1929)

*The Good Companions*, Priestley’s fourth – and breakthrough – novel, deals with the trials and tribulations, the human conflicts and passions in the world of popular entertainment of its time and in particular, in a concert party (defined as a theatre stage entertainment group, popular between the 1920s and 1940s especially in seaside resorts in Britain, and derived from music hall) made up of musicians, comedians, magicians and dancers as it travels around the byways of England.



In general, in *The Good Companions*, Priestley demonstrates a masterly control of musical description and comment. There is a vast amount of music-related information and comment in the novel – about piano, vocal and strings music, songs and dances, the music business, running shows, issues and arguments between the characters as human beings and as performers. Priestley never patronizes, and he wears his musical learning lightly – no doubt, one of the reasons why such a subject did not put potential readers off in the 1930s.

The huge popular and commercial success enjoyed by the novel allowed Priestley to diversify from being a jobbing essayist, reviewer and a part-time novelist to entering the world of theatre drama. It brought him also to the attention of more broad- and narrow-minded critics.

Priestley had been thinking of writing a picaresque novel for a long time, although the book came out when he was only 35. In his youth he had enjoyed this type of novel – *Tom Jones*, *Pickwick Papers* and *Gil Blas* among them – and he said that *Don Quixote* was the “best novel in the world” (Priestley, *LAWM* 50). He ventured into a novel with some picaresque characteristics (the travel, the search of adventures, the appearance of some rogue characters and the satirical criticism of society), set in 1920s England, one that would be full of optimism and hope, a sense of community and humour – perhaps with the aim of ameliorating the bleakness of the time. In addition to his own personal anxieties, this was the time of the Great Depression; the United Kingdom was affected by it in a dramatic manner, with exports decreasing by a half and unemployment figures doubling (in this crash, in some shipbuilding areas of North East England, unemployment rose by as much as 70%) (Jones 109).

John Braine’s biography of Priestley qualifies *TGC* as an “escapist novel” (28). Its three principal characters (Jess Oakroyd, Elizabeth Trant and Inigo Jollifant) escape a dreary or humdrum existence and they are in search of new adventures, looking forward to changing their lives. In the introduction to the newest edition of 2007 of *TGC*, Tom Priestley, the author’s son and a promoter of his father’s legacy, explains that “*The Good Companions* combines two of his favourite themes: the emancipation of the individual, escaping from the restraints of dull, ordinary life, and the dynamic of the group where the individual becomes free to join others and form a new unit, and the reader becomes attached to both” (*TGC* 9).

Into this novel, J.B. Priestley brought the utopian elements considered by Richard Dyer to be appropriate for this kind of musical entertainment – be it music hall or concert parties: a ‘sense of community’, ‘intensity’ and ‘abundance’ (Dyer 26).

Ronald Harwood (1934-2020), a South African-born British author and playwright, asked Priestley on one occasion why he had not written about his experiences in the First World

War, either in fiction or in his autobiographies. Harwood described Priestley's reaction as follows:

A haunted, doomed look crossed his face, He waved a hand repeatedly to and fro, banishing the subject from our conversation. He stared into the fire as though seeing again the horror, repeatedly biting his bottom lip, fighting the memories that were too painful, too terrible to be allowed to surface. And that, I think, is a clue to the real Jack Priestley. (Qtd in *TGC* 28)

In 1928 and 1929 works based on the experience of war started to be published, examples being Robert Graves's *Good-Bye to All That*, Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Siegfried Sassoon's first volume of his fictionalized autobiography, *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*, and R.C. Sherriff's play *Journey's End*, set in the trenches in France at the end of the war. Even though he had been injured twice in the war, Priestley did not write about the warfare experience until his late sixties and in a very passing manner. In *Margin Released* (1962), he explained:

I had had the War, in which almost every man I had known and liked had been killed. Then, just as life was opening out, there came a period of anxiety, overwork, constant strain, ending tragically... So in *The Good Companions* I gave myself a holiday from anxiety and strain and tragic circumstance, shaping and colouring a long happy daydream. (186)

J.B. Priestley was married, with two children, and his wife died of cancer in 1926, the same year as his father. *TGC* was published in July 1929, receiving good reviews and despite initial slow sales, it became very successful with the public, and by Christmas, the publishers were handling 5000 copies a day. The huge success of the novel ended Priestley's financial troubles – he had no private income – and allowed him to form his own theatre company to stage his own dramas (written from the 1930s onwards) and to try out his experiments with time through them. By 1932 over two hundred and fifty thousand copies of the book had been sold (Cook 99) and by 1978, over four million copies (Baxendale loc 519).

The novel contains numerous instances of Wolf's 'telling' of music or thematization of music, but very little imitation of musical forms or 'showing'. One of the aspects that Wolf proposes for musicalization is the presence of the experience of music and its effects in either the performer or the audiences. In *TGC* there are several examples of characters playing instruments or singing, as well as occasional onomatopoeia, but Priestley is more interested in the reactions that music causes in the performers of the music – that is the members of the

troupe – the audiences and people around the stage. According to the theories of Scher, *TGC* is an example of ‘verbal music’, with numerous passages suggesting “musical performances or a subjective response to music” (235). If one follows Benson and tries to answer the question as to why is music present in this novel with ‘literary music’, it can be debated that Priestley uses it as a bonding role between the members of the troupe, creating the community sense as well as using it as a tool for entertainment. In this novel, Priestley introduces some of the cultural entertainments – and some sport – of the 1920s period when music hall (if not concert parties) was declining from its heyday at the end of the nineteenth century, through the Edwardian era, and up to the First World War. As discussed previously, the advances made with films, radios and gramophones, and the change in music tastes caused the fall of music hall.

The book commences with Jess Oakroyd exiting a football match in which his beloved Bruddersford United Association Football Club has been taking part. As a Yorkshire man, Priestley liked his football and makes us comprehend the love of the sport by northerners with a brisk contrast: “To say that these men paid their shillings to watch twenty-two hirelings kick a ball is merely to say that a violin is wood and catgut, that Hamlet is so much paper and ink. For a shilling, the Bruddersford United A.F.C. offered you Conflict and Art” (41). With this sentence, Priestley compares sport to arts, which he thought should be available to all classes and should be anti-elitist. His social attitude to the arts is also present in his obituary of the cricket and music writer Neville Cardus: “[Cardus] might have remembered that the arts do not exist in mid air, that we have to give some thought to the society in which these arts flourish or wither” (Priestley, “One master”).

In the first part of the novel – set in the late 1920s – the three main characters, each from a different class background, are presented: Jess Oakroyd, a Yorkshire joiner, fan of football and dissatisfied with his job, unhappy with his wife and his son; Elizabeth Trant, an upper-middle class single woman who has just inherited some money after the death of her father, whom she had been caring for; and Inigo Jollifant, a school teacher at a stifling preparatory boarding school, who plays the piano and composes catchy, popular tunes. Each of them takes leave of their monotonous lives in search of new adventures on the road. The presence of the trio in the tearooms of a Midland town coincides with that of a dispirited Dinky Doos, a travelling concert party, which is debating about what can they do after the manager has run away with both the troupe’s pianist and their money, leaving the rest in debt. Priestley then introduces the sense of community and solidarity of this concert party, with Inigo’s intervention:

‘...somehow – there isn’t too much – er – good companionship left – is there? I mean – people don’t sort of – pull together now much, do they? ...I’d like one or two people to say I was a good companion. That’s one of the things that’s attracted me about this what’s it – concert party: a good crowd sticking together.’ (*TGC* 268)

At the end of that day after the meeting and dinner, they decide to change their name to “The Good Companions” and agree to continue on the road with the help of Miss Trant who, using her inheritance money, will cancel their debt and take over the management, with Inigo as a pianist and Mr Oakroyd becoming the stage carpenter and baggage man.

In *TGC*, Inigo, a schoolmaster graduated from Cambridge, is an amateur pianist with a talent for composing easy, light songs; this he considers to be merely a hobby, but he is repeatedly encouraged to sell them: “you’ll make quite a lot of money if you keep on turning at things like that” (282). Eventually he travels to the capital in search of a buyer for his songs in London’s ‘Tin Pan Alley’ – the area, just outside the West End, around Denmark Street, where many publishers and other music-related businesses congregated. Before he convinces himself that the visit is going to be worthwhile, he looks at the shops: “Charing Cross Road was bursting with songs. If the shops were not filled with sheets of music, then they were filled with gramophones and records and saxophones and drums and banjos. The place seemed to be a Jazz Exchange” (480). A music publisher is found for his songs and towards the end of the novel Inigo’s success is confirmed, emphasizing the importance of live music at the time, and the industry surrounding it, which includes the publishing of sheet music: “He watches with droll amazement the rising tide of performing fees, sheet music royalties, gramophone royalties, and so forth...it is incredible that he should make so much money out of what seems to him a mere parlour trick” (570). Almost a century later, the sheet music business in Great Britain continues to enjoy a significant economic importance within the music industry, even if much of the selling of music scores has migrated onto the internet and many musicians use a tablet to read their music from.

The concert party is formed of a comedian, Jimmy Nunn; a young female music-hall singer and dancer, Susie Dean; a male jazz singer-dancer, Jerry Jerningham, together with other minor artists including a magician. It also encompasses a jazz band from within its ranks: “Inigo at the piano; Jimmy at the drums; Mitcham with his banjo; and Joe, Susie, and Elsie respectively with cornet, violin, and tenor saxophone, instruments they all played in a slapdash but sufficiently adequate manner” (312). Priestley is trying to make the reader hear the music

with some onomatopoeic sounds imitating the rhythm: “*Rumpty-dee-tidee. Rumpty-dee-tidee.* Quietly at first, then louder, louder, then letting it rip” (312). He also describes the effect that the music carries to the audience.

You could feel the whole house moving to its rhythm through the curtain. They were tapping; they were humming; they were eating and drinking it. A final flourish, crowned by Jimmy, who crashed his drum-stick against the hanging cymbal. A moment’s silence. Then the Pavilion seemed all clapping hands. (312)

Earlier on, Priestley has given an account of Jazz and its history (to date) revealing his initial dislike of it, whilst having come to terms with that type of music.

Jazz, which just had begun as an explosion of barbaric high spirits, a splash of crimson and black on a drab globe, had become civilized; it was quieter, more subtle, and flirted with sentiment and cynicism; its first bold colours faded to autumnal tints; Its butterfly guides were forever fluttering down into melancholy; its insistent rhythms were like the soft plug-plugging of those great machines that now keep whole populations waiting upon them, devouring so much of people’s time and yet leaving their minds partly free to wander – and to wonder; and in its own crude, jiggling, glancing fashion, ...it contrived to express all the sense of baffled desire and the sad nostalgia of the age. (278-279).

This paragraph could be understood in two different ways: talking about the rhythms and the “great machines” could be understood as the massive increase of gramophones at the time and the increase of recordings of jazz that were “devouring so much of people’s time”. It also could be understood as the significance extended to jazz in a society that had become industrialised. In 1927, the German expressionist film *Metropolis* directed by Fritz Lang was released, with H.G. Wells opining that “I do not believe it would be possible to make one [film] sillier” (bfi.org.uk). Its dystopian vision has, according to the British Film Institute, become “recognised as one of the landmarks of science-fiction and a highpoint of late silent cinema”(bfi.or.uk). It portrayed a futuristic urban dystopia where the workers lived and worked long hours underground in large factories with big machines and with businessmen tycoons living above ground in skyscrapers. It could be understood that the movements, “the soft and plug-plugging of those great machines” are also used as a metaphor for jazz rhythms. Priestley may have used this metaphor, conveying a sense of dehumanisation, also to depict the industrial

cities in the North of England that were suffering in the Depression and which were later depicted in his travel and social commentary book *English Journey* (1934).

Priestley still shows some displeasure with jazz music through Inigo saying: “this syncopated stuff’s rotten to read at sight” to which Jerry Jerningham, with his Birmingham accent, responds to Inigo, reassuring him: “You’ve got the Jaizz tech, You’ll make a lat of difference to our baird too.” Inigo soon plays one of his tunes, “Inigo danced on the piano stool, improvised the most astounding variations and flourishes” (*TGC* 280) in real jazz style. In all this episode, Priestley takes the opportunity to connect jazz with the mechanization of industry and society with his metaphors. Despite his dislike of jazz, he understands that it is the music that has been established in live shows and accommodates Inigo to shine with the music.

The narrative of *TGC* reveals some deep knowledge of music on the part of its author and there are numerous instances in the book that demonstrate Priestley’s expertise. One of the chapters is dedicated to Inigo rehearsing at the piano with each of the members of the troupe and commenting on their performances and their numbers from a musician’s point of view. It commences with Inigo thinking about the untuned piano: “Two of the notes, the first G in the treble and the lower D in the bass, were in the habit of sticking and even by the end of the first day he had come to know those two notes so well that they had taken on a personal life of their own” (273); later on, Inigo is talking about having to transpose the songs so as better to fit the individual voices of the performers, “putting some of his numbers down a semi-tone or a tone” (274). In addition, he even uses talking about music to introduce some humour, for example, in this fragment when the narrator comments on the tuning of Joe’s voice: “Joe’s rough, powerful voice still refused to keep on the note; towards the end of a song it wavered between several different notes; and usually at the very end it wandered into another key altogether” (274-275). Another example of musical wit is evinced by Joe’s choice of songs: Inigo asks Susie: “What on earth makes Mr. Brundit [Joe] sing love songs?... I don’t mind what he sings, of course, but anybody less love-sick I can’t imagine” (275). Priestley takes the opportunity to criticize the American influence in popular music with one of the other singers: “Elsie came first and ran through about half a dozen songs, mostly of American origin, songs at once plaintive and impudent... Elsie sang these in a little tinny nasal voice that seemed itself an importation from the United States” (275).

The novel also evokes the rivalry experienced between the musical hall form of entertainment and the cinemas, the latter enjoying great popularity at the time of the fictional narrative. Firstly, it mentions that in Dotworth, one of the towns visited by The Good

Companions, they had to perform at The Olympic, which was a picture theatre. It is also mentioned that “the bill was not very impressive. It suffered because underneath it was a highly coloured poster of a film” (294). A woman in the street comments: “‘I’m not gone on these ‘ere pierrots? She heard somebody say. ‘Give me pitchers’” (294). In part two of the novel, having made its way around the Midlands, the concert party arrives in Yorkshire near Bruddersford, where they encounter problems with a cinema promoter, Mr Ridvers. He owns three cinema halls and sees that he is getting less revenue from his cinemas because the audiences are attending the concert party shows, so he schemes to ruin them by paying people to spoil the show by heckling. As discussed previously, audiences were important in the music-hall performances: they sang along and created a sense of community; the engagement with the artists was important, as we have seen with Marie Lloyd. In general, there has always been some booing in performances; however, barracking performers in theatres is different from booing them, by virtue of its mean-spiritedness and other ulterior motives designed to disrupt the performance, as in this case, to destroy the Good Companions. *Guardian* journalist Martin Kettle made this distinction in a report on a performance of Handel’s opera *Alcina* at London’s Covent Garden in 2022. An audience member performed repeatedly heckled the boy soprano Malaki M Bayoh (who happens to be black). The audience member was later banned for life from the opera house. A different level of heckling used to be *de rigueur* at the Alternative Comedy clubs in London in the 1980s and 1990s, with audience and performers repeatedly trading insults. J.B. Priestley – and his Jess Oakroyd – would, no doubt, have been as aware of the heckling of football players at matches as actors and singers in Restoration comedies in England – or late 18<sup>th</sup>-century *tonadillas* in Madrid, for that matter. Of the latter Elisabeth Le Guin has written, “But this and all official attempts to suppress *chisperismo* (rowdy behavior in the patio) had little lasting effect, as is testified by the frequency of the prohibitions of shouting at the actors, whistling, fighting, and so on...” (47).

Priestley also shows the dismissive attitude shown by the higher classes towards music hall and these concert parties. Hilary, the elder sister of Elizabeth Trant, who had married into society manifests her distaste at finding out that Elizabeth had joined this concert party and had taken over the management – partly for the impact that this would have on her own social standing: “this sort of thing is shabby and fourth rate” (*TGC* 302). “There are plenty of things you could do that would be worth doing and wouldn’t make you and the rest of us simply laughing stock. It’s all so silly and useless” (304).

The novel is structured in three parts of similar length, Braine suggests that this gives it the format of a play. Part one concerns the introduction, initial travels and adventures on the

road of the three main characters, Part two consists of the establishing of the revamped troupe, The Good Companions, and its shows around England with its trials and tribulations – including the near dissolution of the company and when its sense of community is lost –, whilst Part three has the denouement of the novel, with a satisfactory and happy ending, including the rise to stardom in the West End as stars of revues of Susie Dean and Jerry Jerningham.

As we have just discussed, *The Good Companions* oozes music and music making, which the musicians, producers, actors and adapters have taken advantage over the last century to create a number of adaptations, most of them film or theatre musicals, taking also with them the community spirit and the individual effort of the main characters.

### *Adaptations of The Good Companions*

The first adaptation was a theatre play that Priestley himself with Edward Knoblock quickly produced in 1931, before he started to write plays in 1932. The play was very successful and ran for over 300 performances. The play was based around the three main characters: Oakroyd, Jollifant, Trant plus Susie Dean. The critics perceived that sense of community not just from the play, but also because all the audience had read the novel and felt the characters were like old friends:

As every character familiar to those who have read the book appeared on the stage there were shouts of delighted greeting and happy recognition... so the play starts with the enormous advantage of having a ready made public eager to see their favourites step out of the printed page. (Qtd. in Gale 131)

I had no idea just what a classic ‘the Good Companions’ has become. Every character, every incident and every joke were greeted by a rapturous audience like an old friend. (qtd. in Gale 131)

With the advent of sound films, and the huge success of the novel and the theatre stage, an initial musical film was rushed out in 1933 and directed by Victor Saville, where a very young John Gielgud – brought over from the theatre version – plays Inigo Jollifant. It also launched the film career of a very famous music-hall artist of the time, Jessie Matthews, who played the role of Susie Dean. This film focuses on the rising music-hall career of Dean and her final success as a star artist in a West End revue and the romances between Dean and Jollifant and Miss Trant and Doctor McFarlane, an old flame.



J. Lee Thompson's 1957 film was a British musical set in the 1950s, which followed the style of Hollywood musical movies of the time, and was especially centred on the romance and professional rise to fame of Susie Dean in the direction of the London West End revues. Dean was performed by Janette Scott and Miss Trant by Celia Johnson (well-known from the film *Brief Encounter*). The adaptation is the most distant from the original novel eliminating a number of the subplots involving other characters. The film makes a heavy use of the stage and backstage (for example on rehearsals or conversations between the members of the troupe), but at the end of the film there is a stage performance of Dean employing filmic techniques which take away the effect of a theatre stage performance.

Another adaptation was a West End musical with a screenplay by Ronald Harwood, lyrics by Johnny Mercer and music by André Previn, an American pianist, conductor and composer who excelled in three fields: film music in his earlier years, classical music both as a pianist and conductor, and jazz music - some of the numbers in the musical had jazz influences. Despite having positive reviews from the critics it ran for six months, but after poor audiences following the Christmas period it was taken down. The poor audiences were attributed partly to the November 1974 IRA attacks in London. The producers maintained the 1920s setting, the libretto was faithful to the novel and the community sense through the music was kept – discernible from the first number, “Camaraderie”. Judi Dench took the role of Miss Trant.

In 1980/81 there was a new adaptation by Alan Plater, an extensive nine-part series (seven and a half hours of screen time!) of television production for ITV that remained very true to various storylines within the novel. Such is the “music-friendly” nature of Priestley's writing in *TGC* that this TV production (made for the regional division Yorkshire TV), includes numerous musical numbers, the composing credits belonging to David Fanshawe. As well as the plot, the songs also show the picaresque aspect of the novel – for example, “On the Road” – as well as the community aspect of the troupe that Priestley wanted to portray. Amongst the actors, Judy Cornwell appeared as Miss Trant, John Stratton as Jess Oakroyd and Jeremy Nicholas – composer and pianist in his own right as well as a music critic – as Inigo Jollifant.

Priestley's *TGC* has remained in the repertory of theatre companies. In addition, a performance of the Previn-Mercer production took place in 1992 by an amateur company, the St Austell Players based in Cornwall, and a further one in San Francisco in 2000. In 2010 Bristol Old Vic Music School created a new adaptation, again as a musical. In addition, there have been several radio broadcasts in 1994 (to celebrate Priestley's centenary), 2002, a concert

version of the Previn-Mercer musical, as well as a short 90 minute-long radio broadcast adaptation in 2018 in the BBC.

Radio adaptations of *TGC* have been appearing for decades, especially on the BBC in the UK, whether sound-arrangements of the 1957 film or fresh full-cast versions combined with additional musical contributions in 1947 and 1971.

Priestley continues to be present in the theatres. In the case of *TGC*, a new musical production was staged in the north of England, in Newcastle and Keswick, in 2002, to the evident displeasure of some critics. Alfred Hickling, from the *Guardian*, for example, is of the opinion that:

In recent months, revivals of *Eden End*, *Dangerous Corner*, *Time and the Conways* and *Johnson Over Jordan* have sought to rebrand Priestley as a radical prophet of modern theatrical form, instead of a self-contradictory old grampus who positioned himself on the moral high ground and preached until he was hoarse.

The *Good Companions* has been cannily avoided by the radical contingent, probably because it is too well-known and rather disproves the theory that Priestley was anything other than a sentimental popular entertainer. Ian Forrest's enjoyable production proves that there is nothing wrong with sentimental popular entertainment, especially when it comes laced with snappy song-and-dance routines and plenty of good jokes. (Hickling)

Sentimentalism has been just one of the criticisms levelled at Priestley over the years, The views of Woolf, Greene and Leavis about Priestley's writing have already been mentioned above. To these can be added George Orwell and Anthony Powell, but, DJ Taylor, the author and critic in 2012, thought they were excessive and unfair:

The contempt in which Priestley was held by some of his fellow-writers can sometime seem rather startling. [...] Anthony Powell not only put Priestley into his novels as a malign cultural signifier (in *From a View to a Death* (1933) half-witted Jasper Fosdick tries to impress a girl by offering to lend her the family copy of *The Good Companions*) but was still, half a century later, stuffing his diaries with references to the "stupefying banality" of Priestley's mind and his complete unsuitability for a Westminster Abbey memorial.

All this was, and is, horribly unfair – there were far more plausible candidates for highbrow disdain in the 30s than the author of *English Journey* – and yet...certain amount of the mud has stuck (Taylor)

Taylor recognizes that, over the years, the reputation of Priestley's novels has continued to be 'sentimental', the novels being considered to be very long, and their writer one of the first authors to become a bestseller writer. Taylor, however, defends Priestley, suggesting that he provides visions of ordinary life and psychological aspects that "popular fiction" (Taylor, "JBP Adventures") does not usually possess. Priestley himself, in *Margin Released*, complained that he was a victim of the English idea that "anything widely popular must necessarily be bad. Criticism, the worst, not the best, borrowed 'best-seller' from the book trade, where it means what it says and nothing more, and made it pejorative" (188).

Perhaps Alfred Hickling's review illustrates the versatility of Priestley and his work: not only he wrote experimental plays with serious themes such as time, social relationships, work and politics, but he also wrote to entertain people, where music had a pivotal role, of which *TGC* is a prime example.

## 6.2. *Music at Night* (1938)

The play *Music at Night* was commissioned for the 1938 Malvern Drama Festival, held in the spa town in Worcestershire, a festival which had been created in 1929 to run modern plays of the time and which had been focusing mostly on the works of George Bernard Shaw – a resident of the area and the festival's patron.

Not only is *Music at Night* one of Priestley's "Time" plays, but it is also experimental in the way music is involved in the production. His "Time plays" were a series of dramas written by Priestley in the 1930s and 40s, in which he adapted early twentieth-century philosophical theories of time by Carl G. Jung, J.W. Dunne and P.D. Ouspensky. Priestley introduced these theories into his plays as main themes and explored how different temporal landscapes affected the lives and thinking of the characters. Commencing with *Dangerous Corner* in 1932, other works that fall into this category include: *I Have Been Here Before* (1937), *Time and the Conways* (1937), *Music at Night* (1938), *Johnson over Jordan* (1939) and *An Inspector Calls* (1945). In some of these plays, music is used as a dramatic device to help with the changes in time that the play or the characters experience, as has been discussed before.

At the time of the première of *Music at Night*, Priestley was, however, not satisfied with the third act, and following the festival he spent several months rewriting the work; the revised play was finally staged in London in October 1939.

On 12 October 1939, the *Yorkshire Observer* reported:

Mr. J. B. Priestley, daring to open his Malvern play, “Music at Night”, as the first serious West End première of the war, was rewarded last night at the Westminster Theatre by a house which was filled to the last seat and immensely appreciative. (...) It is one of his [Priestley’s] experiments, a play which illuminates the moods of eight people listening to a violin concerto in a drawing room – a dramatic parallel to one of Massine’s symphonic ballets. A brilliant excursion in production, with flashes of the Priestley humour, it absorbed even those members of the audience who refused to acknowledge it is a play at all. (britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk)

The ease with which a 1939 review of a Priestley’s play makes a comparison with a ballet premiere from 20 years previous is telling in its appreciation of experimentalism in the theatre. The *Yorkshire Observer* critic likens – “a dramatic parallel” – *Music at Night* to a -post-First World War highly complex production of Massine. Léonide Massine was a celebrated Russian choreographer and dancer with Sergei Diaghilev’s Paris-based Ballets Russes, who employed the best musicians, set designers and librettists of the time. The critic in London, on comparing Priestley’s play to one of Massine’s ballets and making the point that some spectators did not recognize it as a play, reveals that importance of the role given to music by this drama’s creator.

In this section, I am analysing this play according to Wolf’s theories of musicalization of fiction, in this case, drama, not only with thematization – given that the play is structured as a violin concerto with three movements corresponding to three acts – but also identifying the elements that approach musical qualities, such as the acoustic experience with alliterations, repetitions, polyphony, or the acoustic imagery that Priestley achieves through his writing. In addition, I will discuss how Priestley used music as a literary device. By its title, *Music at Night* is self-evidently concerned with music, but the integration of compositional ideas is a mark both of Priestley’s zeal for experimentation but also his musical literacy which has been discussed previously.

### 6.2.1 ACT ONE. *Allegro Capriccioso*

The play's entire action is set in a living room where a group of guests have been invited to hear a new violin concerto being performed by a violinist and a pianist. In addition to playing the orchestral reduction, the pianist is the work's composer.

Premières of works of chamber music in UK private homes have been providing entertainment for centuries (even before the time of Henry Purcell). However, after the First World War, chamber music programmes – as well as continuing to be held in private homes – were increasingly put on in small concert halls, churches, art galleries, and libraries. Chamber music festivals were promoted by societies or individual wealthy patrons. In the 1950s, and for about 10 years, even Priestley himself was responsible for organizing one such festival – in his own home, Brooke Hill, on the Isle of Wight. Additionally, the improvement in and development of sound recording and broadcasting from the 1920s onwards served to increase knowledge of the chamber repertory and helped with its expansion. In his book *Delight* (1949), in which Priestley writes about his thoughts and feelings, he shows his preference for chamber music at home as opposed to the “horrible little concert halls given up to chamber music” (73). He recalls the joy of the performers as well as the small audience around, and once more finds magic in music: “There has always been to me a sort of cosy magic about it” (73). He then remembers the delight of playing (badly) a Smetana trio with his daughter Mary on the violin, a friend of hers playing the cello and him at the piano, but with no audience: “I drank the milk of paradise” (74). To end this reflection, he shows his displeasure with the radio and gramophones that were replacing live music: “Why – bless our bewildered souls! – every time a violin is taken up to the lumber room, a piano is carried away and in their place is a gadget that turns music on and off like tap water, we move another step away from sanity and take to snarling harder than ever” (75).

In *Music at Night*, a number of evening guests appear, in addition to the two musicians, Shiel and Lengel, and the hostess Mrs. Amesbury: Peter, a communist poet; Ann, a woman infatuated with him; Kath is the wife of Shiel, the composer of the concerto; Chilham, a gossip journalist; a wealthy businessman, Sir James Dirnie, and Lady Sybil Linchester, a society woman and his companion; and Charles Bendrex, who is a cabinet minister. The play's remaining characters are deceased people of significance from the past who will be encountered in the second act.

The three acts follow the musical “rhythm” inspired by each movement of the concerto: *Allegro Capriccioso*, *Adagio* and the third one, *Allegro – agitato – maestoso Nobile*. This corresponds with Wolf’s description of formal imitation, in accordance with his principle of “structural analogies to music” (*TMOF* 58). This also conforms to Scher’s definition of verbal music: “any literary presentation (whether in poetry or prose) of existing or fictitious musical compositions” (234). Priestley achieves a presentation of a violin concerto through the musical techniques he applies to the play including repetitions, formation of music phrases, polyphony, etc. At the same time, Priestley is using the music as a tool, in this case a literary device to create different reactions from the characters who relive their past, their relationships, their emotions and regrets; all of this is viewed as if in a dream. He uses music as a time device, as characters travel to the past and people from the past into the present, as we will see in Act Two. In his biography of Priestley, Brome notes that the process of listening to the music “would reverberate from surface moods to deeper and deeper levels of consciousness” (228).

In the first act there is an introduction of the characters as they arrive at the “event”, and before the concert starts there are several allusions to – and warnings of – what is going to happen. The play commences with the two musicians in discussion about the concerto and the speed at which they should play it. Mrs. Amesbury meets them and shows them the recess of the room where they are going to perform, at which Lengen, the violinist, comments, “We’re meant to be heard not seen” (Priestley, *MAN* 15). Here, Lengen is acknowledging the great importance held by music in the play. Priestley takes the musicians out of the room into the recess, leaving just the music. This is what the different characters are going to react to – and therefore, the audience – and this is what is being reaffirmed by Lengen’s statement. Chilham, a journalist, is given stage directions to talk “*in a quick, staccato manner*” which is a typical direction found in classical music scores (19). Soon after, Peter, the communist poet, asserts:

PETER. I haven’t the least objection to destroying everything and starting all over again.

SIR J. What’s all that?

PETER. I am saying I’ve no objection to wiping out Homer and Shakespeare and Dante and Michael Angelo and Leonardo and Bach and Mozart and King’s College Chapel and Chartres and the Bodleian and the British Museum and the National Gallery – and the whole bag of tricks. Why not? We’d have the fun of doing it all ourselves then. Starting from the beginning. With a clean slate. (22)

Priestley has commenced his experiment, issuing a warning of his intention of breaking the canon of the classical play – “Why not?” – and preparing the audience for a new experience and declaring his thoughts on music through the different characters. The screenwriter and film director Gonzalo Suárez used this quote (of Peter’s words above) in his 2007 film *Oviedo Express*, (a postmodern reinterpretation of *La Regenta*), in which he replaced Priestley’s “the Bodleian and the British Museum and the National Gallery” with “Clarín y su *Regenta*” in order to justify the deconstruction of the text and its rebuilding into a new artistic production. In the film, the next actor to speak, recognizes the quote from Priestley’s play (Willem 623). In *MAN*, following Peter’s declaration of intent of breaking the canon, Bendrex, the cabinet minister, asserts the independence of music and how one can lose the sense of actuality with it. This is a rather pertinent comment from a politician for the time – 1938 – with its combination of pre-war tensions and representing the high tide of appeasement (the foreign policy employed particularly by the UK Government, notably in the 1930s, designed to avoid conflict with Nazi Germany, by making concessions).

BENDREX. Now for some music. I like music best these days because it’s the only art that’s really detached. It doesn’t lead you back to the newspapers. It doesn’t drag in the rest of the world. You can lose yourself in it.

MRS. A. That makes it all the more dangerous sometimes, Charles. It can break down those careful barriers we build up inside our minds.

BENDREX. Yes, but nobody knows but ourselves.

LADY S. Thank God for that! It would be pretty awful if other people knew what sometimes happens somewhere inside our heads, when music gets to work on us.

KATH. Perhaps other people can know. (23)

Priestley is communicating with the audience through the hostess, Mrs. Amesbury, by having her forecast what is going to happen to the characters once the music starts, that is, the music will provoke reactions. Lady Sybil and Kath are discussing the possibility that other people, and perhaps the spectators, can be aware of the effects of that liberating condition caused by music.

This is followed by the introduction of the first movement by Shiel, *Allegro Capriccioso* (fast, bright with a fanciful style). The composer tells the guests that this is not a programme work (as in carrying extramusical meanings), but that they can have their own

reaction to the music: “You can each make your own story for it, if you must have one” (24). The violin concerto is played as incidental music all through the play, there being very precise stage directions of when it is present, the amplitude and expression of the music. Once the music starts, the individual characters start talking first in soliloquies before moving into short dialogues with the next character, with the first one being Mrs. Amesbury. In her speech are to be found alliterations, such as “terrible old and tired tonight”, “bother being loud and bright”, “nasty newspaper”, and “bit of a brute”; repetitions, “I’m sorry, my dear, really sorry”, as well as “anymore” and “little talk,” appearing in two consecutive lines. Across her speech as a whole, there is a constant repetition of the words “you” or “your/yours”. All these alliterations and repetitions suggest musical building blocks:

MRS. A. . . . Yes, you are. And you know it. At any moment you may start yawning and whispering at the top of your voice that you don’t like the concerto, just to spoil everything. And I warn you, Sybil, I’ll be furious if you do play any of your tricks tonight and I’ll pay you out somehow. . . (24-25)

There is also the repetition of “*you* could do something for him”<sup>4</sup> when Mrs. Amesbury is addressing herself initially to Bendrex and repeating it when she directs herself towards Chilham: “You could do something for him, too, Philip Chilham, I don’t like you very much” (25) and repeats this second half of the sentence on her next sentence, which is directed to Dirnie. “What about *you*? I don’t like you very much, Sir James Very-Rich Dirnie” (25). Next, Kath is the character to come forward, and she begins with several repetitions that once again imitate musical phrases:

KATH. All of you – please, *please* – do listen properly – and then like the concerto, really like it, so that you’ll tell everybody about it. You – Philip Chilham – like it – and tell everybody about it. (26)

Chilham is thinking that the piece of music is old-fashioned, without any “modern tempo”(26), and subsequently he employs several aggressive and brutal words depicting “modern hardness” (26) by referring to objects and materials representative of that period around 1938. He makes use of a comparison between hard aesthetic industrial lines and

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<sup>4</sup>Original italics writing. All italics are written as it shown in the play, either stage directions or emphasis by the author.



contemporary music of that time, such as works composed by Schoenberg or Hindemith, for example. Priestley uses semantics, rhythm and pitch to achieve Scher's verbal music.

CHILHAM. (*Without expression*) Just what I thought. Old-fashioned stuff so far. Hasn't got the modern tempo No modern hardness. Steel. Nickel. Chromium plate. Bakelite<sup>5</sup>. Streamlines. Machine guns. Bombing planes. (26)

In the following exchanges there are several further repetitions designed to increase or speed up the tempo, suggesting the experience of music. Kath repeats "himself" three times, and Ann has a line whose stage direction suggests "loudly, cheerfully" (27) with a view to achieving the fanciful style of "*Allegro capriccioso*":

ANN. (*Loudly, cheerfully.*) He doesn't look a bit like Beethoven to me. Fancy having Beethoven in love with you! Frightening! (27)

Kath says once more, "himself" and reiterates the word "happy":

KATH. I want him to be happy. If he's happy, then I'll be happy – and of course the children will be happy too – we'll all be happy, all the Shiels. (27)

And soon after, Kath repeats "Like the concerto – please – *please*" (27) as she started her speech, imitating a coda to the beginning of the piece.

The next character to deliver a speech is Chilham who imagines a mystery play about Lady Sybil being murdered; in this speech there are repetitions of "mystery" and "play", as well as imitation as found in vocal duets where words are repeated from one line to the next and intervention of the 'chorus':

SIR J. You mean -?

CHILHAM. I mean, I have solved the mystery.

*General cries of astonishment, 'What', Good God! etc.*

SIR J. Then where is the murderer?

CHILHAM. The murderer – my dear Sir James – is here.

*More 'What!' and a cry from KATH who collapses.* (28)

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<sup>5</sup> Bakelite is a plastic resin which became fashionable in the 1930s. It was used for all sorts of household goods: telephones, radios, refrigerators, toys, jewellery, etc.

Subsequently, Ann presents herself as being on a South Sea Island. ‘Bright’ is depicted by light, demeanour, speech and colour. In musical scores, the frequently used term, ‘allegro’ – the present movement of the concerto –, expressing a specific speed or mood, is often best translated into English by ‘bright’. The stage directions indicate she should be wearing a bright pareu, the light “should be very bright” (30) and she should appear “*Brightly, moving about*” (30). She describes the island with evocative colourful imagery, “bright” (30) is repeated in her speech, and she sees herself as the queen of the island with the freedom that she imagines, and refusing negativity. There is an alliteration: “No, none of that nonsense” (31). There is the repetition of “Queen” or “popular queen” (31) six times in the course of the following few lines, once more imitating musical tunes with repetitions giving the text a song-like nature in the fanciful style required by the movement.

CHILHAM Okay. Is the island yours, Miss Winter?

ANN (*Proudly*) It wasn’t originally, but now I’m queen of it.

CHILHAM And a very popular queen too, I imagine.

ANN You are quite right, Mr Chilham. I *am* a popular queen, the *most* popular queen the island has ever had. As soon as I arrive – because I’m not here all the time, you know, sometimes I’m staying with my mother in Knightsbridge – but as soon as I arrive, all the natives hold a week’s festival, with processions and speeches and songs and dances and – and – everything and they all cry. ‘Hail to our beautiful white queen.’ (31)

The finishing line imitates the chorus in opera with the word Hail! and natives together hymning the “queen”.

Sir James Dirnie likewise presents features imitating musical phrases: “What do you mean (*After a pause, much louder.*) What the hell do you mean?” (32) and shortly after he engages in a fluid dialogue with Kath. Initially he is imagining how life would have been if he were married and with children; he then changes his interlocutor to Lady Sybil, with just one or two sentences each, which give a sensation of fast interchange, *allegro*. Up to the end of Act One there are interventions by Lady Sybil, Shiel and Chilham; these adapt to the movement but there is less imitation of form.

In this first act, Priestley accomplishes – in words – the presentation of a violin concerto *Allegro capriccioso* first movement by the use of a number of linguistic techniques designed

to imbue the play with a musical quality: repetitions, imagery, comparisons and sporadic rapid exchanges of dialogue. The act conveys the reactions of the different characters to the music and their thoughts in the form of soliloquies. All these techniques are in agreement with Wolf's formal imitation, what he describes as 'showing', or Scher's verbal music.

### 6.2.2 ACT TWO. *Adagio*

In the second act, Priestley anticipates the general mood he is keen to imprint on this movement with initial repetitions of "delightful" and "interesting" (42) appearing three times, and thematization by announcing "orchestral works" (42) twice. Soon after, Shiel, the composer, introduces the second movement of the concerto: *Adagio* (slow, leisurely). Shiel reiterates Priestley's warning to the audience, by telling the guests that there is "Still no story for you as before. You'll have to make your own", and he advises them that "being an adagio movement, of course it's all rather sad". In the next set of stage directions, Priestley explains, in a very detailed manner, that during this movement music fades in and out at the beginning and end of each character's speech. In this act, all the characters tell some story from their past which involves another person who is now dead – that is Priestley introduces ghosts, from the past into the present, a technique found in the time plays. In *Margin Released*, Priestley recalls that in *Music at Night* and *Johnson over Jordan*, he used the dramatic technique of "trying to take my characters outside ordinary passing time altogether and to create, you might say, a four-dimensional drama" (207). Here, although the first three speeches are reminiscent of happy times, the stage directions, however, instruct them to be "*Without moving, very quietly*" (MAN 43) resulting in an *adagio*, melancholic scene, as if the characters were having a dream. These monologues are longer than in Act One and finish with a repetition simulating an echo.

Mrs. Amesbury returns as the first character to tell a story, with a monologue which involves her young son, full of imagery of the spring, and with imitation of musical phrases by reiteration of words ("little", "apple blossom", "white" (43)), and with different evocative auditory images: the blowing of the wind, the laughter of the child, the movement of the apple blossom falling and the child dancing. Sir James Dirnie tells a similar story about his own childhood, but in his case, it is the movement of the child in the river which is evoked. Lady Sybil's reminiscences involve the prayers of the Navajo women invoking the different winds. "Peace/peaceful" and "wind" is repeated several times to create this calm atmosphere of the *Adagio* (43).

Peter, the communist poet, breaks the spell of these memories of peace and soft movements of childhood innocence with words of a phonetically and semantically harsh nature, “hell” and “hard”, both repeated several times as he claims that one should not rest and be complacent “*until the last wrong’s righted*” (44). Kath tries to reconduct the movement with “tenderness” and the succeeding dialogue repeats “tenderness/tender” in each first line:

KATH. (*Wonderingly.*) He wants a world without tenderness.

PETER. Things like tenderness in the world as it is are just like bait on a hook, the soft juicy worm with the cruel steel barb hidden inside it.

KATH. We have not enough tenderness, not too much.

PETER. Go on being tender while the possessing classes go on being tough... (44-45)

Kath recapitulates her thought at the end of this dialogue: “More tenderness. More people listening to slow movements and being deeply stirred by music” (45).

Lengel, the violin player, is the next character to deliver a monologue, in which “magic” and “dead” are the important reiterated words: “All that makes life worth living is magic, any kind of magic, and if you no longer feel that magic is at work, bringing you miracles, then really you are dead” (45). It is noteworthy that it is the violin player, the musician, who is the character who is talking about magic, given that in one of his autobiographical works Priestley identified music with magic: “music still seems the most potent and magical of the arts” (*Midnight on the Desert* 163). At the end of Lengel’s monologue he forewarns the audience about what will happen next: there will be a leap of time into the past where several characters being presented are now dead: “By God, I’ll fiddle the dead out of their graves – the dead men and women, the great hours that are dead but once were alive – and full of magic. Look out you clods, the earth’s stirring – (Priestley *MAN* 46).

It is here where Priestley commences to introduce what he called the fourth dimension, where new characters – deceased people from the past, and significant to the characters that we already know in the play – make their appearance. Some are brought to the present (1938) and confront living characters about past events, whilst others are visited in their pasts by living characters. Stage directions distinguish between these two movements or states. For example,

characters talk as if they were young people and, additionally, past experiences are recreated by means of dialogues. All this happens with music which is slow and evocative of sadness.

Katherine and Shiel appear much younger, in the past – according to the stage directions he is “*a much younger and happier man than we have seen before*” (46). The next lines portray musical phrases:

SHIEL. Katherine! Katherine!

KATH. David.

SHIEL. Kath –er –ine!

KATH. David. I’m here. What’s happened? Hurry up!

SHIEL. (*Excitedly*) Katie – it’s all right. (*Kisses her, then twirls her round, chanting.*) It’s all right, it’s all right, it’s all right. (46)<sup>6</sup>

Following the dialogue between Kath and Shiel, which finishes with repetitions, Priestley examines the ability of music to portray certain attitudes or traits via Sir James Dirnie. Dirnie, according to the stage direction, addresses the audience with: “I don’t understand why the music should be so sad... What really gets a fellow down is staleness, feeling weary and half-dead. I suppose you can’t get that into music, but that’s the real thing. Staleness. Feeling that nothing’s worth the bloody great effort you have to make” (48).

Bendrex talks about specific slow instrumental music and then connects it with the First World War, the end of the Edwardian life which he represents, with the straw hat and the music, and he describes the atmosphere of the pre-war period of 1938:

BENDREX. I remember Ernest Newman<sup>7</sup> saying that a beautiful slow movement of Bruckner’s – and also, I think, The Elgar cello concerto – were really the final bittersweet laments for a dying epoch, the swan-song of a civilization. All slow sad music seems that to me. It has done these many years [...] The world I knew, the world worth living in, vanished in 1914 and since then all existed in a series of vast mad-houses, shrieking with hate and violence,

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<sup>6</sup> To illustrate the melodic quality of Shiel’s words here, mention may be made of a song by Jane Marczewski from 2020, which has the following words in the chorus:  
“If you’re lost we’re all a little lost and it’s alright.  
It’s alright, it’s alright, it’s alright, it’s alright.”

<sup>7</sup> British music critic and musicologist, (1858-1959). According to the *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, “the most celebrated music critic of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (Mann, “Newman”).

stinking of death... This music is an elegy for the 'boater' – the dear old straw hat... From Straw Hat to Steel Helmet – or the Return of the Dark Ages. (48-49)

Parks, Bendrex's deceased manservant from before the war, enters the scene and introduces several instances of intertextuality and cultural references of the period in this dialogue, from before the First World War and 1938:

BENDREX. Where is everybody?

PARKS. (*Slowly.*) Well, sir – her grace and most of the ladies and the Colonel have gone to Church. His Lordship and Captain George and the other gentlemen are down at the stables. Mr Balfour and the young gentleman from Cambridge – Mr Wilding – are down on the tennis court. Mr Barrie is in the library – writing –

BENDREX. Good! Have you any idea what Mr Barrie is writing, Parks?

PARKS. (*With a tiny grin.*) A piece about a member of Parliament, he said, Mr Bendrex. Something about what women know, he told me. He's a very affable gentleman, Mr Barrie is, sir.

BENDREX. Very. And if he comes out of the library, tell him he'll find me in the Italian Garden. (49)

The playwright and *Peter Pan* author, J.M. Barrie, was a good friend of Priestley. The piece alluded to is *What Every Woman Knows*, a play performed in 1908, about a man who wishes to become a Member of Parliament. The Italian Garden is the area of Kensington Gardens in London where the statue of Peter Pan has been sited since 1912. The other people mentioned are Arthur Balfour, Prime Minister of Great Britain in 1902, who was also a keen tennis player and first President of the International Lawn Tennis Club of Great Britain; Anthony Wilding, a Wimbledon tennis champion who died during the First World War while in service, and Captain George possibly was Captain George Euston, who in 1938 broke the land speed record with a car which had a horsepower of 5000 bhp.

Mrs. Amesbury has a conversation with her son Rupert, a Royal Air Force pilot, who died in a plane crash. He is trying to convince her to stop doing these house concerts, but she replies that "they keep me going", meaning that they help her cope with her son's death, by means of both the music and the people who attend the concerts. Following this dialogue, other characters, in the same manner, have conversations with dead people from the past who were close to them. The final music of this second movement of the concerto is introduced again

“*very softly*” as per stage directions. Before the music and the act ends, Shiel, the pianist, has a conversation with his old music professor, Dr. E Benthall, an Austrian-Jewish musician who has been listening to the concerto and who gives his expert opinion on the piece of music, by talking about the movements. It can be understood, however, that Priestley is also critiquing the acts of the play.

SHIEL. I know. I ought to rewrite that first movement. This second’s better, don’t you think?

DR. E. Much, much better. It is not easy to get the – the true colour – of it just with the piano.

I hope you have scored a lightly – specially that middle section – mostly wood wind, eh?

I thought I heard some good passages for oboes and clarinets, eh?

SHIEL. Yes, maestro. But the last movement’s the best. I hope you’ll agree. (68)

After finishing the exchange about the piece, Dr. Benthall states that he wishes that they were both back in Vienna, to which Shiel responds that he has no desire to return given that Vienna has changed: “No, you couldn’t begin to understand how much it has changed. Or the things they do there now. I can’t tell you what I feel about it – but the music might tell you” (69). Shiel goes back into the recess where he and Lengel are playing and “*The music comes out stronger and is terribly sad*” (69). Soon after, the music ends. In this way, Priestley refers to then current pre-war atmosphere in Austria and portrays it with music evoking his feelings about the situation. The then recent changes in Austria that Priestley would have been reflecting involved the Anschluss of March 1938 (the coerced unification of Austria with Germany), but also the increasing persecution of Jewish – and other – people in Austria by the Nazis.

In this Act Two, Priestley has used music as a time device, taking the characters into a dream from the past whilst bringing a number of ghosts out of the past into the present. In addition, he has used music as a means by which to calm nerves strained by the pre-war atmosphere as well as a tool for the evocation of feelings. To achieve all these intentions, Priestley has transformed this second, *Adagio*, movement by the use of all kinds of musical devices: alliteration and repetitions to create musical phrases, as well as auditory sounds to evoke different feelings, assisted by the stage directions and the incidental music (i.e. the violin concerto played by Lengel and Shiel).

### 6.2.3 ACT THREE. *Allegro – Agitato – Maestoso Nobile*

In the preface to *Music at Night*, Priestley explains that he was dissatisfied with the third act but does not supply the reasons for his discontent. After the performance at the Malvern Drama Festival, he rewrote the play – in particular the third act with which he was most displeased. Brome recounts that in the original third act, Priestley wrote some of the text in verse, “which would be chanted in chorus” (qtd. in Brome 228). He had a very short time to write it, and his verse proved to be inadequate, hence he rewrote the initial last act. I have not been able to find a copy of his first version of 1938, but it would have been interesting to compare and contrast the musicalization between both versions.

Priestley follows the pattern he has laid down in the previous two acts, with Shiel describing the movement (of the concerto) and what it is expected:

SHIEL. (*Cheerfully*) All right. Well – now – the third and last movement. Not very long but a bit complicated. *Allegro – agitato – maestoso nobile*, which means that it starts in a nice brisk cheerful style, to wake you up, then it becomes very agitated – y’know, worrying about life, and then it turns all grand and noble, just to end up with. (*MAN 70*)

Over the next few lines, the *Allegro agitato* musical instruction is achieved in words by the repetitions of the text, the volume of the speech and even the movements of the characters that the stage directions indicate. The two musicians are positioned in the recess from where they play:

SHIEL. (*Just off, very loud*) Wake up!

LENGEL. (*Just off, very loud*) Come on, wake up!

SHIEL. (*Coming in, with tremendous zest and spirits*) Come on, come on, wake up, wake up!

LENGEL. (*Entering in the same manner*) It’s reveille. Rise and shine, my little soldiers, rise and shine. Wake up, wake up!

*ANN, PETER, LADY S. and CHILHAM rise at once. MRS. A. and KATH and DIRNIE first sit up sharply, then can rise afterwards.*

LISTENERS. (*Indignantly*) We haven’t been asleep. We haven’t been asleep.

SHIEL. (*In ringing tones*) You have been asleep for years and years.

(*Presents a large revolver at CHILHAM’s head. He starts ludicrously.*)



LENGEL. (Extravagantly kissing MRS. A's hand.) My dear, my dear lady – can't I persuade you – as a favour – to wake up?

MRS. A. (*With surprise, perhaps pleasure.*) Well, yes, you can.

SHIEL. (*Roaring to KATH.*) My love, my love, wake up! (71)

If we analyse the text of this fragment without the names of the characters and think of it in terms of a violin concerto, where Lengel is the violin (V) and Shiel and others the orchestra (O), we can notice the dialogue between the violin and the rest of the instruments carrying the different themes.

O. Wake up!

V. Come on, wake up!

O. Come on, come on, wake up, wake up!

V. It's reveille. Rise and shine, my little soldiers, rise and shine. Wake up, wake up!

O. We haven't been asleep. We haven't been asleep.

You have been asleep for years and years.

V. My dear, my dear lady – can't I persuade you – as a favour – to wake up?

O. Well, yes, you can.

O. My love, my love, wake up!

Several instances of “polyphony” (where a number of voices are sounding together – here, talking) are to be found in the play. For example, in the next fragment, successive pairs of characters are talking at the same time, but they all utter phrases relating to the same theme in the conversation:

SIR J. Any time I'm free. But you know what I'd like to do – and by God I will – is to take you all in my yacht –

ANN. } (*Very quickly.*) South Seas!

LADY S. } Why not, Jimmy, let's go! And Jamaica and Martinique and Trinidad.

CHILHAM. } Bali – mustn't miss that – Bali.

PETER. } Cocos and Galapagos –

KATH. Hawaii and Samoa and Tahiti –

ANN. } Gosh!

MRS. A. } And the Great Barrier Reef, off Queensland. All my life I've wanted to have a look at the Great Barrier Reef. (73)

The following dialogue has characters discussing achievements reached by humans, all this delivered in a state of excitement. Guidance is provided by the stage directions in order to bring off the *Allegro agitato* indication: “*Happily*”, “*Triumphantly*”, “*with enthusiasm*” and “*very heartily*”, and with all the characters laughing (74, 75). Priestley even writes: “*The atmosphere is more important than the speeches*” (75) and that the characters should give the impression of a “*very intimate group being merry together*” (75). There is a “*crescendo of laughter*” until it decreases and there is a “*terrible cry*” which “*must suggest an agony of fear and pain*” (75). Bendrex, the politician, has a monologue with repetitions of “very real”, “Very important”, “pain” and “fear” with some of the speech with rhyme or quasi-rhyme if the quote is reproduced as verse lines:

Pain and fear – Fear and pain.  
Sometimes I suspected them.  
I’d wake up in the middle of the night and then  
Wonder if fear and pain might be waiting for us in the end. (75)

Bendrex pictures himself as though it were the middle of the night, again creating an atmosphere through his demeanour (“*rises slowly and rather unsteadily to his feet, and looks ghastly*”(75)), some onomatopoeic sounds (“*He groans as if shaken by another heart spasm*”(75)), and the setting and the semantics of negativity, mystery and fear of his speech (“midnight”, “dark”, “empty”, “nothing”(76)). Following this speech, one by one, the characters describe situations that cause them pain and/or fear. Some of the characters reminisce about the dead people who were presented in Act Two and recognize their guilt for past events. Once more there are several reiterations of “guilty”, “forgiveness” and “Hell” in the next few lines in order to create musical phrases:

SIR J. I couldn’t have taken that money from my mother – I always have her plenty – and yet  
I feel guilty of that too. Guilty, guilty, guilty!  
MRS. A. We are all guilty creatures. But we can beg forgiveness.  
ANN. Yes, we can beg forgiveness.  
KATH. Yes, we can beg forgiveness.  
LADY S. Oh, no we can’t. There’s nobody to forgive.  
SIR J. We can’t beg forgiveness from an empty throne. Heaven’s to let, but we seem to have a  
longer lease of Hell.  
CHILHAM. It’s true. There is a Hell and we are in it.

SIR J. This is James Dirnie, Shiel, and I tell you we are in Hell

SHIEL. James Dirnie may be in Hell, but what is James Dirnie? Nothing. (79)

On this occasion it is actually the incidental music which is marking the tempo – *maestoso nobile* – instructed by the stage directions: “*the music announces a final majestic theme*”, and Priestley supplies another fragment imitating polyphony, with each character declaiming one line, once again remembering the past with each character reciting one sentence with repetitions:

PETER. (*Ecstatically.*) I remember from the time when the world grew cold and the ice came...

KATH. (*Ecstatically.*) I remember from the time of the great flood...

MRS. A. (*Same.*) I remember from the time of the baking of bricks and the shaping of pottery...

CHILHAM. (*Same.*) I remember from the time of the first canal...

SIR J. (*Same.*) I remember from the time of the first forging...

ANN. (*Same.*) Remembering and remembering, not in any one time or place... (81)

An even truer form of quasi-musical polyphony is established in the next set of lines, where the four women declaim together, followed by the three men, a single voice and a conclusion involving all of them in chorus.

*The music plays a few majestic chords and a blaze of light can come from the recess.*

SHIEL. (*Just off, very impressively.*) Hail to the one great heart and mind!

THE FOUR WOMEN. (*Together or split up.*)

Now we can salute

The heart beating through our hearts,

The earth's great heart

That is love itself.

THE THREE MEN. (*Together or split up.*) Now can we salute the one mind that is ours yet infinitely greater than ours unarresting until the whole world is aware of itself and wise.

ALL. (*In a tremendous shout.*) Hail!

ONE VOICE. (*Quietly and slowly.*)

Forgetting much.

ALL. (*Strongly rhythmical.*) Keep us for ever. Keep us for ever, ever and ever. Ever and ever.

(81-82)

This polyphony-in-words coincides with the end of the violin concerto in the play and Mrs. Amesbury's inviting her guests to move to the next room to discuss the musical work. Priestley plays here with time, dreams and the effect of music which has made people think, and in some cases has changed people. Chilham, for example, is puzzled about what he has experienced and the thoughts of his mother, whilst Ann declares that "when I'm listening to music, like that, I get the *queerest* ideas sometimes." Lady Sybil states that she has "felt quite bloodily unhappy" even though she does not think it is the music. Shiel and Lengel, the musicians, talk about the piece of music and about the fact that they should practice some fragments more. They discover that Bendrex is dead and to end the play, Priestley uses one of his time techniques and gets Parks, the deceased manservant, to welcome Bendrex into the world of the dead. This final scene is similar to the end of *Johnson over Jordan*, written in 1939, in which the main character finally crosses the threshold of death and creates the final link between the characters who are alive and those who are dead.

Considering the question of how much Wolf's principles of musicalization may have been adhered to in *Music at Night*, one can say that the play fulfils most of the principles suggested: there is textual evidence that some of the characters are mirroring a piece of music through performance, in this case a violin concerto that determines the structure of the play, with the movements well specified in the three acts, and followed through by the behaviour and reminiscences of the different characters. There is also intermedial imitation achieved by the different volumes indicated by the stage directions, the abundance of repetitions, alliterations, imitation of polyphony and musical phrases to the point that on some occasions these seem to digress from the play's consistency; all this and, in addition, the time experiment, possibly causing the reaction of the first audience in 1938, who "refused to acknowledge it is a play at all" as reported by the *Yorkshire Observer* at the time.

## 7. Conclusions

In the last few decades, studies on intermediality have developed, and one of those fields includes literature and music, in which several authors have discussed a number of theories identifying music within literary works. Scher and Wolf have followed a theoretical approach, establishing certain concepts and theories to understand the relationship between music and literature, in particular, 'verbal music' by Scher, and 'musicalization of fiction' by Wolf, describing how a literature work can imitate music through the introduction of different

elements such as rhythm, onomatopoeia, polyphony, etc. On the other hand, Benson has followed a more abstract route, asking ‘why’ music is used in literary works. Such studies have addressed poetry and fiction, but only recently have they commenced to investigate theatre plays.

J.B. Priestley felt music very strongly; he introduced it into his works, talking about it in his essays and autobiographical works and embedding it in his novels and plays, approaching it from different angles, both popular and classical. The popular music culture of the interwar years inherited the decay of music hall which was converging into revues and concert-party performances. This change in entertainment coincided with the development of the cinema, the gramophone and the radio, which increased the availability of popular music entertainment in a vast way, entering people’s homes. J.B. Priestley experienced this cultural change in his youth, noticing it in the eight years between going to the Western Front in the war and moving to London. He used music not only as a tool for entertainment but as a literary device to enhance the force of the message intended in his works.

On occasions this message was a socio-political one, with the purpose of trying to “wake up” the people, seen above all in *Let the People Sing*, published and radio broadcasted in 1939 at the outset of the Second World War, where Priestley portrays the people of a town risen up against the establishment in the effort of regaining usage of their council hall by the local band. Two months later, *Music at Night* was performed in London and within it there is a fragment with a “wake up” call, no doubt – not only directed to the characters of the play but also to the audiences. This use of music as an instrument to encourage people in literature has been used by other authors. One example is the novel *The Cellist of Sarajevo* (2008), by Steven Galloway, set during the 1990 Siege of Sarajevo. In this book, three citizens are motivated by the music of a cellist in the street to seek to create a better future post-war environment; thus, music acting as a moral force.

Priestley pictured music as a joyful activity: this is seen, above all, in *Angel Pavement* (1930), where Mr Smeeth’s mood improves on listening to classical music, first at a concert in a celebratory mood after a pay rise and later as a calming effect when he listens to the radio. This calming device is used also in *Music at Night*, where it is portrayed by the member of parliament, Bendrex, who is happy to mollify the mood caused by the pre-war atmosphere of 1938.

On other occasions, Priestley uses music as a time device, not just in some of his time plays, but also in his novels. In *Bright Day* a particular piece of music evokes memories from a long time ago and helps in people being recognized. Mahler’s “Das Lied von der Erde” causes

Sargeant Strete to recall his time during the war in *Three Men in New Suits*. In *Time and the Conways* it serves to link Act One and Act Three to indicate a same timeframe. Elgar's cello concerto in *The Linden Tree* brings to mind past times, as Professor Linden yearns for the Edwardian epoch and the education system which is now becoming lost. However, it is in Act Two of *Music at Night* where music opens the boundaries of time and mind: music brings the ghosts from the past and opens up people's minds for remembrances of key events that happened in the past when they were happier with their lives, and for many of the characters, it changed their lives.

One of the significant conclusions that has been drawn from the study of music hall is the sense of community enjoyed through it by both artists and the audiences, in the late nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth. This has been well described by T.S. Eliot in his essay on Marie Lloyd, "the greatest music-hall artist" (418). It is interesting to note that Priestley wrote *Lost Empires* about the decline of music hall from the point of view of a magician, even though music has a continuous presence in the novel. *The Good Companions* presents this theme of community as the centre of the novel, to the point that when the group suffers horribly from what Priestley calls a 'black week' and this sense of community is lost, the company gets close to breaking up. This theme of concert party and community was also the main subject of the libretto for *The Olympians*, in this case the troupe was composed of the gods of the Olympus, with the community ambience being assisted by the Curé.

Finally, music helps to create comedy and satire in *Low Notes on a High Level*, in this case, of the BBC and its management.

My intention in writing this Master's thesis has been to identify how Priestley employed music as a literary device and, this, I believe has been substantiated. During the research on this thesis, I have identified that his works comply with intermediality studies. Looking at the two primary sources, *TGC* and *MAN*, from the point of view of intermedial studies and, in particular, the theories of Scher and Wolf, I have been able to identify how Priestley blended in music in his books. In *The Good Companions* the characters are united by music, and the thematization of music is continuous once the three principal characters have joined the concert party. This blending in of music is also demonstrated by the fact that all the film and theatre adaptations of the novel (except for the first play carried out by Priestley in 1931) have been produced in the form either of musical film or of musical theatre. In contrast, *Music at Night* gives a very good example of Scher's verbal music, presenting a violin concerto as its theme, the performance of it as well as the response of the play's characters to the music. Wolf's theory provides for several elements of 'imitation' of music or 'showing', such as musical imagery

and the transformation of the text into music by effects through alliterations, repetitions, or polyphony. He considers that there is more musicalization if the frequency of these elements is high, which is the case in *MAN*.

There has been a resurgence of interest in Priestley in recent years, principally in his native country. This is in addition to the fact that his play *An Inspector Calls* has been on stage continuously in the UK since 1992 and is a set text in secondary schools in Britain. Great Northern Books and other publishers, with the assistance of the J.B. Priestley Society, have been making a wide selection of Priestley's plays, novels, and essays available in print for an interested readership once more – allowing the general public to make up its own mind about the writer's present literary status. In 2001 there was a three-play Priestley season in Leeds where *Johnson over Jordan* was performed once again, some sixty years after its premiere, this time with Patrick Stewart in the lead role. Interestingly, Priestley's output has been considered in the early studies of 'intermodernism', with an essay covering his *English Journey* in addition to the work of other writers similarly active during the interwar years. Given the breadth of Priestley's output in the mid-twentieth century, there is surely more scope for his inclusion in such intermodernism studies. Additionally, authors such as Baxendale and Fagge are addressing different aspects of Priestley's writings including his music and his political and social standing. Especially, after having carried out the research on the primary sources for this thesis, I think also that Priestley should be considered more actively in studies of intermediality, in particular for *Music at Night* as one music-related suggestion, but with other dramas by other playwrights as well.

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