

**Commissioning music for the Proms 1960–1985:
constructing new music**

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the way that music was commissioned for the BBC Proms between 1960 and 1985 as an exemplar of the relationship between composers and classical music institutions. It focuses on the intersection between the artists' creativity and the institutional practices of the industry in which they operate.

The commissioning of music in general, and by the BBC in particular, has been relatively little studied in academic research. Histories of the BBC and the Proms focus on *what* was commissioned, rather than *why* or *how*, and musicology has tended either to focus on the music as an autonomous object, independent of the circumstances of its creation, or to concentrate on the social history surrounding its creation. This study brings those two narratives together. Standing at the intersection between the worlds of broadcasting, and of new music composition, it asks how the music was commissioned, and, informed by methodologies drawn from musicology, cultural studies and the sociology of science, interrogates the relationships between the composers commissioned, and those who commissioned them, to see how a large organisation like the BBC could control such a slippery process as the creation of new music. These relationships are examined through a reading of the written materials held in the BBC Written Archives Centre, and interviews with composers, publishers and former BBC staff.

Two dominant discourses emerge from the findings of this thesis, each developed collectively by BBC staff, composers and the wider music industry, to their mutual benefit: firstly, that as the Proms were reinvented during the 1960s, for a composer, a commission for the Proms became the ultimate validation; and, secondly, that the BBC simply enabled composers to write what they wanted. These two discourses reveal, firstly, why certain composers were commissioned; and, secondly, why these composers wrote what they did, without recourse to a detailed

commissioning brief. These findings provide a model for studying the composition of music, or other forms of artistic creation, as part of its social and cultural milieu, and in particular the regulation of apparently autonomous artists by large institutions. This approach could similarly be applied to other areas of broadcasting, and the management of seemingly independent creative figures.

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Introduction

The second page of the published score of *Essence of Our Happinesses* by Elisabeth Lutyens reads as follows:

Commissioned by the British Broadcasting Corporation
for the Henry Wood Promenade Concerts 1970

First performance: September 8th 1970

Solo Tenor: Richard Lewis

B.B.C. Symphony Orchestra and Chorus conducted by Norman del Mar
(Lutyens, 1970: ii)

This acknowledgement of the part the BBC played in the creation of the work is normally all the information that is forthcoming, in the published score, on publishers' websites, in histories of the Proms and the BBC, in academic articles, and in programme notes for concerts and liner notes for CDs: the work was commissioned by the BBC, and the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Chorus gave its first performance. This thesis explores the complex web of relationships and factors that underpin such statements. It is an investigation of the Proms as an institution at the intersection of two cultural worlds: the commissioning process as part of the broadcasting world of the BBC; and the music world of the commissioned composers. This investigation is informed by the issues addressed by the approaches of both musicology and cultural studies. The process by which the music for the Proms was commissioned is examined, comparing what was written and spoken about the process with what was actually done. The thesis seeks to address two superficially simple questions:

How and why were composers commissioned for the BBC Proms?

Why did those composers write what they did?

These apparently simple questions open up a series of complex issues. The findings in this thesis cast light on this hitherto neglected area, and clarify important aspects of both the music industry and the BBC. The thesis illuminates three principal aspects of the music industry: firstly, the composers writing new music, and in particular their interaction with promoters working in the area of new music, their publishers and performers; secondly, the Proms and specifically the importance of new music to their reinvention during this period; and thirdly, the BBC Music Department and its interaction with the music industry. This then clarifies the relationship between the BBC Music Department and the rest of the BBC. The interrelationship between all these demonstrates the extent to which composers were institutionalised by the BBC, drawn into the culture of production, so that their apparent creative independence was actually shaped by the requirements of the Proms and the BBC. The way in which this was achieved by the staff at the BBC, creating a discourse with the composers and their publishers, shows how the BBC was able to control such a slippery activity as commissioning new music for the Proms. Furthermore, in the sense that the Music Department was positioned with one foot very much within the music industry, and the other within the BBC, answering these questions demonstrates how a BBC department, ostensibly under the control of BBC management, was in reality able to act with considerable independence. This in turn provides a model for examining other BBC departments, and the extent to which they were able to maintain their credibility in their spheres of activity outside the BBC, while still keeping their in-house masters happy. On the one hand, despite being external to the BBC, the composers had less independence than might appear to be the case (or than they realized), while the Music Department, which was part of the BBC, was surprisingly independent.

The principal research questions also generate three more questions. Firstly, in considering the discourse that was created around the Proms, and especially commissioning new music for the Proms during this period:

How was the process of Proms commissioning and the importance of new music constructed during this period, and who was involved in that construction?

Glock's and Ponsonby's contributions to this process are already well documented, but this thesis explores the networks of individuals surrounding the Directors of the Proms, who were also involved. The thesis goes on to explain the way that this discourse was developed, and how this discourse was of mutual benefit to several stakeholders: the staff in the BBC Music Department; the wider BBC, that is, departments other than the Music Department, specifically BBC management, the peers of the Controller, Music and their bosses; and the composers themselves, along with their associates in publishing. Secondly, in examining the relationships of the interested parties:

How did these relationships between the various stakeholders – BBC employees, composers, publishers, agents, performers – manifest themselves in two composer case studies of John Buller and Elisabeth Lutyens?

This thesis clarifies the way that staff in the BBC Music Department advocated on behalf of specific works, genres, and composers. Further, it explains how the network surrounding composers constructed an understanding of what was required of those composers. It also explores the importance of money in the developing importance of commissioning new music for the Proms, asking:

How did the fee structure for Proms commissions develop, starting with Glock?

Finally, it unpicks to what extent this understanding was intrinsic and assumed, and to what extent was it learned and imposed, challenging many of the assumptions around how decisions over commissioning were made. Testing those assumptions also questions the extent to which composers were acting as entirely free agents, and to what extent composers adapted to what they understood to be required of them.

The background to the commissioning of new music for the Proms

The Proms is a venerable institution in the world of classical music, and that reputation extends well beyond that specialist world, and indeed internationally: the journalist Joanne Shurvell, writing in the American business magazine *Forbes*, described the Proms as:

The World's Best Annual Classical Music Festival [...] the most eagerly anticipated annual event on any classical music lover's calendar [...] with music from the great composers, along with more experimental evenings and premieres of new works (Shurvell, 2019, online).

This rhetoric can be supported with evidence. The Proms has scale, accessibility for audiences, and a reputation for quality. Every Prom concert from the Royal Albert Hall is broadcast live on BBC Radio 3 and many concerts are televised on BBC Two and Four; the hall holds nearly 6,000 people. Add on to this the international audience on the BBC World Service, and those concerts taken by overseas radio stations, and the popular listenership for classical music concerts is probably unparalleled. For example:

2011 was a record-breaking season for the BBC Proms. Over 300,000 people attended Proms concerts, average attendance for the main evening Proms in the Royal Albert Hall

was 94%, and 52 of 74 concerts in the Royal Albert Hall sold out [...] In 2011 the BBC Proms reached a record 18.5 million viewers in the UK across all BBC television platforms. BBC Radio 3 reaches more than 2 million people each week and has a huge international reach through its broadcasts (BBC, 2012, online).

It is not only size that is important, it is the range of the concerts, and – crucially for this research – the new music that makes the Proms significant in our culture. When the new music commissioned from composers by the BBC for the Proms is discussed in the press, there is little doubt that for a composer this is a career-defining opportunity.

It is important to remember that before Glock's arrival at the BBC in 1959, there had been very few commissions from the BBC specifically for the Proms. Commissioned works tended to find their way into the Proms more by chance, as this letter dated 16 April 1957 from Glock's predecessor, Richard Howgill, to the composer Goffredo Petrassi, makes plain:

I am very glad to have your letter of 13th April and the information concerning the commissioned work "Invenzione Concertata". We did, in fact, schedule it for studio performance in June but, in the absence of news about the work, we had to take it out of the schedule. The first performance is, therefore, likely to be in the Promenade Concerts at the Royal Albert Hall on 9th September with the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Mr. Basil Cameron.

I expect you know that the Promenade Concerts are a series of nightly concerts covering a period of eight weeks in the summer. They have a large and enthusiastic audience, a large percentage of which are young people.¹

This thesis interrogates the notion of 'reinvention' in the light of the growing importance of the commissioning of new music for the Proms, and the key function that the newness of this new

¹ BBC WAC R27/778/1 COMMISSIONED WORKS, 16 April 1957

music had for this reinvention. This is the reason for beginning the narrative in 1960, the point at which Glock took over the Proms, and began to use the commissioning of new music as an important element in his rejuvenation of the concerts, a rejuvenation that also included the broadening of repertoire, the invitation of wider and more international performers, and an imaginative approach to programming.

Although the Proms might seem like ‘a carefully preserved entity handed down across the generations’ (Doctor, Kenyon and Wright, 2007: 6), in fact, as Doctor, Kenyon and Wright go on to explain, the Proms have been reinvented many times across the century-and-a-quarter of their existence, from their unsteady beginnings in 1895; the takeover (or ‘entrance’ as Sir Henry Wood described it) of the BBC in 1927, and the impact that the new broadcasting technology had on the concerts; the influence of the charismatic Sir Malcolm Sargent ‘giving a glamorous image to the unadventurous Proms of the 1950s’ and ‘William Glock’s intervention’ (Doctor, Kenyon and Wright, 2007: 7) in 1959. It is this last intervention, or reinvention, which is in fact the title of the David Wright’s chapter in Doctor, Kenyon and Wright, ‘Reinventing the Proms: The Glock and Ponsonby Eras, 1959-1985’, which is the subject of this thesis, and specifically, the part that new music had to play in that reinvention.

New music has always played a significant part in the Proms. Langley (2007: 41-42) lists the expectations which were already well-established for ‘Promenade Concerts’, when Sir Henry Wood and Robert Newman instigated their series of Proms, basing the list on ‘surviving programmes, press reports or personal memoirs from at least the 1870s – some as far back as the 1840s, 50s and 60s – at various London theatres including the Lyceum, Her Majesty’s and Covent Garden’ (Langley, 2007: 40). One of the expectations was for:

Special commissions or other new works [which] might be introduced each season and played or sung as appropriate, even by the audience, on succeeding nights (with publication and supplier information advertised in the programme)' (Langley, 2007: 40-41).

This would strongly imply that the new works were of a popular nature, included as a commercial venture to encourage the sale of sheet music. This might explain the use by Wood of the expression 'novelty' to describe new music at the Proms, but Wood's enthusiasm for the new went well beyond popular trifles; for example, as well as the oft-quoted inclusion of Schoenberg's Five Orchestral Pieces, Op 16 in the 1912 season, Wood gave the first British performance of Debussy's *Prélude à l'après midi d'un faune* in the 1904 season, and the Suite from Stravinsky's *Firebird* in 1913. These were, however, extreme examples of the new music from the UK and Europe that Wood introduced in the early years of the Proms (see Langley, 2007: 65-73). It was Wood's death in 1944 that Doctor identifies as the fourth and last of:

Four highly significant events [that] transformed the Proms in the years between 1920 and 1944. First, financial doldrums plagued all concert-giving in the years immediately following the First World War [...] Second, from these threats sprang the 'phoenix' of broadcasting in 1927 [...] Third, the Second World War forced the traditional configuration of the Proms as a concert series to change, especially following the loss of the Queen's Hall in 1941 (Doctor, 2007: 74)

Each of these events precipitated a reinvention of the Proms ('modernization' is Doctor's term). Throughout this period, new music played an important part, 'novelties represented an element of Proms programming that was actually given notice' (Doctor, 2007: 108), and Doctor goes on to outline the role new music played (Doctor, 2007: 108-111), noting in particular the lack of rehearsal time available to new music, and questioning whether difficult contemporary works could be presented in the best possible light: not the most encouraging conditions for composers

and their music. Emerging from the Second World War into a new venue, the Royal Albert Hall, and without a dedicated conductor and the figurehead of the Proms, Sir Henry Wood, the Proms were in need of another reinvention. The BBC as an organisation was on a high, having expanded its international activities hugely during the war years, and established itself as a trusted source of impartial news reporting around the world (see Hendy, 2022: 179-292).

[N]aturally curious, state-educated, working-class or lower-middle-class [...] [people were ready for] anything a hungry autodidact might wish for at a time of material austerity: cultural enrichment in the form of a free supply of ‘the best in every department of human knowledge, endeavour and achievement’, something that flew in the face of a traditional British prejudice ‘against people being too clever, too literate’ (Hendy, 2022: 360-361).

In other words, they were ready for the Third Programme, launched by the BBC on Sunday 29 September 1946. For a variety of reasons, the Proms failed to benefit from this new-found confidence (see Garnham, 2007: 130-167). During the post-war years, the BBC Music Department went through a succession of Heads, none of whom seemed to want to take possession of the Proms, which demonstrated ‘how far the Proms then were from the centres of the BBC’s musical concerns’ (Garnham, 2007: 139). Instead, the Proms, without the guiding light of Sir Henry, were ‘de-personalized’ (in the word used by the Head of the Music Department in 1945, Victor Hely-Hutchinson, quoted by Garnham, 2007: 136). The planning was devolved to a committee: ‘programme-builder, Julian Herbage, Concerts Manager W. W. Thompson, and Deputy Director of Music Kenneth Wright’ (Garnham, 2007: 139). Herbage, who took the lead, and steered the planning of the Proms through until the arrival of Glock in 1959, was not on the BBC staff, but employed as a freelance. The Chief Conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Sir Adrian Boult, preferred to dedicate himself to the orchestra’s Winter Season, where the planning was more adventurous, and – this is the crux of the matter – better funded. Winter

Season concerts had three full rehearsals, where a Prom concert had only one. This had been Wood's method of working. He planned the programmes, so he knew what he was getting; he was also famously efficient at preparing concerts on minimal rehearsal. For this reason, the Proms made the BBC a considerable amount of money, subsidising their other public concert activities (Garnham, 2007: 134). When it was realised that a single orchestra could not be expected to prepare a concert programme on one rehearsal, a system of using three orchestras was introduced (in the first instance, the London Philharmonic and the London Symphony, alongside the BBC Symphony), so that one could be performing while the others rehearsed. This led to an increase in standards, but at a considerable financial loss. Finally, when the BBC did find and appoint a new conductor to the BBC Symphony Orchestra (and therefore to the Proms), after Boult's enforced retirement at the BBC's compulsory age of 60 in 1950, it was Malcolm Sargent who was chosen. He was a household name, having been a regular on the popular radio programme *The Brains Trust* since 1941, so well-known to the radio audience, whether or not they had heard him conduct. His popularity with the audience, especially the Proms audience, was matched only by the dislike of his professional colleagues. Orchestral musicians did not respect him, and his enthusiasm for television, over radio, made him no friends at the BBC Music Department. He also had a personal antipathy to new music, and his relatively small repertoire would imply that he was not keen to learn new scores, old or new. At the same time, festivals were springing up around the UK, the 'Cheltenham Festival of British Contemporary Music began in 1945, the Edinburgh Festival in 1947, and the Bath Festival in 1948, which was also the year in which Benjamin Britten founded the Aldeburgh Festival' (Garnham, 2007: 165). These festivals were quick to snap up first performances, and the Proms' reputation for presenting 'novelties' dwindled. In 1953 Herbage had reported that 'They [the Proms] have been leaderless for too many years' and in 1960, that 'I have in the past referred to the Proms as Music Division's dustbin', but upon Glock's appointment he was able to write that 'The Proms are clearly in for a new lease of life (Garnham, 2007: 167). This was to be the case,

and the way the Proms were developed during the 1960s, and the importance of new music to them, is central to this thesis.

Glancing through the obituaries of British composers of the last 50 years, the fact that their music was played at the Proms, and especially that they were commissioned to write for the Proms, is often the headline. This assumption of the importance of Proms performances to composers on the part of music journalists is widely shared throughout the classical music industry. Just as solo performers want a Proms debut, for composers a Proms commission is the signal that they have arrived. The imprimatur of the BBC is valuable in itself, and also opens doors for further, often more lucrative, opportunities in the UK and abroad. Publishers hold a Proms commission in equally high esteem: although they will be trying to find the best match for the objectives of the composers they represent, and some of these will be found in smaller, less prestigious places, for their composers' most ambitious aspirations, a Proms commission is the gold standard. Perhaps the only comparable commission in the UK is for the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. Staff in the BBC Music Department value the Proms and the respect an appearance or a commission confers. BBC management regard the Proms as the jewel in the BBC's cultural crown, combining as they do the very highest quality, a youthful yet discriminating (and very large) audience, and range, diversity and novelty.

The primary research for this thesis derives from two main sources: from files held at the BBC's Written Archives Centre (WAC), and a series of interviews conducted with composers, publishers and former BBC staff. The Written Archives Centre contains files on the Proms, minutes of meetings on new music and the Central Music Advisory Committee, files on commissioned works, listening reports, and files on individual composers. The composers interviewed were Nicola LeFanu, Thea Musgrave, Anthony Payne and Robert Saxton. The publishers were Sally Cavender (Faber Music) and Sally Groves (Schott). The BBC staff were

Andrew Kurowski and Stephen Plaistow (both former Editors, New Music at Radio 3), and Robert Ponsonby (former Controller, Music).

Glock and Ponsonby as the ‘great men’ of history, the role of the BBC, and the existence of a commissioning policy

When the new music commissioned for the Proms is discussed in more serious literature, histories of the Proms, for example, the information given rarely goes beyond a list of the composers commissioned by the Director of the Proms, and the titles of the works they composed in any season. This listing tells of the works and composers commissioned tell a familiar story, and makes three not entirely congruent assumptions. Firstly, that whoever was the Director of the Proms – William Glock and later Robert Ponsonby, in the period under discussion – was individually responsible for choosing the composers commissioned, and it was their taste and musical enthusiasm that led their commissioning; secondly, that these individuals somehow convinced the organisation that was the BBC to go along with their vision; and thirdly, it is implied that there might have been some sort of policy which ensured that commissions were distributed fairly.

This thesis challenges these widely held assumptions, arguing instead that the music commissioned for the Proms was produced through an institutional process, developed by a network of collaborating composers, BBC music staff, publishers, agents, and performers, to produce music, the importance and value of which is defined by its perceived newness. This newness was not something for which the Proms was a vehicle, but rather one of the contributing factors in the reinvention of the Proms during this period; unlike another of Glock’s innovations, the *Invitation Concerts*, which were invented expressly as a medium for new music, the Proms were reinvented, not specifically for new music, but to reflect Glock’s desire to expand the repertoire of music on the Third Programme in general. The appearance of the prog-

rock band *Soft Machine* at the Proms in 1970 was perhaps the most extreme manifestation of this policy, which also incorporated the inclusion of much less well-known mainstream music (such as Haydn), early music, opera and chamber music at the Proms during the same period (see Wright (2008), and Glock, 1991: 200–213).

A narrative developed around Glock, and it was inherited by Ponsonby, which boldly states that he was only interested in hard-line modernism, and ignored composers who were working in a more conservative style. This narrative, developed in the first instance by composers who felt that they were being neglected by the BBC and the Proms, proposed that the Proms were a sort of closed shop, controlled by individuals pursuing a narrow and restrictive policy which excluded either them, or those that they felt had not had fair representation (see, for example, Routh (1972), Simpson (1981), and Rae (2000)). Although the briefest glance at the facts show this narrative to be demonstrably untrue (see Wright (2008)) it has been remarkably tenacious, and is now part of the received wisdom about this period of Proms history (see, for example, Johnson (2011)).

My own place in this research

I have always been fascinated by and engrossed in music. This interest led me into a traditional university music degree in the history of music, composition, aural, and performance, followed by a Masters in music theory and analysis, where I specialised in the Schenkerian analysis of music from the classical period, and in particular Beethoven. As a BBC employee for more than 30 years, I had the privilege to continue that engagement with music, working mostly for Radio 3. Between 1988 and 1989, I worked as Senior Producer on the Proms, effectively assistant to John Drummond, the Proms Director, an opportunity enabled by an earlier role as the producer of *Prom Talk*, a weekly magazine programme previewing the week's Prom concerts. I saw how

the Proms became increasingly important as part of the warp and weft of the entire network's summer schedule: on the one hand, Radio 3 became an increasingly important marketing tool for the season of public concerts, and on the other, the significance of the Proms as a flagship activity of the BBC was woven into other strands of the output, so they could benefit from the reflected glory.

My close professional relationship with the BBC, Radio 3, and the Proms has many advantages, but also some downsides. The principal advantage is that I have an insider's understanding of the working practices of the BBC. Where these might be hard-won by researchers external to the BBC, for me they are second nature. My understanding of the formal structures of the Corporation, its byzantine working practices, its tangle of acronyms, its committees, what gets into the minutes of meetings and what might be omitted, reporting lines both vertical and horizontal, and accounting procedures, all allow me an insight that an outsider might struggle with. The same goes for the informal nature of working relationships between individuals, the language used, what is said and what is actually meant, the maverick figures and how they are contained, and the way individuals within the BBC relate to colleagues elsewhere in the music industry. Furthermore, having left the BBC staff to work in the independent radio production sector, I have a clear understanding of the way that the BBC works with external suppliers, and the way that I and my company were institutionalised by the BBC has many similarities with the way composers were expected to work to commission. Although the commissioning process for radio programmes is very different from new music for the Proms, with formal commissioning briefs, proposals, and pitching meetings for the former, there are nevertheless similarities, especially in the area of unwritten cultural assumptions on the part of BBC staff – which is why so many successful independent producers are former BBC insiders.

Like many BBC employees, and especially those of us with a background in the great history of western music, I grew up as part of BBC culture. I was, *parti pris*, inclined not to question many of the assumptions of the work we did and the way we did it, let alone why we did it. This is compounded by one of the cultural assumptions of the BBC, that its employees are journalists, and are therefore always looking for the story, which demands a narrative approach which can be constructed in such a way as to appear plausible, when in fact through the odd logical fallacy, the chain of cause and effect can fall apart. It has been one of the liberations of undertaking this research to bring to these important questions not only my knowledge as a BBC Proms insider, but the skills of an academic researcher.

As well as the understanding of the BBC, my professional associations there have made many potential interviewees available to me, particularly those senior figures normally unwilling to speak to other researchers. This group of people includes former BBC employers, but also composers and publishers. This is in itself a direct reflection of one area of this research, the way that BBC employees became entwined with the wider music industry. Because I was known to them, they were able to trust me, and it was easy for me to gain their confidence, and they would potentially be more open and honest with a former colleague than an unknown researcher. This in itself brings its own flipside, in that because we shared a common background, we also shared many unwritten and unspoken assumptions, and conversations could take many things for granted. My awareness of this led me to be careful to ask the dumb question (another journalistic trait), to probe some of their answers when I knew there might be important material still left unsaid, and also to be able to read between the lines if this was not forthcoming.

The institutionalisation of composers commissioned for the Proms

This thesis argues that the new music commissioned for the Proms would not have existed in the way that it did without the institutions of the Proms and the BBC. It was created specifically for this context, and the institution was an integral part of the making of the art. In other words, the composer would have written a different piece for a different commissioner, even if the fee, the forces, and the brief were otherwise identical. By de-centring the composer, and not privileging the artwork in the commissioning process, a deeper understanding of the place of the music in its social milieu is discovered. By looking in detail at the relationships between particular composers, individual staff at the BBC and at publishers, it is argued that the music, rather than being a thing in itself, is in fact the product of a web of activity by several people. Further, in developing a mutually beneficial discourse around the commissioning of music for the Proms, BBC staff, composers and their publishers institutionalised the composers, so that they were able to respond appropriately to a commission without the need for a detailed brief, and that in this way the BBC was able to control the individual artistic response to the commission.

In arguing this premise, the thesis charts the increasing importance of the Proms to the musical world and to the BBC. This importance was constructed during this period by the staff of the BBC Music Department, by the wider BBC, and by the composers themselves, along with their publishers, agents and those performers with an interest in new music. This required a discourse to be developed to the mutual benefit of all the involved parties, a discourse around the importance of the Proms, so that as the Proms became a jewel in the BBC's cultural crown, they also became an honour for the staff in the Music Department to bestow upon the very greatest performers and composers, and the most prestigious commission for a composer to aspire to. The way each of these goals supported each other led to this discourse becoming a virtuous circle.

Further, the thesis establishes that the relationships between the various members of this network manifested themselves both in the advocacy by BBC employees of specific works, composers and genres; and in the way that the composers and their networks constructed their understanding of what was required of them. Finally, it demonstrates that the newness of the music played a central role in this organisational and cultural process of production, in particular by the composers who adapted what they wrote to respond to what they understood to be required of them by a Proms commission: it is argued that this was achieved more through intrinsic and assumed understanding of commissioning requirements, along with some learnt expectations, rather than any explicitly imposed brief.

The Literature Review, Methodology and Findings

This thesis is presented in three parts. Part One is a review of secondary literature and a methodology. Part Two is a general examination of the component elements in how commissioning happened, and Part Three brings these components together in a detailed exploration of the experiences of two composers. The first part consists of four chapters, the first three looking at the existing research relevant to the area of study concerned with, firstly, writing about music; secondly, studies focused on radio; and, lastly, histories of the Proms. These three areas are closely aligned, and share many features as well as subject matter. In particular, many musicologists have used radio as a prism through which to examine the social history of music. The last chapter in this first section is concerned with methodology. The second part, which consists of three chapters, examines the institutions of the BBC, the BBC Music Department, the Proms, and the music industry outside the BBC from three different perspectives: firstly, the discourse that was developed around the reinvention of the Proms; secondly, the part that money played in that discourse; and thirdly, how composers came to

understand what they needed to do to successfully fulfil a Proms commission. The two chapters of Part Three look in detail at two composers, John Buller and Elisabeth Lutyens, and how the perspectives investigated in Part Two played out in their experience of being commissioned to write for the Proms. Without constantly referring back to the findings of the second part, the specific detail of third part nonetheless is read in the light of the greater generalities of the second.

The first chapter of the literature review lays out material which explores the field of study, commissioning music for the Proms, before focusing on three recent works of musicology which all aim to situate music in its social and political milieu. While all of them succeed to a greater or lesser extent, it is argued that they all continue to treat the music as a thing in itself, and that the surrounding historical material could be characterised as stuff happening at the same time. The two elements, the music and the milieu, remain stubbornly independent. In the second chapter the commissioning of new music for the Proms is looked at from the point of view of writing about radio: in large-scale histories of the BBC and broadcasting; more focused studies of the BBC, and some broader approaches to media studies from outside radio. The third and last chapter on literature examines previous histories of the Proms, and how they treat the commissioning of new music; a history of the BBC Symphony Orchestra; and a more general history of the Third Programme and Radio 3. Although these latter two are strong on the institution of the BBC, its ambiguities and contradictions, none of these studies addresses the key issue of the constantly-evolving relationships between the individuals working at, and for, the BBC.

Part Two begins with a chapter arguing that the Proms had different meanings for different groups during the period under discussion, but to all of them, the newness of the new music commissioned for the Proms was an integral and important element in what made the Proms. A

crucial element here is how that importance developed: in 1960 a Prom commission was like any other large-scale commission, but during the 1960s and 1970s the value of a Prom commission developed as a narrative constructed between the interested parties. Firstly, the commissioned composers illustrate how a Prom commission became, to use Bourdieu's term, a 'consecration', bestowed by the BBC, recognised by the composer's peers, and also a public recognition by the Proms audience (see Bourdieu, 1993a: 50–51). Secondly, for the staff of the BBC Music Department the Proms became an event pre-eminent in the musical life of the UK, and as such reflected their own self-esteem. Lastly, to the wider BBC the Proms developed to become the jewel in the crown of the BBC's cultural activity, the highest of highbrow events that the BBC supported. This is a discussion of *why* music was commissioned for the Proms: why the wider BBC thought it was sensible way to spend the licence fee; why the staff at the BBC Music Department felt that it enhanced the standing of the Proms; and why composers agreed that it became the ultimate accolade for them as creative artists.

Having discussed the developing importance of the Proms to the wider BBC during this period, and especially the commissioning of new music for the Proms, the next chapter investigates one significant way this importance manifested itself: in the distribution of money. The increase in the commissioning budget during this period was not the result of any plan or policy at the BBC, but rather the outcome of a series of often unforeseen accidents. This chapter follows four interventions in the development of the commissioning budget for new music at the Proms: firstly, by William Glock, newly-appointed Controller, Music at the BBC; secondly, by the composer Elizabeth Maconchy, co-opted onto the BBC's Central Music Advisory Committee in 1961, who proposed a further increase in the commissioning budget; thirdly, by another composer, Benjamin Britten, although in this case the intervention was unwitting on his part; and finally by Director General Aubrey Singer, and a startling, and hitherto unknown,

explanation as to how the commissioning budget was increased once again in the late 1970s from about £5,000 to £30,000.

As the budget for commissioning music for the Proms grew exponentially during the period under discussion, the way composers and BBC staff worked together to produce a commissioned work also developed. The next chapter of findings discusses the commonly-held expectations of composers once they received a commission to write for the Proms: how composers knew what to do when commissioned to write for the Proms. The exploration of these aspects of *habitus*² for the composers falls into two parts. The first focuses on what they needed to know, and the second on who they needed to know. The first part establishes that there was a standardised way that Proms commissions were discussed, a narrative developed by interested parties both within and outside the BBC. The second part of this chapter argues that composers knew what they had to do by a process of precedence and experience. The way that composers developed their networks is explored: with their publishers; with other composers and performers; and with BBC staff. This is the *how* of commissioning music for the Proms: how composers knew what to write, and how BBC Music Department staff developed a language acceptable to the composers, to themselves, and to the wider BBC.

Having looked at the ways commissioning for the Proms developed during this period, Part Three concentrates on two composers: John Buller (1927–2004), and Elisabeth Lutyens (1906–1983). The first chapter is a detailed study of the two works Buller was commissioned to write for the Proms, *Proença* (1977) and *The Theatre of Memory* (1981), the relationships he had with the individuals at the BBC, and also with his publishers. This narrative defines the language of success that the BBC developed during this period.

² For an overview of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, see Maton (2014).

The final chapter of findings looks at a figure whose name will already have cropped up in several contexts, Elisabeth Lutyens. In many ways her feel for the game (to use Bourdieu's phrase) was impeccable, and yet she struggled to be accepted into the field of cultural production (to use another of Bourdieu's phrases) occupied by those composers who were commissioned for the Proms.³ This chapter explains why that should be, and investigates the way she was accepted into that field, or network. It goes on to show how it was possible for Lutyens to fulfil the requirements of that field by adapting the nature of her work: and finally, it shows that it was possible for Lutyens to be given a written brief (however vague and informal) and by misunderstanding it (whether by accident or design) and applying it literally, rather than in the light of the unwritten rules, to produce a work completely unsuitable for the Proms.

A note on the people

The individuals involved in the commissioning process were many and various, and the ever-changing titles used by successive post holders at the BBC can be confusing, to say nothing of the abbreviations and acronyms by which they were known internally. These are explained as and when they occur, but three need to be untangled straight away. Firstly, the intricacies of the BBC 'Music Department' would make a thesis on their own. Rather than getting caught up in nomenclature around the 'Gramophone Department', 'Music Division', the 'BBC Symphony Orchestra Unit' and the 'Proms Unit', and their various management structures, the phrase 'Music Department' is used to mean anybody employed full-time on the BBC staff working on music programmes for the Third Programme and, later, Radio 3. This is also a catch-all including those staff whose principal responsibilities were for the Proms and the BBC Symphony Orchestra. When inter-departmental demarcations require further clarification, this is done on a

³ For an overview of Bourdieu's concept of the field of cultural production, see Thomson (2014).

case-by-case basis as such occasions arise. Secondly, a significant element of this thesis revolves around the way establishments like ‘the BBC’ are taken to be coherent organisations, rather than groups of more-or-less loosely corralled individuals. When that coherence is intended or implied it would be improper to write about ‘the BBC’ without those quotation marks. Just because the BBC is big, it does not mean it is coherent. If there is no implication of coherence, there are no quotation marks. Nonetheless, its sheer size and pervasiveness in British culture (in its widest sense) can make approaching it an intimidating prospect for an individual who perceives themselves to be an outsider: part of this research will demonstrate that, rather like the Wicked Witch of the West in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), the reality is a good deal less scary than its prospect. For the most part, the expression ‘the wider BBC’ is used to mean areas of the BBC outside the Music Department. Often, that is upper management, those above Controller, Music. Occasionally, it means those working in TV production, or other BBC departments: drama, current affairs and so on. When this is the case, the definition is clarified in the context. Thirdly, the title of the people who were nominally in charge of the Proms, William Glock and subsequently Robert Ponsonby. Their official BBC job title was ‘Controller, Music’ (in those days, a separate job and person from the network Controllers of the Home Service, the Light Programme, the Third Programme and, later, Radios 3 and 4; the roles of ‘Controller, Music’ and ‘Controller, Radio 3’ were to be combined in the person of John Drummond in 1985). However, in the wider world, they were also known informally as the Director of the Proms, and these two titles have been used interchangeably, depending on context, in a way that will be clarified on a case-by-case basis.

Given that this thesis is an investigation of a somewhat mysterious process – often as mysterious to those involved in it, as much as to those outside – and in shining a light on this process, unexpected discoveries are made, it may well be that some people would not recognise the way in which they are described, or the way that they behave. This is especially so in the case of

composers, who mostly like to think of themselves as operating quite independently, outside the institutionalisation of places like the BBC, or even their publishers. The lone artist in their garret is still an attractive illusion for many composers, but it is one that this thesis sets out to question.

It will be noticed that the social science's 'actor' is avoided to describe 'somebody taking part in a certain activity', simply because in a study of the arts, its ambiguity can be grating. The expressions 'agent' and 'agency' suffer in the same way. The exception to this is where secondary literature is quoted.

In asking two simple questions, how and why composers were commissioned to write new music for the Proms, and why they wrote what they did, several key elements of this thesis have emerged: firstly, the importance of the relationships between the BBC, the BBC Music Department staff, the Proms, the music industry outside the BBC, and, specifically, composers; secondly, the importance of the Proms to the BBC, and of new music to the Proms; and thirdly, the institutionalisation of composers by the BBC. The main thrust of this research involves de-centring the composer and treating the music as one element in the discourse created around the commissioning and creation of new music, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the music and its place in its social milieu. First though, it is necessary to explore the existing literature in greater detail, starting with exemplars of existing musicological approaches to new music.

part one

Chapter One: Literature Review 1, Writing about music

In tackling the processes of commissioning composers and the music created by these composers for the Proms, I synthesise approaches from musicology, radio studies and historical studies. Such interdisciplinary work provides the opportunity for a richer, deeper and more radical understanding of the object of study. This orientation also enables me to draw on my distinctive academic and professional background in traditional musicology and music theory and analysis, as well as 30 years working at or for the BBC. These theoretical frames and integrated methods allow me to recognise that the music would not have existed without the creative activities of the composer, the commissioning organisation and the editorial decision-making processes of that cultural institution. The object of this research, therefore, is to illuminate that process as the artistic creation of the individual composer within the commissioning institution, as an integral part of its creation.

As established in the Introduction, the commissioning of music for the Proms is an under-explored area. For the most part, when it is mentioned at all, it is to report *what* was commissioned: the *how* and the *why* are ignored. On the whole, this is because the extant literature takes the form of narrative histories, concerned with constructing a chronology of events and a *dramatis personae*. In addition, studies of new music that are founded in a more analytical approach are either based in musicology, and examine the music separately from the circumstances of its commission and composition, focusing on genre, style, reception, and musical analysis; or, if they approach it from a more sociological perspective, they tend to neglect the art object in favour of the social milieu surrounding it. In both cases, music is seen as a thing in itself, an autonomous object to be studied, or else to be put in context, the music still autonomous, but surrounded by social and political activity that might or might not have some influence on it. On the musicological front, there have been very few studies of the

commissioning of music in general, let alone Proms commissions. Most published material in this area is practical advice on how to commission music for worship, recorder groups, student string ensembles, concert bands and the like. Two notable exceptions are McCormick (2000), an MPhil thesis on the works commissioned by the cellist Mstislav Rostropovich for the conductor and philanthropist Paul Sacher's 70th birthday, and Belfy (1986), a PhD thesis on the music that the Louisville Orchestra commissioned between 1948 and 1958. Citing doctoral and masters theses from as long ago as 1986 is an important indication that this field of study is underrepresented and a fruitful area for more research, and my own contribution builds upon these foundations.

McCormick's work, which is written from the perspective of a performer, narrates the biographical interrelationships between composers, performer and commissioner, and presents the composition of new music as a collaborative process, rather than the romantic notion of the 'lone genius', referencing, in particular, Becker's *Art Worlds* (2008). Further, McCormick suggests that composers are writing for each other as much as for the performer or commissioner. Although she invokes Bourdieu, and the commission as an exchange of economic and cultural capital, she does not pursue the idea of the artist making 'art for art's sake', 'consecration' into a particular cultural field, the 'loser wins' and other elements of Bourdieu's *Fields of Cultural Production*. McCormick is explicit in not wanting to look at the music in itself: "To study music sociologically therefore requires shifting our focus away from the "music itself" to look instead at the community and the activity that surrounds a composition' (McCormick, 2000: 85), an approach which, as will be seen later in the context of Georgina Born's theories, neglects the art object in favour of its sociological context. McCormick further identifies that:

If this same kind of tribute been arranged for someone like Tony Blair, Bill Gates, or the Dalai Lama, the cycle of homages would not have meant the same thing, and I would

wager that the composers would have written something quite different (McCormick, 2000: 91-92)

The present thesis builds on, and extends, McCormick's approach, with the aim of identifying how the music would be different, and why it is.

Belfy's thesis is an account of a remarkable ten-year period in the history of the Louisville Orchestra, during which 132 works were commissioned by and for them. Belfy draws on the archive of the Orchestra, interviews, press cuttings and the scores of the commissioned works to develop a rich narrative of how and why these works were commissioned. She draws together the economics of orchestral life at the time, the cultural imperative of supporting living composers, the developing technology of the LP, and the sociological impact of new music on audience development. She further demonstrates that this commissioning programme was the result of three key figures converging in Louisville: the dynamic young conductor Robert Whitney, a new and ambitious orchestral manager, John Woolford, and a politician, who became Mayor of Louisville, Charles Farnsley. This work is particularly impressive, coming as it does at the very beginning of the 'new musicology', in drawing together all these threads into a coherent discourse, and her approach is one that the present project has been able to build upon, chiefly through the application of methodologies which have been developed since Belfy wrote her thesis.

Notwithstanding these two outstanding contributions, when commissioned works are discussed, it is usually in monographs on individual composers, when the approach is not concerned with the commissioning process, but only with the art object itself, the music produced. For example, in Mathias (2012), four pages are devoted to Elisabeth Lutyens's Prom commission *Essence of Our Happinesses*, and the BBC and the Proms are not mentioned once. Mathias's insights are limited

to her contention that Lutyens was ‘preoccupied with concepts of philosophical and mystical time, and ancient rites reflecting the struggle between Life and Death [...] [and the] [o]ther works inspired by these concepts [that] quickly followed’ (Mathias, 2012: 194–195). Radio studies, rooted in the broader fields of media and cultural studies, have been more concerned with speech programmes: news and current affairs, drama, and documentary; buttressed by a small body of work on popular music broadcasting. Recent work on the cultural worker tend to focus on TV and film production, fashion, advertising, and popular music, or, when classical music is discussed, it is the role of performers, often from a feminist or class perspective (see, for example, Scharff (2018)). Important sociological studies, like Banks (2007), a penetrating study of *The Politics of Cultural Work*, overlooks both the BBC and classical music completely.

The field of study

While there is very little material on the specific object of study in my research, there are some important but diverse studies which, when combined, start to illuminate some of the issues concerned with the music commissioned for the BBC Proms, 1960–1985. These fall into three broad areas. Firstly, the study of new music, part of musicology; secondly, the study of the BBC as part of radio studies; and thirdly, the study of the Proms, which, while being accommodated in both the other areas, is largely historical in orientation. These three categorisations have been chosen in order to make explicit the argument of this thesis, an examination of the creation of music at the intersection of the institution of the BBC and the world of new music, and how that creation was instrumental in developing the Proms during the period under scrutiny. Firstly, by examining how music is written about, starting with a broad survey, and then looking at how writers bring different perspectives to progressively more specialised areas of musical composition. Then attention shifts to how radio and the BBC have been written about, again, starting with overviews offered by historians of the BBC, and then looking at increasingly more

focused examples, covering an anthropological study of the BBC, the history of a BBC radio network, and the development of the BBC Music Department. Finally, an examination of histories of the Proms, the BBC Symphony Orchestra, and the Third Programme and Radio 3. Since the studies in all three categories are in some sense historical in approach, this chapter ties the three different perspectives together, a demonstration that the three areas share a great deal of common ground, both in terms of approach and subject matter. Many musicologists address issues in radio studies through their explorations of the role of the BBC in the social history of music in the 20th and 21st centuries, using the BBC Written Archives Centre as a resource for what they would almost certainly describe as fundamentally musicological research.

In all this, though, the question of how composers are commissioned, and what music is composed, through the commissioning process for the Proms, has been largely overlooked. When the subject has been raised, it has usually been in terms of a partisan commentator complaining that one composer or another (sometimes the writer themselves) has been passed over by the commissioners, or the BBC more generally. This approach makes two fundamentally flawed assumptions. Firstly, there is a logical fallacy. This argument is part of a narrative that grew up around Glock and the BBC during his time there, and which prevailed long after he had left, that Glock blocked certain composers: there was even rumour of a blacklist of banned composers (see, for example, Plaistow, 2000). This suited a tranche of composers who felt they were unfairly neglected. They could say, 'Glock neglects composer X, who writes in style Y. I (or another favourite, neglected composer) also write in style Y, and therefore, that is why I, too, am neglected'. The second assumption is that the music exists as a thing in itself, and can be picked up by a Glock or a Ponsonby like products on a supermarket shelf. This glosses over the messiness of what the music is, a part – a very important part – of the shifting, often slippery, web of relationships between the composers and their peers, their teachers and their mentors; their publishers; performers, both individuals and performing groups, with their own

managements; and promoters in a variety of shapes and sizes. All of these have priorities, agendas, and, yes, prejudices of their own, and each of them sees any one composer, any particular piece, and new music in general in quite a different way. My approach is to de-centre the composer and the music, and to disallow that music is an autonomous object, distinct from the world in which it was created. To study it fully, it is necessary, firstly, to examine it in its relationship to the industry, people and institutions in which it is embedded. Secondly, in order to do that, a broader methodology needs to be devised, drawing on sociology, and specifically the sociology of science. Thirdly, it is necessary to develop those frameworks by looking closely at the primary material and developing the theoretical approach from that material, rather than approaching the material from a pre-existing viewpoint; and lastly, the music, the aesthetic object, must take its place as an equal element among every other element, those things that are said and done, which go into constructing the discourse around commissioning new music.

For an example of the how the narrative around Glock as a partisan, narrow-minded purveyor of the avant-garde was constructed, this is the composer Francis Routh, writing in 1972:

The BBC Music Department has not kept pace with the enormously increased range of contemporary music [...] an extreme instance of this limitation occurred in the 1960s when the newly appointed Head of Music, William Glock, exercised the power vested in his position to promote particular composers of the serialist and avant-garde school. Those who were not of this persuasion were disregarded, and their works were not broadcast [...] A trend was thus set which was undesirable because it was lopsided and unrepresentative (Routh, 1972: 372).

One composer who was ‘not of this persuasion’ was, of course, Routh himself.⁴ It might seem possible to level the same accusation at another composer, Robert Simpson, whose polemic *The*

⁴ Routh’s article appeared as a chapter in his book *Contemporary British Music* (1972). The book is divided into chapters on individual composers, grouped in their relationship to a tradition, as ‘The establishment of a tradition’,

Proms and Natural Justice (1981) is a call for the Proms to be planned by one person only for a fixed term – Simpson proposes three, four or five years – to avoid long-term bias or favouritism. As a composer himself, it is odd that Simpson makes no mention of the commissioning process, concentrating instead on whether particular composers got played at all at the Proms, and he lists 21 composers who had no works performed at the Proms during Glock's tenure. This is the musical supermarket *par excellence*: why does Glock not pop down to Aisle C and choose some Skalkottas? Simpson was himself a BBC Music Producer for nearly 30 years, and only wrote his book after he had retired. He was also a person of great integrity, and it would be hard to argue that he was complaining on his own behalf, rather than that of his fellow composers. The same approach has been taken in a rather less personal, but nonetheless partisan, way by Caroline Rae (2000), taking up the anti-BBC cudgels on behalf of Henri Dutilleux and Maurice Ohana, and the slowness with which they were accepted by the BBC during the 1960s and 70s. She blames this on the stranglehold exerted by Pierre Boulez, who Glock appointed as chief conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra in 1969, and whose powerful aesthetic prejudices affected many composers, both in France and beyond. She suggests that 'the effect of [Glock] absorbing the Boulezian aesthetic [...] resulted in the comparative neglect of the music of Dutilleux, Ohana and others' (Rae, 2000: 29). Her accusation, like that of Routh and Simpson, is that Glock's frames of reference were too narrow, and that he neglected swathes of worthy music. Rae's reception study of music by these two figures pits their rather more conservative aesthetic against the arch-modernist Boulez, and she prefers to see the neglect of the composers purely as a result of this, a battle on purely aesthetic grounds, rather than considering any other factors. For example, she mentions that Dutilleux held senior positions at Radio France, and commissioned Ohana several times, but does not suggest to what extent Dutilleux's job there might have hampered his own chance of getting broadcast, either on Radio France or abroad.

'The development of a tradition', 'The evolution of a tradition', plus a group on 'The contemporary scene'. All the 21 named composers in these sections, other than those from abroad, and the three senior composers Walton, Tippett and Britten, were commissioned for the Proms during the Glock era.

Nonetheless, Rae includes some detailed statistical analysis of performances and broadcasts of their music. Statistics also feature in David Wright's (2008) rebuttal of the accusation that Glock's planning of the Proms was too narrow. This is a powerful refutation of the narrative around Glock and his blacklisting of composers. Wright celebrates Glock's Prom forays into opera, early music and neglected composers like Haydn, as well as his juxtaposing of unlikely but telling works in his programme planning. There is also a hefty table to demonstrate how much Glock broadened the repertoire played at the Proms during his tenure, and a table of the British composers he commissioned for the Proms, subdivided by the decade in which they were born. He adds an appendix where he subdivides the living composers performed into British 'mainstream' (35 composers), British 'modernist/avant-garde' (16), Foreign 'mainstream' (7) and Foreign 'modernist/avant-garde' (24). After pointing out that a great deal of the fuss created by British composers about their colleagues' neglect (for example, in *The Listener* following the publication of Simpson (1981)) is little more than xenophobic protectionism, Wright concludes that:

[T]he position of those composers proclaiming themselves 'blocked' by Glock would be no different from what it has been for the legions of composers before and since whose music has been left high and dry by changing fashions, poor luck, lack of patronage or just plain ordinariness [...] Glock's Proms commissions continue to be firmly representative of non-avant-garde idioms in British composition (Wright, 2008: 29 & 33).

Wright's bold contradiction of the received opinion on Glock's aesthetic bias is well-supported by the facts and figures, and bolstered by a range of historical evidence from a wide variety of primary sources, including the BBC Written Archives Centre, and Glock's papers at the British Library. He also places the Proms in a wider social context, taking in the audience and the economics of concert-going, and the critical response to the concerts. Most importantly, he looks at how the Proms were made to matter after years in the doldrums (see, for example,

Garnham (2007)), discussing the increasing quality of the performances, the broadening of the repertoire, and the innovative programming. However, Wright's argument is still on aesthetic grounds, and although he avoids the trap of the logical fallacy Routh tripped into, he falls down where he cites other potential reasons for neglect: 'changing fashions, poor luck, lack of patronage or just plain ordinariness'. None of these stands up to scrutiny, and 'poor luck', for example, requires a great deal of unpacking. Building upon Wright's approach I argue that during this period there was a three-way discourse developed between BBC management, the Music Department and the composers commissioned for the Proms, to enhance the importance of the Proms, to their mutual advantage. Wright's approach is still an example of the Great Man approach to history, with Glock as the lone architect responsible for every decision, rather than as one person in a complex web of personalities: Glock himself in his autobiography is far more generous to his BBC colleagues in the part they played in the rejuvenation of the Proms: for example, he dedicates several pages to working with Boulez on concert planning (Glock, 1991: 137–142). One final contribution to the debate over commissioning music for the Proms comes from the academic and journalist Keith Potter who interviewed Robert Ponsonby:

[T]o find out a few facts concerning the organisation of the BBC Music Division, about which surprisingly little is known generally, and in particular to obtain some information about the BBC's commissioning policy and how it works in practice (Potter, 1975: 24).

This immediately promises to shine some light on what is widely considered to be a somewhat mysterious subject, and Potter does find something out about the structure of Music Division, numbers of producers in London and the regions, where the BBC's orchestras fit in, and who is responsible for new music: Hans Keller, in charge of the Music Reading Panel, a group of external musical experts who recommend (or not) scores sent to the BBC for broadcast. Ponsonby explains that, at this point, Stephen Plaistow, one of the key figures in this research, had no specific brief for new music, but was his chief assistant, and advised him in an informal

way, as one of a group of staff with a particular enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, new music. Ponsonby stresses that although he took the decisions over commissioning, it was a matter for consensus, and that a commission for the Proms was for composers who had already proved themselves elsewhere. Potter takes things at face value, such as Ponsonby telling him that ‘I wouldn’t dream of commissioning a work without consulting the conductor who was going to perform it’ (Potter, 1975: 26), an assertion that is, as shall be seen, patently untrue: composers were often commissioned and then asked who they would like to conduct their new work. This uninterpreted reportage allows Ponsonby to say, more or less literally, that he runs the BBC’s commissioning process like he does because that is how he does it, and he intends to carry on doing it in the same way. Potter raises some interesting issues, but only appears to be interested in what happens, rather than how or why it happens.

New music: the musicological approach

It is difficult to argue with this summary of traditional musicology:

A good deal of our writing (most obviously in music theory and analysis, but also in historical musicology) continues to be nourished by – and to reinforce in turn – the belief that music, or at least Western art-music, is autonomous in significant ways (or, some would say, in nearly every way that matters) from the social milieu in which it is produced and consumed (Locke, 1999: 500).

There is no doubt that in the 20-odd years before Locke wrote that, and in the 20-plus since, the so-called ‘new musicology’ has broadened its remit considerably, moving beyond a straightforward historical context of composers and their compositions to address in detail the social relationships of composers to their networks, particularly those within the music industry: publishers, agents, promoters and performers. This has been embraced wholeheartedly in the

area of popular music, and has also informed the musicology of notated western art music. The framework of musicological discussion has shifted, embracing approaches from elsewhere in the humanities and the social sciences. This radical approach has been explored in Cook and Everist (1999), from which the quotation from Locke above is taken, an influential collection of essays which will be further discussed. Beard and Gloag (2016), summarizing the concepts of musicology, suggest that the ‘new musicology’ is, by now, the mainstream:

[M]usicology has become more critical and less positivistic, more concerned with interpretations and less with facts. [...] It has also become more interdisciplinary as the boundaries between different types of music are partially erased and the search for new critical models pushes way beyond the limits of traditional musicology (Beard and Gloag, 2016: xv).

For example, the writers of *The Proms: A New History* (2007), including Paul Kildea, Leanne Langley, Jenny Doctor, Alison Garnham and David Wright, were all influenced by the economic historian Cyril Ehrlich, and convened a series of seminars at the Institute of Historical Studies at Senate House, University of London from the late 1990s until 2011. Their approaches embrace social, economic and historical perspectives.

Nonetheless, writing about ‘Discourse’, Beard and Gloag describe, on the one hand, ‘Musical discourses – the way we talk about music’ (Beard and Gloag, 2016: 82) and on the other, discourse within musical works, for example, describing *The Death of Klinghoffer* by John Adams as an opera which ‘actually brings contrasting discourses into conflict’ (Beard and Gloag, 2016: 83). In other words, there are discourses about music, and discourses within music. Although it is not made explicit, here ‘the music’ is still being divided off from ‘stuff happening at the same time’ and to that extent, music is still treated autonomously, and the discourse about music is treated separately from the discourse within music. Susan McClary, looking back in 2002

at her radical collection of essays *Feminine Endings* (1991) and assessing the impact the book had, singled out that it had ‘raised a number of issues other than gender. Firstly, the essays performed cultural interpretations not only of lyrics and dramatic plots but also of the music itself’ (McClary, 2002: x, McClary’s emphasis). The words ‘but also’ are doing the heavy lifting here, and it is significant that most of McClary’s collection of essays do indeed focus on lyrics and plot, rather than ‘the music itself’. Nonetheless, her deconstruction of the gendered language used to write about music, ‘Musical discourses – the way we talk about music’, is magisterial (if this word is appropriate in this context). When McClary does address ‘the music itself’, for example in her detailed and highly perceptive reading of Mozart (McClary, 1986), her approach is to anthropomorphise the music and to tease out a narrative in an otherwise abstract piece; she goes so far as to ask, ‘What is the plot, and what does it imply?’ (McClary, 1986: 156). Her conclusions, about Mozart, and his place within the society in which he lived, and how his music related to that society, are truly revelatory, with the minor cavil that this presents ‘society’ as – as Latour would have it – ‘a stabilized state of affairs. A bundle of ties that, later, may be mobilized to account for some other phenomenon’ (Latour, 2005: 1). The richness and nuance that these approaches bring could be developed further, however, by de-centring the musical work, and seeing it as part of a single discourse, along with those other narrative strands, and seeing music, not as something that reflects, or reacts against, the society in which it is produced, but rather is an active part of the discourse that creates that society.

In building upon these approaches, drawing upon ways of looking at music within its social milieu, and adapting them and implementing them in the construction of a single discourse of music in its milieu, rather than privileging the composer and the work, they should be considered as constituents, albeit vital constituents, in the process of cultural production. Similarly, the music composed should be taken to be one element in the construction of the discourse around the commissioning of new music; again, not privileged, but examined alongside the linguistic

elements: what is written and spoken. This approach already goes well beyond setting the music in its 'social milieu'.

In seeking to identify both the uses and limitations of approaches that inform my study, this section of the chapter focuses, firstly, on three recent, significant histories of twentieth century music, chosen because they all, to a greater or lesser extent, deal with music in its social context. These address the issue of music and its place in society with varying degrees of success and sophistication. However, a more thoroughgoing analysis of the relationships between composers and their networks, particularly if that analysis is framed in a wider theoretical sociological field, produces a greater depth of understanding of the music composed. Secondly, there is a reassessment of the state of musicology in general, *Rethinking Music*, a collection of essays edited by Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (1999), and finally a more detailed analysis of Susan McClary's article 'Terminal Prestige: The Case of Avant-Garde Musical Composition' (1989). This polemic is a model of its type, placing the composition of new music squarely in its social context, although, like many polemics, it takes extreme positions in order to make its point, and sometimes misses its targets as a result.

Many general histories of twentieth century music, for example Arnold Whittall's *Composition in the Twentieth Century* (1999), look at music as an autonomous area of study. Whittall is almost apologetic for letting the outside world impinge:

Even if much of my own text may appear to subscribe to the outmoded heresy of autonomy, treating its chosen compositions in isolation from any contexts other than the particular technical features selected by the author, some hint of the world outside the work will break in from time to time (Whittall, 1999: 2).

Indeed, Whittall is as good as his word, and although he acknowledges, for example, that the First World War prevented Bartók from travelling, so he was unable to go on more folk-music-collecting field trips, and instead concentrated on serious composition (Whittall, 1999: 96), this is only the vaguest hint of the world impinging on a composer.

The three historical studies I have chosen here set out to place music in a broader context. The first is Alex Ross's *The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century* (2009), described on its dust jacket as 'The history of the twentieth century as heard through its music', a phrase which could hardly lay its cards more openly on the table. The second study is *British Musical Modernism: The Manchester Group and their Contemporaries* by Philip Rupprecht (2015). This is narrower in focus and a more scholarly approach to the circle around three composers commissioned several times for the Proms: Peter Maxwell Davies, Harrison Birtwistle, and Alexander Goehr. Rupprecht puts the music and musicians into a social and historical context with considerably more nuance and sophistication. The last study is a more narrowly focused still, historically speaking: *Music After the Fall: Modern Composition and Culture Since 1989* by Tim Rutherford-Johnson (2017). This begins with the fall of the Berlin Wall, and, as his title suggests, looks at the music written since then in terms of wider social, political and cultural context, rather than assuming that Western art music, as Whittall suggested, is autonomous, at one remove from the society that produces and consumes it.

To begin with Alex Ross, who promises much. After looking at his general approach, as described in the introduction to the book, there follows a critique of his chapter on Sibelius, who, despite falling well outside my area of research, is a good case study, with Ross providing a variety of approaches in contextualising this composer. The danger with this approach is that it still privileges music as an autonomous object, and the context ends up being stuff happening at

the same time. In his introduction to *The Rest is Noise*, Ross starts confidently, but soon backpedals:

The Rest is Noise chronicles not only the artists themselves but also the politicians, dictators, millionaire patrons, and CEOs who tried to control what music was written; the intellectuals who attempted to adjudicate style; the writers, painters, dancers and filmmakers who variously reveled in, reviled, or ignored what composers were doing; the technologies that changed how music was made and heard; and the revolutions, hot and cold wars, waves of emigration, and deeper social transformations that reshaped the landscapes in which composers worked [...] What the march of history really has to do with music itself is the subject of sharp debate. In the classical field it has long been fashionable to fence music off from society, to declare it a self-sufficient language. In the hyper-political twentieth century, that barrier crumbles time and again: Béla Bartók writes string quartets inspired by field recordings of Transylvanian folksongs, Shostakovich works on his *Leningrad* Symphony while German guns are firing on the city, John Adams creates an opera starring Richard Nixon and Mao Zedong. Nevertheless, articulating the connection between music and the outer world remains devilishly difficult. Musical meaning is vague, mutable and, in the end, deeply personal. Still, even if history can never tell us what music means, music can tell us something about history. My subtitle is meant literally; this is the twentieth century heard through its music (Ross, 2009: xiii).

This takes some unpicking. It is perhaps surprising that Ross chose the cliché ‘the march of history’, implying a single linear narrative, and even perhaps hinting at that old-fashioned notion of history as the story of kings and battles. This is at a time when historians are much more interested in the multiplicity of experience, and in the stories of the ordinary person, caught up in historical events, and how the details of their everyday experiences can combine to create a discourse of those events. This approach is reflected in more recent musicology, with feminist approaches, for example, challenging the accepted canon, and decolonisation seeking out previously peripheral figures for re-evaluation. Despite the approach taken by Whittall (1999), outlined above, Ross suggesting that it is fashionable to fence off music from society is

something of an Aunt Sally. Some areas of historical musicology still do this, but the briefest glance at great swathes of modern musical scholarship suggest the opposite: Cook and Everist (1999) provide a counter-example later in this chapter, and the multiplicity of approaches they cover implies that many modern musicologists are only too eager to engage with society. In the passage quoted above, Ross picks out three composers and three works (or sets of works) that demonstrably drop the artist into the crucible of political activity. But what about Bartók's works that are not inspired by folk music? What about Shostakovich's non-programmatic Symphonies? What about Adams's abstract orchestral works? Nonetheless he is quite right to suggest the diabolical difficulties of articulating the connections between music and society. These connections are central to this thesis, looking at the networks which link composers, works, performers, commissioners, venues, the broadcast media and audiences, among others. By tracing the detail of those networks, and what was said and done, it is possible to see how the links between society and music can actually be traced in both directions.

Ross holds good to his promise to look at this survey through a variety of lenses, and his chapter on Sibelius, a composer who falls outside my area of study, nonetheless clearly demonstrates his approach. For example, he begins this chapter with some biography of the older, alcoholic composer burning his (probably) unfinished Eighth Symphony (Ross, 2009: 157–158), turns to the novelist Milan Kundera for a view on an 'alternative' Europe of the 'small nations' (Ross, 2009: 159) which he goes on to expand in a musical context, taking in Eastern Europe, Scandinavia, and the UK, drawing together a community of (to some extent) nationalist and (again, to some extent) conservative composers of traditional forms like the symphony, concerto and string quartet. For Ross, Sibelius is the representative for this group of composers, those condescended to by more progressive colleagues and critics. Sibelius is seen as a Finnish cultural icon, his face on banknotes, esteemed alongside Fiskar scissors and Nokia phones (Ross was writing before the spectacular decline in Nokia's fortunes). There is a nod to the investment the

Finnish government makes in music: their spending on the arts is ‘roughly two hundred times per capita what the US government spends on the National Endowment for the Arts’ (Ross, 2009: 161). Sibelius supports Finnish independence, both politically, and through his music, quarrying Finnish folk legends for subjects. There is some musical description, of, for example, the Fourth Symphony ‘music as forbidding as anything from the European continent at the time’ (Ross, 2009: 164). Quite a claim, considering that around the same time Schoenberg was writing the Five Orchestral Pieces, Op. 16 and *Pierrot lunaire*. The last music Sibelius completed was incidental music for *The Tempest*, and Ross takes the opportunity to draw parallels between Sibelius and Prospero. He goes on to explain Sibelius’s tremendous popularity during the 1920s and 30s, especially in the USA. He was voted ‘favourite living symphonist’ by New York Philharmonic audiences (Ross, 2009: 171) and even ‘cropped up as a plot point in Hollywood movies’ (Ross, 2009: 171).⁵ Sibelius was a favourite of the conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra Serge Koussevitsky and the New York Times’s influential music critic Olin Downes (Ross, 2009: 172). Others were less enthusiastic, though, and Sibelius was pitted against Stravinsky by the composer and critic Virgil Thomson, and Theodor Adorno rubbished him (Ross, 2009: 173). Ross tells the story of the non-appearance of the Eighth Symphony in some detail, quoting from correspondence between the composer and the conductor Koussevitsky and contemporary newspaper articles. He also describes the political turn of events that led to Sibelius becoming ‘almost an official German artist’ (Ross, 2009: 175). The chapter ends with a reassessment of the composer. Was he really such a reactionary? Or was he, as Ross suggests, quoting Kundera again, an example of:

‘[A]ntimodern modernism’ [with] a personal style that stands outside the status quo of perpetual progress [...] New-music luminaries such as Brian Ferneyhough, Wolfgang

⁵ One movie, actually, the 1944 thriller *Laura*.

Rihm, Tristan Murail, Gérard Grisey, Per Nørgård, Peter Maxwell Davies, John Adams and Thomas Adès all cited him as a model (Ross, 2009: 176–177).

Even Morton Feldman, the avant-garde American composer, praised him in a 1984 lecture at that shrine to European modernism, the Summer Courses for New Music in Darmstadt. In his coverage of this one composer, Ross manages to include biography, politics, musical and social context, some musical description, cross-arts influences, contemporary critical response and something on Sibelius's legacy, all in 20 pages. This admirable breadth is let down principally by Ross's attempts to tie Sibelius's music to large-scale historical and political events, and to take the easy option of using music with an extra-musical element to make sometimes tenuous connections. Inevitably, Ross's is a somewhat superficial reading: he musters many different, sometimes opposing, opinions on Sibelius, but does not stop to consider why these commentators diverged, or agreed. Rather than constructing a cogent discourse from his various sources, Ross is content to let them speak for themselves, and not to interrogate their motives for speaking and writing as they did.

Given Ross's express intention to investigate the 'millionaire patrons [...] who tried to control what music was written' (Ross, 2009: xii), he mentions neither Paul Fromm, a leading philanthropist in the USA during the twentieth century, whose work and influence as a musical patron has been examined by Rachel S. Vandergriff (2017); nor Paul Sacher, the Swiss conductor and patron, the subject of a biography by Lesley Stephenson (2002). Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, who commissioned dozens of chamber music works in the first half of the twentieth century, is also absent. Ross does retell the story of Alice Tully commissioning Olivier Messiaen to write *Des canyons aux étoiles* in 1970, in commemoration of the American bicentennial (Ross, 2009: 454), which Messiaen told to Claude Samuel, who published it in *Music and Color* (Messiaen and Samuel, 1994: 160–161). Oddly, Ross quotes Messiaen, without attributing the quotation or the

source, as saying he was persuaded to accept the commission by ‘a sumptuous repast capped with “an immense cake crowned with pistachio frogs spewing *crème Chantilly*”’ (Ross, 2009: 454). In Ross’s musical description of the work only the natural landscape, birds and stars feature, with some reference to theology (Ross, 2009: 457–458). How disappointing that the full network around the commission and inspiration of Messiaen’s masterpiece was overlooked. In fact, Messiaen was persuaded by a story told at the dinner by Alice Tully, who had accepted an invitation from a maharajah to visit India, solely to shake the paw of a lion. Face to face with the lion, the maharajah and all his court fled, but she was good as her word, and shook the lion’s paw; ‘That lion was her friend’ (Messiaen and Samuel, 1994: 160). Messiaen was reminded of the tale of Androcles and was so moved by the story that he accepted the commission. Ross goes on to suggest that Messiaen accepted the commission on the condition that ‘that he could write in praise of the mountainous landscapes of the American West rather than the cities of the East’ (Ross, 2009: 454). According to Messiaen’s own account, he only began to look for suitable subject matter after accepting the commission, when he found images of Bryce Canyon in an art book. This was somewhere Messiaen could identify with, a very different America to ‘those skyscrapers I cannot stand!’ (Messiaen and Samuel, 1994: 161). Messiaen and his pianist wife, Yvonne Loriod, headed for Utah and Bryce Canyon, spending a week walking in the canyon, listening to, recording and notating the birdsong, taking in the smell of the sagebrush and gazing at the stars, as well as the geological beauty of the scenery. They also visited two other canyons, Cedar Breaks and Zion Park, the latter named by the Mormons for the celestial Jerusalem. This was the last piece of the jigsaw for Messiaen, who wanted to create something ‘at once geological, ornithological, astronomical and theological’ (Messiaen and Samuel, 1994: 163). Messiaen also explained the unusual instrumentation of the piece to Samuel, with its ‘full complement of woodwinds and brass, to which I added a solo piano, solo horn, glockenspiel, xyloimba and very substantial percussion [...] but I reduced the string ensemble [...] [to] six violins, three violas, three cellos and a single double bass’ (Messiaen and Samuel, 1994: 160–161).

This was because the first performance was to take place in the modestly-sized Alice Tully Hall, part of the Lincoln Center complex. Quite apart from the partial and garbled account of the commission, Ross makes no attempt to discern what ‘control’ Alice Tully might have exerted over the music Messiaen wrote, how her story about the lion might have influenced him, not even that the size of the venue of the first performance was a significant factor in the orchestration Messiaen used. The reluctance to relate the circumstances of the commission to the art object is a serious omission in Ross’s study, and one which this study of the commissioning process addresses.

For all its scope and ambition, Ross’s book, while giving a useful overview of 20th century music, and, as he intended, putting it into some social and political context, falls short in some ways. It would be unfair to criticize Ross’s omissions and generalisations – the book is already well over 600 pages long – but his failure to analyse those myriad sources he corrals is disappointing; no real synthesis emerges, only a scattergun array of observations. His stated aim, to see whether ‘music can tell us something about history’, is only to some extent achieved, in that his musicology is often sketchy, his history is often partial, and his analysis of both – the sociology that might have been hoped for – is almost entirely lacking. His contexts for the music are rather like holding up a succession of swatches of curtain material, to see what colour will go with your wallpaper: he fails to establish any real relationship between the music and everything else. This is the result of treating the music as autonomous; unlike Whittall, Ross wants the music to take its place in the world, but until he de-centres the composer and the music, the music and its context will continue to run along parallel tram lines, destined never to meet. Nonetheless, Ross demonstrates that it is possible for music and society to illuminate one another to some extent, and by looking at a much more circumscribed subject in far greater depth, and with greater analytical focus, this research endeavours to progress this approach.

An example of an attempt to interrogate the relationships between composer and the network of the music industry that surrounds them is a more specialised, and indeed more scholarly, survey by Rupprecht (2015). This takes as its subject *British Musical Modernism: The Manchester Group and their Contemporaries*. The central figures, then, are Peter Maxwell Davies, Harrison Birtwistle and Alexander Goehr who all studied at Manchester University or the Royal Manchester College of Music (from 1972 the Royal Northern College of Music) in the 1950s. Rupprecht's study merges historical musicology with musical analysis and some social comment, and his toolkit includes the theories of Pierre Bourdieu, the sociologist, anthropologist, philosopher and historian. The question Rupprecht poses in his introduction is 'How is this group of progressive musicians – "modernest moderns," a bona fide avant-garde – representative of a national tradition?' (Rupprecht, 2015: 11). He paints a picture of the social milieu in which these young men found themselves, bringing in the prevailing musical establishment of Britten and Tippett, the Cold War, the nuclear threat and Suez, quoting sources as wide-ranging as novelist and journalist Colin MacInnes and cultural commentator Robert Hewison, as well as poets Al Alvarez and Philip Larkin (Rupprecht, 2015: 21–22). Rupprecht includes an extended section on 'The state as patron: BBC music culture' (Rupprecht, 2015: 94–109). This is an example of the permeability of categories in this review of the literature. Although Rupprecht would no doubt label his work as 'musicology', here he is writing about radio. While this might not qualify as 'radio studies' as such, nonetheless it is an investigation of the importance of broadcasting and the BBC to the composers who are the subjects of Rupprecht's work. The use of the word 'patron' is interesting here, and this word will continue to crop up throughout this study. More intriguing is Rupprecht's equating the BBC with the state, given that, whatever some commentators might believe to be a too-close relationship between the BBC and the government, it is, nevertheless, technically an independent corporation, funded not by the state, but by the licence fee, and overseen by a Board of Governors. While appointments to this Board are often accused of political bias, they are – at least in theory – independent.

Rupprecht makes one of the very few mentions in a musicological work of Pierre Bourdieu and his field of cultural production:⁶

If the field of cultural production is imagined as a struggle between popular art commanding market value and wide audiences, and an avant-garde consecrated by its aesthetic autonomy, Glock's arrival [at the BBC] shifted emphasis towards the latter (Rupprecht, 2015: 98).

Bourdieu does not present cultural production as a struggle between different fields; rather he is concerned about where artists sit within these fields, whether movement is possible, how young artists find their way into one field or another, and who decides where they end up. Because Bourdieu is writing principally about literature, he is able to make a distinction between popular and serious fiction, which is, in some ways, less distinct than popular and classical music. This is not the place to rehearse the differences between commercial music and art music, but in BBC terms this distinction would have been between the Light Programme and the Third Programme (from 1967 Radios 1, 2 and 3). Rupprecht goes on:

Precisely because the BBC was publicly funded, Glock, much like a gallery director in the private market, could allow a British musical avant-garde economic survival, despite the conscious indifference to economic success or popular appeal of its practitioners. The avant-garde's self-authenticating concern for a 'charismatic' break with commerce – through what Pierre Bourdieu calls an 'interest in disinterestedness' – was never far removed, at Glock's BBC, from finances gathered by a national tax, yet distributed through an organisation capable of dispensing rewards to a cultural élite, much like an aristocratic patron (Rupprecht, 2015: 98).

⁶ For an overview of Bourdieu's theory of fields of cultural production, see Thomson (2014).

Rupprecht acknowledges the economics of musical production, and recognises the difference between commercial, popular success on the one hand, and the consecration (Bourdieu's word) of the creative artist by their peers. It is odd that Rupprecht likens Glock to 'a gallery director in the private market', when he is talking about publicly funded, subsidised art. A gallery director in these circumstances is operating in the commercial market place, and must turn a profit. Similarly, although the comparison to an aristocratic patron is well made, once again, the difference is between private and public money. Moreover, the BBC is not supported through a 'national tax', but through the licence fee, a small but significant distinction. The government directly controls tax spending, but not the independently-collected license fee. How the government might be thought to control the spending of the licence fee through indirect means is beyond the scope of this research. What Rupprecht chooses to ignore is the ambiguity of the BBC's position regarding public events, like the Proms. These are subsidised by the licence fee, but still have to wash their faces, economically speaking, through ticket sales. Glock was very much aware of the significance of the paying audience in the hall: in fact in his introductory essays to the Proms prospectuses, he only acknowledges the radio audience for the Proms after some years in the job.

Rupprecht does acknowledge the ambiguity of the BBC's position towards commercial music and art music, and the strain between high and popular culture at the Corporation and the need to justify the licence fee through large audiences, while also maintaining high artistic standards:

There was an underlying tension, throughout these years, between the BBC's role of educator or patron, and that of purveyor of widely popular entertainment. The vision, going back to the Corporation's early days under Reith, of a "unifying Voice of the Nation", often conflicted with the realities of fragmented taste cultures and familiar opposition between commercially successful genres – light and dance music in the

Fifties, rock in the Sixties – and an avant-garde with narrower appeal (Rupprecht, 2015: 98).

This summary of the ‘underlying tension’ is so compressed as to be misleading. There was a tension between popular and classical (highbrow) music, for sure: see Doctor (1999), for example, who pursues the arguments within Music Department in the early years of the BBC between these genres, and whether listeners could be led from the lower to the higher. Doctor also discusses the tension between classical music and the avant-garde in much more nuanced terms, and especially the part Edward Clark played during the 1930s. In this the BBC is certainly assuming the role of ‘educator’, but not of ‘patron’, a completely different function.

Although he does little to follow up on them, Rupprecht highlights the importance of the BBC in not only broadcasting new music, but commissioning it as well:

Two areas in particular – commissioning and programming – command interest. And the BBC’s influence on the nation is still more evident if one obvious fact is recalled – the sheer size of radio’s invisible audience (Rupprecht, 2015: 99).

This also begs the question over the extent to which the BBC mediates the music to the audience. The assumption here is that, on the one hand, a radio audience and a concert audience are interchangeable, and on the other, that the function of the broadcast is a completely transparent, non-interventionist process. As Scannell (1996) pointed out in relation to the BBC’s broadcast of the Coronation in 1953, this is not the case. A listener in the hall is a completely different animal from a radio listener: one has paid for a concert ticket, whereas the BBC licence fee is not attached in the listener’s mind to an individual event or concert. The listener in the hall is captive, sitting quietly and without distraction, surrounded by a community of people engaged in the same activity, whereas the radio listener can switch off, might well be doing something

else, like the ironing or the washing up or driving, and is likely to be listening alone and surrounded by all the distractions of domestic life.

Rupprecht goes on to discuss the change in commissioning policy that Glock's arrival at the BBC presaged:

By the later Sixties, BBC commissions for new music outnumber those available from any other organization: the Corporation typically offered four or five new orchestral works annually at the Proms, another at Cheltenham, and three chamber works at Invitation Concerts, besides opportunities with its regional orchestras and television assignments. Still, Glock's generosity towards the younger figures he knew from Dartington and the ICA did not eclipse support for established composers, including those working in more traditional idioms – Arnold, Rawsthorne and Anthony Milner all received BBC commissions in the Sixties. A glance at the record, though, confirms Glock's embrace of more avant-garde styles, and personal friends were rewarded amply: Lutyens was premiered by the BBC Symphony Orchestra six times in the next decade, four of these to commission; Priaux Rainier was heard twice (Rupprecht, 2015: 100).

This can be unpicked further. Rupprecht's 'television assignments' are, presumably, composing theme tunes and background music for TV programmes, a very different undertaking from a Prom commission. Rupprecht is quite right to point out that although Glock was keen to give opportunities to the younger modernists, he continued to commission work from more conservative composers (see Wright, 2008). It would be possible to look more closely at the personal friendships that were 'rewarded amply'. Glock presumably commissioned Lutyens because he admired her music, and it is possible that he was friendly with her for the same reason. Nonetheless, the accusation of cronyism cannot be discounted, and certainly Glock and his wife saw a good deal of Lutyens socially (and her husband Edward Clark, until his death in 1962). The complex relationship between Lutyens and the BBC will be explored in greater depth in Chapter Nine. Oddly, Rupprecht does not observe that Lutyens and Rainier were both

women, and that Glock had a better track record of commissioning and encouraging women composers than any of his successors, let alone his predecessors. Rupprecht goes on to discuss financial matters, explaining that although BBC commissioning fees were modest, nonetheless they carried considerable prestige, and often led on to better-paid opportunities abroad. Why a BBC commission was particularly prestigious, and why other organisations took it as a badge of honour is not explored.

Overall, Rupprecht presents a more scholarly, better-nuanced and more thoroughly researched study of his subject. His chapter on the BBC examines the impact Glock's arrival had on classical music. This is not his primary subject, though, and inevitably his examination of the relationship between composers and the Corporation is only partial. There is a great deal more to say about the way the BBC commissioned music than Rupprecht has the space to cover here; in particular the affiliations between BBC executives, composers, publishers and agents, as well as between the composers themselves. Despite Rupprecht's somewhat individual interpretation of Bourdieu's field of cultural production, this theoretical underpinning does add some authority to his arguments. A more thoroughgoing and detailed reading of Bourdieu in this context would yield even more compelling – and, possibly, provocative – results. Studies of cultural work by, for example, Banks (2007) could fruitfully be applied here. The economics of the BBC's cultural support is also largely skated over, and an examination of the policies behind the allocation of funds to commissioning of serious music, as well as its impact on individual composers, would cast a light on the BBC's role in this area. Rupprecht is a step closer to opening the door on the BBC and music commissioning here, but his superficial reading of Bourdieu, his misinterpretation of the funding mechanism of the BBC, along with his unwillingness to question widely-held opinions on Glock, the Proms, and the BBC through closer examination of the primary material, inhibits his success. A more thoroughgoing application of theoretical frameworks such as those of Bourdieu, along with some other influential thinkers (more will

follow in the chapter on methodology), a better understanding of the BBC and its workings, and, in particular, a closer interrogation of the primary sources bring us much closer to understanding how music was commissioned for the Proms. The more focused object of study in this thesis allows this, whereas Rupprecht's more wide-ranging study cannot be expected to go into such detail, or with such rigour.

In expanding the theoretical framework, and especially in digging deeper into the primary materials, the researcher runs the risk of becoming part of the discourse, either through their own prejudices skewing their interpretation, or by privileging certain material above others. There is also a danger in ignoring, or being unaware of crucial primary sources. This is the case in the more narrowly focused approach, historically speaking, of *Music After the Fall: Modern Composition and Culture Since 1989* by Tim Rutherford-Johnson (2017). The author takes as his starting point the fall of the Berlin Wall, and, as his title suggests, looks at the music written since then in terms of wider culture. This is an attempt – not explicitly stated – to embrace the approach found in the sociology of science, and the work of Bruno Latour in *Reassembling the Social: an Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (2005) and John Law in *After Method: mess in social science research* (2004). Rutherford-Johnson writes that this is not 'an attempt to establish a canon of the "best" works composed since that date' and his approach is based 'not on chains of influence and accumulations of prestige but on responses to questions from outside of the world of musical exchange value' (Rutherford-Johnson, 2017: 23), which seems to suggest that he is trying to position the music in a wider social, political and cultural context, rather than the more common belief that Western art music (Rutherford-Johnson is careful to limit himself to discussion of this music) is somehow autonomous, at one remove from the society that produces and consumes it. Unfortunately, he rather undermines this ambition by telling us that composers and performers 'talk to one another, they have respect for each other's work, they attend each other's concerts, they discuss professional and aesthetic matters, and they disagree' and he is

aiming to ‘better capture the reality of the contemporary music ecosystem’ (Rutherford-Johnson, 2017: 21). This would seem to limit him to the interactions between musicians, apparently discounting publishers, record companies and promoters. Ian Pace comments on this shortcoming in his review of the book:

There are many such ‘ecosystems’, depending upon location and social milieu; Rutherford-Johnson presents those which he himself frequents as if they encompass a totality. He evades questions of inclusion within his own: how many people involved with this ecosystem do not have some professional involvement, or aspirations thereof, with new music? Who has the wherewithal to network with such people, or the time (or the location)? (Pace, 2017: 102).

This is very much the argument in Latour (2005) who is at pains to ensure that every network is accounted for, and none is a construct of the observer rather than the participants. Law (2004), observes that the meaning of, for example, a clinical condition means very different things to different people in different situations. Nonetheless, in the encouragingly-titled chapter ‘Mediation and the Marketplace’, Rutherford-Johnson does demonstrate some sophistication in his handling of the ‘contemporary music ecosystem’, discussing John Tavener’s work *The Protecting Veil* (Rutherford-Johnson, 2017: 29–30). He examines this work in the context of Henryck Górecki’s Third Symphony, the recording of which was a huge commercial success in the UK during the early 1990s, selling enough copies to find its way into the UK pop album charts. Rutherford-Johnson tells the story of the Tavener commission, at the request of the cellist Steven Isserlis, by the BBC, and its rapturous reception at the 1989 Proms. He explains that Tavener had already received media interest that year, with a TV documentary on Channel 4. He quotes the composer Steve Martland as saying it was ‘one of the most unbelievably beautiful and moving pieces I have ever heard’ in a preview programme broadcast on BBC Radio 3, and paraphrases *The Observer*’s music critic, Nicholas Kenyon, who declared the work to

be one of the ‘masterpiece[s] of contemporary religious music to sit alongside the Górecki, Olivier Messiaen’s opera *Saint François d’Assise* (1983), and Arvo Pärt’s *St. John Passion* (1982)’ (Rutherford-Johnson, 2017: 30). So, as well as the composer himself, Rutherford-Johnson corrals a performer, Isserlis, the BBC, the Proms, Channel 4, Martland and Kenyon, who collectively consecrate Tavener’s work. This discussion of Tavener forms just a part of a wider examination of what Rutherford-Johnson calls ‘Spiritual Minimalism’, so it is hardly surprising that all these figures are only mentioned in passing, and that their roles in the creation, mediation or legacy of *The Protecting Veil* are not investigated in any detail. Given that the popular success of Górecki’s Symphony was in large part driven by a commercial CD (Górecki, 1992), it might have been worth mentioning that the Tavener work was recorded by Isserlis for Virgin Classics and released in 1992 (Tavener, 1992), and at the time of writing (2021) has received at least nine subsequent commercial recordings.

Where Rutherford-Johnson falls down is where he has only partial sources. For example, later in the same chapter he discusses Benedict Mason’s *Meld*, commissioned by the BBC for the Proms. He explains that:

[H]is primary strategy is the use of site-specificity [...] The building itself becomes a performer in the work, with doors, layout, and so on all being brought into use. In *Meld*, written for the 2014 Proms, the circular galleries of the Royal Albert Hall, its arena, the organ, and the aisles between seats were all brought into the work’s conception, with musicians appearing and parading between the different locations throughout the piece (Rutherford-Johnson, 2017: 44).

Several newspaper reports on *Meld* say that the work was ‘three years in the planning’ which, given the ubiquity of the phrase, or cliché, would quite likely come from a BBC press release. What is not said, is that Mason wrote the piece for the BBC Symphony Orchestra for the 2011

Proms, but when he delivered the score, it was immediately apparent that the work was unperformable under normal conditions: the complexity of the choreography of the peripatetic players, plus the necessity of them to memorize the entire 40-minute score, made a 2011 first performance impossible.⁷ So the work was not, as Rutherford-Johnson says ‘written for the 2014 Proms’, and it was not ‘three years in the planning’. It was delivered for the 2011 Proms, found to be beyond the capabilities of the normal performing groups available, put on ice, and only given its first performance thanks to a radical young ensemble, the Aurora Orchestra, being prepared to take on the task. That the BBC Symphony Orchestra was unable to do it in 2011 is hardly surprisingly, given their intense workload during the Proms season. This is a clear, if rare, example of the BBC and the composer failing to communicate over the practicalities of performing a new work, but Rutherford-Johnson’s account is partial at best and misleading at worst.⁸

Rutherford-Johnson makes the case for looking at music through the social and political events that surround, or even perhaps generate, it, and despite shortcomings, not least the observation by Pace (2017) that the author fails to locate his own position in the narrative, this approach at least avoids the accusation that Western classical music can be seen as something which somehow stands apart from society. A more considered approach to the networks Rutherford-Johnson identifies, using Actor-Network Theory as defined by Latour (2005) and Law (2004) would yield a richer and more nuanced account, which could go further in identifying the relationships between the composer and their networks, the power wielded and the effect this might have on the art produced.

⁷ Personal communication, anonymous source, 2018

⁸ Isabelle Dedieu made a film of the first performance of *Meld* for BBC Space, using multiple cameras around the hall, as well as GoPro cameras worn by members of the orchestra. The video was for a period available online at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0580cb7> and an article by Mason is online at Guardian 23 June 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/jun/30/benedict-mason-on-meld-viewing-my-work-through-different-eyes> (Mason, 2016)

Each of the three recent works of musicology surveyed attempts to put music into some sort of social context. It has emerged that despite best efforts, and a sometimes-explicit ambition to avoid it, all these approaches still fall into the trap of seeing music as an autonomous subject, an aesthetic object that exists independently of the social and political events that are taking place around it. By building upon these more sophisticated and socially-oriented approaches, it is possible to go further yet. By de-centring the composer, and considering the constantly-evolving series of relationships around them, the context of the composer and the music can be even better understood. In order to achieve this, the wider range of approaches developed in the ‘new musicology’ are required, along with the determination to construct a single discourse around the commissioning of music, rather than a dual discourse of – on the one hand – what is spoken and written about the music, and – on the other – the music itself. A more sophisticated theoretical framework needs to be constructed, developing the approaches of the ‘new musicology’, and in particular treating the art object as one element in developing the overall discourse. Moreover, the framework must be developed from a close examination of the primary material, rather than applied to it from a pre-conceived theoretical standpoint. When this is done, then the music can take its place as a vital, but not privileged, part of the network, or ‘the rest of the universe’.

Rethinking Music, a collection of essays edited by Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (1999), is at once a response to Joseph Kerman’s influential study *Musicology* (1985, published in the USA as *Contemplating Music*), and at the same time a reassessment of the State of the Nation, in the light of ‘widespread loss of confidence’ (Cook and Everist, 1999: v) in the discipline. The problem, as they see it, is ‘the relationship between musicology and the rest of the universe’ (Cook and Everist, 1999: vii). ‘New Musicology’, as they call it, is, in their words, ‘a “musicology of the provisional”’ (Cook and Everist, 1999: x), taking into account a range of views, sources and interpretations. This was hugely influential, encouraging musicologists to embrace a range of

disciplines from outside traditional approaches, and the expansion of musicology to embrace methods from economics, literary theory, the social sciences, feminist theory, semiotics, anthropology and so on.

In the chapter from *Rethinking Music* by Locke, quoted at the beginning of this section, he cites some ‘musicological work rich in critical awareness and insight’ (Locke, 1999: 500), which includes Susan McClary’s article ‘Terminal Prestige: The Case of Avant-Garde Musical Composition’ (1989). McClary’s polemic is fundamentally an attack on difficult university-based composers and their glorification of complex music that is unable to find an audience. On the way it takes on the alleged refusal of these composers to address anything other than the abstract analytical aspect of their work; the opposition of serious art music to popular, commercial music (or even postmodern, tonal music); and the implied or explicit misogyny of this position. McClary raises some pertinent points. Firstly, she reinvents Bourdieu’s field of cultural production, calling it the ‘academic prestige market’:

Perhaps only with the twentieth-century avant-garde, however, has there been a music that has sought to secure prestige precisely by claiming to renounce all possible social functions and values, just as Wagner's Alberich renounced human love in exchange for the Rheingold. [...] This strange posture was not invented in the twentieth century, of course. It is but the *reductio ad absurdum* of the nineteenth-century notion that music ought to be an autonomous activity, insulated from the contamination of the outside social world [...] Pierre Boulez, for instance, in defending the integrity of avant-garde music against the option of pluralism, states: ‘The economy is there to remind us, in case we get lost in this bland utopia: there are musics which bring in money and exist for commercial profit; there are musics that cost something whose concept has nothing to do with profit. No liberalism will erase this distinction’ (McClary, 1989: 60–61).

Rather than consider who it is that confers the prestige, who appoints to these positions of power, whose taste they are arbitrating and why, or indeed why leaders among these arbiters of

taste happily admit to their position, McClary prefers to take these figures as self-evidently wrong and misguided. Like Bourdieu, she takes a very black-and-white position: commercial success can be measured exclusively in term of units sold, and the 'academic prestige market' is entirely at the whim of those who bestow this prestige. In fact, there are crossovers here: as Keith Negus (2002) suggests, even commercial record companies deal in cultural capital, and value artists and recordings in ways that put greater value on their reputation, over and above units sold. In the same way, even Bourdieu's Symbolist poets have to live, and need to sell enough copies to turn a profit (Bourdieu, 1993a: 39). McClary continues:

In many ways, however, the academic prestige market is even less stable than the commercial market. Within the commercial market, it is at least clear that (for whatever reasons) a certain number of concert tickets or recordings have been sold. A popular artist may go from adulation to obscurity overnight, but some measure of that short-term fame will have been evident. By contrast, the claim that one's music is valuable precisely because of its autonomy from social function is itself precariously dependent on particular social definitions of prestige (McClary, 1989: 63).

It is these 'particular social definitions of prestige' which this research examines. Prestige, and how and why it is bestowed, and by whom, is obscure, perhaps deliberately so, but its mystery is part of its power, and unpicking the networks that confer prestige clarifies how and why certain composers are consecrated (Bourdieu's word) and others are not. McClary goes on to criticise American university music departments for failing to discuss pop music (she was writing this in 1989, and there is no doubt that much has changed in this regard over the last 30 years):

American popular music, when taught at all in music departments, is usually presented as part of 'ethnomusicology' – the culture of the 'primitive', the ethnic 'Other': a clear indication of the economy of prestige at work. More often such popular music is left for American Studies or sociology departments to deal with on the grounds that it really isn't music at all (McClary, 1989: 67).

One thing that has changed relatively little in those intervening years is the reluctance of musicologists to apply the methodologies of ethnomusicologists to Western classical music, and it seems odd that McClary does not suggest that the ethnological approach could work just as well for Babbitt as for Babylonian harp music. Instead McClary berates the university cabal for keeping this myth of non-commercial music alive:

For everything rests on some community continuing to think that this audienceless music is prestigious: otherwise, prestige simply evaporates. It begins to feel a bit like the make-believe worlds of *The Glass Menagerie* or *The Wizard of Oz*, in which enormous amounts of energy are poured into keeping a fantasy of denial alive (McClary, 1989: 68).

The question being: who bestows the prestige? Perhaps this is the place to take a step back, and examine the networks surrounding the creative artists. Who has the power and the money? How do they prioritise one composer over another? To whom are they accountable for their decisions? Finally, McClary tackles the question of economics, drawing a distinction between a rock hit of the 1980s and the privileged ivory tower composer she wishes to denigrate:

To begin, let us address forthrightly the issue of money: yes, the recording⁹ is commercial. I bought it at a store, as did some hundred-thousands of others. Yes, it aimed to be, and succeeded in being, a popular hit: for those traditionally excluded from the marketplace, the achievement of a commercial hit accrues extraordinary prestige (though valuing commercial success is not the same, as Boulez suggests, as producing music solely for profit – only someone in very comfortable conditions could thus disparage economic gain). Without question, the song is multiply mediated through musical discursive practices, electronic technology, marketing decisions, and the recording industry's distribution patterns: no more than any other piece of music is it the pure representation of authentic experience (McClary, 1989: 77).

⁹ of Earth Wind and Fire, *System of Survival*

Rather like the question of using an ethnographical approach to Western classical music, it would appear that it might be beneficial to look at the economics of the world of contemporary classical music. This is a big subject: who gets the money, why, what does this mean, is it a self-fulfilling prophecy, does buying time for composers mean that they are then in the position to receive more commissions, grants and so on?

McClary's article, the oldest text under consideration here, is also the most radical and the most useful. Since writing this article McClary, while continuing to argue that traditional musicology is flawed in assuming that music exists somehow outside the society that created it, has pursued avenues other than that in her article examined above, leading the musicological field in feminist theory and music, especially in the ground-breaking *Feminine Endings* (1991), and becoming involved in the early excursions of musicology into queer studies. Nonetheless, there is something of the baby and the bathwater in McClary's polemic. The only music she refers to specifically is the album by Earth, Wind and Fire, and although she locates it in 'musical discursive practices, electronic technology, marketing decisions, and the recording industry's distribution patterns', there is no discussion of the music and what it might mean to the members of the band who wrote and performed it, its producer, the engineers who recorded and edited it, the designer of the record's sleeve, the assistant in the record shop who sold it, the fan who bought it – or the music analyst dissecting it in his ivory tower.

All the studies reviewed in this chapter acknowledge that music is not an island, entire of itself, and all grapple with the problem of how to contextualise music, with greater or lesser success, in the politics and society of its time. It is possible to extend this line of enquiry, building on their considerable achievements, incorporating many of the elements of media and cultural studies

with musicology in order to better understand both music and cultural production; in this context, the music commissioned for the Proms, and the Proms and the BBC themselves.

The next section of this literature review is an examination of some of the texts from the area of studies that focus on radio which illuminate the BBC as an institution, the part that music – especially new music – played in it, and how that institution might relate to a composer commissioned to write for it.

Chapter Two: Literature Review 2, Writing about radio

Studies of the BBC (and other large institutions) fall into two broad categories: top down analyses, that treat the working of the BBC as a reflection of those who lead the organisation; and bottom-up approaches, examining the programme makers, their relationships, and how their individual contributions affected the big picture. The former might be caricatured as the Great Man approach of kings and battles; the second is a more modern historical trend for examining the minutiae of the everyday. This thesis makes the case for the latter approach, because the BBC is for the most part driven by the autonomous activity of a large number of creative individuals, often acting in opposition to the policy of their superiors. Furthermore, it is not possible to study the BBC without examining its outcomes, the programmes themselves, or, in the case of commissioning music, the music that was produced.

This chapter engages with the literature on and around the field of studies which focus on radio, taking in, firstly, the major historical approaches to the BBC as a broadcasting institution, by Asa Briggs and Jean Seaton; secondly, three studies of the BBC, each taking a different methodological approach, by Jennifer Doctor, David Hendy and Georgina Born; and a discussion of Born's study of another large musical institution, IRCAM (Institute for Research and Coordination in Acoustics/Music). Each of these studies delves more deeply into the workings of the BBC, with Briggs's magisterial survey, a historian of the media, contrasting with Hendy, a media historian, Born, a musicologist who also describes herself as an anthropologist of the BBC, and Doctor, another scholar working within the broad discipline of musicology, but who uses the previously neglected area of BBC radio to construct the social history of music. It must be acknowledged that Briggs's history was written before the formulation of radio studies as a field of academic study in the mid- to late-1990s, and was only adopted as part of the radio studies literature retrospectively.

There is very little in the radio studies literature devoted exclusively to classical music, or on the Third Programme and BBC Radio 3. An exception is Tony Stoller's 2018 monograph *Classical Music Radio in the United Kingdom, 1945–1995*, based on his PhD thesis. There is virtually nothing on programme making here, let alone the creation of new music, which is not the concern of Stoller's thesis, which he describes as a:

[N]arrative account of the history of classical music radio in the UK between 1945 and 1995, from before the launch of the Third Programme until after the launch of Classic FM [...] rebutting the conventional assumption that this aspect of British radio was simply about the Third Programme and Radio 3 [...] and is dominated by the dialectic between highbrow and popular culture, between elite and demotic taste, and between a class-based and a classless approach to radio broadcasting (Stoller, 2015: 3).

This history is a useful antidote to the widespread belief that classical music radio in the UK has been the exclusive preserve of the BBC, and the Third programme and Radio 3. It is concerned in a large part with the regulatory framework which necessitated, for example, the provision of classical music on independent local radio in the 1970s, and where Stoller delves into programming, he tends to concentrate on statistical analysis of music broadcast.

There is a good deal to be learned about the workings of the BBC's Music Department through the secondary literature of radio studies, even in the few paragraphs devoted to it in the last of the five volumes of the official history of the BBC, by Asa Briggs, *Competition* (1995), which covers the period in question. Briggs is concerned with the Great Men of the BBC (and they were almost exclusively men), high-level policy decisions, personnel changes at the top of the organisation, at Board and Departmental level, questions of funding, and – in particular – the relationship of the BBC to government. Briggs saw everything that happened at the BBC as a

reflection or manifestation of the Director General of the time, Hugh Greene, and he was also concerned primarily with television, radio taking a back seat. Reading Briggs it would be possible to miss that the BBC was in the business of making television and radio programmes, let alone how it went about this task. This approach feeds off, and in turn feeds into, the notion that ‘the BBC’ is a monolithic organisation, single-minded in its working, and run, top down, through a series of policy documents enacted by a compliant staff. This is the image projected by the mainstream media in the UK, which sees the BBC primarily as a news organisation, conveniently forgetting comedy, drama, art, children’s programmes, and music. Briggs’s title for this period in the BBC’s history is ‘Competition’, and his approach is explicit when he writes that:

Of all BBC departments, the one which was least influenced by competition was Music. The selection and presentation of music reflected not what ‘the competitor’ was doing, but what were the tastes and tendencies within the BBC itself and within the musical world of which it had become an important part. Serious music was given a high priority, small though audiences were in terms of percentages of the population, and while sound was obviously the major medium in music, serious attempts were made to give televised music an accepted place on the screen (Briggs, 1995: 227).

The implication here is that because there was no competition from the commercial TV channels in the arena of ‘serious music’, the Music Department could be left to its own devices: it remained an area of relative autonomy in the BBC, able to follow its own ‘tastes and tendencies’. Even here, Briggs implies that the BBC Music Department itself had taste, rather than the individuals working within it. Briggs’s televisual bias is also revealed. Briggs hits on another important theme, when he writes that the Music Department was an important part of the wider musical world: as Briggs later relates, when Glock arrived at the BBC in 1959 he appointed a group of young producers, Hans Keller, Stephen Plaistow, David Drew, Alexander Goehr and Leo Black, all already active in the music scene, as composers, critics or publishers. In this way the BBC absorbed the influences of these external organisations. Some of Glock’s new

appointments (Keller, Plaistow and Black) remained at the BBC, becoming BBC lifers. As such, they made programmes, joined committees, organised auditions and reading panels, and generally influenced the warp and weft of the Music Department. On the other hand, Drew and Goehr both left, Drew to join the publisher Boosey and Hawkes, and Goehr to work as a composer and in academia. Drew, who was active as journalist, edited the influential new music magazine *Tempo*, and became Head of New Music at Boosey and Hawkes; he also organised, on behalf of the Gulbenkian Foundation, an important series of commercial recordings of new music, issued by EMI. Goehr eventually became Professor of Music at Cambridge University, where a list of his students reads like a *Who's Who* of British composers. In this way Drew and Goehr, having absorbed something of the culture of the BBC, took their experience at the BBC's Music Department with them into other important areas of British musical life, and through their work outside did a great deal for BBC music: in Drew's case, in reviewing so much of the new music that the BBC produced; and in Goehr's, providing generations of composers for the BBC to commission, and, indeed, many more members of the BBC's Music Department. When Briggs writes in more detail about the appointment of Glock, and his appointment of those young producers (he omits Plaistow, for some reason), he attributes Glock's decision as reflecting the wishes of the Director General of the BBC, Hugh Greene, and also relates it to TV:

Most important of all, he [Glock] succeeded in bringing new men into the BBC's Music Division, many of them young men of the kind that Greene wished to recruit for BBC Television [...] Glock wanted to give them as free a hand as possible (Briggs, 1995: 232).

This demonstrates the shortcomings of Briggs's approach. Glock surely appointed the best people (all men, it seems) he could find, already respected in their own right; it seems unlikely that it would have crossed his mind that they were a type, somehow validated by Greene and TV (a medium in which Glock never showed the slightest interest).

When Briggs does engage with particular programmes, as he does when he writes about the beginnings of *Dr Who* (Briggs, 1995: 416–426), then the roster of staff involved in programme-making begins to appear: producers, designers, actors, script-writers, publicists, and, indeed, the audience. Although Briggs does invoke something of the messiness of TV production, with contradictory expectations, missed deadlines and overspent budgets, he cannot resist drawing attention to a report, written early in 1962, to ‘“survey the field of science fiction in its relevance to BBC Television Drama” with a view to creating a fifty-two-week serial mainly for older children’ (Briggs, 1995: 421), as if to suggest that what we now know as *Dr Who* flowed logically from this report. Briggs’s authoritative history, rich in detail and impeccably researched, only tells a partial history of the BBC, a great deal of which could be illuminated simply by looking at the relative autonomy of the different departments within the Corporation, and examining how individual programme makers developed and maintained their social relationships.

Briggs’s successor as official historian of the BBC, Jean Seaton, digs deeper into the functioning of the BBC, and in *Pinkoes and Traitors* does address the business of commissioning new music, and indeed begins to explore how this happened, with reference to which sort of composer Robert Ponsonby commissioned, and how he went about approaching them (Seaton, 2015: 110). She also mentions the huge increase in the budget for commissioning new music achieved by Ponsonby, without questioning how or why this was achieved. Seaton’s findings are the starting point for the examination of this subject in Chapter Six of this thesis. She further suggests that the reason for commissioning new music was ‘so that “British” music should not become a heritage trinket’ (Seaton 2015: 91). There is no reference to where this idea came from, and there is no evidence in either the BBC Written Archives Centre, or from my interviews, that this was a view held by anybody working in the BBC at that time. She unearths some delicious and unexpected titbits, for example, on the subject of new music:

Plaistow felt it was important to reflect what was being written, even if it meant broadcasting works that were ‘undistinguished, ephemeral, or even boring’ – a somewhat radical interpretation of public service responsibility (Seaton, 2015: 99).

Seaton leaves this hanging, out of context, and without further interpretation. It is, perhaps, a rather more extreme expression of Glock’s view of commissioning:

Except in the case of a few great masters, no one ever expects a high proportion of commissions to end in works of lasting value [...] commissioning is concerned not only with results but also with the impulse and encouragement that it generates (Glock, 1991: 117).

Furthermore, it begs a question over aesthetic judgement: in whose opinion is a work boring? What seems boring today, might, in future years, be viewed as transcendental and visionary. On the other hand, Seaton subsequently extrapolates that ‘the composers that the BBC espoused – Maxwell Davies, Alexander Goehr, Maw, Birtwistle – became accepted into the repertory. But was this for the circular reason that the BBC promoted them?’ (Seaton, 2015, p.91), arguably the most penetrating observation on new music and the BBC in the entire literature. In Chapter Four of this thesis, on Methodology, this remark is examined in the framework of Bourdieu’s of fields of cultural production, which produces fruitful results, by asking: is the commissioning process a self-fulfilling prophecy? If the BBC pays composers to write, it bestows distinction on that composer, which will encourage others to commission them. A BBC commission, especially for the Proms, is like a kitemark for a composer, a guarantee of quality. In buying the composer time to compose, the BBC increases their status. The performances by the BBC, broadcast on radio and, possibly, TV, also enhances these composers’ profiles. Seaton later discusses Robert Ponsonby’s contribution to the Proms:

[The Proms] had become exciting under Glock. But Ponsonby, who understood live concerts, included more popular composers and raised the budget for Proms commissions sixfold. Those commissioned were often British, and a good mix of established and young composers. The works included both the avant-garde and the conventional, from Oliver Knussen's Third Symphony (1979) to Giles Swayne's *Cry* (1980). Ponsonby approached composers sensitively to discover what they wanted to write (Seaton, 2015: 110).

This last sentence was from an interview Seaton conducted with Stephen Plaistow. There is no doubt that Ponsonby was a much more experienced impresario than Glock when he took over the Proms. In many ways he continued to programme in a similar mould as Glock, expanding the range of music, including more early music and continuing to commission, and to include new music from overseas as well as from the UK. Whether he included more popular composers than Glock is debatable. Glock certainly included the popular classics in his programmes, even if they were mixed and matched with less familiar fare – another feature Ponsonby embraced. Ponsonby's success in increasing the budget for the Proms commissions is also mentioned by Carpenter (1996: 294) and will be discussed further in the following section of the Literature Review. Quite why Seaton picks out Knussen's Symphony No 3 and Giles Swayne's *Cry* is not clear. Neither of them is an example of either the conventional, nor the most avant-garde, and they were both relatively young, at the time, Knussen 27 and Swayne 34, and in fact Knussen's Symphony was virtually finished when the BBC commissioned him: as a *Blue Peter* presenter might have it, 'Here is one I prepared earlier'. Plaistow's comment, though, is very telling: it demonstrates that the commissioning process was conducted on a personal level, either directly between Ponsonby and the composer, or via the composer's publisher, and that there was an element of negotiation. The composer was not given carte blanche, but nor was there a strict brief issued from on high by 'the BBC' to the composer. This line of enquiry is pursued in much greater depth in Chapter Seven of this thesis, looking at the social relationships of the people involved, and especially the relative power of the various parties.

Three important books concerning aspects of radio and the media, and one in the field of new music, all approach their subjects from different angles, and all provide lucid models for research in this area, although none of them directly addresses the object of study. First, Doctor (1999), a study of the early days of the BBC and its approach to avant-garde (or, as she has it, ultra-modern) music. Then Hendy (2007) and a history of Radio 4, covering the same period as this study, but a different network, and finally two books by Georgina Born, the first an anthropological study of IRCAM (Institut de Recherche et de Coordination Acoustique/Musique) (Born, 1995), and the second a similar study of the BBC in the years between 1996 and 2003 (Born, 2004). Born's own exegesis of these books, and her call for a broader theoretical framework for the interpretation of cultural production in general is found in her article from 2010, 'The Social and the Aesthetic: For a Post-Bourdieuian Theory of Cultural Production'.

Doctor's pioneering study of the BBC's part in the promulgation of the music of the Second Viennese School is a meticulously researched and very readable account. Doctor's exemplary use of the BBC's Written Archives is put at the service of what might be called a social-historical-musicological approach. However, rather than taking one composer and investigating how the BBC affected them, Doctor looks at how BBC radio had a bearing on everybody in the musical world; hence her place here, in studies of radio, rather than in musicology. This is a hugely impressive and authoritative account of what happened, but the why and the how, in terms of internal institutional dynamics, do not form part of this narrative. Doctor's objectivity as a BBC outsider is beneficial in interrogating the working practices of the BBC; but the way the BBC worked, the way programmes got made, the levels of autonomy between departments, and the social relationships of the people involved fall outside the scope of this study. For example, discussing the 'embarrassing failure' (Doctor, 1999: 162) of three works commissioned by the

BBC in 1930, two of which never materialized, and one of which became Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast*, attention is concentrated on what happened at a departmental level, quoting minutes, correspondence and memos between senior figures. There may well be no material in the BBC's Written Archives Centre which directly involved the composers themselves, but if there was, it does not form part of Doctor's narrative. An account of how Walton came to turn a request for something 'really light in character and suitable for the microphone [...] for "small chorus, small orchestra of not exceeding fifteen, and soloist"' (Doctor, 1999: 157), which Walton described on 25 June 1930, as requiring 'a chorus (not less than 16 and preferably about 24 or 32), two soloists (baritone and mezzo-soprano), speaker and small orchestra' (Doctor, 1999: 159) into what we know today as *Belshazzar's Feast*, scored for baritone soloist, a large chorus, large orchestra, including three or four percussionists, piano, organ, two harps, and two brass bands would make a fascinating study in its own right. Doctor lays the blame for the failure at the Music Department's door, when it might be possible to address the roles individuals played in it, and the way the BBC, the Music Department, and its staff operated with a high degree of independence. Nonetheless, Doctor's approach has had a considerable influence on the approach taken in this thesis, and it is certain that without her model, this current project would be much the poorer.

Hendy's history of BBC Radio 4 benefits from Hendy having been a BBC producer, so he does have first-hand knowledge of how programmes get made, and the crucial importance of the relationships between BBC staff, and the freedom (or, sometimes, lack of it) enjoyed by its staff, especially producers. Like Doctor, Hendy's use of the BBC Written Archives is hugely impressive, and this archival work is supported by interviews with key players. Hendy is also an avid listener – a fan, really – bringing together the historian's scruples over what is fact, what is opinion, and what is hearsay; an insider's understanding of the BBC's culture and ethos; and the enthusiasms and frustrations of a listener. Hendy is clear that 'this is *a* history of Radio Four, not

the history' (Hendy, 2007: vii), and the parameters within which he worked are clearly explained. It is apparent that only by looking at events from a variety of standpoints does anything like a complete picture emerge:

Something approaching a rounded version of events comes from reaching deep inside the BBC itself, by talking to those who worked there, and seeing what they really said – and meant – in their dealings with each other at the time (Hendy, 2007: vii).

Those two words 'and meant' are telling. Inevitably, Hendy's survey of forty years of an entire BBC radio network is partial, as he says himself, but in this thesis it is possible, in focusing on a much smaller time frame and subject matter, to pursue that interpretation of what was said, written, and meant – and, importantly, what was actually done – in far greater detail, unravelling the contradictions and ambiguities, to create the discourse that was created around commissioning music for the Proms. Nonetheless, Hendy provides an excellent model: his account of the early days of David Hatch's Controllershship, and the 'offence against Radio Four's traditions' (Hendy, 2007: 304) that was *Rollercoaster* is a convincing narrative, drawing in senior management, the press and the audience to explain its failure. Hendy puts the programme in the context of Hatch's previous experience in Light Entertainment and at Radio 2, and his desire to loosen up the schedule and lighten up the presentation, explaining that there were precedents for this freewheeling style, and that the experiment had knock-on effects on the network long after it was gone. However, apart from one short comment, 'Even the programme's producers confessed to not always being clear what the programme was trying to do' (Hendy, 2007: 303), there is nothing from the broadcasting coalface; nothing on what Richard Baker, the programme's host, or the reporters did or said. Nor is there any analysis of the discourse created around the programme which led to its failure. The audience ratings were good, it attracted the desired demographic, but it was pulled because, according to Hatch, 'it required more staff and it required more money, and both those things are unobtainable now' (Hendy, 2007: 304).

Financial constraints might well have played a part in Hatch's decision not to continue the programme, but to place the blame almost entirely on the accountants (the faceless money-men are always popular scapegoats at the BBC), along with a muddle over which wavelength it should be broadcast on, would appear to gloss over the far more complex web of prejudice, timidity and fear which led to *Rollercoaster's* failure.

Georgina Born's anthropological study of IRCAM, the Institut de recherche et coordination acoustique/musique, (1995) falls outside the realm of media studies, but on the other hand, her approach to a large musical institution has useful applications when looking at the BBC. The work, described by Born as an 'empirically and sociologically informed account of modernism, post-modernism, and the avant-garde' (Born, 1995: 32), was based almost entirely on interviews, and focuses on the relationships between the composers (the creatives) and the computer scientists (the techies). Born's analysis of their discourse is sensitive and searching, and she accounts for the contradictions and ambiguities in addressing the assumptions that each group has about the other – and indeed themselves. Born identifies that among the composers, the traditional model of the lone creative artist is still paramount, the 'excessive preciousness of the heroic individual author' (Born, 1995: 315), whereas there is an institutionalized privileging of the technical and administrative staff, who are the permanent human infrastructure of IRCAM, whereas composers come and go on a short-term, project-led basis. The parallels with the BBC are illuminating, and the question over whether the salaried staff at the BBC are also institutionally privileged over the hired hands, the composers commissioned. This delicate, complex, and constantly-evolving relationship is the central core of how music was commissioned by the BBC.

In her study of the BBC (2004) Born is studying the eco-system of the BBC, and it is based on the conceit of the BBC as a distant and exotic tribe; from the outset she calls herself 'The

Anthropologist Among the White City Natives' (Born, 2004: 1). Again, this study is based on interviews, but also to a great extent on the access Born achieved to attend editorial and other meetings at the BBC, where she was able to eavesdrop without participating in the discussion; she is always sensitive to how her presence might have affected the meeting, but in larger groups, she would have gone practically unnoticed. Even more importantly, Born had access to a wide range of workers, staff from all levels of the BBC, and in several different departments, not only in programme-making. She also met with the staff of independent production companies, and freelancers. Her presentation of the material, in the form of reported speech, diary entries and analysis, is powerful, and, at times, very funny. For anybody familiar with the workings of the BBC from the inside, reading this study is done with a smile of recognition on one's face, and a cringe of embarrassment in the pit of one's stomach. Born's analysis of the casualization of the workforce ('Working and Not Working', Born, 2004: 179–211) charts the shedding of staff jobs, the adoption of short-term contracts, and the rise of the independent sector, with great acuity, quoting editorial executives, administrative managers, producers at various levels of seniority, and union officials. Although those working in the independent sector and as freelancers were ostensibly working at arms' length from the BBC, nonetheless, they were highly institutionalized, and their success was often based on how closely they understood BBC culture, just as it was for BBC staff. The analysis of their discourse is gimlet-eyed, and yet some of the most coruscating material is often where the words of the 'natives' are left to speak for themselves: for example, when a series of middle-ranking employees all tell Born that they are 'typical BBC': white, middle class, privately-educated, Oxbridge graduates, who cannot understand why they are not more successful. She goes on to talk to people from different backgrounds, too, but the impression is that, despite wishing to 'present itself as a purveyor of best practice in employment' (Born, 2004: 201) and a champion of equality of opportunity, the BBC at that time was still very much dependent on the old boys' network. On the one hand, this relates directly to the new music village surrounding the commissioning of music for the Proms, and the possible accusations of a

chumocracy in operation there, but on the other, Born's anthropological approach is one that can illuminate the processes of commissioning, even if these natives dwelt in Yalding House, on Great Portland Street, rather than in White City. This anthropological approach is also applicable to the commissioning of music for the Proms, particularly as this process straddles these worlds of financially large institutions – the BBC – and individual production – the composer.

In her article discussing these two studies, Born (2010) constructs the theoretical scaffolding around her approach, an:

[A]ttempt to accomplish several linked goals: to provide a substantively rich account of what are reflexive creative and intellectual cultures [...] as well as to analyse the conditions for creativity that prevail in the two institutions, the causalities that underpin these conditions, and the results of these processes in terms of the cultural output (Born, 2010: 189)

It is arguable that Born is far more successful in the first and second of these, leaving any analysis of the outcomes – TV programmes and musical works – very much in third place. For example, in her study of the BBC, the ground-breaking *Our Friends in the North*, one of BBC2's most successful drama series, both in terms of audience figures and critical reception, much discussed in media circles, and winner of multiple awards, gets mentioned a dozen times, but mostly in lists of successful programmes, grouped by genre; when Born discusses the series in detail, it is in terms of the complexities around the commissioning process, Controllers coming and going, their tastes (especially that of David Jackson, Controller of BBC2 at the time, who thought it too political), the budget, legal issues, and the social policy covered by the plots (Born, 2004: 357–359). There is nothing about the aesthetics of the programmes: their scripts, the casting, the settings, the cinematography, or the music. Similarly, in her study of IRCAM, Born barely talks about the music at all. She singles out Boulez's own work as being of primary

importance to the validation of IRCAM: '*Répons* has borne a great deal of the weight of legitimizing IRCAM because music, and Boulez's music above all, remains the main arena for assessing the results of IRCAM' (Born, 1995: 91) and mentions this, the most significant of Boulez's works composed at IRCAM, more than 15 times in the text, but only once does she make any kind of aesthetic judgement, when she remarks (rather disparagingly, perhaps) that:

A few current IRCAM works do have the shadow of postmodern aesthetic influence – although not, it is true, of the “retro” kind of which Boulez, Bayle, and others are so dismissive. There are gestures at both greater “simplicity” (within the modernist framework) and at lush orchestration (characteristic of *Répons*), but these are really dilutions rather than transformations of modernism (Born, 1995: 324).

The music journalist Tom Service, writing on the day Boulez's death was announced, was not shy of making an aesthetic judgement, describing *Répons* as 'Boulez's most ambitious masterpiece of electronic and acoustic fusion, music that creates a new kind of cosmic resonance from its ensemble and their ethereally, electronically transformed sounds' (Service, 2016, online). While Born's sophisticated anthropological approach is admirable, she neglects the subject-specific analysis, which, in the case of this thesis, is the musicology. When she writes that:

[A]n explanatory theory of cultural production requires reinvention in relation to five key themes: aesthetics and the cultural object; the place of institutions; agency and subjectivity; questions of history, temporality and change; and problems of value and judgement. These themes are deeply connected; each can be seen as ultimately subordinate to the first, that is, to providing a non-reductive account of the aesthetic in theorizing cultural production (Born, 2010: 172) [...] The goal is to redirect the field of criticism itself, away from the banalized terms of object in 'context', or telos of innovation, towards a critical field that is focally concerned with the social and material, the temporal and ontological, as these mediate and imbue the aesthetic (Born, 2010: 198) [...] The intention, then, is to restore questions of aesthetics and form, now inflected

through an analytics of mediation, and on this basis to proffer judgements of value and indicate their basis so as to revivify critical debate, not close it down (Born, 2010: 199).

This approach is the basis of this thesis: to account for the ‘aesthetics and the cultural objects’ without privileging them, and rather than contextualizing the art objects, to open up the debate over artistic value through the discussion of the institutional mediations of those objects. Born’s development of a theory of the sociology of art after Bourdieu are discussed further in Chapter Four, on Methodology. Before that, though, the last part of the Literature Review, which is concerned with histories: of the Proms, of the Third Programme and Radio 3, and of the BBC Symphony Orchestra.

Chapter Three: Literature Review 3, Writing histories

This section of the Literature Review is concerned with historical surveys, firstly of the Proms themselves, by Ateş Orga (1974), and David Cox (1980), and a chapter on this era of the Proms by David Wright (2007); then a more general history of the Third Programme and Radio 3 by Humphrey Carpenter (1996), and finally, a history of the BBC Symphony Orchestra by Nicholas Kenyon (1981). In order to come to a full understanding of the Proms, it is necessary to see them as a discourse developed by a network of parties: the Directors of the Proms, the staff of the BBC Music Department, the wider management of the BBC, composers (alive and dead) and performers, along with their publishers and agents, and the audience. These historical studies, concentrating as they do on the Proms as a summer season of public concerts, and pursuing the Great Man approach to history, concern themselves almost exclusively with Glock and Ponsonby, the repertoire and performers, and the audience for the concerts in the hall. The BBC hardly gets a look-in. Carpenter, Wright and Kenyon all pay far more attention to the BBC as an institution, and Carpenter and Kenyon, both with experience of working for the BBC, convey some of the corporate mess of the place. Wright, as an outsider, is rather tidier in his assessments, especially of cause and effect: tidier, but less accurate. Wright is also alive to the BBC's audiences on radio and TV, not just the audience in the hall. What is missing from all these accounts, however, is that sense of the constantly shifting relationships between all these different individuals, and it is this that lies at the heart of this thesis.

None of these studies questions that the BBC and the Proms should be commissioning new music, how it is done, nor who is involved in the process. It is accepted that there is a coterie of composers who are in, but not what makes them in or why. Several commentators suggest that this group is more diverse than the BBC is given credit for. It is assumed, but rarely stated, that during the period under discussion, a Proms commission became quite possibly a career-defining

moment for a composer, but there is little acknowledgement of the responsibility this bestows on the commissioning process. Studies of aspects of the Third Programme and BBC Radio 3 also provide useful background, for example Garnham on Hans Keller (2003) (which, given his interest in, and responsibility for, new music, contains surprisingly little on commissioning), as do memoirs from former Proms Directors William Glock (1991) and John Drummond (2000), despite Drummond's tenure at the Proms falling outside the chronological scope of this thesis. Both discuss commissioning, in rather different terms: Glock suggested that you do not expect to get great pieces, but commissioning is good for the ecology of the system, and he names three individual examples that he was proud of: 'Harrison Birtwistle's *Nomos* (1968), Nicholas Maw's *Scenes and Arias* (1962), and Hugh Wood's *Scenes from Comus* (1965)' (Glock, 1991: 117). Drummond is far more personal. At one point he lists those composers that he commissioned for the Proms, and the works they produced; which of them he liked, and which he did not (Drummond, 2000: 446–448). He is more interesting on the support he sought in this area from his own staff, Stephen Plaistow and Andrew Kurowksi, and the publishers representing composers. While he acknowledged that his own response to new music was instinctive rather than rational, he:

[C]ame back again and again to those whom I felt had found a real voice and whose music was showing growing confidence and achievement [...] I was adamant, and my view was shared by Plaistow and Kurowski, that it should not be a case of Buggins's turn coming round to old so and so who hadn't had anything for a while (Drummond, 2000: 340).

Memoirs are the natural place to settle old scores and justify oneself, as well as to cast oneself in the best possible light. As will become clear, none of these ideas were Drummond's and had become well-established before he returned to the BBC as Controller, Music in 1985.

Nonetheless, both these views of former Directors of the Proms contribute to an understanding

of the discourse that was developed around the Proms and the standing of commissioning within that narrative.

The first histories of *The Proms* by Ateş Orga (1975) and David Cox (1980) are straightforward narratives.¹⁰ Both report the facts, without asking why or how decisions are reached. They cover the whole history of the Proms, from their inception in 1895 to 1973 (Orga) and 1979 (Cox), and are, of necessity, broad in their approach, rather than deep. Orga portrays Glock as ‘progressive and constructive’ (Orga, 1975: 144) and suggests that Glock played a major role in making London ‘the musical capital of the world’ (Orga, 1975: 144). He draws on Glock’s lecture *The BBC’s Music Policy* published as part of his autobiography (Glock, 1991: 200–213), and suggests that, as in the early days of the Proms, which were the brainchild of the conductor Henry Wood, ‘Once again the dreams of a single man dominated the concerts’ (Orga, 1975: 146). This Great Man approach to history is one which can only ever tell a very partial story. Much is made of the new music that Glock championed, ‘contemporary bitter “pills” to swallow’ (Orga, 1975: 146) and alongside lists of the orchestras, soloists, conductors and repertoire that featured in each season, Orga draws attention to the music commissioned for the Proms, but only to list the composers and the titles of the works. He also quotes from Glock’s introductions to the Proms prospectus, calling these short essays ‘policies’, and reporting Glock’s praise for the Proms audiences without further comment. He charts the increasingly international flavour of successive seasons, with more foreign conductors and, eventually, orchestras, for example. Reporting on the 1964 season, Orga continues to promulgate the misplaced notion that Glock was a fan of Schoenberg and his school: ‘The only touch of Glock’s predilection towards the so-called Second Viennese School was Schoenberg’s *Erwartung*’ (Orga, 1975: 154–155). Orga marks

¹⁰ Another history of the Proms, Hall (1981) promises ‘research among 5000 programmes, 20,000 press cuttings and sixty-three years of BBC files’. None of this is evident from this breathless, tabloid-style account.

the end of Malcolm Sargent's responsibility for conducting the First and Last Nights of the Proms in 1966, and in 1967 welcomes the arrival of Colin Davis as:

[A] new and much younger person, the recently appointed dynamic principal-conductor-elect of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Colin Davis. Immediately the spotlight was featured on a personality which soon asserted itself with the Prommers and carved a special place in their affections (Orga, 1975: 157).

The cult of personality cultivated by Sargent is seen to pass seamlessly to the new appointment, and again the Proms audience was the vital group to consecrate the newcomer, but Orga is soon charting Davis's declining popularity: 'To establish a rapport with a generation reared on Sargent was no easy task' (Orga, 1975: 158), and demonstrating how:

[H]is role was gradually whittled down in the period 1967–73. The idea of a single conductor linking the Proms had by 1973 almost entirely been replaced by that of a central administrative force (the BBC) directing its energies towards the creation of an international summer festival of music (Orga, 1975: 158–159).

Orga did not have the space to pursue this interesting line of thought, but he does, in this recognition of 'a central administrative force', provide a starting place for the role of the BBC as an institution, central to this research. Significantly, in his prioritising of 'the Prommers', Orga is laying his cards on the table, in this demonstration that the history he is writing is of a season of public concerts, given in London during the summer. There is hardly a mention of the BBC as a broadcasting organisation, and although he can spend half a page charting the rise in ticket prices for the audience in the hall between 1960 and 1973, the audience on radio and TV are ignored.

Cox's study, an authorized history, published by the BBC, does little to develop what Orga had already done. Cox was very much the BBC insider having worked there from his demob after the

Second World War until his retirement in 1976. His history draws a little more on the BBC Written Archives, quoting letters from Malcolm Sargent to William Glock on issues of programme planning, for example. He also acknowledges some of the backroom staff involved in the Proms, from the Concerts Organiser to the BBC Symphony Orchestra's orchestral supervisor, responsible for the layout of the chairs and music stands. He does document the works commissioned for the Proms, occasionally passing a comment on them: Lutyens's *Essence of Our Happinesses* (1970) was, according to Cox, 'one of the composer's most acceptable works' (Cox, 1980: 219). He does not vouchsafe how or why that might have been the case. Like Orga, Cox writes about the Proms primarily as a season of public concerts, although occasionally he does mention the radio and TV. He devotes a chapter to 'The Prommers' (Cox, 1980: 227–232), based very largely on some audience research he conducted for the book. In many ways, Cox is better on the early years of the Proms, and he acknowledges that although Henry Wood was the musical figurehead in those early days, he received a great deal of administrative support from Robert Newman, and financial support from Dr George Cathcart (Cox, 1980: 26), and discusses, for example, the writing of programme notes, an element in concert giving so often taken for granted (Cox, 1980: 45). Cox does provide examples of political economy at work in the early history of the Proms, for instance the struggles between the publicly-funded BBC, the commercial music publishers and the independent orchestras, with the publishers and orchestras resenting the way the newly-established BBC could undercut them (Cox, 1980: 82–84). Previously the publishers were also musical impresarios, using public concerts as a promotional tool for their products, rather in the way pop bands tour in order to sell CDs and other merchandise (although this model is now changing in the age of download and streaming). This struggle could be interpreted as a shift of power and wealth from the private to the public sector, shadowing a political movement that resulted in the National Health Service, the Welfare State and nationalised industry. Cox also includes a series of useful appendices, the first of which, "Novelties" at the Proms 1895–1979' (Cox, 1980: 256–308), lists first performances and first

performances ‘in England’ [sic], and, from 1958, works not previously performed at a Henry Wood Promenade Concert, which identifies all the BBC commissions. Cox includes one significant aesthetic judgement, an example of the mediating power of the charismatic Proms Controller William Glock. Writing about the authority that Pierre Boulez, chief conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, brought to his performances, he contrasts two works commissioned for the 1971 season. Cox praises:

[H]is mastery of the most *avant-garde* styles [...] demonstrated in the late-night Round House concert which, besides Messiaen (*Sept Haikai*) and two Ligeti works, included George Newson’s *Arena* – a BBC-commission for mixed media, comprising solo clarinet, speaker, the singers Cleo Laine and Jane Manning, a choir, the King’s Singers, a section of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, film projections, coloured lights. Press comment was not encouraging. But about another commissioned work that season – *Scenes and Prophecies* by Bernard Naylor – the critic of *The Financial Times* commented that Naylor ‘uses traditional harmony in a way that makes it seem entirely new and expressive’. This is a notable impression to have made in the composers’ world of the time, when a Prom commission from Glock would for many [composers] have meant a challenge to write something as far off the beaten track as possible! (Cox, 1980: 220–221).

The implication is clear: the ‘traditional’ Naylor is superior to the ‘off the beaten track’ Newson. What is less clear is how Cox is contributing to the narrative around Glock, that he was some sort of arch-modernist. Cox assumes that we understand what he is getting at here; that Glock had a reputation as a supporter of the most experimental avant-garde trends. It is almost like an in-joke, but one which, in fact, has relatively little basis in reality: Glock’s commissioning was far more wide-ranging than is often credited, and included a great deal of more traditional music – including, of course, the Naylor piece which Cox had used as a stick with which to beat him. Just as Glock, the BBC management, and composers themselves developed a discourse around the Proms, and the value of a commission for the Proms, so a discourse developed around Glock and his espousal of the avant-garde, to the exclusion of anything more traditional. Wright (2008)

investigates the lack of basis for this narrative in much more detail, providing a springboard for this thesis.

Carpenter (1996) is not primarily concerned with the Proms, but his history of the BBC Third Programme and BBC Radio 3 is a meticulously-researched¹¹ and entertainingly-written account. Although Carpenter's brush is that much broader, he nevertheless does incorporate much valuable material on the Proms, and commissioning. As a result of some interviews conducted with key players, including Glock and Ponsonby, Carpenter gets much closer to the everyday working of the BBC, something entirely missing from the accounts of the Proms. He is able to convey some of the messiness of the place, and, through his long experience as a presenter of radio programmes, he understands that most decisions, far from being carefully thought-out manifestations of well-established policy, tend to be taken on the hoof during informal lunches or chance meetings in corridors. This is evident on almost every page of the book; a good example is the way Tony Scotland joined the presentation team at Radio 3 in the early 1970s:

While working as a sub-editor in the Broadcasting House newsroom, he noticed the number of items about the arts around the world which were not getting into bulletins. He mentioned this to Cormac Rigby,¹² and found himself invited by Stephen Hearst¹³ to compile [...] a weekly programme, *The Arts Worldwide*, in which these news stories were read by two announcers. Since this was considered to be a half-time job, it was arranged for him to spend the rest of his time announcing (Carpenter, 1996: 276).

In this way, a lowly news sub-editor launched a weekly series on a national BBC network, subsequently becoming one of its best-known and well-loved voices.

¹¹ Carpenter was assisted in his research by Jennifer Doctor.

¹² Head of Presentation at Radio 3

¹³ Controller, Radio 3

Carpenter also picks up on the economic power the BBC wields, explaining that both Glock and his successor, Robert Ponsonby, increased the amount of music the BBC commissioned (Carpenter, 1996: 285 & 294). Here Carpenter reports the facts without backing it up with any evidence, although there is a wealth of material in the BBC Written Archives Centre for the increase Glock achieved. The increase Ponsonby achieved, which was considerably greater, is again not backed up by evidence, although in an interview for this research Stephen Plaistow casts unexpected light on how this increase was achieved. This will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Six. Carpenter reports the disparity between the modest fees that British composers received compared to foreign composers, although again there is no evidence that this was the case. This begs questions over the relative worth of individual composers in financial terms, but also indicates that the value of a Proms commission to a British composer might lie more in the prestige than simply the fee, which might mean less to composers outside the UK. On the other hand, foreign composers might also have an affection for the BBC for quite different reasons, as Sally Groves suggested in an interview for this research. Groves explained that Hans Werner Henze, while he was a radio operator in the German Army during the Second World War, had covertly listened to the BBC as a source of news, and for that reason he held the BBC in both esteem and affection.¹⁴

Wright (2007) calls his chapter in *The Proms: A New History*, ‘Reinventing the Proms: the Glock and Ponsonby Eras, 1959–85’, which is exactly the period of my study, and although he follows the general thrust of Proms histories in largely laying out the facts as a chronology, and adopting the Great Man approach (as his chapter title implies), he nonetheless covers a great deal of ground in this diligently-researched work. Wright was, when he wrote this, Reader in the Social History of Music at the Royal College of Music, and he has written scholarly histories of that

¹⁴ Sally Groves, personal communication, 21 March 2018

institution, as well as the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM). In his interpretation of the facts, Wright goes beyond simple description, and he situates the Proms as part of the wider BBC when, for example, he writes that:

The transformation of the Proms' range and standards during those twenty-five years involved more than innovative programming. It was bound up in the BBC's own attitudes to the concerts. As Glock's success made the Proms a source of international prestige, so the Corporation came to value them more. Although this new and hitherto unexpected level of esteem – the cultural dividend, as it were – came at an ever-increasing cost, it was a price the BBC was essentially willing to pay (Wright, 2007: 168).

This prestige, the 'cultural dividend', echoes Bourdieu's distinction between economic and cultural capital (see, for example, Moore (2014)), and Wright suggests that the cash followed the kudos, in a logical, causal way. He also suggests, that, in the same way, the BBC was happy to provide increased financial support for the Proms because Glock increased the broadcast coverage of the concerts: 'a justification for increasing financial support from the central BBC administration – was an expansion in the broadcasting of the Proms' (Wright, 2007: 183). This tidy cause and effect is not supported by the evidence, and although these two chains of events, the increasing budget, and the increase in broadcasting, might have been tenuously related, each happened in a much more piecemeal and untidy way. As a social historian, Wright contextualises the reinvention of the Proms with prevailing attitudes: 'Glock's radicalisation of the Proms resonated with the adventurousness of the new cultural and social attitudes of the 1960s' (Wright, 2007: 171), and he draws parallels with Lindsay Anderson's call for a radicalisation of British cinema, William Burroughs's *The Naked Lunch*, the Beatles *Sergeant Pepper*, Terence Conran's Habitat shop, the miniskirt, and Elizabeth David's *French Provincial Cooking*. All of which implies some sort of unified Zeitgeist, to which the Proms might – or equally, might not – relate. Some sort of link might be discerned with Glock's inclusion of *The Soft Machine* at the

Proms (13 August 1970), but hardly with championing the chamber music of Mozart or the symphonies of Haydn, the incorporation of opera or the exploration of repertoire pre-Bach. There may be fruitful ways to look at Glock's radical mixed concert programming in the context of Conran's design-focused Habitat, say, but this is beyond Wright's scope. Nonetheless, as is clear, Wright's work is on a completely different level of sophistication than any of his predecessors, and although there is a tendency to repeat received wisdom without demur – the Proms audience is 'knowledgeable and sophisticated' (Wright, 2007: 173), for example – the depth of understanding, especially of the BBC as a broadcaster, rather than simply a concert promoter, is impressive: there is a section on 'Television's Advance' (Wright, 2007: 198–200) discussing the three-way antagonism between BBC staff whose priorities were the different requirements of radio, TV and the concerts in the hall, at the same time acknowledging the element of glamour that TV brought, as well as its huge audience. There is also a detailed discussion of 'The Proms Audiences' (Wright, 2007: 207–209) and that plural indicates that Wright is going beyond his predecessors in discussing not only the audience in the hall, but also those on radio and TV. The mediation of the concerts, through the design of the concert programmes, the expansion of the prospectus, and the introduction of pre-concert talks is discussed, as is the commercial element of the concerts. Wright also reassesses Ponsonby's contribution, suggesting that his 'achievements as Director of the Proms have been less celebrated inside and outside the BBC than they deserve' (Wright, 2007: 197). As a history of the Proms during this period, Wright provides a solid basis for this thesis, a synchronic examination of just one element of the Proms. Wright's social history might be even more incisive, were he to embrace a more thoroughgoing musicological/cultural approach, but there is no disputing his achievement here.

Prior to Glock's arrival, the BBC had commissioned new works to be performed by the BBC Symphony Orchestra at the Cheltenham Festival, and Nicholas Kenyon (1981) and David

Wright (2007) agree that Glock's new strategy to commission for the Proms, was 'to secure the widest hearing for these [...] scores' (Wright 2007: 175). The context for the music was changed. They agree too that there was a move away from the conservative aesthetic of the so-called Cheltenham Symphony,¹⁵ towards a more modernist approach, although this was by no means as far-reaching as has often been assumed, as discussed above. It is also to be born in mind that in the early 1960s the Proms had not achieved the status that they were to realize subsequently. In an interview for this research, Thea Musgrave made it clear that a Prom commission was just like any other large-scale choral or orchestral assignment: this might have been the case when she was first commissioned, in 1962, and her attitude might not have changed much over the years, but in general there is agreement that a Proms commission became a very significant thing for a composer. Theodor Adorno (1978) and subsequently Max Paddison (2004 & 2010) suggest that the context in which music is commissioned and performed will affect its nature, but neither Kenyon nor Wright pursues this potentially fruitful line of enquiry, coming as they do from a background of social history.

Kenyon's history of the BBC Symphony Orchestra (1981) is concerned with conductors, repertoire, soloists, management, tours, recordings, box office receipts and concert series. As a journalist himself, Kenyon draws heavily on press cuttings to give an impression of the reception of the work of the orchestra. He is also clear on the remit of the study: it is not a book about the experience of playing in an orchestra, rather it is 'a comprehensive record of the BBC Symphony Orchestra's achievement in the first fifty years of its existence' (Kenyon, 1981: x). He warns the reader that there will be 'many prosaic lists of programmes and dates, accounts of composers' new and unfamiliar works, samples of critical reactions' (Kenyon, 1981: xi). He also leaves the history of broadcasting during this period to Asa Briggs, and the contribution of the orchestra to

¹⁵ The discourse around the Cheltenham Symphony is itself one that could benefit from further research.

the Proms to David Cox: 'I have tried to avoid duplicating material in David Cox's comprehensive survey, *The Henry Wood Proms* (BBC Publications, 1980)' (Kenyon, 1981: x). Given that Cox's book had only come out the previous year, and they shared a publisher, this might have been a commercial injunction, rather than an editorial decision. Having acknowledged the richness of the BBC's Written Archives, Kenyon outlines some of his key themes: the balance between broadcasting and public concert-giving; 'the relationship between the BBC's administrators, who make the licence-payers' money available to the Orchestra, and those who guide its musical fortunes' (Kenyon, 1981: xi–xii); and the tension between adventurous repertoire and audience size. It is unfortunate that Kenyon devolves responsibility for the Proms to Cox, in that his study, using the BBC Written Archives, extensive interviews, and press cuttings, along with his sensitive and acute interpretation of the material at his disposal, is a model of its kind. The scope of Kenyon's work necessitates that he sweeps past important events, for example, writing about the orchestra's 1979–1980 season of concerts: 'Mark Elder revived a notable Prom success, John Buller's *Proença*, which was also recorded' (Kenyon, 1981: 423). This work is examined in detail in Chapter Seven, its commissioning, performance and reception; it is beyond the scope of this study to investigate the fascinating and tangled story which lies behind Kenyon's bland phrase, it 'was also recorded'. This is a subject for further research. Like Carpenter, Kenyon, who was a member of staff at the BBC when he began this book, has a nose for the sometimes-chaotic way that business was conducted at the BBC, and is particularly strong on the negotiations involving the appointment of conductors. He is also interested in the management structure of the orchestra, but has nothing to say on the subject he implied in his introduction, the tension between the management of the orchestra, the Music Department, and the Controllers of the Third Programme and Radio 3. He includes several useful appendices, including a list of all the first performances given by the orchestra, in which he identifies BBC commissions, a list of the orchestra's personnel, and other 'Personalia',

including relevant administrators, such as successive Controllers of the Third Programme and Radio 3 (Kenyon, 1981: 439–441).

To summarise this review of the extant literature in the three relevant areas, musicology, studies focused on radio and histories, is to acknowledge the outstanding quality of work done in all three, and that these disciplines are more closely connected and aligned than they are disparate, while still noting that there are gaps in each of them, gaps which this research aims to address. In musicology, there has been a definite movement away from studying music as a thing in itself, and towards setting music in its social context. Nonetheless, the material surveyed here still privileges music as something separate from its context, which can be described as stuff happening at the same time. The lacuna here would appear to be that the evolving relationships between the composers and the other people working in the industry which surrounds them has been neglected. Ross, Rupprecht and Rutherford-Johnson all address the social milieu surrounding the creation of music, but without examining the central question, which is how the relationships between the individuals involved construct the understanding that the composer has of what is required of them. It is this omission that this study aims to make good. In the sphere of radio studies, the problem is almost exactly the opposite: that the social and anthropological are studied, to the detriment of the aesthetic, the art object. In almost every case, there is a disjunction between the people making the radio or TV programmes (in the studies of the BBC), or the music (in the case of IRCAM) and the programmes and music as an aesthetic object. There is also, in some cases, a tendency to pursue the Great Man approach to history, the stories of kings and battles, and to neglect the foot soldiers, the people who actually produce the programmes and make the art. This approach is particularly dominant in the work of Briggs, who seems to assume that everything the BBC does is a reflection of the Director General at the time, but the same inclination still runs through the other material. This same attitude also dominates the histories of the Proms, which see the development of the Proms during this

period as solely the work of Glock and Ponsonby, and overlook all the other participants, both at the BBC and outside. Once again, it is the relationships between the various parties that is ignored. The studies of the Third Programme and Radio Three by Carpenter, and the BBC Symphony Orchestra by Kenyon, paint a more authentic picture of the untidy corporate life at the BBC, but the significance of this mess, and its influence on the programmes produced, is something that this thesis addresses. How this task has been approached, and the tools that have been assembled to undertake this endeavour, is the subject of the following chapter, on the methodology of this thesis.

Chapter Four: Methodology

So far, the way that existing literature conceptualizes the idea of new music has been explored, through approaches developed in musicology; the BBC's commissioning processes, as established in institutional histories and other studies focused on radio research; and the history of the Proms, drawing upon the basic histories produced by both musicology and radio studies academics. It has been argued that while all these approaches have their strengths, and all of them, to some extent, locate the creation of music; in its social context, the music always remains, to a greater or lesser extent, a thing in itself, rather than a part of the milieu from which it appeared. Even in the most sophisticated work, by Rupprecht, Wright, Doctor and Born, there is an element that there are twin discourses, as described above: a discourse of what is written and spoken about the music, and the discourse of the music itself. This chapter outlines the analytical toolkit developed for this very different investigation as a contribution to understanding the Proms as an institution at the intersection of two cultural worlds: the commissioning process within the broadcasting world of the BBC; and the music world of the commissioned composers. In particular, the process whereby those twin discourses become one single discourse with the music, the art object, becoming one element of that discourse.

This approach is derived from a synthesis of institutional histories, radio studies and musicological methods to explore both the organisational culture of the BBC and the historical location of the music and the Proms. The process by which the music for the Proms was commissioned is examined, comparing what was written and spoken about the process with what was actually done. The primary material was approached without prejudice, as 'inclusively as possible [...] producing a body of instances rather than to set limits to that body' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 167), without any methodology imposed in advance. Its interpretation is based on a methodology inspired by, rather than slavishly following, the theories of Bruno Latour, the

messiness of John Law, and the social psychology of discourse of Potter and Wetherell. These interpretative methods are framed within the approaches informed by the key literature.

Approaches drawn from the issues addressed by cultural studies are valuable in analysing the cultural institution of the BBC, and in particular the effect that the BBC as an institution had on the composers working at arms' length, and the publishers who represent them. Musicology also informs this methodology, embracing as it does historical musicology, the study of the history of composed Western classical music; ethnomusicology, drawing on anthropology; and encompassing music theory, aesthetics, and acoustics. In practice, there is a considerable crossover between the disciplines of cultural studies and musicology, but in this context musicology provides a frame of reference for looking at the music as an artistic object, and how it might have been influenced by the cultural milieu in which it was created.

The findings of this thesis are divided into two parts. The first is an examination of the institutions of the BBC, the BBC Music Department, the Proms, and the music industry outside the BBC. It consists of three chapters. The first considers the discourse that was developed around the reinvention of the Proms; the second, the part that money played in that discourse; and the third, how composers came to understand what they needed to do to successfully fulfil a Proms commission. The two chapters of the second part of the findings look in detail at the composers John Buller and Elisabeth Lutyens, their experience of being commissioned to write for the Proms, and how the perspectives investigated in the previous chapters were manifested in their specific cases.

The primary sources, written, oral and aural

The primary materials for this project are of several different types:

- Written archival material

- Interviews conducted with composers, former BBC staff and publishers
- Scores and CD recordings
- Recordings of BBC radio programmes
- Publications including BBC Handbooks, Proms guides and concert programmes, *Radio Times* and *The Listener*

All these sources are treated as primary objects in the diverse discourses which construct the principal discourse of the Proms as a site for new music. Elisabeth Lutyens, who is addressed in detail in Chapter Nine, is an example where materials of a subjective nature, such as her autobiography, her correspondence with figures at the BBC, the programme notes she wrote for Proms programmes, the response of critics and of staff at the BBC, and the music she composed, all combine to create the discourse of her contribution to new music at the Proms. Rather than seeking to discover a single, 'true' narrative, all the primary evidence, sometimes conflicting or even contradictory, is woven together to create the discourse, all the richer as a result of the messiness of the process.

The principal archival source, the BBC Written Archives Centre, is a physical archive of files, housed at Caversham in Berkshire, containing memos, letters, contracts and press cuttings. There are files on individual composers, and more general files on new music, commissioned works and the Proms.¹⁶ Recordings of the first broadcast performances of works at the Proms were listened to and transcribed, as were interviews with composers on preview programmes, such as *Prom Talk*, available at the Sound Archive of the British Library.

¹⁶ For a full list of files consulted, please see the References section of this thesis.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with former BBC employees;

- Robert Ponsonby (Controller, Music)
- Stephen Plaistow (Editor, New Music)
- Andrew Kurowski (Editor, New Music)

Publishers:

- Sally Groves (Head of Promotions, Schott and Co.)
- Sally Cavender (Head of Promotions, Faber Music)

Composers:

- Thea Musgrave (b. 1928)
- Anthony Payne (1936–2021)
- Nicola LeFanu (b. 1947)
- Robert Saxton (b. 1953)

In the course of this project, a wide range of music commissioned and composed for the Proms during this period was examined, but for the purposes of this thesis the focus is on a fairly narrow number of sources and subjects, concentrating in the end on just two composers, John Buller and Elisabeth Lutyens, for close analysis. Adding more examples would only have made the thesis unfeasible in size, rather than adding anything substantive to its scope. Nonetheless, other figures are referred to in the course of the argument.

The BBC's Written Archives Centre holds more than a quarter of a million files of correspondence, chosen, according to BBC Records management Policy, at least in part for its:

Historical/research value

The records reflect the history of the BBC, its output, activities and development, its relations with government and individuals, its social impact, or its role in reflecting and contributing to UK and world history (BBC, 2014, online).

Which is to say, the BBC retains this material because its staff believe it to be significant. For this reason, there are files on individual composers, those that have been deemed to have contributed to UK and world history, which consist in some material produced outside the BBC, such as publishers' promotional leaflets, concert programmes, and some press cuttings; but the bulk of the material is personal: letters to and from BBC staff to composers, and internal memos between staff concerning the composer in question, along with some official material like contracts. One of the advantages of this material – letters, memos, contracts and so on – is that it exposes the contradictions and ambiguities of the BBC staff working in this field. The material is invaluable in three main respects: firstly, it was generated quite independently of this research, and so I played no part in the social fabric of its production. The letters and memos, in particular, are far more wide-ranging than any interview could have been, and cast all sorts of light on the writers' world view than the relatively formal and research-oriented nature of an interview could. Secondly, there is scope for writers to voice quite different accounts of the same activities and events, which could also be compared and contrasted with the specially-recorded interviews: it is possible to see how the people involved could contradict each other, and indeed themselves, in the construction of this particular discourse. Finally, the material is contemporaneous with the events it describes, rather than a recollection, which is the case with the interviews. Although the interviewees all (with the exception of Ponsonby) continued to work in the same field after 1985, they were asked to remember their experiences during that period. Although their recollections may well have been coloured by experiences after 1985, nonetheless, their contributions form an important and authoritative element in the construction of the discourse around commissioning music at this time.

As well as these files on the individual composers, there are files dedicated to more general internal BBC matters, such as commissioned works, the Proms and new music. These contain minutes of regular committee meetings, reports commissioned by those committees, and memos pertinent to the subject of the committee. There are also the minutes of the meetings the Central Music Advisory Committee, a committee chaired by the BBC Controller, Music and comprising senior members of the BBC Music Department staff, and representatives of the music industry, including from the worlds of composition, performance and music education. Although there was usually one member from the world of light music, this was a committee concerned with classical music. The Written Archives Centre also holds a more-or-less complete run of Proms guides, or prospectuses, and concert programmes.

Using the BBC Written Archives Centre's files has its own pros and cons. On the plus side, there is a huge amount of material, very little of which has been approached in the way it is being used here. The danger is that it is easy to read selectively, only using that which backs up the reader's prejudices. To avoid this, as full account as possible of the subjects focused upon is presented, at the same time not reifying the material which supports the thesis, or ironizing that which does not. One significant disadvantage of the material from the BBC Written Archives Centre, and this is a disadvantage whose scope is unknowable, is how much material remains unseen. While the Archive is well-curated, the archivists are untiringly helpful, and the indexing of the files is apparently full, it is impossible to know whether there were whole areas of material in runs of files which might have been missed. The researcher is also dependent on the quality of cross-referencing, the possibility that documents might have got lost, and that individual archivists might not have understood the significance of some material. The files are also vetted for material that might be considered legally or personally compromising. Having said all that, in comparing the files that were consulted with those of other studies relying heavily on the Written

Archives (for example, Briggs (1995), Carpenter (1996), Doctor (1999), Garnham (2003), Hendy (2007), and Seaton (2015)) it is possible to be reasonably confident that this is not the case.

Despite my best efforts, which included meetings with the current Controller of BBC Radio 3, Alan Davey, the current Director of the Proms, David Pickard, and Radio 3's Head of Music Programming and Policy, Edward Blakeman, access to the BBC's own sound archive was not made available to me. Instead I was dependent on the British Library's Sound Archive, which, while being far from comprehensive, nevertheless was a valuable source of broadcast material, including recordings of first performances of commissioned works from the Proms, including the presentation of the announcers at the Royal Albert Hall, and interval talks when these were deemed to be relevant. The Archive also holds Proms-related programmes, like *Prom Talk*, a weekly magazine programme running during the Proms season, and dedicated to previewing highlights of the coming week's concert. This naturally often included interviews with the composers of commissioned works. It was possible to listen to entire works and programmes, and to transcribe interviews and presentation.

Semi-structured interviews with figures with a particular interest in the commissioning process were conducted: from the BBC, publishers, and composers. The former BBC employees were chosen for their close involvement in the commissioning process: the former Controller, Music and Director of the Proms, Robert Ponsonby; Stephen Plaistow, who was Editor, New Music for much of this period, and was one of Glock's early appointees in the early 1960s: in many ways it was Plaistow who was instrumental at the BBC in developing the commissioning system during the years under discussion; and his successor as Editor, New Music, Andrew Kurowski. Although Kurowski worked at the BBC during the tail end of Ponsonby's time there, he only became responsible for commissioning on Plaistow's retirement in 1991. However, he worked closely with Plaistow from 1982, he learned the ropes from Plaistow, and continued the

commissioning process in very much the same way. While William Glock was expert in the field of new music, and held strong views, Ponsonby was not, and he depended much more heavily on the advice of Music Department producers, and especially the Editor, New Music.

The two publishers interviewed worked for two of the UK's leading classical music publishers, both with a very strong roster of living composers, Schott and Co. and Faber Music. Schott's has a considerable list of British composers, including Michael Tippett, Alexander Goehr and John Casken, and is also a subsidiary of its parent company, based in Mainz, and therefore also has many international composers on their books, including Hans Werner Henze, Toru Takemitsu and György Ligeti. Faber Music is an independent, London-based company, set up originally as a sister company to Faber and Faber in order to publish the music of Benjamin Britten, and maintaining strong, if informal, links with them. Their roster of composers, almost entirely British, includes the leading figures of a generation that came to artistic maturity in the 1970s, including Oliver Knussen, Colin Matthews, and Jonathan Harvey, all commissioned for the Proms during this period. The recently-retired Head of Promotions at Schott's, Sally Groves, was responsible for the publisher's living composers and had spent nearly all her working life at the company. Sally Cavender, her opposite number at Faber's, was just on the point of retiring when she was interviewed. She, too, had spent almost her entire working life at Faber's. Given their longevity in the industry and recently-retired status, both these interviewees were able to speak candidly, particularly as I have a long professional and personal relationship with both of them.

Four composers were interviewed, chosen to represent a cross-section of those commissioned to write for the Proms. Each composer was born in a successive decade: 1920s, 30s, 40s, and 50s. Thea Musgrave (b.1928) is the oldest living composer, who was also commissioned the earliest: *The Phoenix and the Turtle* was first performed at the Proms on 20 August 1962. She subsequently wrote a Viola Concerto for the Proms, first performed on 13 August 1973, and, more recently,

Two's Company, premiered on 31 August 2007. Musgrave was therefore commissioned during the Glock era (twice) and also by Nicholas Kenyon. Anthony Payne (1936–2021) was commissioned twice for the Proms: although *The Stones and Lonely Places Sing* received its first performance at the Proms in 1979, that was commissioned by the Nash Ensemble and Amelia Freedman; *The Spirit's Harvest*, commissioned for the Proms, was premiered on 31 July 1985 and *Time's Arrow*, his second Prom commission, was first heard on 24 July 1990. Nicola LeFanu (b.1947) was, like Musgrave, commissioned by Glock: *The Hidden Landscape* was first performed on 7 August 1973, when she was still in her mid 20s. She has not received a subsequent Proms commission. Robert Saxton (b.1953), was commissioned to write for the 1983 Proms season, but was unable to finish the work in time; his Concerto for Orchestra was first heard the following season, on 13 August 1984. He was subsequently commissioned for the Proms, and *I will awake the dawn* was premiered on 10 September 1987.

The interviews were semi-structured. Those with Musgrave, Groves, Ponsonby, Plaistow and Kurowski were conducted face-to-face. These mostly took place in the interviewee's home, although Musgrave was interviewed in her hotel room, and Kurowski in a café. In Musgrave's case, her husband was present, and we were joined for part of the interview by the oboist Nicholas Daniel. The other interviews were conducted over Zoom. Although some key issues needed to be covered, the interviews were allowed to flow as conversations, and all of them went on for an hour or more; the exception was that with Ponsonby, who tired quite quickly on account of his age (he was 91 at the time of interview). All were recorded and transcribed, using transcription software, and then edited by hand and ear. On the whole, unnecessary repetitions, hesitations and deviations have been removed without remark, unless these appeared significant. Although all the interviewees were active during the period under discussion, inevitably they were recalling events from many years ago, and their attitudes and recollections may be coloured by events from the period after 1985. These interviews, and some material from the BBC

Written Archives Centre – in particular, correspondence from Elisabeth Lutyens – have occasionally been quoted at some length, when the sheer length of the anecdote or letter formed an integral element in the discourse. It should be noted that my interviewing style is informed by my professional background as a BBC producer: I have considerable experience in producing long-form interviews for broadcast (I was the principal producer on Radio 3's *Private Passions* between 2000 and 2014) and conducting interviews myself to provide material for documentary and feature programmes. Further, I knew all these interviewees in advance, from a variety of contexts, and some of them very well as BBC colleagues. A good deal of background material was acquired in an informal way through my working at or for the BBC: between 1985 and 1990 as a Radio 3 Producer in London, including two years as Senior Proms Producer, 1989–1990; between 1990 and 1999 I held successive posts at BBC Birmingham, as Chief Producer and Editor; from 2000–2014 I was a director of the independent radio production company Classic Arts, making several major strands for Radio 3. This has several implications. On the one hand, I have an insider's knowledge and understanding of the BBC. On the other, I may be guilty of making many of the same assumptions as BBC employees, and failing to question working cultures and practices that an outsider might. I had access to BBC staff, who were happy to talk to me about their experiences; the danger is that they are old colleagues, and often friends, and would assume that we share many of those unwritten protocols upon which the BBC depends. In my defence, I should say that throughout my BBC career I had a healthy scepticism for the discourse that the BBC creates around itself, and have worked hard to be dispassionate about my findings: questioning the assumptions that BBC staff might make about their work, at the same time striving to contain my sometimes overly cynical attitudes.

Approaches from outside musicology and cultural studies: the sociology of science and discourse theory

Three texts are fundamental in informing my approach. Firstly, Bruno Latour's *Reassembling the social* (2005), an introduction to Actor-Network Theory, a subject Latour tried to distance himself from after developing it with Michel Callón and John Law in the mid-1980s. Latour's model of social entities in a constant state of change is utilized to look at the BBC, the Proms, the process of commissioning music for the Proms, and the composers commissioned. Latour's text is largely a polemic against what he calls the 'sociology of the social', which he characterises as believing that society is a thing in itself, and that sociologists of the social tend to approach the objects of their study with preconceptions of the size and nature of the collections of which these collections are a part. These sociological preconceptions then inform, or even dictate, how these objects work, socially speaking. Latour turns this around, and argues that we should start from the relationships between particular actors, actants and mediators, accept that social entities are in a constant state of flux, and focus our work on how these associations function and change. When we think of 'the BBC' we think of production departments, broadcast networks, commissioning executives, websites, series, programmes, contracts departments, legal departments, producers, production teams, camera crews, buildings, plus all the individuals and their relationships, one with another and with the outside world. 'The Proms' conjures up another array of images, including the Royal Albert Hall, orchestras, conductors, soloists, presenters, and in particular the audience: the Prommers. There are the traditional musical elements, too: the Last Night being the most obvious, but also an expectation of certain fixtures like Beethoven's Ninth Symphony – and, at least since the 1960s, an expectation of new music. This approach acknowledges Latour's proposition that most social entities are much more complex than we often recognise and when we study them and try to analyse them they lose their distinctiveness. Because this research builds from the primary evidence found in the BBC Written Archives Centre and interviews, scores and recordings, along with secondary sources, a

number of theoretical frames have been found to be useful in explaining what this evidence shows us about the work of these BBC staff and composers. In particular, following Latour's later reassessment of Actor-Network Theory, I have seen both the corporation's employees and the creative workers as actors in complex institutional networks that he terms the 'sociology of associations', although, like Latour, I have not used the strict nomenclature developed for Actor-Network Theory, but rather allowed his later approach to inform the analysis of my findings.

The second text is *After Method: mess in social science research* by John Law (2004). Although Law's field is the sociology of science, and, in particular, medicine, in this thesis the validity of his theory is tested in the very different field of commissioning music and the BBC. Law builds on Latour's Actor-Network Theory and argues that 'methods [no longer] *discover* and depict realities. Instead [...] they participate in the *enactment* of those realities' (Law, 2004: 45). In this study, Law's approach is utilized to address the slippery subject of commissioning of new music, examining it from a variety of different standpoints to see how an institution like the BBC was able to control and rationalize this process. Looking at this practice from the point of view of members of BBC management, the BBC Music Department, composers and their publishers, and performers, a discourse is constructed that recognises that commissioning new music for the Proms is not a single object of study, in the same way that Law describes a case study of alcoholic liver disease and the way that it, as an object of study, morphed into a range of different objects depending on who he was talking to: 'the object of study seemed to slip and slide from one interview to the next' (Law, 2004: 78). Law argues that this fluidity is intrinsic to the object of study, rather than a symptom of disorganisation on the part of the researcher, and exactly the same fluidity is intrinsic to this study.

The third text is *Discourse and Social Psychology* by Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell (1987). Here the authors argue that discourse (in its loosest sense of what people say and write) rather

than reflecting an external reality and exposing a consistency of approach or attitude, instead is instrumental in constructing that reality. Discourse has a function, and that function is to make things happen. Like Law, Potter and Wetherell's subject is science, more specifically the philosophy and sociology of science. Their approach, a close reading of what is written and spoken, along with what was done, is fundamental to this study. That which has been written and spoken about the object of study is interrogated utilizing Potter and Wetherell's approach. Much of this material justifies actions after the fact, and Potter and Wetherell's approach is concerned with the variation in interpretation of the same events. They describe this as 'variability': they see language as constructive, in that it constructs a social reality. This is not necessarily intentional on the part of the speaker or writer:

We do not wish, however, to make the process seem necessarily deliberate or intentional. It may be that the person providing the account is not consciously constructing, but a construction emerges as they merely try to make sense of a phenomenon or engage in unselfconscious social activities like blaming or justifying. All language, even language which passes as simple description, is constructive and consequential for the discourse analyst (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 34).

Although much of the primary material of this study might have been thought of by those who wrote it and spoke it as 'simple description', the consequences of their words would have serious consequences for the recipients of a Proms commission, and this is the point at which discourse tips over from simple explanation into a manifestation of power relationships. The power relationships between BBC management, the Music Department, composers and their publishers are fluid, and only solidify at significant moments: in this case, usually, in the commissioning of a new work. As Latour writes:

[P]ower, like society, is the final result of a process and not a reservoir, a stock or capital that will automatically provide an explanation. Power and domination have to be made up, composed (Latour, 2005: 64).

One feature of this research is the opportunity to examine the music composed alongside other modes of discourse; not prioritising it above all the other material as traditional musicology might, but treating it as another strand in constructing the discourse. A criticism that is sometimes directed at the sociology of music is that it ignores the central object of study, the cultural object: as Georgina Born (2010) writes in her critique of Bourdieu and cultural production, ‘much scholarship in the sociology of art is vulnerable to accusations of reductionism for failing to address the specificity of the aesthetic and the art object’ (Born, 2010: 174). In this context, the music composed to commission for the Proms is interpreted as one of the composer’s contributions to the discourse, which, to a very great extent, is otherwise verbal. The dominance of the linguistic element in discourse analysis is hardly surprising, but here the analysis is extended beyond the verbal to include the music, the ‘art object’, using the techniques of traditional music analysis, discussing genre, influences, musical language and style – the aesthetic, in short – to allow the music to take its rightful place in the debate. It is also vital to include those musical networks which comprise the more traditional musicological approach – musical influences and trends, for example – in the same way that a medical researcher studying health would still take human biology into account in their study of illness, as well as the environmental and social factors.

Two sociological approaches to art: Becker and Born

An influential approach in this context is that of Howard Becker in *Art Worlds* (2008), who acknowledges that even in those artistic fields which normally give priority to the individual creator, the lone genius, of which composed classical music in the Western tradition is certainly

one, there is nonetheless a network supporting that individual artist, and without this support, the art would either not exist at all, or would be very different. In this thesis Becker's thinking is interrogated, to see to what extent the BBC and its staff are instrumental in the creation of the new music commissioned for the Proms. Becker also provides the categories of different sorts of artists: 'Integrated Professionals', 'Mavericks', 'Folk Artists' and 'Naïve Artists' (Becker, 2008: 226–271). Integrated Professionals are those who work along well-established lines; if they are composers, then they write for conventional instruments, using traditional notation. They know how their work is likely to fit into orthodox concert programmes, how much rehearsal time they are likely to get and so on. As Becker points out, without these people, art worlds would cease to exist, because they are required to continue to make characteristic products. Mavericks, on the other hand, find all this too constraining. They want to work outside the conventions, and by and large they are either ignored by the mainstream, often laughed at as amateurs, or else forced to curb their excesses. The concept of the Integrated Professional is valuable in this context, not only in their understanding of their 'Art World', but also in their interchangeability. Becker uses the example of leading concert pianists as interchangeable commodities: 'If Horowitz cannot appear with our orchestra, Rubinstein will be perfectly acceptable' (Becker, 2008: 231), and, furthermore, justifies the support of the second-rate:

[A]rt world participants think a large number of people, not just the very best, worth bothering about, for the practical reason that you have to encourage many in order to find a few, and there is no telling when someone not worth bothering about will suddenly become worth it after all. If we bothered only about the *very* best, we would shut our galleries eleven months out of the year, open Carnegie Hall only now and then, and publish many fewer books (Becker, 2008: 231).

Which chimes nicely with William Glock's view that he did not expect commissions to result in anything of great value, but rather that the process encouraged the ecosystem among composers

(quoted on p. 56) 'The vast majority of composers commissioned for the Proms fall into the category of 'Integrated Professional', and composers' understanding of what is required of them is central to their institutionalisation by the BBC: this has much in common with Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus'.¹⁷

Born (2010) offers a theoretical frame for a sociological approach to art (and, indeed, institutions such as the BBC) in a post-Bourdieu landscape which also incorporates and critiques that branch of Actor-Network Theory developed by Hennion (2012 & 2015) which embraced a musicological approach, Wolff (1981 & 1983) and his attempt to reconcile sociology and the aesthetics of art, anthropological work by Gell (1998), and Foucault's theories of discourse. Her principle cause for complaint is that, unlike, say, musicology:

[M]uch scholarship in the sociology of art is vulnerable to accusations of reductionism for failing to address the specificity of the aesthetic and of the art object [...] for Antoine Hennion, the classical forms of sociology when taken to the analysis of art, whether from critical theory, interactionism or constructivism, have 'always been less interested in creation, genius or the works "in themselves" than in what makes these categories appear as such' (Hennion, 2003: 81) (Born, 2010: 174).

The necessity for those inverted commas around 'in themselves' is telling: Born is wary of those subject-specific studies, like musicology, which privilege the 'works in themselves' above all else; nonetheless, her argument is more in the other direction, that sociology is guilty of skating around aesthetics. She cites Wolff's attempts to take both on board, incorporating what might now be called reception theory and genre theory in an acknowledgment of why people actually like and are interested in art, and then situating the aesthetic in the discourse that is created around it, while still addressing the 'extra-artistic' elements of significance:

¹⁷ For an overview of Bourdieu's concept of habitus, see Maton (2014)

Four elements can be discerned in Wolff's project: first, 'taking as a topic of investigation that value already bestowed on works by their contemporaries and subsequent critics and audiences'; second, 'recognizing the autonomy of the question of the particular kind of pleasure involved in past and present appreciation of the works themselves'; third, uncovering those 'aesthetic categories and judgements which locate and inform the researcher's project' (Wolff, 1983: 106); and fourth, with reference to Foucault, analysing the 'specificity of the aesthetic in terms of the particular discursive practices that constitute it, while leaving open the possibility of relating [it] to extra-aesthetic factors' (Wolff, 1983: 94) (Born, 2010: 175).

One element of this aesthetic discourse is the relationship – a conversation, almost – between an artist's earlier and later work, which might seem blindingly obvious to the musicologist:

Gell takes this Husserlian perspective to the relations between works in any artist's oeuvre, tracing how later works are anticipated in earlier ones, and how retentions of earlier works are found in later ones (Gell, 1998: chapter 9). He illustrates with reference to Marcel Duchamp's work from 1913 on, proposing that it forms 'a distributed object, in that each of Duchamp's separate works is a preparation for, or a development of, other works of his, and all may be traced, by direct or circuitous pathways, to all the others' (Gell, 1998: 245) (Born, 2010: 184).

Nonetheless, this theory of the 'distributed object', can be extended beyond the traditional musicological perspective, in the way that Gell relates objects created not by a single artist, like Duchamp, but by a community of creative practitioners, in this case Maoris and their meeting houses:

He takes the corpus of Maori meeting houses built between 1870 and 1930 as a collective instance of such object agency, suggesting that this oeuvre represents a composite object distributed in time and space. An oeuvre (or genre), Gell concludes, is an object

distributed in space and time, where the relations between individual artworks map out a web of retentions and protentions (Born, 2010: 184).

An approach that can form a methodology for looking at the music commissioned for the Proms; while the work of any individual composer can be related to their earlier works, and will in its turn look forward to their later style, it is also possible to group together individual art works into 'a composite object', and examine works by disparate composers that might yet be gathered together as a composite of Proms pieces. Born's position is that of a scholar pushing beyond Bourdieu's 'Field of Cultural Production' (Bourdieu, 1993a), which, useful as they are, might be seen to be rather rigid. Born proposes that:

[A]n explanatory theory of cultural production requires reinvention in relation to five key themes: aesthetics and the cultural object; the place of institutions; agency and subjectivity; questions of history, temporality and change; and problems of value and judgement. These themes are deeply connected; each can be seen as ultimately subordinate to the first, that is, to providing a non-reductive account of the aesthetic in theorizing cultural production (Born, 2010: 172).

Born is sailing perilously close to the rocks of traditional art history here, in subjugating the sociology to the aesthetic, with its concomitant trap of her own starting point of reductionism, and studying the context of art works as adjuncts to the real business of the 'aesthetics and the cultural object'. Born goes on to further refine Bourdieu's theories, incorporating some of Foucault's historical perspective into Bourdieu's theory of habitus, and focusing Bourdieu's fields of cultural production as concerned with style and genre, along with a little historical perspective:

Hence works of art are produced through the interaction between an artist's habitus (or socialized disposition), which reflects her social origins and personal trajectory, and the

field as a structured space of competing styles and genres, themselves resulting from the evolution of the field. Second, Bourdieu's insistent probing of the relational, of the 'consensus in dissensus, which constitutes the objective unity of the ... field' (Bourdieu, 1971b: 191), stands as an exemplary sociological implementation of the post-structuralist imperative to engage with the analysis of classification, boundaries and difference (Born, 2010: 177).

Born's attempt to give Bourdieu's fields some sense of change through time is developed further in her desire to see the fields as dynamic places of change. She does not mention Bourdieu's discussion of how aspiring artists are able to enter a field:

It is true that the initiative of change falls almost by definition on the newcomers, i.e. the youngest, who are also those least endowed with specific capital: in a universe in which to exist is to differ, i.e. to occupy a distinct, distinctive position, they must assert their difference, get it known and recognized, get themselves known and recognized ('make a name for themselves'), by endeavouring to impose new models of thought and expression, out of key with the prevailing modes of thought and with the doxa, and therefore bound to disconcert the orthodoxy by their 'obscurity' and 'pointlessness' (Bourdieu, 1993a: 58).

Rather, Born sees Bourdieu's theory as one of stasis:

Bourdieu's theory of agency therefore privileges the iterative over the transformative; what is crucially missing is an explanation of 'how [the] schemas [of the habitus] can be challenged, reconsidered and reformulated' (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 983) (Born, 2010: 181).

This insistence on the change and development of the creative artist is key to Born (the word 'trajectory', or its derivatives, appears 11 times in the article):

If there is an overriding dimension of creative practice that has been lamentably neglected – by Bourdieu, production of culture and cultural studies alike – and that demands to be studied, it is the insistent, existential reality of the historical orientation of producers by reference to the aesthetic and ethical trajectories or coordinates of the genres in which they work, an orientation that enables or affords agency (Born, 2010: 192).

Finally, with incorporation of some elements of Foucault's thinking, Born arrives at a method that integrates that vital element of the developmental trajectory of the artist, their development from one work to the next; the relationship between the work of one artist and the others working in the same field of cultural production, how any work fits with others being made at the same time, and its coherence, or otherwise, with the prevailing artistic style; and finally a willingness to look at all the factors that might have had an influence on the creation of a particular work of art (here Born swerves that dangerous pothole that privileges the aesthetic above all else):

Foucault offers clarity in elaborating difference as a methodological principle. He outlines three modalities of difference to be utilized when tracing genealogy. The first is synchronic: that we should assume the internal differentiation of dominant cultural formations, analysing both their regularities or coherence, and their dispersion. The second is diachronic: that we should trace the trajectory of such dominant cultural formations, assuming neither continuity nor discontinuity, nor a uniform rate of transformation; here we read the ethnographic material for its encapsulation of currents or dynamics of different temporal depth. The third is analytical: that in elucidating genealogy, we should effect 'a sort of multiplication or pluralization of causes ... a multiplication [that] means analysing an event according to the multiple processes that constitute it', leading to a 'polymorphism' of the elements brought into relation in the analysis, and of the domains of reference mobilized (Born, 2010: 195).

Born's theoretical article presents a powerful methodological framework, a toolkit for examining the music commissioned and composed for the Proms from a multiplicity of angles, incorporating the sociology of the work without ignoring its aesthetic existence as an art work.

Born's critique of Bourdieu's theory of the fields of cultural production is useful, especially in focusing and simultaneously freeing up his rather rigid concepts, to provide a more flexible tool. Bourdieu's theories of 'habitus' (see, for example, Maton (2014)) and 'doxa' (see, for example, Deer (2014)) are useful in establishing the narratives that have been created around commissioning music for the Proms, but Bourdieu's phrase 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu, 1994: 63) has unfortunate connotations in this context. To Anglophone ears, it sounds like there may be an element of cynicism about it, how to cheat the system to your own advantage. There is also an element of the professional about it, as in a footballer's professional foul: what you can get away with. Composers writing for the Proms were not merely professional, but aspired to mastery, quite a different thing. In no way were they playing a game: to a composer, composition is deadly serious, not something to earn a living, but a large part of their own self-worth and identity; to describe yourself as a 'composer' is different in kind from calling yourself a 'plumber' or an 'accountant'. Bourdieu asks 'Who creates the creator?' (Bourdieu, 1993b: 76). Talking about the ideology of the fetishization of the single creative artist, composing alone in their garret, he writes:

It is this ['charismatic'] ideology which directs attention to the *apparent producer*, the painter, writer or composer, in short, the 'author', suppressing the question of what authorizes the author, what creates the authority with which authors authorize (Bourdieu, 1993b: 76).

Bourdieu asks the question: who bestows this prestige and symbolic capital on the kingmaker? In the case of the composers commissioned to write for the Proms, it is the BBC itself and the staff who the BBC employs, who do that to a very great extent.

Selection of participating composers and works

A significant methodological challenge to the researcher in this area is the sheer richness of the available material. During the period in question, 1960–1985, 84 works were commissioned from 60 different composers. Most, although not all, of those composers have one or more files in the BBC Written Archives Centre; for example, there is no file on Naresh Sohal, commissioned for the 1982 Proms. Composers' files were selected based on knowledge that there might be material of interest (from reading secondary material, such as biographies), availability, and instinct. In this last case, instinct, it is possible that I allowed my choices to be led by my own musical tastes. This was avoided as far as possible, and in pursuing composers who stood outside my normal sphere of musical enthusiasm, I have been happy to broaden my own appreciation for a wider range of genres. The files of the following composers were examined in detail:

- Richard Rodney Bennett
- John Buller
- Gordon Crosse
- Peter Maxwell Davies
- Robin Holloway
- Elizabeth Lutyens
- Elizabeth Maconchy
- Nicholas Maw
- Dominic Muldowney

- Thea Musgrave
- Nigel Osborne
- Roger Smalley
- John Tavener
- Malcolm Williamson
- Hugh Wood.

The Covid-19 lockdown prevented me from examining the files of Nicola LeFanu, Colin Matthews, and Anthony Payne. The file on Bernard Rands contained very little material, and nothing Proms-related. Other than Rands, any of the composers listed would have made fascinating subjects for detailed study, and many of these figures will be revisited in the course of further research. However, as themes began to emerge and the shape of this research became clearer, it was possible to identify a smaller number of composers for really close analysis, and although these figures will feature as exemplars of the broader themes of the thesis, two composers emerged as representative of the entire group: Elisabeth Lutyens and John Buller. They each get a chapter to themselves. From the musicological perspective, the two composers have some things in common, in that they were both modernists, in the sense that they wrote in a non-tonal idiom, eschewing traditional forms or conventional thematic creation or development; on the other hand, Lutyens's rather austere musical language was developed from a Webernian 12-note method, with an emphasis on economy of means; whereas Buller's more opulent approach derives more from the lavish sound world of Ravel, even reaching back to Richard Strauss and Wagner. From almost every other perspective, though, they are quite different: Lutyens already had history with the BBC when she received her first commission for the Proms, and had enjoyed a professional and personal relationship with Glock long before he joined the BBC, whereas Buller only found his feet as a composer in early middle age, and had to

establish himself with the BBC at that point. Lutyens was well-established on the UK music scene as a mentor and teacher, whereas Buller built his network at a much later stage. Lutyens, by the time she was commissioned for the Proms, was hugely experienced, with a very significant catalogue of major works (she was almost notoriously prolific); whereas when Buller was commissioned, he had not yet written anything for full orchestra. They could both fit Becker's category of 'Integrated Professional', and Lutyens, in her second Prom commission, adapted her idiom very successfully to what was required, while Buller was able to expand his own still-developing musical ambitions to fill the parameters of a Prom commission. Lutyens was also able to play the 'Maverick', as demonstrated in her unsuccessful third Prom commission, whose disastrous non-appearance at the Proms is a vivid demonstration of what happened when composers failed to follow the unwritten rules of the game. Nonetheless, both composers were successfully commissioned for the Proms, and although both of them have been rather neglected since their deaths, Buller's light is currently quite extinguished, whereas Lutyens maintains a low but still recognisable profile.

Many of the commissioned pieces are available to listen to at the British Library's Sound Archive, and several have had commercial recordings, many of which are still available. A very good representative sample of all Prom commissions are available online, via YouTube. The issue of the afterlife of Proms commissions, and in particular their commercial exploitation, is beyond the scope of this research, but would make a fascinating topic for future investigation. Nonetheless, the CDs were a useful resource, and the booklet notes could be illuminating, often for what was left out, as much as for what was included. The sound quality of the recordings at the British Library was limited; the Library is not always specific about the source of the recordings, other than many of them were off air, presumably via domestic FM receivers, and often onto reel-to-reel tape recorders in the 1960s, and possibly cassette later as this technology developed. Despite – or, possibly, partly because of – the limitations of the sound quality, these

recordings, complete with radio presentation, applause, and lengthy silences (the Radio 3 pause), are very evocative of the radio broadcasts of the period, and vividly conjure up the concert atmosphere of the Royal Albert Hall.

The material gathered was as exhaustive as possible. Rather than limiting the scope of the research, in the first instance it was made as inclusive as was viable, providing the widest possible range of views, opinions, ambiguities and contradictions. Once gathered, it was sorted roughly by subject. The material from composers' BBC files tended to fall naturally into chronological narratives, which, while often compelling, could range over many subjects. The narrative element in the studies of Buller and Lutyens has been retained, as the richness of this material needs to form its own developing arc, and the nature of the developing relationship between the composer, BBC staff and others in their network has its own story to tell. This was also true of the material from the BBC Handbooks and the Proms prospectuses and programmes, where the development of the discourse was constructed over a period of years. The material on commissioning budgets and commissioning fees also has its own historical momentum. The interviews tended to fall more naturally into categorisation by subject, and this is reflected in the way this material is presented in the thesis. In the same way that the material found its own shape, it also created its own analysis. As already outlined, rather than approach this object of study with a ready-made theoretical toolkit, the skills needed to interpret it grew out of a close reading of the various elements. Instead of attempting to summarize general principles from the material, it is allowed to speak for itself, and create its own discourse. Which is not to say that it is not interpreted and critical faculties are not employed, but the material and its interpretation are always in dialogue; the questions constantly asked are: why interpret it this way and not that? Why see a pattern here, and not there? Why is this contradiction significant and not that?

As a model for organisational ethnography, Georgina Born's *Uncertain Vision: Birt, Dyke and the Reinvention of the BBC* (2004), combines interview, analysis and a personal diary in an imaginative and original study. The thrust of the narrative is carried by Born's scrupulous research from the BBC's Written Archives Centre, from other media archives, and from previous histories. This narrative is interspersed with extracts from interviews, often quoted at some length, and her personal diary entries. This provides an excellent model for this research project. Born (1995) is a more traditional organisational ethnography of IRCAM, making extensive use of interview.

In the field of historical musicology, Jennifer Doctor's *The BBC and Ultra-Modern Music, 1922–1936 Shaping a Nation's Tastes* (1999) provides a model of how to use the BBC's Written Archives Centre. She made extensive use of the Written Archives in her account of the changing music policy of the BBC during the 1920s and 30s. Here, internal memos, correspondence, contracts, newspaper articles, policy documents, the *Radio Times*, concert programmes, memoirs and previous histories of the BBC are woven into a very readable account of this earlier period of the BBC's history. David Hendy (2007) used a combination of the BBC Archives, both written and audio, to research his history of Radio 4, *Life on Air*. As he acknowledges, the written archive for this object of study consists very largely of newspaper cuttings, which, while significant, can only tell part of the story. For the rest he was dependent on extensive interviews with those who were there at the time. Hendy is scrupulous in distinguishing between fact, hearsay, conjecture and opinion in this study of the BBC in relation to, and as reflection of, its audience. The value of this study from the point of view of this research is that it demonstrates an understanding of the BBC as a maker of programmes, and rather than treating the output as the result of top-down management decisions, it acknowledges the central role of the individual producer in shaping the character of an entire radio network.

In attempting to study the commissioning of music for the BBC Proms, without privileging either the music over its social milieu, or vice versa, the methodology developed for this study reaches beyond the traditional frameworks of either musicology or radio studies, to embrace the theories of sociologists of science. The approaches of Latour, Law, and Potter and Wetherill enrich more traditional approaches to the study of art, building on the existing theories of both Bourdieu and Becker, and going some way to address the theoretical misgivings of Born. Born's principal concern is that in the study of art, the aesthetic baby has been thrown out with the sociological bathwater, a state of affairs precipitated by the scholarly pendulum swinging too far in favour of the social milieu over the study of music as an art object in itself. As was seen in the Literature Review, in the work of Ross, Rupprecht and Rutherford-Johnson, there has been an enthusiasm to situate music into its social milieu, and in utilizing the approaches derived from sociologists of science, this thesis aims to further develop their efforts. In concentrating on one very specific area, the music commissioned for the Proms, and investigating the relationships between the composers and those people working for the institution of the BBC, the intention is to demonstrate the discourses which were developed around the Proms, and the commissioning of music for the Proms, and how it was possible to institutionalise the composers concerned to the extent that they were able to understand what was required of them without detailed briefs, and the BBC was able to control the slippery process of commissioning music. The following chapter explores the way that one such discourse, around the importance of the Proms to the BBC, and the value of the new music commissioned for the Proms, was developed. This discourse was developed in parallel by senior management at the BBC, the members of the BBC Music Department, and composers and their publishers, to the mutual benefit of all parties.

part two

Chapter Five: Constructing the importance of the Proms

In the three chapters which comprise the second part of this thesis, the focus is on three elements in the making of commissioned music for the Proms. This first is on how the importance of the Proms was constructed during this period, and the part that new music played in the construction of that narrative. The second is on the role that the distribution of money took in that construction. The third chapter is an examination of the relationships between the members of the music industry and the BBC: who the key players were, and what they needed to know. The third part of the thesis, chapters nine and ten, interweaves these elements through an examination of two composers' experiences of being commissioned for the Proms.

In this chapter, it is argued that the reinvention of the Proms during this period was far from being solely the vision of the successive Directors of the Proms, William Glock and Robert Ponsonby, but was rather a discourse fashioned by members of BBC staff (including, of course, Glock and Ponsonby) and the importance of new music in the construction of that narrative was also dependent on composers and their publishers.

According to David Wright, the Proms were reinvented during the seasons 1960 to 1985, 'transformed into an international music festival of the first rank' (Wright, 2007: 168). He ascribed this transformation to 'Sir William Glock, BBC Controller of Music from 1959 to 1972 [...]and] his successor, Robert Ponsonby, Controller of Music from 1972 to 1985' (Wright, 2007: 168). Wright also recognised that alongside the innovations of Glock and Ponsonby, this reinvention was also a result of the:

BBC's own attitudes to the concerts [...] a source of international prestige [...] this new and hitherto unexpected level of esteem – the cultural dividend, as it were – [which]

came at an ever-increasing cost [...] a price the BBC was essentially willing to pay’ (Wright, 2007: 168).

This approach to understanding an important moment of change narrates a simple story in which Glock (re)created the Proms, the BBC saw that they were good, and rewarded him accordingly. In this we can see many of the tropes of history-writing that have been discussed so far. Firstly, it utilizes Glock within a Great Man narrative of history. Secondly, it ascribes to a large organisation like ‘the BBC’ an ability to possess an institutional attitude (here a willingness to pay). Thirdly, it constructs events into a simple process of cause and effect.

In Bourdieu’s terms, Glock was able to create the cultural capital of the Proms, and then exchange it for the hard cash, economic capital, needed to put on the concerts. In this chapter and the next, that assumption is challenged: firstly, by asking how and why the importance – the cultural capital – of the Proms was constructed during this period, and what part the commissioned music for the Proms played in that construction; and secondly, how it was that financial support was forthcoming. Received wisdom would suggest that as the Proms became more successful, it became the best place to programme new music to give it the highest profile, but in fact it is more fruitful to look at the way in which the newness of the commissioned music was instrumental in creating that success. This is achieved by looking at the way composers viewed the Proms and their attitude to writing for them; then by seeing how the staff of the BBC Music Department – those people responsible for planning and producing the Proms concerts – regarded the Proms; and finally, by examining the way that the wider BBC saw the Proms. It was mutually beneficial to all three groups that the reputation of the Proms flourished, and the way that each group invested in their reinvention is interdependent. In the following chapter, the way that financial capital was directed to the Proms commissioning budget is examined, in tandem with this increasing cultural capital. ‘The BBC’ was, indeed, ‘willing to pay’, but this quotidian

phrase conceals a complex series of events by which the Proms commissioning budget was increased during this period; it was not simply a case of the economic capital following the cultural capital, but a far messier story than the implication that ‘the BBC was willing to pay’. The decisions made over the commissioning budget were the closest thing to a policy achieved during this period: it was committed to paper how much money there was to spend on commissions, and – loosely – what it should be spent on.

In this chapter it is argued that the Proms had different meanings for different groups during the period under discussion, but to all of them, the newness of the new music commissioned for the Proms developed to become an integral and important element in what made the Proms. To composers the Proms had one meaning: by the early 1980s, the experience of writing for the Proms was likened by one composer to entering a Grand Prix race without having driven the car before¹⁸ and described by a publisher, when interviewed in 2018, as ‘the ultimate validation for a composer’.¹⁹ It was, to use Bourdieu’s term, ‘consecration’ (Bourdieu, 1993: 50–51), bestowed by the BBC, recognised by the composer’s peers, and also a public recognition by the Proms audience. For the staff of the BBC Music Department the Proms meant something else: a meaning encompassing the Royal Albert Hall and its acoustic; the top-flight orchestras, conductors and soloists who gave the concerts; the varied repertoire, especially the new works, and the imaginative programming; and the audience, in the hall but also at home listening to the radio and watching TV. To the wider BBC the Proms became the jewel in the crown of the BBC’s cultural activity, the highest of highbrow events that the BBC supported. They had an existence as public concerts, with a large audience in the Royal Albert Hall, drawn from a wider-than-usual demographic for classical music concert-going, lending credibility to the BBC’s often-expressed desire to widen participation; they had a high profile on the radio and – during the

¹⁸ Robert Saxton, personal communication, 22 and 23 October 2020

¹⁹ Sally Groves, personal communication, 21 March 2018

period under discussion – an increasing visibility on BBC TV. It should be noted that there were other interested parties involved in the reinvention of the Proms during this period, including performers, publishers, critics and the audience, both in the hall on the radio and TV, but while their activities are taken into account, in this study the focus is on the composers, the staff of the BBC Music Department and the wider BBC.

The Proms according to the composers commissioned to write for them

By the end of the period under discussion here, for a composer, to be commissioned for the Proms had become a career-defining experience: the ‘consecration’ of Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1993: 50–51). This was part of a discourse that only developed during the period under discussion, as part of the reinvention of the Proms; for Thea Musgrave, first commissioned to write for the Proms in 1962, when she was still in her early twenties, it was no different from any other commission:

It’s always a big deal to get a commission for an orchestra piece or chorus and orchestra, whatever, [...] absolutely. The Proms is a wonderful opportunity to be in the Albert Hall with this huge audience and the Prommers all there, it’s different. Well it isn’t really different. It’s just exciting to do.²⁰

The Prommers, the Proms audience, is common to every discourse on the reinvention of the Proms. However, the audience is only one element in why a Proms commission is exciting. According to Bourdieu’s ‘principles of legitimacy’:

[W]e find three competing principles of legitimacy. First there is the specific principle of legitimacy, i.e., the recognition granted by the set of producers who produce for other

²⁰ Thea Musgrave, personal communication, 22 September 2018

producers, their competitors, i.e. by the autonomous self-sufficient world of ‘art for art’s sake’, meaning art for artists. Secondly, there is the principle of legitimacy corresponding to the ‘bourgeois’ taste and the consecration bestowed by the dominant fractions of the dominant class and by private tribunals, such as *salons*, or public state-guaranteed ones, such as academies, which sanction the inseparably ethical and aesthetic (and therefore political) taste of the dominant. Finally, there is the principle of legitimacy which its advocates call ‘popular’, i.e. the consecration bestowed by the choice of ordinary consumers, the ‘mass audience’ (Bourdieu, 1993a: 50–51).

For the purposes of this study, the first of these categories is the powerful group of composers who are the self-appointed gatekeepers to their own exclusive club; the second is the BBC, the publishers and the critics (equivalent here to Bourdieu’s ‘academies’); and, finally, the audience, both the audience in the hall and on the radio and TV.

Andrew Kurowski gives a somewhat metaphysical account of how he perceived what the Proms meant to the composers commissioned to write for them, from the perspective of his experience in becoming involved in the process in the early 1980s:

I don’t know really what the Proms are. In a word, is it the space, is it the [Royal] Albert Hall, or is it the audience? Because a Beethoven symphony is a Beethoven symphony; if it’s done at the Proms, does that make it a Proms piece? No, it’s just done at the Proms, but something special is added, and I think when a composer writes for the Proms, okay, there might be things he [...] or she has to think about. [The] acoustic [of the Royal Albert Hall] principally: sound, travel, intensity, all those things. I didn’t think the composer has to think, ‘Oh, it’s a Prom, I’d better make it light and frothy, because [otherwise] the audience won’t like it’. I think it’s the opposite. I think you can say, ‘This is my big safe cushion, I can go mad here, I can be really adventurous and [...] the Proms will support me’. [...] It’s about the audience, the intensity, you’ve probably got 5000 people there. Most composers when they’re putting on their little premières have about 23 people in the audience, so to go to 5000 overnight, that’s overwhelming. But it doesn’t mean to say that the Proms impose a style or an attitude, what it does impose is a

kind of anxiety and overwhelming sense of stress, I think, because there is this feeling you've got to put it out there. And you will be judged by 5000 people and the broadcast audience.²¹

All of which suggests that the Royal Albert Hall, the music played, the audience, the acoustic and the atmosphere all played their part. It was also the sheer size of a Prom concert (to say nothing of the BBC), which Kurowski suggested for a composer might be simultaneously intimidating and supportive. On top of this there is the element of judgement; it is perhaps not entirely coincidental that the standing audience at the Proms are in what is called the Arena, a term reminiscent of Greek or Roman gladiatorial combat, and the passageway to the stage from backstage is called the Bull Run, evoking another form of gladiatorial combat, the bullfight. Composers do see the Proms rather as Kurowski describes. Robert Saxton, commissioned for the 1983 Proms²², by which time a Proms commission had become established as a really significant thing, is explicit about Bourdieu's 'set of producers who produce for other producers, their competitors'. He puts it like this:

I think it's the whole business of having grown up going to Proms. And I really didn't think I was good enough. You know, there was Ollie [Oliver Knussen], there was Simon [Bainbridge], there was Liz [Elisabeth Lutyens], and I'd been at [Benjamin] Britten's 50th Birthday Prom when I first met him. And I just thought, 'God, this is the real thing'. You know, it's like suddenly somebody putting you in a Formula One car and saying, 'Go on, you go around now'. But you're in a race, you're not just driving. And I think I was really, really nervous [...] I think I was really shit scared actually. [Pause] Yeah. [Laughter] I admit it.²³

²¹ Andrew Kurowski, personal communication, 24 October 2017

²² Saxton was commissioned for the 1983 Proms, but failed to deliver, and his Concerto for Orchestra was first performed in the 1984 season.

²³ Robert Saxton, personal communication, 22 and 23 October 2020

The metaphor of the racing car is striking, and that it was like not just having a practice lap, but being entered for a race. Expectations were huge. Saxton also felt he was writing for his composer colleagues, both established senior figures and his contemporaries, ‘the other producers [and] competitors’.

Composers were not only writing for their peers, though. They also felt a responsibility to the audience, the ‘ordinary consumers, the “mass audience”’ (Bourdieu, 1993: 51). Peter Maxwell Davies, in a letter to Glock dated 15 November [indistinct] 1961 wrote about the responsibility he felt towards the Proms audience: ‘The prospect of writing a work for the prom [sic] audience is rather daunting but very stimulating.’²⁴ Davies felt that he was composing, not for ‘the BBC’, not the Proms, not for Glock himself, not the BBC Symphony Orchestra, but for the Proms *audience*. It could be that Davies was bundling all the aforementioned into his definition of the Proms audience, but there is no evidence that he was, but nonetheless, even as early as 1961 a composer could feel the pressure of writing for the Proms. That Davies found the Proms audience both ‘daunting’ and ‘stimulating’ reinforces Kurowski’s point that composers certainly did not feel they needed to dumb down for the Proms audience, but rather that it was a discriminating audience that inspired the composer to up their game. The creation of this enthusiastic, open-minded, and youthful audience was also part of the reinvention of the Proms.

Certainly, there could be a feeling of upping their game, a pressure to excel. Robert Saxton was aware of that tension, and although here he acknowledges that pressure from the BBC and the Proms, it was another commission, from the London Sinfonietta’s Artistic Director, Michael Vyner, where the challenge was made explicit. The commission from Vyner was for the work that was to become *Circles of Light*, first performed by the London Sinfonietta at the Queen

²⁴ BBC WAC RCONT 1 PETER MAXWELL DAVIES FILE 1 1959–62, 15 November [indistinct] 1961

Elizabeth Hall on 5 March 1986. When Saxton was commissioned to write for the Proms, he already had a piece in mind, but did the knowledge that he was going to be writing it for the Proms change his thinking about this piece?

Yes, I think it did, if you want me to be honest. It would be easy to say, wouldn't it, 'Oh, no! Oh, the purity of art'? But I think it did because it was the same when I did *Circles of Light*. Michael Vyner commissioned me in a very odd way, [...] he said, 'I want you to write a piece for the London Sinfonietta. You know I haven't really gone a bundle on your music [...] but I want you to write something that you really want to write, and I want you really to push the boat out. This is a great ensemble. So no farting about. This has got to be the best piece you've ever written'. [...] It threw down the gauntlet, he said, 'Pull out the stops'. And it gave me courage. And in a sense, in a totally different way, I think Stephen [Plaistow] and Robert [Ponsonby] did that with the Concerto for Orchestra: 'You can have whatever size orchestra you like, write the piece you really, really want to write'. So in that sense, yes. And I think one is always aware with the Proms, there's this [...] focus on new music from [BBC music] producers such as Veronica [Slater], Stephen [Plaistow], Misha [Donat] [...] You know, one was thinking of them.²⁵

Saxton is explicit that he was aware of the expectations of individuals at the BBC, and what their tastes were. It was not a question of what 'the BBC' or the Proms required, it was specific people who Saxton knew and respected.

Saxton's reaction to a Proms commission was understood as well by those individuals at the BBC, as Andrew Kurowski clarifies. He also acknowledges that this expectation does not need to be articulated, it is implicitly understood.

²⁵ Robert Saxton, personal communication, 22 and 23 October 2020

It's not for the BBC to say this to composers, but by giving a Proms commission [...] it's a responsibility that people feel they have to stand up and be a bit taller than they have been hitherto [...] so it is a challenge and therefore responsibility because you have to deliver something. But I think that's the composer's problem, not the BBC's. I think what the BBC is saying through a Proms commission is, this is an emblem of trust, an emblem of faith in the composer.²⁶

On the one hand, there is an expectation that the composer will have to 'stand up and be a bit taller', or as Michael Vyner put it, 'Pull out [all] the stops'. On the other, it is a badge of honour, or 'an emblem of trust'. Anthony Payne, who was already in his 40s when he was commissioned for the Proms in 1985, remembered this 'emblem of trust' that, by this time, the BBC bestowed:

It was only after I got commissions and had a BBC broadcast I thought, now I'm no longer a music critic who's trying to write music, I am a composer who has to write music criticism to make a living.²⁷

Payne makes it quite clear that a significant factor in his being confident to call himself 'a composer' was that 'the BBC' thought he was. If the BBC recorded and broadcast his music, and commissioned him to write, then it was not hubris on his part to think of himself primarily as a composer.

Sally Groves, former Head of Promotions at Schott and Co, interviewed for this project in 2018, summed up what the Proms, and a commission, had grown to mean to composers:

They all want their Proms commission. They want them desperately, and then they want another one. It's the validation, isn't it, the ultimate validation for a composer?²⁸

²⁶ Andrew Kurowski, personal communication, 24 October 2017

²⁷ Anthony Payne, personal communication, 13 August 2020

²⁸ Sally Groves, personal communication, 21 March 2018

Like the wider BBC and the Proms planners, composers also valued the Proms audience highly, and many of them had known the Proms from a young age as members of that audience. Saxton described the Proms as ‘the real thing’, and he was explicit in thinking of the Proms as something that other people wrote for, his heroes, either older figures with whom he had studied – Britten, Lutyens – or his successful contemporaries – Knussen, Bainbridge. The legitimacy bestowed by writing for his peers, in Bourdieu’s terms, is also reflected in his writing for known, named individuals on the BBC staff. The last word must go Groves, however, and her assessment of a Proms commission as ‘the ultimate validation for a composer’. Which prompts the question, how did a Proms commission become the ultimate validation for a composer? What part did the BBC Music Department play in the creation of this significance?

The Proms according to those that planned them: the Proms prospectus

A reading of the Proms prospectuses, the annual guide to the Proms season, is revealing in its preoccupation with the audience in the concert hall as opposed to that on the radio and TV, and, just as significantly, the way that changed between 1960 and 1974, when William Glock retired, and Robert Ponsonby replaced him at the helm of the Proms. The Proms audience was a vital ingredient in the discourse that developed around the Proms during this period, important to the composers writing to commission, but also to the BBC staff. The staff of the Music Department also valued the quality of the Proms, the international performers, the imaginative programming, and the range of the repertoire. A crucial part of that repertoire was the new music commissioned for the Proms.

The introductions to the prospectuses, written by Glock, and subsequently Ponsonby, give a good feel for how the people who put the Proms together wanted them to be perceived by the

wider world, and in particular by the Proms audiences themselves. In that, they are a triangulation between the Proms team at the BBC – what they actually thought, and what they were prepared to commit to paper – senior management at the BBC, and the general public. For the most part, Glock set the tone for these introductions when he took over the Proms in 1960. At that time the editorial content of the prospectuses was very plain: Glock's brief introduction, the concert listings and an index of artists, works by genre and 'Works not previously performed at a Henry Wood Promenade Concert'. Glock's emphasis was on breadth of repertoire, and novelty: introducing previously unheard works – old and new – to the Proms, while always maintaining the traditional favourites. Glock first made mention of the specially-commissioned new works in 1961, and these remained a feature of his introductions nearly every year. In 1962 Glock wrote in some detail about the audience research that had been conducted for what he described as the 'revolutionary' seasons of 1960 and 1961:

We set out [...] to analyse the individual programmes of 1961 in relation to the box office receipts [...] Since the Prom audience is the most enterprising in the world, it need cause no astonishment that the largest attendance of the whole season was for a programme which included Schoenberg's Violin Concerto [...] Prommers welcome new experiences, so long as they can also have the great music of the past that they know and love – in this case, Beethoven's seventh symphony (Glock, 1962: 4).

Glock preferred not to imagine that the Prommers came principally to hear the Beethoven, and put up with the Schoenberg under sufferance; rather, he described the audience to itself as 'the most enterprising in the world', cleverly reflecting back that flattering image. Any individual audience member who had heard the Schoenberg and enjoyed it might feel pleased, smug, even; anyone who had heard it and hated it might feel they needed to try harder next time; and anybody who had not heard it at all might think that they really ought to give it a go. Glock was creating a self-fulfilling prophecy: if you were to be a member of the Proms audience, then you

had better be enterprising, and lap up the Schoenberg Violin Concerto. In 1964, having asserted that ‘There are no fundamental innovations in the 1964 Proms’ (Glock, 1964: 4), Glock then explained the balance of the musical planning of the concerts in some detail, and finished his introduction with:

One important novelty I have left till the end. Ten of the concerts will be televised, four by BBC-1 and six by BBC-2. This dramatic development in the diffusion of the Proms means that they will probably have a total audience, in the hall and over the radio and on television, of about fifty millions during the course of the season (Glock, 1964: 4).

Even the quickest back-of-the-envelope calculation – about 50 concerts, about 5000 in the hall – would mean that the audience at the concert in the hall had been increased in size 200 times. An impressive increase in anybody’s terms, even if some of the audience at home might be less attentive than those at the concert. The following year Glock noted that ‘many of the Saturday night programmes will be broadcast in the Home Service instead of in the Light Programme; this explains, amongst other things, a rather adventurous evening [...] on August 28²⁹’ (Glock, 1965: 4), and that 12 of the concerts would be televised. Two years later, in 1967, Glock put a different slant on the Proms, and one which would have been significant to the wider BBC:

During the last few years the Proms have gradually become like an international festival, and the change has taken place not as the result of any decision, but step by step, in trying to achieve each season a more striking repertoire and higher standards of performance [...] What remained for 1967? [...] very little apart from the fact that 1967 was to surpass 1966 in every respect possible (Glock, 1967: 4).

Badging the Proms ‘the world’s greatest music festival’ was still some years in the future, but already Glock is able to describe it as ‘like an international festival’, and that would be something

²⁹ A programme of concertos by Stravinsky, Mozart, Malcolm Williamson, Handel, Tippett and Bach.

that the wider BBC would want to be associated with, and to celebrate. This international reputation is twofold, in that in the musical world the Proms as a concert series would have been seen as preeminent, and as a broadcast event it would also be seen as world-leading, not least through its broadcasts on the World Service and via the Transcription Unit's recordings. (The BBC Transcription Unit selected BBC programmes to be sold to broadcasting organisations around the world.) This suited the wider BBC very well, to be seen to be dominant among broadcasters and in the field of classical music. In 1968 Glock ended his introduction:

There are fifty-two Proms this year. Seven will be televised, including part of the memorial concert for Sir Malcolm Sargent on 19 July. Every programme will be broadcast here at home, and as the BBC World Service will also send out seventy broadcasts, many of them directly transmitted from the Albert Hall, this 74th season will probably have a total audience of at least a hundred millions (Glock, 1968: 5).

Simply by reminding his readers of the World Service output, Glock had doubled his audience. The World Service audience has always been notoriously difficult to measure, and tends to be based on best guesses, but it is nonetheless huge. The BBC's ambassadorial role worldwide, sometimes described as soft diplomacy (especially significant during the period of the Cold War), was an important negotiating tool for the BBC with government, and a reminder of the role that the Proms played in that function would have been politically shrewd. David Wright summarises the progression of broadcast audiences during the 1960s:

One development during Glock's tenure [of the Proms] – and a justification for increasing financial support from the central BBC administration – was an expansion of the broadcasting of the Proms. In Glock's first season only some three-quarters of the concerts were aired on radio [...] The 1961 prospectus set out the normal broadcasting schedule for the concerts: Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays on the Home Service, Tuesdays and Thursdays on the Third Programme and Saturdays on the Light Programme [...] It was in 1964 that Proms coverage increased significantly, with radio

relays for all concerts [...] The greater involvement of television meant that the Proms became much more important to the BBC's cultural identity (Wright, 2007: 183).

There is no evidence that increased financial support for the Proms was dependent on the expansion of broadcasting; the two things appeared to go hand-in-hand, just as the value of the Proms to composers, the BBC Music Department and the wider BBC increased together to mutual benefit. This does not mean there was necessarily a direct cause and effect.

With the arrival of Robert Ponsonby in 1974, the Proms prospectus, which had remained consistent in look, layout and content throughout Glock's reign, began to evolve. The look of the booklet was consciously modernised, abandoning what might have seemed classic or timeless for a trendier, more colourful, eye-catching style. It also increased in size, and indeed price, and began to include a range of articles on the music included in the Proms season. By 1979 the prospectus contained a good deal of essay material, including a feature on the music commissioned for that season, 'Composers' Comment', with paragraphs written by the commissioned composers about their new works. Inviting composers to write about their own music had become by this time an established trend, no doubt part of a desire to allow the composer to speak directly to the audience, unmediated. This prominence given to the new music written especially for the Proms highlights its importance to the reinvention of the Proms. Whereas in previous prospectuses the concert programmes had been printed unadorned, to speak for themselves, for the first time in 1979 each programme was now appended with a brief explanatory note, described within the BBC as a 'Proms puff',³⁰ an acknowledgement of the commercial nature of this writing, designed to entice the ticket-buying public. The whole prospectus was an altogether more commercial venture, with many more advertisements than

³⁰ BBC WAC R27/1077/1 HENRY WOOD PROMENADE CONCERTS GENERAL, 26 March 1985

before. There was even a musical crossword, again to make the prospectus appear more like a glossy consumer magazine.

Ponsonby, like Glock before him, was always ready to praise the Proms audience, and in 1981 another redesign of the prospectus featured the appearance of the Proms audience themselves on its cover. As the prospectus developed over the years from 1960, the reader was given more information: to begin with, just an introduction and a listing of the concerts, then short paragraphs on the featured composers and their photographs, then essays, the 'Proms puffs' and then in 1981 the audience was given back to itself, not only flattered in the written introduction, but as an integral part of the graphic representation of the Proms, right there on the cover of the prospectus. Ponsonby, in his introduction to the 1976 prospectus, had recognised that the Proms is a team game: there was a nod to the participating orchestras and conductors, which had been introduced by Glock; but exceptionally this year Ponsonby thanked the staff at the Royal Albert Hall, and acknowledged the support of producers at Radio 3, and the administrative support of the [BBC] Symphony Orchestra Unit (Ponsonby, 1976: 5). This acknowledgement that the Proms depended for their success on a genuine division of labour, was a very different proposition from William Glock's. Ponsonby, educated at Eton and Oxford, and a patrician member of the Establishment elite if ever there was one, might not have been consciously referencing Karl Marx, but nonetheless this recognition that the Proms went beyond just the composers, conductors and orchestras, and that the person that sold you a programme or an ice cream, or drew up an artist's contract also played a significant role, was a development that is impossible to ignore, especially at a time of turbulent industrial relations: this was the year the Grunwick Dispute began. In 1981, this division of labour was further developed, with several BBC Radio 3 producers given a name check³¹ for their help with the planning; a tribute to a BBC

³¹ Peter Dodd, Misha Donat, Hugh Keyte, Stephen Plaistow and William Robson.

backroom boy, Chris Samuelson, who had led the Concerts Management team for 14 years, and who was retiring; to the BBC Symphony Orchestra ‘the backbone of the Proms’; and also to the concert audience in the hall: ‘the best in the world’ (Ponsonby, 1981: 5).

In his last year as Director of the Proms, Ponsonby, after celebrating the large audience for the broadcasts of the concerts, wrote ‘The Proms are surely superlative ambassadors for the musical life of this country, threatened though it is, and I am proud that the BBC is in a position to promote them’ (Ponsonby, 1985: 5). Throughout the Ponsonby years, the BBC brand had always remained discreet; Ponsonby had resisted any change to the formal title of the Proms as ‘The Henry Wood Promenade Concerts’ in deference to the conductor who had started them. It was John Drummond, his successor, who rebranded them ‘The BBC Proms’, complaining that nobody knew it was the BBC who actually promoted and paid for the concerts. As for the Proms as an ambassador for British music-making, Ponsonby could not have foreseen to what extent they would become an ambassador for the BBC brand in general, with subsequent Proms Directors, Nicholas Kenyon and Roger Wright, happy to share The Proms brand with other BBC flagships, among them *Blue Peter* and *Doctor Who*.

The priorities of the Proms’ Directors, Glock and Ponsonby, focused on three areas: firstly, the breadth of programming, with ever-widening repertoire, including more early music, less well-known music and new music, some of it commissioned by the BBC; secondly, the quality of music making, and especially the invitations to orchestras, conductors and soloists from around the world, calling attention to the international nature of the festival; and finally, the audience. The size and heterogeneous demographic of the audience was important, but so was its open-mindedness and discrimination. The importance of the Proms to those planning them rested on these priorities, and the novelty of the new music commissioned for the Proms was an integral part of what made the Proms. Ponsonby’s acknowledgement of the team involved in making the

Proms happen was part of the same narrative: the Proms were not only big, with the most concerts, the largest audiences, the most visiting orchestras and the widest ranging programmes; they were also the best, with the BBC's most talented producers assisting in planning the most imaginative programmes, the most glamorous orchestras and the most discriminating audiences.

The Proms according to the 'wider BBC': the BBC Handbook

The nature of the BBC's cultural identity, and the value the wider BBC placed upon the Proms and the vital part that new music played in that value, can be gauged by the coverage of the season in the annual BBC Handbook. The function of the Handbook is explained on the website British Online Archives:

The BBC's handbooks were published yearly from 1928 to 1987, apart from a two-year break in 1953–1954. Alongside the Annual Report and Accounts, which the BBC is required to submit to Parliament, these handbooks were intended to be a publicly available report of what it did and why. The handbooks' aims have been summarised thus by Sir Ian Jacob, former Director-General (BBC Handbook 1955): 'To provide a clear and reliable guide to the workings of the BBC, to survey the year's work in British broadcasting, and to bring together as much information about the BBC as can be assembled within the covers of a small book' (British Online Archives, online).

Although the Handbooks were ostensibly a report to the licence fee-paying BBC audience, they were also very much political tools, aimed at decision-takers and policy-makers in Parliament. Until the mid-1960s, the writers of the handbook were anonymous, so it really did appear to be the voice of 'the BBC'; after that, elements that contained opinions were credited, as shall become apparent. Prior to Glock's rejuvenation of them, the Proms hardly got mentioned in the BBC Handbooks. For example, in the 1955 Handbook, there was a single mention, that the BBC Symphony Orchestra, among its other activities, played in 'more than half the Promenade

Concerts' that season (BBC, 1955: 60). In 1959, the year of Glock's appointment to the BBC, the situation was much the same, and the emphasis was very much on the concert-giving activities of the BBC's orchestras rather than anything to do with broadcasting:

Public concerts by BBC Orchestras [...] in London and the provinces are part of the policy to encourage concert-going. These concerts also enable listeners to see the orchestra and conductors 'at work', which would not be possible in the studios or converted studios where most of the music broadcasts are staged.

In 1957 the BBC Symphony Orchestra visited Dundee, Aberdeen, Glasgow and Edinburgh, Worcester, Brighton and Huddersfield. Other public appearances of the orchestra were the usual season of ten symphony concerts in the Royal Festival Hall and twenty-five of the Promenade Concerts in the Royal Albert Hall – the whole series of which have been sponsored by the BBC since 1927 (BBC, 1959: 84).

It might seem odd that a broadcasting orchestra should be on a mission to encourage concert-going, and that these concerts would be an opportunity for listeners to see the musicians in action, but this demonstrates the extent to which the BBC Music Department, including its orchestras, were as much a part of the music industry in the UK as they were part of the BBC.

The wider BBC is proud to have 'sponsored' the Proms since 1927, even if the wholesale ownership of the season hardly seems to be covered by the word 'sponsorship'. Elsewhere in the 1959 Handbook, it was noted that BBC TV broadcast 'RELAYS OF PUBLIC CONCERTS From the Proms, the Edinburgh Festival, the Hallé Centenary Concert and the Light Programme Music Festival' (BBC, 1959: 168). Here the Proms are first among equals, and not preferred over the Edinburgh Festival, for example. The First Night of the Proms is also featured in notable Outside Broadcasts, in 'A list to illustrate the range of EVENTS covered', alongside the Badminton Horse Trials, the Farnborough Air Display and the Boat Show (BBC, 1959: 169). To the Television Service the Proms was just one more public event to be covered, to bring the

gamut of UK cultural activities to the viewer at home. These events included a good deal of mainstream sport (football, rugby, cricket, tennis, golf, racing), various royal activities, and some theatre. Although the BBC prided itself on bringing a wide range of activities to the listening and viewing public, what 'the BBC' deemed appropriate for its audience was fairly circumscribed. The 1960 Handbook included a much more extensive section devoted to Music on 'Sound Radio', in which it proclaimed 'The BBC is the largest single provider of music programmes in the country'. Since the BBC still had a monopoly on radio broadcasting at this time, this presumably refers again to public concerts rather than radio programmes. Over three pages the musical activities of the BBC were detailed; nearly all of this was classical music, although the BBC Light Music Festival got a mention, as did:

The sixty-fourth season of Henry Wood Promenade Concerts at the Royal Albert Hall (which have been sponsored by the BBC since 1927) played to nearly 300,000 people during forty-nine evenings (BBC, 1960: 59).

Again, the emphasis is on the public concerts rather than the broadcasts, and the reiteration of the interest that the BBC has had in the Proms 'since 1927' emphasises the heritage aspect of the Proms, an integral part of the cultural warp and weft of the UK for over 30 years. The integration of the BBC into the musical landscape is outlined:

The responsibility for all music broadcasts rests with the Music Division, under Controller, Music. It is divided into two parts: the Heads of Music and Light Music programmes, with their planning and production staffs, work closely with choral and orchestral sections, public concerts management, brass and military band organizers, music publicity, and the copying and hiring section, an offshoot of the BBC's vast music library. There is close liaison with BBC television and regional music staffs, with agents and publishers, and with radio stations overseas (BBC, 1960: 60).

The value of this close involvement in the musical scene, both in the UK and abroad is the flipside of Ian McIntyre's complaint that BBC departments had more in common with their specialist fields outside the BBC than they did with their colleagues in different departments at the BBC (Hendy, 2007: 155). For the first time new music gets a mention in the BBC Handbook:

[N]early 700 new compositions were submitted to the BBC reading panel. Out of forty premières given by the BBC, thirty-eight were British works. Out of seventy-five first broadcast, seventy were British.

The BBC commissioned a Piano Quintet (Kenneth Leighton), which was performed at the Cheltenham Festival and broadcast from there in July 1959, and a Symphony (Malcolm Arnold: No. 4) for performance during 1960 (BBC, 1960: 60–61).

There are also 'SOME FACTS ABOUT BBC MUSIC PROGRAMMES (SOUND RADIO) 1958–9', which, along with the number of operas broadcast (80 altogether) consists entirely of 'Premières, First broadcasts, First performances in Great Britain, and First broadcasts in Great Britain' (BBC, 1960: 61). This fresh emphasis on music on the part of the wider BBC, especially classical music, and the prominence given to the new, was surely a reflection of the energy and enthusiasms of the new Controller, Music, William Glock. There is also weight given to the fact that nearly all of the new work was by British composers. At this time, the BBC wanted to stress that it was the *British* Broadcasting Corporation, and that the licence fee, paid by people living in the UK, was being spent on supporting and promoting British music. This is one of the circles the BBC was forever struggling to square: maintaining and cultivating its reputation internationally, while ensuring that the licence fee was not seen to be spent abroad.

The 1961 Handbook includes an unattributed article on 'Meeting the Needs of the Audience', with a subsection 'The Patron of the Arts', which begins:

Sound radio still remains the principal medium for the broadcasting of music of all kinds (music does, in fact, occupy 40 per cent of the sound output); and the BBC's position as the main musical provider in the country has frequently been commented on by music critics and musicians in their appraisals of the new music calendar now being undertaken by the BBC. The BBC Symphony Concerts and the Proms, for so long an established part of the musical life of the country, were supplemented by some innovations, one of the most notable being the series of Thursday Invitation Concerts broadcast weekly in the Third Programme before invited audiences [...] The Thursday Invitation Concerts have been enthusiastically received and praised. During the year, also, thirty-seven compositions (including two specially commissioned by the BBC) were given their world premières; one hundred and twenty-five were broadcast for the first time; and there were forty broadcasts of works never previously performed in this country (BBC, 1961: 32–33).

Once again, the emphasis is on the new, and works commissioned by the BBC are highlighted, if not named. There is also a shift away from concerts as public events, with the new Invitation Concerts *broadcast* every week, with an invited, rather than paying, audience, making them more like studio broadcasts for which the audience in the hall was incidental. Nonetheless, the BBC maintained its traditional role with regard to the Proms and the BBC Symphony Orchestra's season. In this context, the Proms were seen as the long-established foundation upon which innovations may flourish. This reiterated the longevity emphasised in previous Handbooks ('sponsored by the BBC since 1927' (BBC, 1959: 84)). Having extolled radio's contribution to musical life, television music is given its due, before attention is turned to drama:

The BBC's place as a patron of music, in its commissions and in the maintenance of its many orchestras, is well known and recognized. But this patronage spreads into the life of the other arts. In established drama, for instance, the Third continued its look at seventeenth-century plays; the Home Service presented leading actors and actresses [...] and television embarked on two major dramatic enterprises with 'World Theatre' and 'Twentieth-century Theatre'. But both sound and television encouraged and commissioned dramatic works for their own mediums (BBC, 1961: 33).

And this the section ends:

The extent of the BBC's patronage can be measured from the fact that within the year the sum of £9,750,000 was spent in fees to musicians, composers, artists, and writers of all kinds, including those concerned with the lighter forms of entertainment. Of this, £580,000 was spent on the BBC's permanent orchestras, which themselves provide full-time employment for something like a quarter of all permanently employed musicians in this country (BBC, 1961: 32–33).

This turn towards 'lighter forms' led neatly on to the next section of the article 'Entertaining the Audience'. Having had sections on news and current affairs (inform) and now on serious music (educate) it is time for the BBC to entertain, fulfilling the possibly-apocryphal Reithian original tripartite purpose for the Corporation. Reith did not, however, stipulate that the BBC should act as a patron of the arts. This function was presented in the Handbook as a self-evident good: this was a rare use of the term 'patronage' at the BBC, and it is particularly noteworthy in that it draws together music, theatre, and specially-commissioned work. Both radio and television were getting into their stride as independent mediums, confident that they should be commissioning dramatic work specifically intended for them, as well as representing traditional theatre.

Commissioning new music is not quite the same, although Sir Arthur Bliss had been commissioned to write an opera *Tobias and the Angel* specifically for television which was given its first broadcast performance on 19 May 1960. Concert music, on the other hand, is not specific to either radio or television, but the commissioning of new music is presented here as part of the BBC's overall patronage of the arts. As 'Home Broadcasting' was asserting itself, the External Service was still doing important work in disseminating UK culture around the world:

Important British occasions are reflected generously in output. Festivals, for example at Aldeburgh, Bath, and Edinburgh, provide musical and documentary programmes. From

the Promenade Concerts broadcasts are taken which in particular tend to illustrate the achievement of artists and composers with Commonwealth connexions [...] No important musical occasion in Britain passes unnoticed (BBC, 1961: 197).

In this context the Proms are an ‘important musical occasion’ in their own right, but also ‘illustrate the achievement of artists and composers with Commonwealth connexions’. Here the Proms are a source of pride not just for the BBC, but for the nation as a whole, and an appropriate representation of all that is great and good in the Commonwealth.

In 1963, the Handbook opened with a six-page article ‘A Year of Decisions’. This naturally focused on the publication of The Pilkington Report on Broadcasting and its implications for the BBC, and the use of the satellite Telstar to broadcast live television pictures between Europe and the USA. Among the plaudits for popular entertainment programmes on TV, like *Z Cars* and *Steptoe and Son*, sport, current affairs, the expansion of local radio and developments in engineering, there was a full page devoted to music on radio and TV – most of it classical. As well as plans ‘to restore the BBC Symphony Orchestra to the position of eminence it enjoyed before the war’ (BBC, 1963: 11), it was reported that ‘The annual Henry Wood Promenade Concerts at the Royal Albert Hall included unusually adventurous programmes which were warmly received by gratifyingly large audiences’ (BBC, 1963: 11). On the one hand, this still emphasised the Proms as a series of public concerts: the ‘gratifyingly large audiences’ here were those in the hall, not on radio or TV; but on the other, it was no longer the heritage of the Proms that is remarkable, but the ‘unusually adventurous programmes’. That ‘unusually’ is telling: the Proms are on the move, artistically speaking, and although the freshness and imagination of the concerts is reflected, so too is their continued popularity.

The Handbook for 1965 included several authored essays on a variety of subjects, including *Music Planning, Its Responsibilities* by Hans Keller, one of Glock’s early appointments, and the most

publicly-outspoken of his new brooms. In the article, Keller addresses the problem of ‘contemporary music [...] [and] the crisis of communication’ (Keller, 1965: 14). In amongst the various Kellerisms – oxymorons, dependent on the placing of quotation marks, such as ‘there is plenty of “good music” that isn’t good, and conversely, plenty of good music that isn’t “good”’ (Keller, 1965: 15) – he addresses the issue of how new music finds its way onto the radio, including, naturally enough, music that is specially commissioned by the BBC:

[T]he BBC also plays a more active part in the promotion of new music – in fact of creation: at fairly regular intervals, commissions go out both to established composers and to what one might call – contemporary phenomenon – established unestablished composers, i.e. those who have made a name for themselves but whose style may be too provocative, or for that matter too conservative, to have as yet found undisputed recognition (Keller, 1965: 16–17).

Out of another thicket of oxymorons, Keller is explicit that the BBC is active in the creation of music. What the BBC’s part in this creation is, he leaves largely unwritten, but the implication is that the BBC is interested in composers who have ‘made a name for themselves’ but have not yet found ‘undisputed recognition’. Which begs the questions, where have they made a name for themselves? And who bestows undisputed recognition? Given that earlier in the article Keller has stated, as a fact, albeit in a rather roundabout way, that Benjamin Britten is ‘this country’s greatest composer’ (Keller, 1965: 14), it seems that Keller is taking this responsibility on himself; or at least, himself and his like-minded colleagues at the BBC. Through the gift of a commission, Keller is saying that the BBC is ‘consecrating’ (in Bourdieu’s terms) the composer as ‘established’ or, perhaps even more provocatively, someone who is not yet established, but Keller believes ought to be. He goes on to say that the ‘much-discussed new look of BBC music’ is seen most clearly ‘in the BBC’s public concert life – the winter season of the public concerts, the Tuesday Invitation Concerts and, of course, the Proms’ (Keller, 1965: 16). It would appear that Keller,

with a reputation as a combative disputant, wrote this article as a response to a debate in the press about Glock's reforms of BBC music (see, for example, Wright, 2008). Again, he returns to the BBC's promotion of public concerts, and with that 'of course' singles out the Proms as the flagship amongst them, the place where new music in general, and BBC commissions in particular, are exposed to the widest possible audience in the most important public arena with the highest-possible profile.

In 1966 the Handbook included a section on 'Music Broadcasts', and set out the BBC's stall very clearly:

The BBC's musical output has long been recognized as the most powerful and influential single factor in British musical life. Musical Britain – composers, orchestras, choirs, festivals, young artists – looks to the BBC for patronage and publicity, and would often be in serious difficulty without BBC help (BBC, 1966: 65).

These are confident, celebratory words, a ringing (self) endorsement for the BBC as a great good in musical Britain. Once again, that word 'patronage' sneaks in to describe the BBC's musical activities. It is possible, however, to read this endorsement as something of a threat: 'We' (the BBC) are 'powerful and influential', and 'You' (musical Britain), will be in 'serious difficulty' without our patronage. The text between the lines might be, 'and so you had better do what we want, or you will be in trouble'. It is a double-edged sword, all that power and influence. Even as long ago as 1966 the BBC was targeting youth: not all artists look to the BBC for patronage, apparently, only the young ones. The following year's Handbook, for 1967, rehashes the same article, but without that call-to-arms, although it is back verbatim in 1968, when the External Services feature more prominently, and their role is explained:

The main objectives of the BBC external broadcasts are to give unbiased news, to reflect British opinion, and to project British life and culture and developments in science and industry [...] Many entertainment programmes are broadcast, including sport and music of all kinds. For example, the Promenade Concerts never fail to attract an enthusiastic audience (BBC, 1968: 93).

Once again, the Proms are seen as the key export in the area of British culture, an issue that was particularly in the minds of the BBC that year, the year of *Our World*, an event explained by Joanna Spicer, Assistant Controller, Planning, Television, in an article with the title 'World television':

On Sunday 25 June 1967, from 8 to 10 pm BST, the first world-wide television programme, of live sequences from Europe, Africa, America, Canada, Mexico, Australia and Japan, was broadcast under the title 'Our World'. Its potential audience was five hundred million viewers, unhappily reduced by one hundred and fifty million because of the last-minute withdrawal by the television organizations of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Poland, East Germany, Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria: it was seen round the world and round the clock between 11 am and 1 pm on Sunday 25 June on the West Coast of the USA and Canada and 4 to 6 am on Monday 26 June, in Japan (Spicer, 1968: 15).

Our World had been the brainchild of a BBC TV producer, Aubrey Singer (later to become managing director of both BBC Radio and BBC TV, and whose name will pop up again in the next chapter), and the final segment of the marathon was broadcast from the BBC, and consisted of the Beatles and friends performing *All You Need Is Love*, written specially for the occasion.

The Handbook for 1970 had a long and far-reaching opening article written by the recently-installed Director-General, Charles Curran. After several pages of remarks on the introduction of

colour on TV, the successes in radio and the External Services, sections on Management, the BBC and the Press, and Resources, Curran finally got around to the elephant in the BBC room: the McKinsey Report and the resulting paper *Broadcasting in the Seventies*, which appeared in July 1969, and has been described as ‘One of the most controversial documents ever produced by the BBC’ (Briggs, 1995: 721). This is not the place to go into detail over the upheavals this paper caused for BBC music, and the disputes both internal and external over the realignment of the radio networks, the end of regional as opposed to local radio, the demise of the Home Service and the Third Programme, and the creation of Radio 3 and Radio 4, but Curran’s words on the passing of The Third Programme are germane:

I have heard it said that the abolition of the Third Programme as a separate entity is a sign of philistinism in a BBC run by graceless journalists. What a mockery of the truth that is! The Third Programme served its purpose with outstanding success for a generation, but it outlived its original context. The 1944 Education Act was still only a few years old when the Third started. The Arts Council was but dimly foreshadowed. The Promenade Concerts had hardly yet established themselves as the summer festival of music for the youth of Britain, adventurous in this as in other directions (Curran, 1970: 22).

When the Director General wanted to invoke three indisputably ‘Good Things’ (Sellar and Yeatman, 1930) that had been established around the time that the Third Programme had been created, he invoked firstly the 1944 Education Act, secondly the Arts Council, and thirdly he reached for that jewel in the BBC’s – and the UK’s – cultural crown: the Proms. No matter that the Proms had been established in 1895, or that the BBC had taken them over in 1927, or that they had only really become what he describes as ‘the summer festival of music for the youth of Britain’ during the 1960s. When it came to that one incontrovertible Good Thing that defined the BBC, it had to be the Proms. Incidentally, later in the Handbook, the Proms was described as ‘the biggest summer music festival in the world [...] the BBC’s most important series of

concerts' (BBC, 1970: 82). This was perhaps the first use by the BBC of that epithet for the Proms, 'the world's biggest/greatest classical/summer music festival', later adopted as the strapline for all the BBC's advertising of the Proms. This was echoed in the section on the External Services and its World Service music programming: 'The most important single musical event of the year is the Proms, and in the World Service last year there were 84 broadcasts from this summer series' (BBC, 1970: 85).

The following year, 1971, Ian Trethowan, Managing Director Radio, wrote an article for the Handbook imagining how radio might have developed if television had been invented first, and radio had only come on the broadcasting scene subsequently; the sort of party game played by radio producers in pubs up and down Great Portland Street. In it, the Proms was shorthand for all classical music. Trethowan highlighted radio's portability:

The pleasures of broadcasting could be carried around as easily as a book or a handbag, and enjoyed anywhere: having a meal, sitting in the car, sitting in the garden, working at the factory bench or in the office, lying in bed. Instant news, instant pop or instant Prom, it was there for anyone at the flick of a switch, or the press of a button (Trethowan, 1971: 17).

The alliteration is appealing, but the use of 'instant Prom' is illuminating. Once again, this echoes the Reithian triumvirate to inform ('Instant news'), entertain ('instant pop') and educate ('instant Prom'). Later in the article Trethowan extolled the virtues of the range of choice available on BBC Radio:

Radio can, and does, cater for a very wide range of interests. One interest group may be served by John Peel, another by the Proms, another by Shakespeare in stereo, yet another by 'I'm Sorry, I'll Read That Again', or by Jimmy Young, or by 'The World at One', or by

local news bulletins, or a new play from Europe, or the Test Match commentaries or 'Gardeners' Question Time' (Trethowan 1971: 19).

As well as more alliteration, there is a deliberate humour in the juxtaposition of the sublime and the ridiculous, but each of these examples is, in its own way, iconic in the BBC's eyes, and this demonstrates that the Proms have become just that to the BBC: iconic. John Peel might be immortalised in the naming of part of its central London headquarter the 'Peel Wing', and most of the other examples are still on the air in one form or another (other than the late Jimmy Young), but the Proms is up there with them, representing the BBC's highest brow, along with Shakespeare. That the Proms are highbrow does not preclude them also being popular: later in the Handbook, in an article on Television Audiences during the months of February and August, it is noted that while audiences in general are higher in February than August, the BBC1 arts strand *Omnibus* gets higher audiences in August, when the Proms feature. Indeed, the *Omnibus* audience in February was 1,550,000 while in August it was 3,150,000, more than twice the size. Another article on music on television noted that one of these *Omnibus* programmes drew on an innovative evening featuring two contrasting Prom concerts: the first provided *Omnibus* with a Bach Concerto, and the second the prog rock *Soft Machine*, again demonstrating the breadth of the season, and its appeal to audiences wanting either Bach or prog rock, or indeed both. Another article on music on radio took up the theme of seeking out the new, both new performing talent, but also young composers:

[F]inding new talent in composition is an important consideration. Several hundred new works are sent in each year to the BBC: these are carefully considered, with the help of an outside panel of distinguished musicians. A proportion of these works is accepted and eventually broadcast. At the same time, the BBC regularly commissions new works from composers. In 1970 Malcolm Arnold was asked to write a piece for the last night of the Proms; Tim Souster and Sebastian Forbes were among other composers who received commissions (BBC, 1971a: 75).

The BBC's Reading Panel for unsolicited scores sent in by composers and publishers would make a fascinating study, beyond the scope of the present project. However, the commissioning of new music, and the importance of encouraging emerging talent, is seen as a key responsibility of the BBC. The commissioned composers also form their own incongruous trio, the conservative, established Malcolm Arnold, the university-based Sebastian Forbes, and the pop-influenced experimentalist Tim Souster, representing Keller's established and unestablished composers, perhaps.

In 1973, the emphasis was again on the size of Prom audiences, the range of the offering, the international element and, once again, the commissioning of new music:

The Proms constituted again the most important musical contribution by the BBC. For the first time, all Promenade Concerts were broadcast by Radio 3 and in stereo. The total audience for these concerts, in the Royal Albert Hall, on British and foreign radio and television, and on the BBC World Service, is an estimated 100 million. Visiting orchestras and choirs from the Proms included the Munich Philharmonic, the first visit of a Japanese Orchestra (the NHK Symphony Orchestra), the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir, and the Schola Cantorum, Stuttgart. BBC commissions were for Ronald Stevenson's Piano Concerto No. 2, John Lambert's *Formations and Transformations* and a cantata from Gordon Crosse.

Other BBC commissions in 1972 were given to Elisabeth Lutyens, Iain Hamilton, David Jones, George Newson, and Peter Maxwell Davies (BBC, 1973: 53).

Here is the BBC's pride in the Proms in a single paragraph, celebrating the technical innovation of stereo; the huge audience, in the hall and on the air, both at home and abroad; the visiting artists from abroad; and the new music specially commissioned. By now the international complexion of the Proms, especially big-ticket visiting orchestras from overseas, trumped the

need to be seen to be spending the licence fee exclusively on homegrown talent. The wider BBC acknowledged the importance of making these new commissions without making explicit why they mattered. Later in the Handbook that question is answered, at least in part:

On no account can the initial basic impulse which brings the BBC's activities in the serious music field into being be ignored. The BBC has many duties, but its relevance depends on an awareness of its social function. Without this awareness, its duty to the listening public cannot be fully discharged. BBC music broadcasting is a partnership; a partnership between the BBC and the music profession in its widest sense; a partnership not only with living composers and performers, but also the music societies and promoters, orchestral managements and opera companies. This collaboration is crucial if BBC music is to reflect, sustain, and if possible invigorate the musical life of the society it serves (BBC, 1973: 57–58).

This strikes a very different tone compared with the rather self-congratulatory attitude evinced during the later 1960s: 'the most powerful and influential single factor in British musical life. Musical Britain [...] would often be in serious difficulty without BBC help' (BBC, 1966: 65). Now it is about the BBC's duty, both to the listeners, but also to the music profession, including, specifically, 'living composers'. Indeed, BBC music has a social function, 'to reflect, sustain, and *if possible* invigorate the musical life of the society it serves' (my italics). This might be a reaction to the wider political climate of the period; 'The economic and political situation had sharply deteriorated between 1972 and 1974, a year of record inflation and of two general elections' (Briggs, 1995: 867). Perhaps this is the BBC reflecting the political and economic situation, not only in its news and current affairs programmes, but in the attitude of its music producers and their output. The BBC is a multifaceted organisation, and it might seem to the casual observer, and indeed to the BBC's own staff, that departments such as news and classical music have very little in common, but there is still a common corporate atmosphere: the editor of *The World at One* and the Director of the Proms (to take two examples given by Trethowan, above) still

breathe the same air in Broadcasting House, eat in the same staff canteen and complain about the same bosses and BBC coffee.

The 1974 Handbook demonstrates that by this time, the BBC saw the Proms as a powerful brand. In an appendix to the Handbook, there is a list of significant programmes on both television and radio during the previous year, and the Proms feature in the usual places: radio, TV and World Service. Furthermore, it was reported that:

In addition to the summer [Proms] season, which comprised 57 concerts and was as extensive in scope as in recent years, there was a further development in the introduction of a short season of Winter Promenade concerts (BBC, 1974: 144).

In addition, the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra had performed at the Glasgow Proms (BBC, 1974: 154), BBC Wales had broadcast ‘Regular promenade concerts from the City Hall, Cardiff’ (BBC, 1974: 157), and there had been relays from the Bristol Proms (BBC, 1974: 164). In the report on Radio 4, another sort of Proms was reported, with: ‘the introduction of 60-minute *Poetry Proms* in which Sir John Betjamen presented a “concert” of favourite verse before an audience’ (BBC, 1974: 38). The BBC really had annexed the brand, so although ‘Promenade Concerts’ had been around since the 18th century in the pleasure gardens of London, and there were Proms concerts all over the UK, by this time, ‘the Proms’ meant the summer season of BBC concerts at the Royal Albert Hall, and the BBC was able to use the name for other of its activities, immediately conferring the status of the parent brand on its offspring. For the first time in a Handbook ‘The Promenade Concerts’ had a dedicated section:

‘Only the Proms could fill Brompton Oratory with thousands of young people for an hour of liturgical music, at ten in the evening,’ wrote a music critic reviewing a concert of plainsong and Renaissance music in the 1973 season. Only the Proms can attract an audience of half a million to a concert on Radio 3. And their remarkable appeal extends

to distant corners of the world: listeners to the World Service relays of the Proms write to explain that while they may miss some of the subtleties of the music through short-wave reception, they sense and enjoy the unique atmosphere of the concerts.

The Proms, started in 1895 under Sir Henry Wood, have been organised and financed by the BBC since 1927. In promoting these concerts the BBC aims to recover through ticket sales sufficient to cover its costs, excluding the cost of house orchestras and staff. [...] In recent years the range of the Proms has been greatly extended: new kinds of music have been presented, foreign orchestras and conductors introduced and new works commissioned. This new dimension has been added with no loss in popularity for the concerts and is largely the achievement of Sir William Glock, recently retired as BBC Controller of Music (BBC, 1974: 261).

It would seem that size does matter, at least to the BBC in respect of the Proms. The popularity of highbrow concerts squares the BBC's constant striving for both quality and quantity, or to use Huw Wheldon's widely-quoted phrase, 'To make the good popular and the popular good'. As well as the size of the audience – and, large though the Oratory is, surely 'thousands' is an exaggeration? – its makeup was as important to the BBC: it was an audience of 'young people' that filled Brompton Oratory. The youth of the Proms audience was important to the BBC; for reasons beyond the scope of this research, the BBC, like many highbrow cultural institutions of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, has valued a younger audience over an older one, and this reflects the wider social elevation of youth during this period. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term 'teenagers' began to be used in the UK from the 1930s, but in its modern sense, 'teenagers' surely began, like sexual intercourse, in that *Annus mirabilis* of 'nineteen sixty-three [...] Between the end of the *Chatterley* ban/And the Beatles' first LP' (Larkin, 1974: 34). As well as the size and age of the audience, here the BBC takes explicit ownership of the Proms, 'organised and financed', and is transparent on the scope of that finance: the BBC's orchestras and the Proms administration team come for free, but the rest of the season has to wash its own face through ticket sales. In the first part of the Handbook, the 'Annual Report and Accounts

1972–73’, there were a series of appendices, including a ‘Select list of broadcasts’. One of these was ‘Music’, and the first section within that was ‘Premières and Commissions’:

Of the 55 world premières of British works broadcast this year, eleven were commissioned by the BBC. Three of these were performed in the 1972 season of Promenade Concerts: Gordon Crosse’s ‘Celebration’ (audience, chorus and orchestra), John Lambert’s ‘Formations and Transformations’ (viola, women’s chorus and orchestra) and Ronald Stevenson’s second piano concerto, sub-titled ‘The Continents’. The other eight works were: Harrison Birtwistle’s ‘La Plage’, Peter Maxwell Davies’ ‘Blind Man’s Buff’, Elizabeth Lutyens’ ‘Counting Your Steps’, Robin Holloway’s ‘Evening With Angels’, Anthony Milner’s ‘Symphony’; plus three works for the BBC’s 50th anniversary [...] George Newson’s ‘Praise to the Air’ and compositions by Iain Hamilton and Daniel Jones, the last two commissioned by BBC Scotland and Wales respectively (BBC, 1974: 144).

That this celebration of the new led the section on music is a demonstration of the importance that the BBC placed on new music and commissioning, and commissioning for the Proms, reflecting the value placed on this area of activity by William Glock, and the staff of his music department.

The overall editorial pattern established in 1974 was retained in the 1975 Handbook, with a separate section for the Proms, premières and commissions leading the section reviewing music output, and a section on programme contracts. In the section on Radio 3, it was noted that:

All the major British music festivals were fully reflected and the Proms, in Sir William Glock’s last year, represented a considerable artistic achievement. All the concerts were broadcast on Radio 3 and attendances at the Royal Albert Hall were once again high (BBC, 1975: 36).

In the 1976 Handbook the arrival of Robert Ponsonby was remarked upon:

As always, the season of Promenade Concerts – the first series to be planned by Robert Ponsonby – provided a rich feast of music, almost universally applauded by the general public and serious critics (BBC, 1976: 28).

Again, premières and commissions led the section on music broadcasting on radio, and the section on the Proms continued along similar lines to previous years. The BBC's regional orchestras all had their Proms appearances noted, and the Proms on BBC TV, World Service (as mentioned above) and as distributed through the Transcription Service all got their customary mention. By this time the Handbooks had become rather formulaic, with only very slight deviations from the format and wording that had become established. The Proms featured more strongly in the 1982 Handbook, as a result of the Musicians' Union strike, which meant that 'the opening of the Promenade Concert Season was delayed' (BBC, 1982: 2). This was expanded upon in the section on Radio 3, when the true extent of the strike was explained: 'the season of Henry Wood Promenade Concerts, which should have started on 18 July, did not begin until 7 August' (BBC, 1982: 11). In other words, three weeks of the eight-week season were lost to the strike. In a new section on books and other publications about the BBC, David Cox's history of the Proms *The Henry Wood Proms* (Cox, 1980) was listed.

That the wider BBC saw the Proms emerge during this period as its most important shop window for classical music, and new work in particular, could not be made more clearly than it is in these Handbooks. The confluence of its highbrow credentials with its large and (relatively) diverse audience was the perfect demonstration of key BBC principles, as was its celebration of talent from the UK which happily co-existed with its powerful international profile. There is the stress laid on its long heritage, and its importance as a key element of UK culture to be showcased around the world on the External Services and through the Transcription Service; its possibility for commercial exploitation; its strength as a key BBC brand; its importance to the

radio and TV audiences, and – most important of all – the place where radical and innovative programming would be recognised most widely. This is what the Proms meant to the wider BBC.

Validation runs through all these meanings of the Proms. For the composers, it is they themselves who are validated as composers through the bestowal of a commission from the Proms. For the Directors of the Proms, their own taste and ability are validated by the size, quality, range and popularity of the Proms. Finally, the Proms validate the BBC, their cultural capital balanced, or rather, enhanced, by the large and diverse popular audience. What emerges clearly throughout is the mutual benefit that was derived from this reinvention of the Proms. For composers, a Proms commission was the consecration they sought, and the platform needed to be universally acknowledged as pre-eminent for that consecration to be recognized. For the BBC Music Department, the reinvention of the Proms was for them to be acknowledged as working on the most successful festival in the world. It also gave them the clout to invite the best orchestras, the starriest soloists and conductors, and attract the greatest composers: the cultural capital that a Proms commission bestowed outweighed the modest fees involved, as will be discussed in the next chapter. For the BBC, the Proms became one of its great cultural yardsticks, something to put beside Shakespeare as a great British cultural achievement. It was also possible to reflect back the Proms audience, flattering them as young, discriminating, and open-minded. Just as the Proms commission became a self-fulfilling accolade, so the audience, by being told it, was encouraged to become ‘most enterprising in the world’ (Glock, 1962: 4).

During Glock’s tenure, and that of his successor Robert Ponsonby, a discourse was developed around the Proms by staff at the BBC’s Music Department, the BBC’s management, and composers who were commissioned to write new music for the Proms. This mutually-beneficial discourse turned on the Proms being innovative, high quality and popular. There were many

strands to this narrative, and the following chapter demonstrates that one of the most compelling was the way that financial support was directed towards the budget for commissioning new music. Two main points are argued: firstly, that although most histories of the Proms tend to the Great Man principle, and focus their attention on the vision, imagination and innovations of Glock and Ponsonby, here it is shown that, while not disallowing the importance of these two prominent figures, in fact the Proms discourse was developed by a much wider and more disparate group of people, some BBC staff, others from outside. Secondly, it is established that the increase in the commissioning budget during this period was not the result of any plan or policy at the BBC, but rather the result of a series of often unforeseen accidents.

Chapter Six: The establishment of a commissioning fund, and its growth

The last chapter discussed the increasing importance of the Proms to the wider BBC during this period, and especially the commissioning of new music for the Proms. This chapter builds on these broader considerations to investigate one significant way this manifested itself: in the distribution of money. As has been shown, the cultural worth of the Proms, its young audience, the inclusiveness of the cultural offering, and the value put on the new, was explicit in the way the Proms were discussed within the BBC, and in the public face they presented to the audience, to politicians and cultural movers and shakers. Nevertheless, it was the support that the BBC provided to the Proms and the commissioning of new music that tells the story of their increasing significance. The most tangible way that that support was manifest was the distribution of money. This balancing act, of the cultural capital of the Proms, in contradistinction to the fiscal cost, forms the backbone of my argument throughout this thesis. In this chapter, therefore, I look at the music the BBC commissioned for the Proms using a broad lens of critical political economy, ‘the study of the social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources’ (Mosco, 2009: 2). The focus is on the financial resources that the BBC provided for this activity. It is the social relationships between individuals within the BBC, and relationships between those at the BBC with composers, publishers and agents that ‘constitute the [...] distribution, and consumption of resources.’ This chapter follows moments at which the commissioning budget was, firstly, established, and then significantly increased. Each of these moments was the result of an intervention by an individual, two of whom were BBC employees, and two were composers.

The first of these four interventions was from the newly-appointed Controller, Music at the BBC, William Glock, whose earliest achievement in this area of Proms commissions was to establish a separate commissioning budget of £150 per annum, formalising what had previously been a rather *ad hoc* arrangement. This annual ‘grant’ (as Glock described it) was quickly turned into a three-year rolling fund of £450. This is a demonstration of how a new Controller, Music interacted with his direct boss, the Director of Sound Broadcasting, Lindsay Wellington, and how this interaction resulted in an increased, independent commissioning budget. The second intervention was from the composer Elizabeth Maconchy, co-opted onto the BBC’s Central Music Advisory Committee in 1961, who proposed a further increase in the commissioning budget. Unlike the example of Glock and Wellington, this request from a figure outside the BBC, who was nonetheless invited to advise on music policy, was not resolved in a quick exchange of memos, but rather provoked some detailed research into commissioning fees elsewhere in the UK and around Europe. This research highlighted that discrepancy between the BBC’s fees and those of other European broadcasters and UK commissioning organisations, as well as the very limited rights the BBC took in commissioned works. As a result, the annual commissioning budget was increased to £1,000, largely a result of peer pressure from foreign radio stations, especially those in Germany, and concern over the BBC’s standing as a patron of the arts at that time. Glock took this opportunity to adjust the balance of commissioned works in favour of the Proms, reflecting the increased significance of the Proms to the BBC, and, importantly, to take the budget under his own control. This intervention from outside the BBC enabled a more thoroughgoing revision of commissioning policy, and one which depended on a comparison of the BBC’s activities with other organisations operating in the same field, but one which nevertheless resulted in an outcome that was acceptable to the BBC’s management. The third figure to prompt change was another composer, although in this case the intervention was unwitting on the composer’s part. Although Glock’s even-handedness in composers’ fees was for the most part exemplary, there were some exceptions, chief among them Benjamin Britten,

who, given his eminence, came in for special treatment. Negotiations within the BBC, between Glock, Wellington and the Director General, Ian Trethowan, over fees for a commission from Britten, show that the BBC's management was prepared to put additional funds into commissioning, in order to increase the BBC's reputation as a patron of the arts, and its standing among European broadcasters. This is an example of Pierre Bourdieu's cultural capital in action, where the potential value of a commission, in terms of kudos, outweighed the financial outlay.³² The last figure to stick their oar into the commissioning water was another Director General, Aubrey Singer, and a startling, and hitherto unknown, explanation as to how the commissioning budget was increased once again in the late 1970s from about £5,000 to £30,000. This is often mentioned but never explained.³³ Stephen Plaistow was at that time Editor, New Music at BBC Radio 3, and in an interview for this research he put forward a very cogent argument, whereby Aubrey Singer, who was personally very keen on opera, made funds available for Radio 3 to commission a series of operas for the British opera houses. As Plaistow explained, this project was rather too ambitious even for the collective clout of the BBC, and so although only one of these projects ever came to fruition, this budget-line was not removed the following year, and so it got spent on non-operatic commissions, and this then continued in perpetuity. Robert Ponsonby, who had succeeded Glock in 1972, in an interview for this research said, rather enigmatically, 'As William [Glock] once famously said, "Do it first, tell them afterwards". And I got away with it for, well, all those years, really'.³⁴ This is an example of corporate cock-up rather than conspiracy (let alone policy), where it was expedient to quietly forget about a stray £30,000 budget line, rather than dredge up the reason it was there in the first place.

³² For an overview of Bourdieu's theory of capital, see Moore (2014)

³³ See, for example Carpenter, 1996: 294, and Wright, 2007: 207

³⁴ Robert Ponsonby, personal communication, 5 March 2018

Intervention One, by William Glock: the establishment of a commissioning fund

Before Glock arrived at the BBC, there was no separate budget for commissioning new music. Funds came either from the Third Programme Allowance, a general programme budget, or from the Director of Sound Broadcasting's Fund, a central radio budget. Glock's first commission for the Proms was for an overture by William Alwyn, *Derby Day* (first performed 8 September 1960), for which Alwyn received a fee of £50. Glock appeared to pluck this figure out of the air, presumably basing it on what he had paid for new works at his previous jobs. Before *Derby Day* had even had its first performance, Glock had talked the Director of Sound Broadcasting (DSB), Lindsay Wellington, into funding several commissions for each year's Proms. A memo from Head of Sound Broadcasting Administration, M. M. Dewar, to Glock, dated 21 June 1960 confirms this:

With reference to your memo of 7th June to D.S.B. about the commissioning of a few pieces from British composers for each Promenade Concert Season, I should be grateful if you would let me have a note when you commission an overture, concerto, etc., from a British composer with a statement of the fee arranged [...] The cost of commissions for the Promenade Concerts will be chargeable to D.S.B.'s Programme Reserve and it is understood that the total fees will not exceed £150 in any one year.³⁵

Three things emerge from this memo. Firstly, that the agreement was to commission only British composers; secondly, that the money was not transferred to Glock's own Proms budget, but remained in the budget of the Director of Sound Broadcasting; and thirdly, that Glock was proposing to commission three pieces each year. Keeping the money in the central radio budget would imply that this might only be a temporary arrangement, and the funding could subsequently be withdrawn, if the scheme to commission music for the Proms was not seen to

³⁵ BBC WAC R27/778/2 COMMISSIONED WORKS, 21 June 1960

be successful. Glock did not see it like that, though, as is made clear from a list dated 8 December 1960, and headed 'Prom Commissions'.³⁶ This lists no fewer than 13 composers who Glock wanted to approach (or perhaps had already approached) to write works for the 1961–1964 seasons. Three of these, Alan Rawsthorne (1962), Priaulx Rainier (1964) and Hugh Wood (1964) were added in ink afterwards, so Glock may have only been planning three years ahead, and that notion is borne out by a memo he wrote just two days later, on 10 December 1960, to the Director of Sound Broadcasting:

I am ready now to approach various British composers, to ask them to write short works for the Proms. It would be safer, however, in order to have a 'reserve' of compositions – i.e. not to be caught out with only one, say, of the pieces asked for in any given season – if I could plan about three years ahead and invite 8 or 9 composers very soon now. As the procedure is that we pay for each commissioned work when it is finished, and accepted by us, this would mean a rather more elastic arrangement than £150 for 1961, £150 for 1962, etc. Would you consider a three-year grant, not to exceed £450, to be disbursed to composers as and when they finish their pieces? That would be a great help.³⁷

On the one hand, this appears to be a perfectly straightforward request to simplify the administration of the scheme. On the other, it could also be read as pointing to the commodification of the musical works, in Adorno's sense. By having a reserve of compositions ready, if one supplier fails to deliver, then another can be pulled off the shelf to replace it. This also harks back to Becker's notion of 'Integrated Professionals' as being interchangeable (Becker, 2008: 226–271). The key issue here is that Glock wanted to have a reserve of new works to call upon; he could always have replaced an unfinished commissioned work with an existing piece, but this would not have been the same thing, at least in his eyes. The critical thing was that the

³⁶ BBC WAC R27/778/2 COMMISSIONED WORKS, 8 December 1960

³⁷ BBC WAC R27/778/2 COMMISSIONED WORKS, 10 December 1960

piece should still be a first performance of a BBC commission. In one sense, this reinforces the notion that a commissioned work is a commodity: the brand-new BBC-commissioned 10-minute overture is different in kind from any other recent 10-minute overture. Horowitz and Rubinstein might be interchangeable commodities, but a BBC commission cannot be swapped for a work written for, or paid for by, another organisation. Furthermore, the line that ‘we pay for each commissioned work when it is finished, and accepted by us’ would imply that the work is a product, commissioned in advance, but only paid for when it is delivered, and is seen to be acceptable. This transaction would appear to have more in common with having a bespoke suit made than the inspired creation of great art by the lone genius more normally associated with the composition of classical music. Andrew Kurowski, Plaistow’s successor as Editor, New Music at BBC Radio 3, did not see the commissioned work like a handmade suit at all, but rather, as he put it, with disarming candour:

It’s like saying to a brickie, ‘How much to build that wall?’ Not, ‘How much per brick do you want?’ and saying, ‘When you finish the wall we’ll pay you’. And if they say, ‘It’s going to take two weeks’, you say, ‘Okay, we’ll pay you that price, the same price and if you do it tomorrow, it’s the same price’. So it’s a job. It’s a price for a job, as opposed to me saying to a brickie, ‘How much of your professional life are you going to spend building this wall, and what would your salary equivalent be?’ That’s not what we’re saying. Because, like a brickie, a composer is probably accepting two or three other commissions elsewhere, in that same window of time. And he’s [sic] probably juggling ideas, having meetings about things, and also attending performances of existing works.³⁸

This puts the composer firmly into the same camp as any other freelance cultural worker in the cultural industries.

³⁸ Andrew Kurowski, personal communication, 24 October 2017

Glock's proposal of a rolling three-year 'grant' for commissioning was acceptable to Lindsay Wellington, Director of Sound Broadcasting, who wrote a memo agreeing to the proposal in principle, and inviting Glock to act upon it. Within a few short months Glock had established a three-year rolling commissioning plan with a budget assured at least that far into the future.

Intervention Two, by Elizabeth Maconchy: a comparative study of commissioning fees

In the early part of 1962, the composer Elizabeth Maconchy was invited to join the BBC's Central Music Advisory Committee (CMAC). The committee was, as its name suggests, purely advisory. It had no executive power, but was there to represent the views of the music profession outside the BBC. At the first meeting of the committee after her appointment, on Wednesday 15 March 1961, Maconchy raised the issue of an increase in fees for music commissions at the BBC. It was decided to postpone discussion of this matter until the next meeting:

[T]o give the BBC an opportunity to look into the whole question (including performing rights and copying of parts) and to obtain facts and figures from other radio organisations and commissioning bodies.³⁹

This research was entrusted to Harry Croft-Jackson, Chief Assistant (Music Programme Organisation). Wellington sent a memo to Glock, dated 5 June 1961:

This confirms the telephone conversation we had on Friday. I agreed that you should be free to commission four short works for the Proms each year. For the time being we will note the financial obligation as being £200 p.a. I phrase this agreement in this way: to leave room for reappraisal of the cost if the Croft-Jackson research leads us eventually to believe that our scale of commissioning fees is too low.

³⁹ BBC WAC CMAC MINUTES 1961–1962, 15 March 1961

Will you study the whole question of the commissioning of larger scale works so that by the time Croft-Jackson's report reaches us you are ready to do me a general paper setting out the pros and cons of commissioning, the nature and scale of the commissions that we should offer and the fees which they should command. In other words, while I am quite clear that commissioning short works for the Proms is part of our general policy of encouraging British works and British artists through the medium of the Proms, our purpose in excersising [sic] this form of patronage outside the Proms is not so self-evident, and I think we should argue the whole thing out and make decisions on policy as a result of our deliberations.⁴⁰

Already the number of commissions each season had risen from three to four. As well as the research on commissioning from Croft-Jackson, asked for by CMAC, Wellington asked Glock for a more wide-ranging paper on commissioning in general, in the hope of establishing an agreed policy. He reiterated the Britishness of the works commissioned for the Proms, and appeared to feel happy that he could justify these, describing the purpose of exercising patronage in this way as 'self-evident'. What Wellington wanted to know is, can larger-scale works, commissioned for occasions other than the Proms, and often from foreign composers, and at greater cost, also be justified? Just over a fortnight later, Croft-Jackson reported his findings in a 10-page memo to the Director of Sound Broadcasting, his Assistant, and to Controller, Music. He explained:

In accordance with Minute 4 in the minutes of the last meeting of the Central Music Advisory Committee, we have now been able to compile some facts and figures regarding commissioning fees for new musical works paid by the BBC (shown here in some detail as a record of the range and extent of our commissioning over the past five years), by foreign radio organisations, and by other commissioning bodies.⁴¹

⁴⁰ BBC WAC R27/778/2 COMMISSIONED WORKS, 15 March 1961

⁴¹ BBC WAC R27/778/2 COMMISSIONED WORKS, 21 June 1961

Although not every organisation Croft-Jackson approached had replied, he had information from three British orchestras: the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and the English Chamber Orchestra; three British festivals, Cheltenham, Leeds Triennial and Aldeburgh; and broadcasters in Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Italy, France, North German Radio in Hamburg, and Belgium. He outlined the information included:

- 1) A list of the types and titles of works (where known) and the fees paid in each category of composition.
- 2) Notes on some of the commissioning bodies in this country, and extracts from the replies received from foreign radio organisations.
- 3) Notes on (a) performing rights, and (b) BBC rights in new works and copying of parts.
- 4) A chart which shows at a quick glance the scale and range of fees paid by all the organisations who have provided data.⁴²

Glock noted in pencil in the margin ‘Careful and useful piece of work’, ‘Why foreign fees bigger, what rights do they take?’ and ‘ADSB,⁴³ [illegible] and CMus to consider, & draft a) policy recommendation [and] b) CMAC paper’. There followed four pages which comprised lists of works and the fees paid. The overall picture was that the foreign radio stations paid more generously than the BBC, but were also more flexible and subjective in their fee structures: the BBC tended to be more egalitarian, offering a flat fee to everybody, irrespective of reputation. All the organisations had slightly different approaches but shared, on the one hand, a workmanlike, artisanal element: the fee was based on the length or scale of the work, rather like paying a brickie by the yard; and on the other, an element of cultural capital, where the status of the composer and the importance of the work were taken into consideration. How this second element was arrived at, and how a particular value was put on the status of an individual

⁴² BBC WAC R27/778/2 COMMISSIONED WORKS, 21 June 1961

⁴³ Assistant to Director, Sound Broadcasting

composer, was not forthcoming. This important factor is very little discussed in general, despite it being a driving force behind the distribution of funds among composers commissioned; it seemed to be taken for granted that the relative value, or pecking order, of composers was widely understood among those in positions of power. For those outside this charmed circle the hierarchy could have seemed highly subjective, based around cliques and cabals, mutually beneficial backscratching and personal relationships. All of which is a negative way to look at the networks that almost inevitably develop in one of Bourdieu's fields of cultural production.

The third section of the Croft-Jackson report consisted of 'NOTES ON (a) PERFORMING RIGHTS, AND (b) BBC RIGHTS IN NEW WORKS AND COPYING OF PARTS'. The rights the BBC took in commissioned works were: the right of first performance, the right to record for all BBC purposes, and the right to make two copies of the full score for BBC use or to make one copy and retain the original. To anybody from the world of commercial music, TV, cinema, or literary publishing, these demands might seem exceptionally modest in their scope. There was no exclusivity clause, other than that for the first performance, and no option to make a commercial recording to sell. Ownership of the work in any real sense – other than the ownership of scores and orchestral parts – reverted immediately to the composer and their publisher. There was no explicit demand that any future performance should credit the BBC as the commissioner of the work.

As outlined above, Croft-Jackson had received information from 13 organisations, and the fourth and last part of the report was a single page, an ingenious representation of the scale of fees paid by each of them. This is the whole page, exactly as it appeared in the report:

	<u>£</u>	20	40	60	100	150	200	250	300	350	400	<u>500</u>	.....	<u>690</u>	.....	<u>833</u>
<u>Aldeburgh</u>						<u>50</u>										
<u>BBC</u>		<u>20</u>				<u>150</u>										
<u>L.P.O.</u>					<u>75</u>	<u>150</u>										
<u>C.B.S.O.</u>				<u>50</u>			<u>200</u>									
<u>France</u>		<u>30</u>					<u>217</u>									
<u>Holland</u>				<u>40</u>				<u>245</u>								
<u>Leeds</u>								<u>250</u>								
<u>Italy</u>		<u>30</u>							<u>288</u>							
<u>Cheltenham</u>				<u>50</u>	.....				<u>300</u>							
<u>Hamburg</u>						<u>135</u>				<u>357</u>						
<u>E.C.O.</u>					<u>100</u>	<u>150</u>	.....				<u>400</u>					
<u>Sweden</u>						<u>173</u>	.....							<u>690</u>		
<u>Swiss</u>			<u>42</u>									<u>500</u>	...			<u>833</u>

BBC WAC R27/778/2 COMMISSIONED WORKS, 21 June 1961: 10

The distinction between underlinings and lines of dots is not completely obvious in its meaning, and the x-axis across the top is not linear, but nonetheless, this is a clear, at-a-glance representation of how these organisations chose to spend their money on newly commissioned works. What is immediately striking is that, with the exception of Aldeburgh, the BBC paid the lowest low fee, £20, and the joint lowest high fee, £150. A week after Croft-Jackson's report was distributed, the Director of Sound Broadcasting sent a memo, dated 29 June 1961. He asked for his Assistant and Glock to study the report with a view to coming up with 'a statement of what our policy and practice should be',⁴⁴ to form the basis of a paper to the Central Music Advisory Committee. The next meeting of the Committee was less than a month away, and Wellington was on leave until the day before the meeting. He asked that a paper should go forward to the committee only if his Assistant 'judges that there is an overwhelmingly clear case for maintaining our present rates or for making a small increase in them'.⁴⁵ In other words, he wanted time to

⁴⁴ BBC WAC R27/778/2 COMMISSIONED WORKS, 29 June 1961

⁴⁵ BBC WAC R27/778/2 COMMISSIONED WORKS, 29 June 1961

discuss the paper before it went to the committee if it was to make any radical suggestions. He also posed four questions:

1. Why are foreign fees bigger than ours? Does this reflect different living values and habits of payment in different countries?
2. What rights do other commissioning institutions take in the works? We take no rights save those set out in Section Three of the paper.
3. What is our purpose and basic policy in commissioning works at all? Obviously it is our desire as an important patron of music in this country to encourage living composers. Is this result better achieved by commissioning a number of works at relatively small fees or a few major works at much higher fees?
4. When were our rates fixed? Have they been reconsidered recently in the light of the general arguments in favour of increasing fees to meet increased cost of living?

The result we want to achieve is that we should be seen to be pursuing an intelligent and liberal policy, and making payments which are not mean or grasping but which are not an extravagant use of licence money.⁴⁶

Wellington, as an outsider to this process, was able to ask some fundamental question here, and he fixed on four key issues, three of which address the composer in very practical terms as a cultural worker. Firstly, that the BBC had to be seen to be keeping up with foreign broadcasters, not only in terms of the numbers of new works commissioned, but in parity of fees offered, in relation to living costs in that country. Secondly, to question why the rights taken in new works were apparently negligible. Thirdly, to ask, why commission at all? A question he appears to answer to his own satisfaction, 'Obviously it is our desire as an important patron of music in this country to encourage living composers'. It is that 'obviously' that gives the game away. It might be obvious to him, and perhaps obvious more widely in the BBC, but who ever said that the BBC must be 'an important patron of music in this country'? This is one of those unwritten and

⁴⁶ BBC WAC R27/778/2 COMMISSIONED WORKS, 29 June 1961

unquestioned cultural assumptions that permeate the BBC. Wellington also asked whether it is better to pay for many small works, or a few larger ones. Lastly, he compared fees to the inflation in the cost of living, a yardstick that would have been used when negotiating salaries within the BBC. These are all important questions, but it is the last sentence which encapsulates the perennial BBC financial balancing act. They need to pay enough to keep the composers, and the musical world at large, happy (or at least reasonably content) while on the other hand being able to defend themselves against a politician or journalist accusing them of squandering public money. The third of these questions goes to the heart of one of the key issues that the BBC has to address on a daily basis. Given that it is supported by public money, in the shape of the licence fee, is it the Corporation's role to be identifying and encouraging emerging talent, which can then be taken up by other organisations, possibly with greater commercial interests? Or should the BBC be using the licence fee on tried and tested talent? This applies just as much to actors, writers, journalists and DJs as it does to composers. The answer, almost inevitably, is a bit of both. For every young unknown DJ launched on Radio 1's overnight graveyard slot, there will be an already well-known celebrity hired by Radio 2 for its daytime schedule. On the other hand, many comedy shows have found their first national platform on Radio 4, which have subsequently transferred successfully to the larger audiences (and higher fees) of TV. This is perhaps a closer analogy to composers, who would be discovered as they emerge at the beginning of their careers, encouraged by being given a small commission, and then, if that were successful, increasingly larger opportunities, until they were ready, in the BBC's eyes, for a Prom commission.

However, it was the first two questions that Harry Croft-Jackson was asked to pursue, the third question presumably being considered by the management to be beyond his pay grade. He reported back on 10 July 1961, with a three-page paper. This was his answer to the first question, 'Why are foreign fees bigger than ours?':

Apart from the bigger fees for commissioning, fees paid to solo performers, ensembles, conductors, and orchestras are higher in some European countries than they are in this country. In part, the rates reflect the different costs and standards of living in the various countries, and also the high value placed on the art of music and the worth of composers and performers. This latter applies particularly in Sweden, Switzerland, and Germany.⁴⁷

This is an example of Croft-Jackson abandoning his BBC colleagues to side with his fellow musicians and artists. David Hendy quotes the newly-appointed Controller of Radio 4, Ian McIntyre, writing in 1975, who described the compartmentalised nature of BBC radio departments: ‘this was a structural thing – numbers of departments, for whatever reason, had been allowed to regard themselves as fiefdoms, as baronies, as “statelets” within the state’ (Hendy, 2007: 155). Hendy went on:

[E]ach [department] felt a greater affinity with their own professions in the world outside than they did with the BBC. Drama, for example saw itself as part of the world of theatre; Current Affairs believed itself, first and foremost, to be in the business of journalism (Hendy, 2007: 155).

Likewise, staff in the BBC Music Department would have felt themselves part of the wider musical culture, or field of cultural production, in Bourdieu’s terms, and here Croft-Jackson is happy to put the boot into the philistine BBC bureaucrats, whose appreciation of serious music led them to undervalue it, at least in comparison to the cultured Swedes, Swiss and Germans. Croft-Jackson is not saying that ‘we’ (the BBC) put less value on composers than ‘them’ (the foreign broadcasters). Rather he is saying ‘you’ (the BBC management) do not put the appropriately high value on ‘us’ (classical musicians). This is a particularly *recherche* form of industrial relations, where not only are the workers pitted against the bosses along the lines of

⁴⁷ BBC WAC R27/778/2 COMMISSIONED WORKS, 10 July 1961

the classic Marxist model, but putting an additional aesthetic twist on the argument, pitting artists against the philistines, in a way that is familiar in the BBC, where the production staff see themselves as the creatives, in opposition to the management, the suits. After addressing the issue of rights, Croft-Jackson was asked to look into when the BBC's rates were fixed:

In theory, then, we have no 'fixed rates' – but in practice the fees we have paid from 1956 onwards are akin to fixed rates. They run as follows (see my paper of June 21):

£20 – £80 for light music, according to scale of work.

£50 for short/medium scale works for Promenade Concerts.

£75 for chamber music.

£150 for major orchestral and choral-orchestral works.⁴⁸

Thus the rates, rather like the British Constitution, are unwritten, but widely understood. This is characteristic of the BBC in general, where policy is rarely spelled out, but passed on down generations of producers as a cultural code of practice.⁴⁹ Croft-Jackson summed up:

Since our fees have not changed over the past five years – a period during which the cost of living (as we all know only too well) has continued to rise, I hope we can see our way to increase our fees. Perhaps by raising our fee for short/medium-scale orchestral works from £50 to £75, and our fee for a major work to some figure in the region of £200 to £250. What queers the latter pitch is this kind of information: I learn that Lord Harewood intends to institute a scale of commissioning fees for Edinburgh Festival ranging from £300 to £1,000 – the top fee to be offered to such composers as Shostakovich and Britten.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ BBC WAC R27/778/2 COMMISSIONED WORKS, 10 July 1961

⁴⁹ See, for example, Hendy quoting Hugh Greene (Hendy, 2013: 81)

⁵⁰ BBC WAC R27/778/2 COMMISSIONED WORKS. 10 July 1961

According to figures derived from data published by the UK's Office of National Statistics,⁵¹ inflation in 1961 was running at 3.4%, and over the previous five years cumulatively had been 13.2%, so Croft-Jackson's suggestion of increasing the fees at the lower end by 50%, and at the higher by between £50 and £100 seems somewhat over-generous. On the other hand, if other organisations, like the Edinburgh Festival, were offering fees considerably higher, then the BBC would have needed to match the going market rates. Once again artistic worth was measured in purely financial terms, and composers with the very highest reputations were offered the most. This, and the mention of Britten, will become even more relevant shortly. Who decided that Shostakovich is worth £1,000 was not explored by Croft-Jackson. Perhaps this was something of a self-fulfilling prophecy: if one commissioner will pay Shostakovich £1,000, then that sets the benchmark, Shostakovich will expect others to match that fee, and other composers will aspire to secure equivalent fees, along with the equivalent reputation.

Glock followed up Croft-Jackson's second paper with another memo to DSB, dated 24 July 1961:

[T]he question as to how – in your own phrase – we should get out to pursue “an intelligent and liberal policy” in the commissioning of new works. How many should be commission [sic], in what contexts should this happen and what payments seem reasonable, taking into account the practices of other institutions and the increased cost of living?⁵²

He suggested commissioning more smaller works, because:

[W]e can provide greater stimulus to British composers, who are not on the whole at home in symphonies or other massive works, by asking a relatively large number of them

⁵¹ Office for National Statistics *RPI All Items: Percentage change over 12 months* [online]

⁵² BBC WAC R27/778/2 COMMISSIONED WORKS, 24 July 1961

to write short pieces such as overtures, concert arias, divertimentos, and so on, than by staking everything on one or two grandiose commissions a year.⁵³

This rather sweeping generalisation seemed to ignore, conveniently, the large scale works of Britten and Tippett, for example, both of whom were successfully writing operas, oratorios and (in the case of Tippett) symphonies. Nonetheless, Glock couched his recommendation in terms of what the composers might want to write, rather than necessarily what the BBC might want from them, and to adapt any policy to their strengths. There is also something of an escape clause: Glock might commission two large-scale works and they might both be duds, but if he commissions five smaller works, and two were duds, he could point to the other three works as successful results of his commissioning strategy. Glock then went on to outline the proper contexts for commissions. He did this by suggesting that commissioning a symphony for the programme *Music to Remember*, a programme of popular, light classical music that ran from the mid 1950s until the mid 1980s, would be:

[L]iberal but not intelligent. To ask him [sic] to write a work for the Proms, for the Thursday Invitation Concerts, for the annual chamber concert at the Cheltenham Festival, or for the winter series at the Royal Festival Hall, would be quite another matter. These are in fact the contexts that seem to us most suitable, and indeed all four of them have already been subject of BBC commissions.⁵⁴

In other words, Glock wanted go on doing exactly what he was doing already, and by suggesting a rather extreme option, of commissioning a serious modern work for a popular concert series, he was discounting any other less inappropriate options as equally extreme. He then went on to support Harry Croft-Jackson's suggestions of proposed increases in commissioning fees, and summed up:

⁵³ BBC WAC R27/778/2 COMMISSIONED WORKS, 24 July 1961

⁵⁴ BBC WAC R27/778/2 COMMISSIONED WORKS, 24 July 1961

Supposing we commissioned four or five pieces for the Proms, three of four for the Thursday Invitation Concerts, one for Cheltenham and one for the Festival Hall, that would make about ten a year; and granted always that we did our utmost to choose well, I think that for £1,000 a year the BBC could earn very great goodwill, provide an extra thrust to its own programmes, and fulfil in an “intelligent and liberal” way its policy of encouragement for the arts.⁵⁵

This way everybody should be happy. The BBC would be popular with the wider music industry in general, and living British composers in particular; the radio audience would benefit from an enriched and varied output; and the BBC would be seen to be fulfilling its own role as a patron of the arts.

The next document in the file is a memo from Controller, Finance to CPO(S) (Controller of Programme Operations (South)), and copied to Glock, dated 31 August 1961, ‘Approval given to an increase of £1,000 p.a. recurring revenue expenditure of Commissioning Fees for Musical Works’.⁵⁶ This is dated before the next meeting of the CMAC, but then that was only an advisory committee, with no power to actually establish policy or agree spending. The committee was to receive a report, drafted once again by Harry Croft-Jackson. This précis of his earlier report, circulated on 8 November 1961, summarised his research and ended with a series of recommendations amended in two different hands, one of them Wellington’s and the other Glock’s:

Using these facts and figures as a guide, the BBC has drawn up the following plan upon which your comments are invited. It proposes to increase its number of c[ommission]s to about ten a year, for the following contexts:

⁵⁵ BBC WAC R27/778/2 COMMISSIONED WORKS, 24 July 1961

⁵⁶ BBC WAC R27/778/2 COMMISSIONED WORKS, 31 August 1961

four or five short orchestral works for Promenade Concerts at (~~£75-00~~) £100 (instead of £50 at present).

three or four chamber works for Thursday Invitation Concerts at (~~£50-00~~) £75.

a chamber work for the annual BBC Chamber Concert at Cheltenham Festival, at £75 (as at present).

a symphonic work for the Winter Series of public concerts in the Royals Festival Hall, (~~£75-00~~) £100 if a short work, and (~~£200-00~~) £250 if a major work (instead of £150 at present).

The larger fees now proposed are considered to compare satisfactorily with those paid elsewhere in Europe when allowance is made for the value of the rights taken, in each case, while the g[rea]ter no. [number] of c[ommission]s w[oul]d mean that the BBC can draw on a relatively large number of composers of different schools and age-groups, and provide a greater stimulus to British music and its own programmes.⁵⁷

It was Wellington, ever the politician, who added ‘upon which your comments are invited’ in the first sentence. In a later document, dated 5 February 1966, an anonymous writer compiled a list of commissions by CMus between 1956 and 1965. Assuming that it is both accurate and comprehensive, it is possible to estimate that the amount spent on commissioning new music in 1960 was £275 for three pieces; in 1961 it was £225 for four pieces, and then in 1962 it was £950 for seven pieces: an underspend against budget of £50. While it is extraordinary that Glock had managed to increase the spend on commissioning by something in the region of 400%, what is perhaps even more noteworthy is that this negotiation was achieved in just three months. Glock would, at this point, still be seen as a relative new boy, a privileged position in a large and normally slow-moving Corporation, but his passion and commitment to the cause of

⁵⁷ BBC WAC R27/778/2 COMMISSIONED WORKS, 8 November 1961

commissioning new music must have rubbed off on his colleagues, who were apparently only too happy to support his objectives.

As noteworthy as the substantial hike in the funds available to Glock is the way that, without it ever being mentioned anywhere (at least not on paper), he had turned a modest commissioning budget for the Proms, held centrally, and only paid out by the Head of Copyright on a piece-by-piece basis, into a fund for all of BBC Radio's serious music commissions. This would have given Glock much more flexibility to spend the money as he saw fit: without spelling it out, this had become Glock's budget rather than being under the control of the Director of Sound Broadcasting. This was a canny political move on Glock's part, and one can only conjecture whether Lindsay Wellington was complicit in this manoeuvre. Given Wellington's track record, and his success and staying power at the BBC, one can only suppose that it was; which is not to underestimate Glock's own considerable negotiating skills.

Intervention Three, by Benjamin Britten: an unconscious intervention

The way the BBC presented this system would appear to be equitable, democratic and fair: the rates were established, and everybody got the same fee for the same sort of work. Or almost everybody. In the commissioned works file⁵⁸ there are four documents relating to Benjamin Britten, without doubt the pre-eminent and senior figure among British composers at this time. The last of these is associated with the Proms, and the question of the commission fee is significant. In a letter dated 14 October 1969, Glock wrote to Ian Trethowan, the Director General of the BBC:

⁵⁸ BBC WAC R27/778/2 COMMISSIONED WORKS

I have good reason to think that if we offered Benjamin Britten a commission, he would write a major work – a Sea Symphony, which he has been planning for some time – for the 1971 Proms. I have talked with his publishers (Faber & Faber)⁵⁹ about this, and they seem confident that if we could offer £1,000 Britten would be likely to accept. As you may know, my total allowance for commissions is only £1,500, so unless I withdraw several commissions in 1971 (and this would almost certainly arouse criticism), I can't possibly afford the Sea Symphony. I need hardly say that it could be an exciting event and one which would bring us a lot of prestige. Is there any hope then that there could be a special grant of £1,000 for this particular work?⁶⁰

Glock wrote not to his immediate boss, the Director of Sound Broadcasting, but directly to the Director General of the BBC. Perhaps he had already discussed this with DSB and they had agreed this strategy. It indicates just how significant Glock believed this commission to be that he would bother the DG with it, quite apart from the large sum of money involved. He stressed that spending this money would buy the BBC prestige, exchanging financial capital for cultural capital in the form of a musical composition. It also demonstrates that he was quite happy to pay Britten ten times the going rate to secure this. Although Glock gave Trethowan an alternative solution, withdrawing existing commissions, he indicated that this would draw criticism of the BBC – he does not say from whom, but presumably he meant the press and the wider musical establishment. Trethowan replied eight days later:

The idea of commissioning Britten to write a Sea Symphony for the 1971 Proms is exciting. By all means try, and I agree that we should make an extra £1,000 available for this.⁶¹

⁵⁹ In fact, Britten's publisher was Faber and Faber's sister company, Faber Music, founded in 1965 to publish and promote the music of Benjamin Britten.

⁶⁰ BBC WAC R27/778/2 COMMISSIONED WORKS, 14 October 1969

⁶¹ BBC WAC R27/778/2 COMMISSIONED WORKS, 22 October 1969

One that got away. None of the standard literature on Britten makes any mention of this work. At the time Britten was working on a 1967 BBC commission for the television opera *Owen Wingrave*, which he completed in 1970, and was first broadcast in May 1971. He was by this time sick with the heart complaint that was to kill him, and in 1970 he began work on his final opera *Death in Venice*, which his colleague Colin Graham described as the one which ‘went deepest into his own soul’ (Graham, 1989: 55). Indeed, Britten delayed important heart surgery in order to finish the opera. From this abortive project involving Britten we can infer that alongside the equitable commissioning fees established by Glock, he, and his BBC colleagues, were prepared to find considerable additional funding to support projects that they believed would confer prestige upon the Corporation. The availability of additional funds to support prestigious commissions of this sort appears to have continued, if only in an informal way. For example, on 4 January 1972 Glock wrote to Olivier Messiaen, a figure, like Britten, of international pre-eminence:

Is there any hope that you might have time to write a work for the BBC, for performance at the Royal Festival Hall on February 28, 1973, and after that at the Promenade Concerts in July or August 1973? Both concerts would be conducted by Pierre Boulez, and what he and I would like to suggest is a choral work lasting perhaps forty to fifty minutes. Is there any chance? If so, we should be very happy indeed. We could offer a fee of £1500, and adequate rehearsals! Do please let me know what you think.⁶²

This was followed up by a letter from Ponsonby, dated 26 April 1973:

I am so pleased that you are hopeful that you could write to commission for the BBC a substantial work lasting between 60 and 90 minutes, either for orchestra alone, or for soloists and orchestra, or for chorus and orchestra. I appreciate that you have first to finish the new work for New York and that after that you have an opera for Paris! We

⁶² BBC WAC R83/625/1 MESSIAEN, OLIVER 1955–1964, 4 January 1972

agreed, however, that the BBC commission would follow as soon as possible after that – in other words from 1976 onwards.

In a letter written to you in January last year my predecessor Sir William Glock offered a fee of £1,500 and this is the figure which I quoted to you yesterday. I naturally hope that it remains acceptable to you.⁶³

It would seem that although Britten himself did not benefit from this putative increase in the commissioning budget, nonetheless the resources remained for other opportunities. Sadly, the Messiaen commission, like the Britten, came to nothing: ‘the work for New York’, *Des canyons aux étoiles...*, and ‘the opera for Paris’, *Saint-François d'Assise*, kept Messiaen fully occupied for the next decade.

Intervention Four, by Aubrey Singer: an operatic intervention

Finally, to the even more spectacular increase that Robert Ponsonby achieved in the late 1970s. This is mentioned in Carpenter (1996: 294) and Wright (2007: 207), but never explained. In the latter, it states that ‘Ponsonby was successful in persuading the BBC to increase the fund available for the commissioning of new music, which rose from about £3,000 to £30,000’ (Wright, 2007: 207), although no evidence is cited. Carpenter explained that Ponsonby ‘applied to senior management for an increase in the fund for commissioning new music, pointing out that the BBC’s fees for this were deplorably low by international standards’. Carpenter attributed this information to an interview he conducted with Ponsonby on 7 February 1996. As has been quoted already, in an interview for this research Ponsonby was asked about this huge increase in the fund, and he said, rather enigmatically, ‘As William [Glock] once famously said, “Do it first, tell them afterwards”. And I got away with it for, well, all those years, really’.⁶⁴ What it was he got

⁶³ BBC WAC R83/625/1 MESSIAEN, OLIVER 1955–1964 26 April 1973

⁶⁴ Robert Ponsonby, personal communication, 5 March 2018

away with is explained in an interview conducted with Stephen Plaistow on 16 May 2018.⁶⁵ It ties the increase to another commissioning project, which Carpenter outlined:

Ponsonby and his staff had a scheme to commission new operas for each of the major British opera houses from distinguished composers. Ligeti would be asked to write something for English National Opera, Nicholas Maw for Kent Opera, Richard Rodney Bennett or Thea Musgrave for Glyndebourne, Peter Maxwell Davies for Scottish Opera. More remarkably, Welsh National Opera would be offered Stephen Sondheim. The BBC would pay the commission fee, and the companies the production costs. Negotiations began, with the support of Aubrey Singer, now Managing Director, Radio – another ex-television man, who particularly approved of the choice of Sondheim, because he would attract big audiences (Carpenter, 1996: 303).

One of Ponsonby's staff was Stephen Plaistow, and he remembered the episode a little differently, and is worth quoting at length:

[T]he commissioning budget was a pot which the Controller looked after and spent, and it was his money [...] But it was so small, and then something happened, I can't remember what started it...I think it was probably Aubrey Singer⁶⁶ who said, 'Why don't we commission an opera for all the opera companies in the land?' And I had the wit to say 'Oh, yes, very good idea, Aubrey, why don't we do that? Can I come and see you about money?' and [...] when I did eventually get to see Aubrey [...] I said, 'I've come to talk to you about commissioning and money', and [...] he'd obviously had a chat with Robert Ponsonby also, about opera, and Robert had expressed reservations, and that hadn't gone down too well with Aubrey, and at a stroke he just increased the pot of gold enormously, so that it was possible to ask Ligeti to do something for the English National Opera, which never actually materialised [...] and there was Aulis Sallinen, for Covent Garden, *The King Goes Forth to France*, I don't think it's ever been revived.⁶⁷ But then when I went to Glyndebourne and Moran Caplat⁶⁸ was still there and I can

⁶⁵ Stephen Plaistow, personal communication, 16 May 2018

⁶⁶ Managing Director, BBC Radio, 1978–82

⁶⁷ It has, actually, most recently in 2009, and there is a commercial CD recording, ONDINE ODE 1066–2D

⁶⁸ Moran Caplet was General Administrator at Glyndebourne, 1945–1981

remember very well, because I was horrified at the way he said, 'Oh yes, well we did have experience of trying to get some new work, it was Nicholas Maw in the 50s, it wasn't an altogether happy experience'.⁶⁹ God, for somebody to put the kybosh on something, like that. Well, Glyndebourne! [...] But it was not easy to do, why should it be easy, but it didn't seem to lead on to many other things that could be commissioned by the BBC for the opera companies.

But having had that money made available, the money stayed?

The money stayed there [in CR3's commissioning fund].

I don't think anybody's told that story before. It's in Humphrey Carpenter's book that the budget was significantly increased during Robert's period, but not the reason behind it.

Well that's how it was. It was to do with operas, because Aubrey liked opera. Dear Aubrey.⁷⁰

So according to Plaistow, it was Aubrey Singer, the Managing Director, Radio, who was personally keen on opera, who made funds available for Radio 3 to commission a series of operas for the British opera houses. Although only one of these operas actually came to fruition, the Sallinen, this budget-line was not removed the following year, and so it got spent on non-operatic commissions, and this then continued in perpetuity. Ponsonby might well have thought that what he had 'got away with', was a stray budget line in his commissioning fund that never got removed.

It should be noted, however, that this figure of £30,000 was the overall commissioning budget for BBC Radio 3, not only for the Proms, and would include the funds for commissions for the BBC Symphony Orchestra's winter season, the regional orchestras and any chamber music for

⁶⁹ In fact, it was the 1960s. *The Rising of the Moon* was premiered on 19 July 1970 at the Glyndebourne Festival conducted by Raymond Leppard and directed by Colin Graham

⁷⁰ Stephen Plaistow, personal communication, 16 May 2018

Invitation Concerts and Festivals, which tended to get commissioned on a more ad hoc basis. Even so, it was a Herculean achievement of the two Controllers, Glock and Ponsonby, to establish a commissioning budget in the first place, in 1960, of £150; to get it turned into a three year rolling budget of £450 the same year; in 1961, to get the annual budget increased to £1,000 (this was the moment when it ceased to be a commissioning budget specifically for the Proms, and became a more general budget under CR3's control); to get a further 50% increase to £1,500 in 1967; and then to get that tremendous increase to £30,000 during the late 1970s. On the other hand, without the direct intervention of the composer Elizabeth Maconchy, the unwitting intervention of Benjamin Britten, and the almost comic intervention of Aubrey Singer, none of this would have happened. Or would not necessarily have happened. Both wealth and power were accrued by Controller, Music during this period, whether by stealth or through deliberate policy decisions on the part of the BBC it is impossible to tell. The account Plaistow gave of the way the Controller came by that figure of £30,000 might suggest the former, cock-up rather than conspiracy. Nonetheless, in less than 20 years, BBC Radio 3 (as it had now become) had gone from being an organization for whom, in the words of Harry Croft-Jackson in his report of 10 July 1961, 'commissions were comparatively few',⁷¹ to one of the richest and most powerful single organisations commissioning new music in the UK. According to the Annual Report of the Arts Council of Great Britain for 1979/80, the Arts Council spent £150,000 'on commissioning new compositions and on bursaries to composers' (Arts Council, 1980: 23) and the list of composers they commissioned, funded entirely or in part by the Arts Council, runs to 105 names (Arts Council, 1980: 24–25). These composers, though, were commissioned via individuals (usually performers), small performing groups, or large organisations. Several composers received more than one commission per annum in this way, and the scale ranged from a commission to Harrison Birtwistle for an opera, via English National Opera, to a song-

⁷¹ BBC WAC R27/778/2 COMMISSIONED WORKS, 10 July 1961

cycle by Edward Cowie, via the baritone David Wilson-Johnson. These were, respectively, *The Mask of Orpheus*, first performed at ENO in 1984, and *Brighella's World*, given its first performance by David Wilson-Johnson and David Owen Norris in 1981. The difference here is that, as Universal Edition's website makes clear, Birtwistle's opera was 'Commissioned **by** English National Opera **with the help** of funds provided by the Arts Council of Great Britain and the RVW Trust' (my emphasis) (Birtwistle, 1984, online). It would appear that there is a great deal of difference between the Arts Council agreeing to provide funding for a project that ENO wishes to pursue, and the BBC approaching a specific composer to commission a work. The implications of this difference are beyond scope of this study, as is the question of whether the BBC had at this time become the most influential commissioner of new music in Europe or indeed the world, but these subjects would be fruitful areas for future research.

Glock, prompted by the composer Elizabeth Maconchy, and working with Lindsay Wellington (Director of Sound Broadcasting), M. M. Dewar (Head of Sound Broadcasting Administration), Harry Croft-Jackson (Chief Assistant (Music Programme Organisation)), Controller, Finance and Controller of Programme Operations (South), established a commissioning policy, such as it was, back in 1961:

Supposing we commissioned four or five pieces for the Proms, three of four for the Thursday Invitation Concerts, one for Cheltenham and one for the Festival Hall, that would make about ten a year; and granted always that we did our utmost to choose well, I think that for £1,000 a year the BBC could earn very great goodwill, provide an extra thrust to its own programmes, and fulfil in an "intelligent and liberal" way its policy of encouragement for the arts.⁷²

⁷² BBC WAC R27/778/2 COMMISSIONED WORKS, 24 July 1961

That policy was allowed to evolve, gradually, as will become clear in the next chapter, until in 1983 Ponsonby was able to write to Plaistow, regarding the fee negotiations over a commission for Peter Maxwell Davies's Third Symphony:

I have asked for his proposal in writing and we must consider very carefully whether such a fee would dislocate the notional scale we have evolved which, if not munificent, is at any rate fair to all concerned.⁷³

By this time the fee scale is 'notional' and has 'evolved'. Glock's straightforward scale of fees and numbers of works commissioned for the various concert series had become much more malleable, and the way that commissions were apportioned, and how composers responded to the challenge of a Proms commission is the subject for the next chapter of this thesis.

⁷³ BBC WAC R83/1320/1 PETER MAXWELL DAVIES, 11 February 1983

Chapter Seven: Everything you need to know to get a commission for the Proms

The last chapter explored two things: firstly, how the budget used to commission new music for the Proms grew exponentially during the period under discussion; and, secondly, the way composers and BBC staff developed a way to work together to produce commissioned music. This chapter discusses the commonly-held expectations of composers once they received a commission to write for the Proms. I use the phrase ‘commonly-held expectations’ to mean how composers knew what to do when they received a commission to write for the Proms. This exploration of Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*⁷⁴ is utilized as a means to focus on composers in terms of, firstly, ‘what they needed to know’, and, secondly, ‘who they needed to know’. Inevitably, these are inextricably linked: much of what they needed to know was learned, sometimes explicitly, sometimes almost by osmosis, from who they needed to know. The first part of the chapter, ‘what they needed to know’ falls into three sections: firstly, it is argued that there was a standardised way that Proms commissions were discussed. In this way, BBC employees demonstrated their commitment to composers and new music, rather than to the BBC, at the same time institutionalising the composers who were commissioned. This dominant discourse was developed by members of the BBC Music Department with the composers and their publishers. In the previous chapter, it was argued that when it fitted their purposes, BBC staff could side with the music industry outside the BBC, the creatives opposed to the suits. In developing this discourse, the BBC staff were using a language that composers and publishers were comfortable with, while still making sense to their managers at the BBC. Secondly, it is argued that composers knew what they had to do by a process of ‘precedence and experience’, which was how the Director General Hugh Greene described the ‘self-managing bureaucracy’ of the BBC in 1965 (Hendy, 2013: 81). Finally, a demonstration of how this process, the

⁷⁴ For an overview of this concept, see Maton, 2014: 48–64.

institutionalisation of the composers, meant that they could be expected to compose appropriate works for the Proms without a written commissioning brief. The second part of the chapter, ‘who they needed to know’, shows how composers developed their networks: with their publishers; with other composers and performers; and with BBC staff.

What you need to know

The dominant discourse: helping composers to write what they wanted

The dominant discourse, which was shared by BBC employees, composers and their publishers, espoused the principle that the composer was given complete artistic freedom, and that the BBC was merely the enabler in the creative process. Stephen Plaistow, former Editor, New Music at BBC Radio 3 expressed it like this:

‘[The] main point was to get behind what it was that the composer wanted to write and see whether you could help that, and they had ideas of what they wanted to do, of course they did [...] ‘Tell us what you want to do and let’s see if we can help it happen’. And that was the thing with the BBC in those days, helping things to happen’.⁷⁵

The model was that the composer came up with the idea for a piece, and the BBC supported the composer and the idea, both financially, through the commissioning fee, and in a more nurturing, almost pastoral sense, as a sounding board, lending moral support and even being a shoulder to cry on. While belief in this approach was no doubt sincerely held by those BBC executives involved in the commissioning process, and they genuinely imagined that the composer was given complete autonomy, here it is argued that in reality composers were bound by unwritten – and indeed, often unspoken – commissioning briefs, and their freedom was only within certain well-established parameters. This narrative, of the creative freedom of the

⁷⁵ Stephen Plaistow, personal communication 16 May 2018

individual, is common throughout the BBC, where Controllers believe that their networks and channels are sovereign, editors believe their strands have autonomy, producers like to think they operate independently, and journalists believe their integrity is purely subjective and not dictated by the BBC. Although this discourse is central to the BBC and its defence of its political impartiality, its independence has been vigorously challenged by, for example, Tom Mills (2016). Just as Controllers of Music plan the Proms without recourse to their management, composers write without recourse to the BBC executive or executives who commissioned them. The problem is, as Mills wrote in *The Guardian*:

[L]ike any organisation, the BBC has a particular working culture based around policies, conventions and incentives that influence how the people who work there behave, as well as who is appointed or promoted.

At the top, there is a board made up of a mix of senior BBC managers, government appointees and other establishment figures. Beneath them is a highly paid group of executives, disproportionately drawn from private schools and Oxbridge, who know that the BBC depends on governments for its funding and its long-term survival. Then there are the BBC's senior political journalists, whose work defines the tone of its output (Mills, 2019, online).

Mills's point is that, in the arena of political journalism, if the BBC appoints and promotes the right people, its 'working culture' will look after itself. The same is true of music at the BBC. If you appoint the right people, and, in this case, commission the right composers, then the need for a formal, written commissioning brief, let alone commissioning policy, is superfluous to requirements. This could be read as an example of institutionalization, where the norms found in the BBC, the values and beliefs that dominate the thinking of its employees, also direct the work of those who work for it at arms' length, like composers commissioned to write for the Proms. In the same way that new employees, like Glock and his appointees, Keller, Plaistow, Black and

Goehr, in their turn impacted the institution of the BBC, and changed its norms, so the commissioned composers will have had some influence, and the policies controlling the commissioning of music will have gradually evolved over time. In fact, as will become clear, commissioning policy as such was, like the commissioning briefs, largely unwritten.

In discussing the ‘self-managing bureaucracy’ of the wider BBC, David Hendy quotes from a speech given by Director-General Hugh Greene in 1965:

[H]e pointed out that, like Britain, the BBC had ‘no written constitution’: it was governed ‘more by precedence and experience’ [...] As a result, conventions had accumulated over the years, and these had ‘almost’ – but ‘not quite’ – the force of law (Hendy, 2013: 81).

Hendy suggests that Greene was implying a sixth sense on the part of the BBC producer, who could ‘pursue his or her intellectual goals responsibly – that is, without outside interference or fiercely rigid code of conduct’ (Hendy, 2013: 81). Hendy’s interpretation was given a musical spin by Andrew Kurowski, Plaistow’s successor as Editor, New Music at BBC Radio 3, talking about whether or not any code of conduct – ‘fiercely rigid’ or not – was required in the commissioning of new music at the BBC:

I always think policy is a bit like sonata form. Nobody sat down with a blank sheet and said, ‘I’m now going to write sonata form, and this is how it goes’. It was a sort of distillation of what so many people had done, by imitation, by osmosis, by hearing and playing, and then discovering that the form was emerging. And the same with policy [...] So this idea of policy then became a sort of a sort of a creative process where ideas were added to already good ideas, and then other ideas fell off, changed. And so, by the time I came into it, there was nothing written down, saying, ‘This is the policy’.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Andrew Kurowski, personal communication, 24 October 2017

This is also a good analogy for how composers knew what to write when they got a Prom commission, ‘by imitation, by osmosis, by hearing and playing’. More of this later. Kurowski here was talking about the BBC’s, and more specifically Radio 3’s, policy on new music in general, rather than specifically about commissioning policy:

But there were frequent meetings with composers’ representatives, an annual meeting with the central body that represented the activities of composers, which was the Composers’ Guild of Great Britain and the Association of Professional Composers, now consolidated into BASCA.⁷⁷ But we would have to present a report of our activities, and that report meant facts and figures, how many first performances we’d given, how many pieces we commissioned, how many, indeed, broken down under the gender balance, how many second performances we’d given, and so on and so forth. So that when you start to think in those parameters, then you’ve got something to write down, because it’s a report and that report then can start to solidify into policy, because that’s what we did last year.⁷⁸

Rather like the policy outlined in the BBC Handbooks, this was justification after the event, rather than any attempt to suggest what might be done in the future. There was no written policy, as Kurowski made clear:

People said, ‘Well, what’s the BBC policy?’ I found myself stepping off on a slightly heretical foot by saying, ‘Well, actually, there isn’t one’. And by that I meant that there is one, but it changes.⁷⁹

Indeed, it did change during the period under discussion, but by a process of evolution, as the dominant discourse took hold, and composers and publishers came to believe it just as much as BBC staff did. In buying in to the belief that they had freedom to write what they liked,

⁷⁷ The British Academy of Songwriters, Composers and Authors

⁷⁸ Andrew Kurowski, personal communication, 24 October 2017

⁷⁹ Andrew Kurowski, personal communication, 24 October 2017

composers also had to assume the BBC's unwritten constitution, and adopt an appropriate practice, within a set of assumptions, be they conscious or unconscious.

Management by 'precedence and experience'

'Precedence and experience' were the guiding forces of so much that happened at the BBC, as outlined by Hugh Greene in his 1965 speech, referenced above. Most composers commissioned for the Proms would have known what previous composers had written in similar circumstances. Nicola LeFanu's mother was the composer Elizabeth Maconchy, who had commissions and performances at the Proms when LeFanu was growing up. LeFanu explained that as a youngster she had been a regular in the audience, and was familiar with new music at the Proms:

I'd been to lots of Proms myself as an audience member. [...] I knew all about Proms audiences, I'd stood there at the Proms myself, or sat on a seat, whatever. And of course, my mother had had a number of Prom performances all through her career. So I was familiar with that aspect too.⁸⁰

Malcolm Williamson received no fewer than five commissions for the Proms during this period (Organ Concerto, 1961; Concerto grosso, 1965; *The Stone Wall*, 1971; *Hammarskjöld Portrait*, 1974; *Next Year in Jerusalem*, 1985). When he was interviewed for BBC Radio 4's *Desert Island Discs* in 1976, he made it clear that it was necessary to adapt your style to fit the occasion:

Since composition is so difficult, you cannot falsify your personality and what you are you must be. And it is perfectly pointless writing a piece like Stockhausen if you're commissioned by Canterbury Cathedral, for example, to write a Requiem (*Desert Island Discs*, 1976, online).

⁸⁰ Nicola LeFanu, personal communication, 21 October 2020

This makes explicit that Williamson would, while still writing in his own personal style, accommodate the work to the circumstances. If he were commissioned to write a Requiem, then, like one of Alfred Gell's Maori meeting houses, it would be based on previous examples (Gell, 1998: 251–258). Like LeFanu, Anthony Payne was a Proms regular long before he was commissioned to write a piece for the festival, which became *Spirit's Harvest*, given its first performance on 31 July 1985:

I've been a Proms devotee ever since I was about 13 or 14. I think it's the most wonderful place [The Royal Albert Hall]. I know that [the acoustic] depends very much on where you sit. But somehow I imagine what it's like when you're standing in the crowd in the middle of the bottom [of the Arena] with the orchestra about 20 yards away, and that is running through your mind all the time, yes, very much so. [...] I always remember my first bow for the *Spirit's Harvest*, from walking onto that platform and seeing these rows of people all looking up at you and often kind of smiling and one or two of the more cheeky ones waving. I think that's absolutely lovely.⁸¹

That familiarity with the hall, its acoustic, the Proms audience and, inevitably, the music that was played, might also influence the type of music a composer would think it appropriate to write. Payne, whose style might be described as neo-Romantic, rather than explicitly modernist, did feel some peer pressure to adapt to a preconceived style acceptable to the Proms:

I did feel that that [from] some of my contemporaries and friends, people I admire like [Harrison] Birtwistle and [Peter] Max[well] Davies and the like...but actually another composer played a part in a way, I think, in giving me the confidence to go down that road was Nick [Nicholas] Maw. Because he was someone who had strong links going back to people like Richard Strauss, but had also written early pieces which are kind of post-Webern and post-Schoenberg, so I reckoned I probably belonged in that little area, you know?⁸²

⁸¹ Anthony Payne, personal communication, 13 August 2020

⁸² Anthony Payne, personal communication, 13 August 2020

This would imply that the most successful of Payne's contemporaries, composers who had already been commissioned for the Proms, like Peter Maxwell Davies and Harrison Birtwistle, might set some sort of expectation. Although these two were frequently coupled together, along with the slightly older Alexander Goehr, as the Manchester School, in fact while they shared an enthusiasm for early music, like Ockeghem, Gesualdo, Machaut, Dunstable and the like, their musical styles were distinctly different. Nonetheless, Payne acknowledged there was a *lingua franca* that he might have felt some pressure to follow. On the other hand, the neo-Romantic composer Nicholas Maw was a role model for Payne, who was similarly inclined. Maw sanctioned Payne to write in an ostensibly unfashionable style, his success as a senior figure in the new music world gave Payne the permission he needed. Payne assembled a rather intriguing group of Maori meeting houses, in the shape of Maw, Strauss, Schoenberg and Webern, which might act as models for his own work. Having used the expression '*lingua franca*', Robert Saxton contrasted what seemed like a compositional hegemony operating in the 1960s to 1980s with the more heterogenous compositional landscape of today:

What does Radio 3 consider to be new music today? There isn't an orthodoxy any more. There are some very professional and exciting young composers, but back then there was an element of it that was like the Catholic Church, and you didn't step out of line.⁸³

The notion of compositional 'orthodoxy' and an unwillingness to 'step out of line' more than implies that composers understood that they needed to follow an accepted precedent, and even if they were not able to follow that prevailing current, then like Anthony Payne, they would still have to seek permission from an accepted musical model. In accepting the BBC's model of

⁸³ Robert Saxton, personal communication, 22 and 23 October 2020

‘precedence and experience’, composers made it possible for commissions to be made without the need for a detailed brief.

Commissioning briefs, written and unwritten

In some cases, and especially early on in Glock’s tenure at the Proms, commissioning briefs were written, and gave quite explicit instructions to the composer as to what was required. When Glock made his very first commission for the Proms in 1960, he approached William Alwyn, a well-known film composer who could write quickly and follow a brief:

[D]o you think you can provide us with a 1960 Beatrice and Benedict? I would like something gay and festive and clear, that we could use again and again.⁸⁴

Asking Alwyn to write an updated version of one of the most popular and frequently-played overtures of the 19th century, *Béatrice et Bénédict* by Berlioz, might be setting the bar rather high, but this is certainly a commissioning brief. In previous correspondence with Alwyn the duration of the work was specified, ‘6–7 minutes’ and also its context: it was to precede the Cello Concerto by William Walton. Alwyn’s response, *Derby Day*, certainly fitted the bill, and has been one of his most successful works, frequently broadcast, and with (currently) three commercial recordings available, it did get used ‘again and again’. Glock also gave Alwyn a fairly close brief for a subsequent work, that became the Concerto grosso No. 3 (1964). This was for a specific occasion, a concert to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the death of Sir Henry Wood, the founder of the Proms. The concert took place on Wednesday 19 August 1964. Glock wrote to Alwyn in a letter dated 17 February 1964:

⁸⁴ BBC WAC R27/778/2 COMMISSIONED WORKS, 11 March 1960

On August 19 we're commemorating at the Proms the twentieth anniversary of Henry Wood's death; the programme includes Vaughan Williams's Serenade to Music, Sibelius's Fifth Symphony, Henry Wood's arrangement of the Bach Toccata and Fugue in D minor, and Walton's Belshazzar's Feast – in that order. But I want an opening piece; and it occurred to me that it would be a suitable gesture if we were to commission something, lasting say 12–14 minutes, not an Overture or an introductory piece of any kind, but perhaps a concertante work, possibly with organ, and conceivably in three movements. You know the BBC orchestra now has the finest woodwind section in the country, and I can safely add that the string leaders are also first-class.

What do you think? Are you willing to write the considerable kind of piece I'm trying to suggest, something I expect should end rather brilliantly in order to set off the Vaughan Williams, for £100 and by the end of June at the latest?

I hope you're going to say Yes, and if you do, I shall ask you please to conduct the work yourself, so that it will not be played at half the proper speed.⁸⁵

The Vaughan Williams Serenade was written as a tribute to Wood, and he was closely associated with the music of both Sibelius and Walton. The reference to Alwyn's work 'being played at half the proper speed' was an allusion to the first performance of *Derby Day*, conducted by Malcolm Sargent, who, having rehearsed it at the correct speed, played it at half speed in the concert (according to Wright, 2008: 174). Alwyn was a fluent composer, well known for his film scores, and able to work to tight deadlines, which might explain why Glock felt able to ask him to write this work in just four months, whatever his other commitments might have been. He was also able to work to a brief, and he delivered the work pretty much to spec: no organ, but 15 minutes long (so a minute over Glock's request) in three movements, as stipulated, and with plenty of work for the orchestral principals – the brass, not mentioned by Glock, also get quite a workout. The one deviation from Glock's brief is the end of the work, which Alwyn described as a

⁸⁵ BBC WAC R27/778/2 COMMISSIONED WORKS, 17 February 1964

‘threnody’ in his programme note (Alwyn, 1964: 13). Perhaps the professional film composer recognised that such a memorial tribute should end with a degree of pathos. Glock also gave fairly close briefs on three subsequent occasions; each of the works was for the Last Night of the Proms, and was to include audience participation. These were works by Malcolm Arnold (*Fantasy for Audience and Orchestra*, Op 106, 1970), Malcom Williamson (*The Stone Wall*, 1971) and Gordon Crosse (*Celebration*, 1972).

These quite detailed briefs provided to the composer were for very specific occasions. This was not, however, the way that BBC employees normally talked about the commissioning process. Andrew Kurowski explained that the detailed brief that the BBC might provide for a composer writing for a particular occasion was the exception rather than the rule; he also outlined the principle of commissioning works that a composer already had in mind, how that process might be initiated, under what circumstances, and how that germ of an idea might be developed:

It didn’t always start with us going to them and saying, ‘We’re thinking of a string quartet, what do you think?’ That kind of thing did happen, but it wasn’t the way most conversations started, what it was, was, ‘What are you working on at the moment and where do you want to go next? What’s in your mind?’ And so what we tended to find out was that maybe the immediate piece was a string quartet, but what that person wanted to do next was a concert scena for soprano and orchestra. And you’d think, ‘Okay, I’ll log that’. And then the next time we might have a meeting with the Controller, I’d be saying, ‘Just in case you want to know, the composer X is quite interested in this scena for soprano’. [...] So it went on a sort of wish list [...] it was a constant rolling programme, and then we’d monitor developments. [...] Of course, there have to be occasions when the BBC would say, [...] ‘It’s X anniversary of the Proms. We need a bright curtain raiser for this concert, any ideas?’ So [...] obviously, we’re not going to go to the person who is going to turn in a five-act opera. You’re going to go to the person who can write something quite quickly, and last 10 minutes, and say it all in that 10 minutes, and actually entertain people. So you did sometimes have to match the horse to the course. And that was part of the fun as well. But what it did was it kept the variety. Well, I say

variety, other people might say balance, in constant perspective and constant play. So you weren't just saying, 'Oh, no, no, we only want serious, 25-minute pieces'. And that's largely how we conducted business.⁸⁶

On the one hand there were the explicit commissioning briefs for occasional works, but on the other, an apparently open-ended, composer-centric approach. This second approach was also how the composer Nicola LeFanu spoke about her commission from William Glock to write for the 1972 Proms. She felt that she was operating completely freely:

There were no constraints. I'm sure there was a contract, no doubt, I must have it somewhere, which would have specified a duration. But there were no constraints. I knew from the outset it would be for the BBC Symphony Orchestra. I think at that date, that all the commissions he [Glock] gave were for the BBC Symphony Orchestra. And I imagine I knew fairly early on that Norman Del Mar would conduct it.⁸⁷

Although LeFanu, echoing Plaistow's narrative of a non-interventionist BBC, clearly says, 'there were no constraints', she follows it up with, 'I knew from the outset it would be for the BBC Symphony Orchestra'. Which immediately issues a whole web of constraints, unwritten but understood by the composer: the likely instrumentation and the amount of rehearsal time, for example. LeFanu went on, 'I knew fairly early on that Norman Del Mar would conduct it'. This again implied expectations: as Del Mar's fellow-conductor Bernard Keefe has suggested, 'Although his repertory was enormous, his closest sympathies were for music of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, most notably Mahler and Delius' (Keefe, 2001, online). A picture of the sort of work expected is already beginning to emerge from this very limited information, although LeFanu believed she was being given *carte blanche* to compose anything she liked. Nonetheless, composers believed they had artistic freedom, and Glock did nothing to dispel this

⁸⁶ Andrew Kurowski, personal communication, 24 October 2017

⁸⁷ Nicola LeFanu, personal communication, 21 October 2020

idea as many of his letters to composers reveal; for example, this, dated 26 July 1962, to Lennox Berkeley:

This is to confirm that you are writing a piece lasting from fifteen to twenty minutes for the 1963 season of Proms. You may perhaps have different ideas when you sit down to writing the work, but meanwhile I certainly like the prospect of a concertante piece for four wood-wind and orchestra.⁸⁸

This might imply that a conversation had taken place, the composer had proposed a concertante work that he had in mind, and Glock received the idea enthusiastically. This enthusiasm in no way precluded Berkeley from changing his mind subsequently, however. As things worked out, Berkeley produced the *Four Ronsard Sonnets, Op 62* for tenor and orchestra for the 1963 Proms season, first performed on 9 August 1963; his *Sinfonia Concertante, Op 84*, for solo oboe – rather than four winds – and orchestra, another BBC commission, was first performed on 3 August 1973 at a Prom concert celebrating his 70th birthday.

This rather laissez-faire attitude could have its downsides. Stephen Plaistow explained that he found the commissioning process in some disarray when he inherited it in the early 1970s:

William [Glock] would write a letter to somebody saying, ‘Would you like to write a piece for the Proms next year?’ and the answer always came back, ‘Yes, I’d love to!’ ‘We’re thinking of something not more than 20 minutes really, and I can’t tell you yet who the orchestra or the conductor might be, but have a think’. So in the end the deadline passed, the piece hadn’t arrived, the composer might have been in some state of worry because perhaps what he [sic] really wanted to write was a string quartet.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ BBC WAC R27/778/2 COMMISSIONED WORKS, 26 July 1962

⁸⁹ Stephen Plaistow, personal communication, 16 May 2018

Although there are plenty of letters from Glock just as Plaistow describes in the files at the BBC Written Archives Centre, of which that to Lennox Berkeley is a single example, there is scant evidence of non-delivery. Plaistow's perception that there was a problem was his justification to commission in a different way. His analysis of Glock's commissioning process also hints at the beginnings of the idea that 'the BBC' in the person of Stephen Plaistow or other interested producers might, instead of commissioning in the abstract, sound out composers about what they wanted to write, and then fitting that to requirements the BBC might have for new music. Robert Ponsonby put it like this:

I remember Stephen [Plaistow] and I having lots of conversations about what the criteria were for the BBC to 'lordly' commission, and Stephen said, 'You see, it's no good us firing off a commission for a Piano Concerto from this composer or that; what we need to know is whether they've got a Piano Concerto in mind, in which case we could commission it'. And that I think is a principle which was very sound and which by and large we adopted.⁹⁰

This then, became the dominant discourse, the 'principle [...] we adopted', or at least the narrative that BBC staff employed. Nicola LeFanu adopted the same narrative, but it was clear that in fact there was a commissioning brief, a set of expectations that needed to be followed. While Kurowski denied that the BBC only wanted 'serious, 25-minute pieces', when no other conditions were specified that was frequently what they got. For example, that was what Nicola LeFanu, commissioned apparently without constraints, wrote on that occasion: in *Gramophone* magazine the reviewer Richard Whitehouse described the resulting work, *The Hidden Landscape*, with 'its oblique yet purposeful trajectory from the ominous, even confrontational to a gauntly imposing climax and expectant close' (Whitehouse, 2020: 39), and the recording he was writing about, which was of the first performance at the Proms, lasts just a little less than 25 minutes. It

⁹⁰ Robert Ponsonby, personal communication, 5 March 2018

could be interpreted that there was a commissioning brief, and not just for those occasional pieces. It was just that the brief was negotiated informally, over a period, in a series of conversations, perhaps, and never – or very rarely – committed to paper. Kurowski expanded on how that unwritten brief might be negotiated as the composer worked on the piece:

[W]hen a commission came about, it wouldn't be a weekly phone call, saying 'How many bars were written this week?' You know, that's the greatest way to stress somebody. But you might just say, when you see them, 'Everything okay, how's it going?' Because they might say, [...] 'I don't want to write two movements any more, I want to write one big one'. [...] And you think, 'Okay, that's fine'. And there are some things you have to deal with more or less immediately, like, when you've asked for a 10-minute string quartet, and the person says, 'Well, I've just put in a Russian male voice choir and three tenor tubas. Is that all right?' You think, 'No'. That's the point at which you do have to say, 'It's not what we asked for', you know? So there was a sense of keeping things on edge. But if they said, 'Well, actually, I think I want to add an oboe solo', you might say, 'Well, okay, [...] it's an oboe quintet now, not a string quartet', and you had to go with the flow. And people did have second thoughts, [...] they think, 'Actually, this is bigger than I was intending', or it's more convoluted or more involved. And I think there's even been cases where someone has said, 'Can I put this work on hold and write you another piece because I don't think I can get to the end of this one? This is something for later'. And we would often say yes, if we could fit it in. So unless we'd given specific and rather tight deadlines and conditions under which the person had to work, in other words, if we said, 'Write a 10 minute jolly overture for the [BBC] Concert Orchestra's 40th anniversary', that was fairly specific, which means you can't go in for the Russian male voice choir and five tenor tubas, outside of that it was free rein. So it was a mixture of the two, but mostly it was us finding out what the composer wanted to do and moving forward with that. And that was encouragement enough, because there would be this constant rapport; we'd see that composer at festivals, we'd see them at concerts, we'd see them in the street. Very often we'd see them socially for drinks or on the phone. And I never felt that my door was closed. Midnight on a Sunday evening, I would find myself having a

complicated conversation about where the third movement was headed. And one had to do it, it was not a chore; it was a joy.⁹¹

In this way, the commissioning brief was a negotiation, a conversation before the commission was offered, which then continued as the piece progressed. It may never have been formalised, but there was an understanding between the composer and the BBC executive responsible, and often involved the composer's publisher, as shall be seen in the second part of this chapter. The composer felt free to write what they wanted, but only within unspoken, but widely-understood, expectations. It suited those at the BBC to claim that this was a non-interventionist approach, maintaining as it did the independence of the composer.

Who you need to know

Given that composers were either explicit or at least implicit in knowing what they had to write for the Proms, how was it that they knew? This understanding derived from being in the know, what Bourdieu described as *habitus*, having 'a feel for the game' (see, for example, Maton (2014)). There was no written set of instructions that composers could refer to, they were obliged to assimilate these rules from three principal sources, and in this section of the chapter each of these is examined in turn: firstly, the composers' publishers; secondly, their peers, other composers and performers, and their teachers; and finally, those BBC executives that they got to know. This network of relationships, of which the BBC Music Department was only one part, was instrumental in spreading the BBC's institutionalisation outside the staff, and embracing those composers commissioned to write.

In investigating how the BBC commissioned music for the Proms, the issue of personal relationships is vital, the 'who the composers needed to know': 'the BBC' consists of individuals,

⁹¹ Andrew Kurowski, personal communication, 24 October 2017

just as the community of composers does, and it is the way that these personalities interact to produce the commissioned works, that is the subject here. During this period, as has become clear, staff at the BBC Music Department valued these relationships very highly; producers got to know composers; they took an interest in what that composer was working on, and in what they might want to do in the future. Publishers did a similar job, and represented the vision of their composers to BBC personnel. When these aspirations meshed with what the BBC required, then a commission might be forthcoming. Although networking in its modern, popular, meaning was probably a largely unfamiliar term to all those involved at the time, nonetheless it happened, then as now, in more or less informal ways. The object here is to see how it worked, and why it was important. As well as looking at networks in the everyday sense, Bourdieu's fields of cultural production also form a frame of reference, as do the Art Worlds of Becker, and the request from Born that the art object (the music) itself should not be neglected (although that concept is explored more thoroughly in the next chapters). Considering composers in terms of their networks is a delicate and multi-layered undertaking.

Publishers

What is clear from the following example is that the network surrounding a young composer was complex, and the different members of it could overlap, influence and disrupt other relationships. Robert Saxton was a student of Elisabeth ('Liz') Lutyens, who herself was an influential spider at the centre of very powerful web, and who was able to provide some considerable support to those of her students that she felt were deserving. Sheila MacCrindle was the Head of Promotions at Chester Music, who became Saxton's publisher. Richard Rodney Bennett was a composer, pianist and teacher, who for a time had a piano duo with Susan Bradshaw, specialising in new music and broadcasting frequently on the BBC. Finally, Roger Smalley, like Bennett, was a composer, pianist and teacher, working at Cambridge when Saxton

went to study there. Saxton explained how this network functioned on one particular occasion, right at the beginning of his career:

Sheila once told me that Richard Rodney Bennett didn't like something he'd heard of mine. And Liz rang up and said, 'Look, Sheila' – because Chesters were thinking of taking me on – 'I hope this isn't going to influence whether you take Robert on just because Richard didn't like this piece [...] just look at the work, don't listen to Richard', and in fact, Sheila was very good about it, and Liz introduced me to Richard, who'd originally been the person that I'd been recommended to go to and who put me on to Liz; it was Richard that Susan Bradshaw thought I should go to. So the thing is that Richard then was very kind to me afterwards. But the thing is that I'd written a piano piece, which Liz had said to me, 'Right, at last, you've written a piece', which was just before I went to Cambridge, 'I want you to take this to Susan Bradshaw'. And I made an appointment and went round and she criticized it and she said, 'I'm going to broadcast this'. Now when I told Liz, Liz said, 'Well, that's very interesting'. And then she said, 'I also want you to give it to Roger Smalley when you go up to Cambridge'. And I contacted Roger and Roger said, 'Come around and see me'. And he then said, 'Well, I'm going to broadcast it as well'. [...] I'm not saying it's a shattering piece. But Susan could have said, 'Well, thank you for coming to see me, now bugger off', and I'm not praising myself. But I think there was a two-way thing, where I waited for Liz to tell me when I was ready. I mean, her first lesson with me, she said, 'Well, you've got no talent, so we'll have to find some'. If I said that to a student now, they'd claim it as mental health infringement. What it meant was that when somebody said something positive, you knew they meant it.⁹²

Chesters did take Robert Saxton on, and Sheila MacCrindle, the Head of Promotions, worked very hard on his behalf.

The composer's publisher is central here, and finding the right publisher was not necessarily a straightforward process. Elisabeth Lutyens, for example, was successively published by Chester

⁹² Robert Saxton, personal communication 22 and 23 October 2020

Music, Mills Music, Schott and Co, her own imprint the Olivan Press, and Universal Edition. Mills Music, based in the USA, and publisher of several leading American composers of the avant-garde, was perhaps best known in the UK for publishing popular music: its offices were in Denmark Street, London's Tin Pan Alley. This would have had some synergy with Lutyens's commercial music for film, TV and radio. Lutyens's other publishers were leaders in UK new music, and although she felt they did less than they might to promote her music, they certainly lent her credibility. On the other hand, Malcolm Williamson was published by Josef Weinberger, originally a Viennese company specialising in licensing performances of operettas by Johann Strauss II and other Viennese composers. In the UK this licensing extended to plays and pantomimes. This association would have done nothing for Williamson's reputation as a serious composer. Sally Groves, formerly Head of Promotions at Schott's London office spent two years at Novello early in her career, and she agreed that certain publishers would give a composer credibility, although that was not the only consideration:

Well there was caché, but if it didn't work that was miserable. So for example Richard Rodney Bennett was at Universal [Edition], probably the most prestigious in lots of ways, but his music and face didn't fit, so he moved to Novello, along with Thea Musgrave. It was quite a super list with George Rizza [in charge] and I was brought in to enlarge it and promote it. It was a great two years actually [...] George Rizza was a very sympathetic, a very marvellous publisher, actually, and the other thing is that UE has always...I mean Harry [Harrison Birtwistle] left UE when Bill Colleran retired. It's always been Vienna: it [UE] doesn't really think that music created outside the German-speaking world matters.⁹³

Groves's phrase, that a composer's face might not fit, is another way of agreeing with Bourdieu, that if 'producers or products [...] are not in their right place [they] are more or less bound to fail' (Bourdieu, 1993b: 95). Once a composer had found a publisher – or the publisher had found

⁹³ Sally Groves, personal communication, 21 March 2018

a composer – the promotions department at the company became an important member of the network. Stephen Plaistow explained the crucial role these individuals (nearly all of them women, interestingly), and how they acted as intermediaries between composers and BBC staff:

They [publishers] had a big part to play, and nearly always it was pleasure to have them on your side, because you could make sure that they would send you pieces to look at by composers that they knew you would be interested in. They were so good like that, the two Sallys⁹⁴ in particular but also Janis Susskind [at Boosey and Hawkes] and when it came to a notion that something might be brewing, that could be something good, that had the Proms as the possible destination, then they were wonderful, because they would they would be able to help with the way the thing got...processed is not right word...but developed and thought about and they'd do it in such a sensitive way that the composer wouldn't go around crowing, 'Ooh, I've been asked to write something for the Proms', but it would be something that was possible. And all that business of the publishers working closely with the BBC Centres outside London and with orchestras everywhere, that was absolutely terrific.⁹⁵

In this way the publisher also acted as something of a midwife in the production of the commissioned works, being part of the way the new piece was 'developed and thought about' during its gestation between the commission, the delivery of the score, and its first performance. It was not only the composer who was developing and thinking about the piece. Becker has suggested that there are more people involved in the making of art than just the artist, even in those art forms where the creative act appears to be in the hands of a single individual (Becker, 2008: 7–9). The publisher also needed to know who was in favour: they sent BBC staff music 'by composers that they knew you would be interested in', an echo-chamber of taste. Sally Groves further unpacked that function of publisher's promotions department:

⁹⁴ Sally Groves at Schotts and Sally Cavender at Faber Music

⁹⁵ Stephen Plaistow, personal communication 16 May 2018

The chief function of a promoter is to understand the vision of the composer and realize that vision in the most appropriate way. So it might be high-profile, it might be small: it depends what the vision is, and I had very good relationships with – well, not Glock, I wasn't really around – but with Ponsonby, really good, and he always had a twinkle in his eye, and we used to have lunch [...] [where] we would discuss the composers. Not too many at a time, only when I had something really important. [Michael] Tippett and [Hans Werner] Henze would always top the list, and [György] Ligeti of course would be there, and [Toru] Takemitsu and Sandy [Alexander Goehr] and then John [Casken]. [...] I wouldn't say too much: I would tease out where they were thinking ahead, and how one of these things might fit and then we would keep in touch. And then we would keep in a lot of touch with Stephen [Plaistow] because of course Stephen was always there as well as commissioner of new music. I'd see Stephen a lot.⁹⁶

This approach was echoed by Sally Cavender, who also recognised that BBC executives could also be more directive in their commissioning, as well as supporting ideas that had come from the composers:

[T]hey did a brilliant job of discussing what composers were deserving of this honour, with the requirements of the various BBC orchestras and institutions and marrying up the two, so that they would say, 'We think Julian Anderson should be writing a Piano Concerto, and we think the BBC Scottish should be the right people to do it'. And that's how many commissions emerged. Or even better, was when Stephen Plaistow would have a composer in his office, or he would say to me, 'What does Joe Bloggs want to write? And can we help them do that?' Which was wonderful because not many commissioning organisations do that. Mostly commissioning organisations are working on the basis of, 'We want to have this on our totem pole. It's ours. We want exclusivity, we don't want anybody else to do it. It's part of our justification for getting a grant from the Arts Council'. So it's not really a philanthropic business, you know, if it's the LSO or the LPO, it's about them and their standing in the world. It's not about, 'How can I help that composer?' So the BBC had an incredibly wonderful approach.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Sally Groves, personal communication, 21 March 2018

⁹⁷ Sally Cavender, personal communication, 24 September 2020

In this way, a new work was cooked up by a trio of composer, publisher and BBC executive, and Cavender is clear that the way the staff of the BBC went about commissioning was quite different from other organisations, and she echoes the dominant discourse that the BBC was philanthropic, helping composers do what they wanted to do anyway, while also suggesting that the process could be more directive.

Other composers and performers

Saxton's story, which opened this section, demonstrated how his older peers, performers and composers, could be influential. Two composers, of different generations, were particularly powerful in the new music village during this time: Lutyens's influence has already been seen, and there is more on her in a moment, but first, Oliver Knussen. Knussen (1952–2018) was hugely influential in the new music world: as a composer, and a teacher of composers, as a mentor to his younger colleagues, and champion of his peers. He was also a conductor of significance, working with orchestras around the world, with particularly close associations with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the London Symphony Orchestra and the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra in the UK, the Cleveland Orchestra in the USA and the Residentie Orchestra in The Hague. Moreover, he was the Artistic Director of the London Sinfonietta 1998–2002, Artist in Association with the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group from 2006, an Artistic Director of the Aldeburgh Festival 1983–1998, and Head of Contemporary Music at Tanglewood 1986–1993. The enormous force for good that Knussen exerted on the world of contemporary music is undeniable, although there was another side to the power that he wielded. Oliver Knussen and Jonathan Harvey were both represented by Sally Cavender at Faber Music, but Harvey never got the recognition in the UK that he received elsewhere in Europe, as Cavender explained:

People didn't pick up on Jonathan, partly because Ollie didn't rate him. I said to Ollie, 'You've never done any Harvey'. He said, 'No, it's not on my wavelength. I've got nothing against him. He's a nice guy. But he's not on my wavelength'. Now, not being on Ollie's wavelength when he was running the Sinfonietta and virtually controlling new music, certainly in London, meant that you didn't get a look in. It did so much damage to Jonathan, and I couldn't do anything about that. [...] Ollie was like a spider in a web, such a sort of web of influence. And so powerful was his authenticity, in that if he had a view, he backed it up in a way that nobody could refute. And what I would say to people who used to complain about this – many people would complain to me about Ollie's influence – I would say, 'Look, the problem is not that there's Ollie, it's just that there aren't more people like Ollie'. Boulez was another one who had huge influence, and to some degree, rightly so, but we need more giants, not fewer, we need these giants to have a strong view, which does mean excluding some people, but that's inevitable.⁹⁸

Knussen's 'wavelength' was such that it could virtually break a composer's reputation. Knussen never promoted various other composers who were not on his wavelength, Xenakis, for example, or the British exponents of the new complexity like Brian Ferneyhough, James Dillon and Michael Finnissy. This is not to say that none of these composers was able to flourish in the UK, and indeed Dillon has had no fewer than four commissions for the Proms, but that particular modernist aesthetic had to find other champions than Knussen.

Robert Saxton had known Knussen since they were both in their early 20s, as he explained.

Saxton had been at school with a mutual friend, the composer Simon Bainbridge:

I'd sent in to the ISCM⁹⁹ panel the piece I'd written for my BMus at Oxford. And Simon [Bainbridge] said, 'Do you know Ollie Knussen?' And I said, 'No, but I heard him conduct when he was 14'. Not the famous LSO thing.¹⁰⁰ But somebody took me to Morley College, and Ollie, who was 14, conducted some Chinese songs of his, this

⁹⁸ Sally Cavender, personal communication, 24 September 2020

⁹⁹ International Society for Contemporary Music

¹⁰⁰ Knussen conducted the première of his First Symphony with the London Symphony Orchestra when he was 16.

wunderkind, in a little afternoon concert. I remember it. [...] And the thing is that Simon said, ‘Ollie would like to meet you’. So I said, ‘Really? Why?’ And he said, ‘He’s been on the ISCM panel, and he was particularly interested in your piece’. So I went to see Ollie, [...] and he said, ‘Look, I’m really interested in this piece’. And that’s how we met.¹⁰¹

Knussen had an important part to play in Saxton’s first Prom commission, although he did not conduct its first performance. Saxton explained:

I failed to complete my Concerto for Orchestra for the 1983 Proms. And I got in a terrible state. I just tore a load of stuff up, and I rang Stephen [Plaistow] and Stephen said, ‘Look, I’ll have a word with Robert [Ponsonby]’, and Robert rang me and said, ‘Fine. Haven’t you written any other pieces?’ I said, ‘I’ve written a chamber orchestra piece which Ollie [Oliver] Knussen’s commissioned for America,¹⁰² which has also been cancelled’. And he said, ‘Well, can we do that in the Proms? I’ve got a slot in a Northern Sinfonia Prom, which Ollie can have’. It was Ollie’s first time as a conductor at the Proms. And he said, ‘We’ll do the concerto next year’. Can you imagine that happening? But he said, ‘No. We’re here to help you’. I said, ‘But that gives me two Proms in two years’. He said, ‘That’s not your problem, is it?’ So I told Stephen, I thought I was cheating. And Stephen said, ‘It’s not cheating. It’s just one of those things that’s happened’.¹⁰³

It was in this way that Saxton’s *The Ring of Eternity* received its first performance at the Proms on Wednesday 24 August 1983 with Oliver Knussen conducting the Northern Sinfonia, and his Concerto for Orchestra was duly completed and given its first performance on Monday 13 August 1984, with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, conducted by John Pritchard. The support that Knussen, as a conductor, gave to Saxton is an indication of the significance of performers, and particularly conductors, have in composers’ networks.

¹⁰¹ Robert Saxton, personal communication, 22 and 23 October 2020

¹⁰² The commission was for the St Paul Chamber Orchestra in Minneapolis-St Paul

¹⁰³ Robert Saxton, personal communication, 22 and 23 October 2020

The web surrounding Elisabeth Lutyens has already been discussed, and the help she gave to her student, Saxton. He was not the only one of her students who got a leg up, as Stephen Plaistow, a member of the same circle, explained:

[Y]ou got to know people; including, up in this part of London,¹⁰⁴ and much missed by me, although she could be a holy terror, Elisabeth Lutyens, who was teaching then not only Malcolm Williamson, but Brian Elias and Robert Saxton. And Liz expected me to visit her regularly, which was always a pleasure to some extent, although things went on in a rather boozy way, not that she took the booze then, she was on the wagon for a long time, but the booze always flowing freely in visitors' direction and you met people there, and she listened to a lot, and she talked a lot about those two composers in particular, Brian Elias and Robert Saxton. [...] But a lot of people wanted to go and show work to her, and she was she was very good, and she was very, very intelligent.¹⁰⁵

It is difficult to avoid interpreting 'intelligent' here as to mean 'her taste coincided with mine', although once that mutual trust had developed, then if Lutyens recommended someone doing something new, Plaistow would at least take them seriously, and indeed during the period under discussion here, Saxton received a commission for the Proms, Williamson four, and Brian Elias one.

BBC Music Department staff

Stephen Plaistow, Editor, New Music at the BBC during this period, has now taken his place in this network surrounding the aspiring composer. The staff at the Third Programme and Radio 3 are the last piece of this particular jigsaw. Having seen how composers worked with their publishers, and their peers, now we can see how they made contact with BBC producers with an

¹⁰⁴ Primrose Hill

¹⁰⁵ Stephen Plaistow, personal communication 16 May 2018

interest in new music. That was by no means a straightforward process, as Anthony Payne explained:

Yes, it was all very mysterious. And when I look back I often think how lucky I was to get a start. It was the BBC that really gave me lift off at the beginning, because I got down from university with no reputation as a composer [...] But I joined in various things like SPNM¹⁰⁶ and I started to meet people who counted, and it was actually Stephen Plaistow who managed to get my first BBC broadcast [...] I had a word with him saying, 'I've just started to compose and what should I do about getting the BBC interested?' He said, 'Send me a score'. Sort of old boy network kind of approach. Which I did. And months later he said, 'I'm afraid people haven't been all that kind about it, but just leave it to me.' [...] So it took the work of, I suppose you'd say, a friend. We didn't know each other that well, but he had some faith in me and kind of pushed it and it worked that way. That's how I started to get in with the Beeb. But what goes on behind the office doors, is deeply mysterious. I mean, I was very lucky to have friends. I didn't realise then, I was so naive how important it was. You know that, for instance, Jane¹⁰⁷ and I were introduced to each other by Susan Bradshaw. [...] Because it was Susan, I think, who told John Poole, the BBC Singers' conductor, that I was writing a big choral piece and that turned out to be *Phoenix Mass*, which was my first big work. And it wasn't a commission by the Beeb, but they did it, rehearsed it and gave it a fine performance, and all that was done through old boy network stuff, you know. And I think it was that that eventually led to the Proms commission.¹⁰⁸

It might be noted that during this period the mid- to late-1960s, several of the 'old boys' were in fact 'old girls', including the composer Elisabeth Lutyens, who is discussed at length in Chapter Ten of this thesis, the BBC producer Veronica Slater, and Susan Bradshaw, who appears here in Payne's narrative, now adding the function of matrimonial matchmaker to her accomplishments as pianist and critic. While Payne was explicit about the idea of an 'old boy network', it is worth

¹⁰⁶ The Society for the Promotion of New Music

¹⁰⁷ Jane Manning, the soprano, and Payne's wife

¹⁰⁸ Anthony Payne, personal communication, 13 August 2020

noting that as far as Bourdieu's fields of cultural production goes, it was Plaistow who, as an iconoclastic young producer, was repositioning himself in the BBC's field, at the same time introducing a new composer into their own field. How telling, as well, that Anthony Payne, a composer in his 80s at the time of that interview, commissioned many times by the BBC, including for the Proms, and for many years a regular voice on BBC Radio 3 as a presenter, friendly with many BBC producers, somebody who knows the BBC as well as any non-staffer might, still says that 'what goes on behind the office doors, is deeply mysterious'. The importance of making personal contact with somebody influential at the BBC, in this case Stephen Plaistow, was critical, and it was this contact, individual to individual, composer to commissioner that Plaistow saw as the crux of the matter:

[T]he thing was it was *personal*, and I don't mean always personal to me, although I did feel I carried the responsibility for making sure that all the suggestions that I took to the Controller – that was the process, because it was his pot of money – and I said 'I've got some suggestions you might like to think of for Proms seasons coming up – or public concerts, not always Proms – and [composers] X, Y and Z are thinking about the following' [...] The personal nature of it was terribly important for the composer, that he [sic] had a producer, not necessarily me, but a producer to ring up about this thing he was doing, and somebody he could talk to about it.¹⁰⁹

Here Plaistow makes it clear that it was not only his taste and opinion that counted, but that there was a group, a field, of interested BBC producers involved. Some of these would have been among those 'people [who] haven't been all that kind about' Anthony Payne's music, but nonetheless, it was finally Plaistow's decision whether or not to take an idea to the Controller: he was the gatekeeper. Payne had other supporters, however, and as well as his personal link with Plaistow, he acknowledged that they also provided an entrée to the Proms: it was the Nash

¹⁰⁹ Stephen Plaistow, personal communication 16 May 2018

Ensemble, and in particular their energetic and influential Artistic Director, Amelia Freedman, who had commissioned an early chamber work from Payne:

But that [*The Stones and Lonely Places Sing*] wasn't a Prom commission. Amelia commissioned me and got the Prom at the Roundhouse and managed to get the Beeb to say yes to including a first performance by me. And Mark Elder [the conductor] said he wanted to see it before he said he'd do it. So I went around to his place and showed it to him. And he looked at it for about five minutes and said, 'Yeah, that's fine'. I mean, all he meant was that my handwriting is very neat, and he could read it easily, and it was very well laid out, and so he said he'd do it. So it's all that kind of thing; it all seems so vague. But I think somebody quite liked that [*The Stones and Lonely Places Sing*] and it got around to *Spirit's Harvest* being commissioned. Glock [had] heard pieces of mine. He was one of the judges at that competition which ran for a few years and then folded, for chamber pieces, and this year it was for pieces for choir, and it was the Alldis Choir who did it, and I remember the finalists for this were me, Brian Elias and Michael Finnissy. And the chief of the judges was Glock. So we had a kind of connection slightly from there, it was all that kind of thing. It was all about getting known, in a weird kind of way. And I didn't realise, I was absolutely naive. I just sort of was around, and got to know people. And the Prom eventually happened.¹¹⁰

Mark Elder's name will reappear in the chapter on John Buller. Once again, here in Payne's circle of influence is a performing group, the Nash Ensemble, and their manager, Freedman; a conductor, Mark Elder; and a BBC person, William Glock, plus another Lutyens pupil, Brian Elias, entering the same competition as Payne. Nicola LeFanu also came to the attention of the BBC via a competition. Her mother was the well-known composer Elisabeth Maconchy, and although that family connection must certainly have opened doors for LeFanu, at the time her career was starting, Maconchy's music was hardly in favour with the new music brigade, and the association could possibly have been detrimental to her reputation. LeFanu received a Proms

¹¹⁰ Anthony Payne, personal communication, 13 August 2020

commission from William Glock while she was only just out of college. This was to be *Hidden Landscape*, premiered at the Proms in 1973:

I wrote it in my early 20s. [...] Because in 1971, I should think, possibly '72, the BBC ran a Composers' Competition, which they hadn't done before. They've done many kinds of competitions since and anyway, I think you had to be under 30 or something. And I won it [...] with my Oboe Quartet¹¹¹ which I'd written in 1968 when I was at the Royal College of Music. Anyway, so that's I'm sure why Glock had heard of me and commissioned me [...] I was working part-time as a school teacher, I taught three days a week in London at a girls' Secondary School, and then four days a week I composed, I think that's how it went. And I got a telephone call [...] from Glock's secretary saying, 'Sir William would like to meet you. And could you come in at such time?' And I said yes. And so then I said, 'What's it about?' And she said, 'Well, I think he'd rather tell you himself'. So I went not knowing. And he very rapidly broached the suggestion. And I have a vague recollection that he asked if I'd be interested in writing a Viola Concerto. And I wouldn't, but I don't know if I've imagined that or not, but it is a very difficult medium, it's not something that I would have taken on at that stage, having never written for a large orchestra. I'd written for chamber orchestra before. And I'd had my chamber orchestra piece played at the Royal College of Music in a Patrons' Fund concert, but Glock wouldn't have known that. I'm sure it was a mixture of knowing I'd won that competition and then he had an ear to the ground. He knew everybody. And Liz Lutyens was a close friend of his and the time I won the Cobbett Prize, she was the judge. And she said to my mother, 'I would hate to have a daughter who's a composer'. So funny. And then, anyway, the invitation came from Glock and obviously I accepted it, and I was already being published by Novello; that was another very lucky thing. And my memory is that probably it was the Patrons' Fund concert with the chamber orchestra piece, which is called *Preludio One*, well it was just called *Preludio* then. I think that George Rizza who directed Novellos came to that concert, and then they wrote approaching me to send other work and I sent my solo oboe work and my Oboe Quartet. And they took them on, and that was the start of my relationship with Novello.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Variations (1968)]

¹¹² Nicola LeFanu, personal communication, 21 October 2020

It is becoming clear that the circle of influence was really rather small: once again, Elisabeth Lutyens is a key figure, as is George Rizza at Novello, and William Glock at the BBC. Having made that personal connection with an influential figure at the BBC, composers had to be careful to nurture them. What happens when one figure leaves the BBC and another arrives to take their place will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Nine, on Lutyens, but different composers had different experiences of this process. Robert Saxton got on well with Ponsonby and his successor, Nicholas Kenyon, but not the subsequent Proms Director, Roger Wright: ‘Roger and I had known each other since we were students [but] I’ve never had any rapport with him at all as Controller, but Nick and Robert, yes’.¹¹³ LeFanu had a different perspective: she ‘certainly felt much happier once Roger Wright was in charge of things’.¹¹⁴ On the other hand, the departure of an old hand and the arrival of a new broom could have the opposite effect, as Robert Saxton explained. He had written a little song to a Mallarmé poem, *Brise marine*, when he was a postgraduate student at Oxford. Two years later, after Glock had retired from the BBC and been succeeded by Ponsonby, his publisher, Sheila MacCrindle got in touch:

Sheila said to me, ‘Veronica Slater¹¹⁵ has got a concert in the Concert Hall [of Broadcasting House], and it’s going to be William Glock, playing a Mozart Piano Quartet, and Boulez conducting *Le marteau sans maître* in a live broadcast, and we’re going to begin with your *Brise marine*’. And I said, ‘Oh, God, no’. And Sheila said, ‘Come on, ducky, you’re a big boy now’. [...] Veronica said, ‘Now stop being stupid’, and I said, ‘But when I think of Stockhausen...’, and she said, ‘Yes, Stockhausen has written some very great pieces like *Gruppen*, and he’s also written a lot of very bad pieces. Now, will you leave this to me? I have chosen this as the producer, it is my programme’. And so I spoke to Liz, and Liz said, ‘Well, I’ve always told you if you go too fast, run too fast, and you get things recorded and played, and then you’ll regret it. I’ve warned you. [...] I tell you what, I’ll come with you’. So Liz and I went to the concert, and the piece was done. And afterwards, I was introduced to Boulez, [...] and I promise you, this is what

¹¹³ Robert Saxton, personal communication, 22 and 23 October 2020

¹¹⁴ Nicola LeFanu, personal communication, 21 October 2020

¹¹⁵ Veronica Slater was a BBC Radio 3 producer with a special interest in new music

happened. He said, ‘Did you write that piece?’ I said, ‘Yes’, and he said, ‘Good night’, and walked off with Glock. And I wasn’t particularly upset, because, you know, who was I to be? I mean, I was just a 22-year old. But Liz said to me, ‘That was very ungenerous of Pierre’. She said, ‘In his position, you behave properly.’ And she said, ‘I’m very cross with William’, because she knew him so well. Anyway, Robert [Ponsonby] came up to her and had a chat, and Liz said to me, and this is going to sound immodest, but this is reported speech. She said, Robert had said, ‘I was very impressed by your student’s piece. I thought it was a very beautiful, imaginative setting of Mallarmé, and got to the essence of the poem’. [...] And I think Robert decided he was going to take the opposite point of view [from Glock]; how much politics there was in that I don’t know. But he obviously respected Veronica. And ever since then, Robert was very kind to me.¹¹⁶

How much it was Ponsonby wanting to take the opposite view, and to put his own stamp on the BBC’s musical landscape is not clear. New music was very much Glock’s territory, and it was not one of Ponsonby’s areas of expertise, and so to follow the lead of a respected BBC producer and an influential publisher might have seemed a safe way to make his mark in opposition to his predecessor. Whatever his reasons, Saxton was now firmly in the BBC fold. The same desire of new blood to kick against the prevailing attitudes was also expressed by Plaistow:

[T]he fun part was [...] treating composers alongside performers, as people who might have a long-term development and might be people who we would – I think it was Christine Hardwick’s word – ‘nurture’. She talked about gardening.¹¹⁷ It was very good actually because that was what you were doing sometimes with people like Harry [Harrison Birtwistle] whose early broadcasts I got much involved with because he couldn’t get past the Panel¹¹⁸ and I had to operate the Panel, but just before I arrived Harry had fallen foul of Mosco Carner or [Edmund] Rubbra or one of the outside reporters who thought it was all complete rubbish and the man was utterly unmusical and actually William Glock (whom I adored) didn’t see the quality of Harry, when of

¹¹⁶ Robert Saxton, personal communication, 22 and 23 October 2020

¹¹⁷ Christine Hardwick was Head of the Radio 3 Music Department from 1982 until her retirement in the early 1990s

¹¹⁸ The BBC Music Department’s Reading Panel where outsiders read scores and recommended them for broadcast, or not

course the qualities of his two contemporaries Sandy [Alexander Goehr] and Max [Peter Maxwell Davies] were so evident, and they were so articulate and eloquent about what they wanted to do and how they wanted to change things and...you know, all their intellectual equipment. Harry of course didn't do that, he just went on, writing these little things, but I thought they were terrific. So I could thump the table a bit and thoroughly upset Harry Croft-Jackson¹¹⁹ and those sorts of people, and that was a pleasure in itself, but they'd eventually say, just to keep me quiet, 'Well, alright, you go and do a recording and we'll listen to it'. I did Harry's early wind quintet, *Refrains and Choruses* then the Sappho songs¹²⁰ and bits and pieces. And every note meant [something], and not at all what Max was doing, although they overlapped with their interest in old music. And this was someone I thought I'd like to continue to know and we became very good friends and are still.¹²¹

Here was Plaistow, the new kid on the BBC block, supporting a young composer in the teeth of opposition from his senior colleagues, and rather enjoying ruffling some feathers. Moreover, he not only admired Birtwistle's music, and did what he could to promote it, but he also struck up a lifelong friendship with Birtwistle.

This examination of the various networks surrounding composers who were commissioned to write for the Proms will have clarified, to some extent, Anthony Payne's observation on the BBC's baffling commissioning process, 'what goes on behind the office doors, is deeply mysterious.'¹²² The nature and influence of composers' networks is now clear. In the everyday sense of the word, networks support composers, open doors, and provide opportunities to work and present that work. This is Payne's 'old boy network'¹²³ in action, an example of the old adage about what and who you know, although it does support the popular twist that it's not who you know, it's who knows you. At the same time, while all the individuals here were active within

¹¹⁹ Harry Croft-Jackson was a long-standing and conservative member of the Music Department

¹²⁰ *Entr'actes and Sappho Fragments*

¹²¹ Stephen Plaistow, personal communication 16 May 2018

¹²² Anthony Payne, personal communication, 13 August 2020

¹²³ Anthony Payne, personal communication, 13 August 2020

their own diverse fields of cultural production – composition, publishing, broadcasting – and repositioning themselves within those (as Plaistow did, early in his career at the BBC), they were also influencing the reputations of each other, publishers pushing their composers, and BBC producers lobbying for projects by their own favourite composers. As your composer's star rose, so too did your reputation.

There was the network among composers: for example, Robert Saxton benefitted from the leg-up that Oliver Knussen was able to give him. Saxton also had the help of Elisabeth Lutyens, not only senior and influential in the circle of composers, but also his teacher, who quickly accepted him as a colleague rather than as a student. As has been seen, Lutyens was instrumental in introducing Saxton to his publisher, Sheila MacCrindle at Chesters, and the relationship between composer and publisher was also fundamental. MacCrindle's support for Saxton was key in his success. The three-way relationship between composer, publisher and the BBC was crucial; but it is important to stress here that it is not 'the BBC', but individuals within the Corporation: as Plaistow said, it was 'personal', and Latour's call to arms is germane here:

[W]henever anyone speaks of a 'system', a 'global feature', a 'structure', a 'society', an 'empire', a 'world economy', an 'organisation', the first ANT¹²⁴ reflex should be to ask: 'In which building? In which bureau? Through which corridor is it accessible? Which colleagues has it been read to? How has it been compiled?' (Latour, 2005: 183).

The way Payne cultivated Plaistow, for example, is mirrored by Saxton and Slater. Critics were influential, too: Paul Griffiths, for example, whose name appears again in other contexts in this project; and Susan Bradshaw, listening to Saxton's piano piece and offering to broadcast it (he was sent to see her by Lutyens, let us not forget) as well as introducing Payne to his future wife,

¹²⁴ Actor-Network Theory

Jane Manning. This, then, is the second element to Bourdieu's habitus, his 'feel for the game'. Knowing the right people, and knowing what to write when a commission comes your way, might seem like an inherent characteristic. In a case like Robert Saxton, who had been moving in the right circles since he was a young schoolboy, that might seem to be the case. Bourdieu was insistent that this understanding was in fact, learned, as Karl Maton interprets it:

Actors do not appear in a field fully armed with god-like knowledge of the state of play, the positions, beliefs, and aptitudes of other actors, or the full consequences of their actions. Rather, they enjoy a particular point of view on proceedings based on their positions, and they come to acquire a sense of the tempo, rhythms and unwritten rules of the game through time and experience (Maton, 2014: 53).

In the following chapters, the cases of John Buller and Elisabeth Lutyens are explored, and each of their narratives interweave the elements explored in the previous three chapters. These two composers exemplify in their different ways the elements outlined in the thesis so far, and provide the opportunity to examine the music they composed to commission for the Proms in the context of their relationships with staff at the BBC Music Department. Buller came to composition at a relatively late age, and as a result, his acquisition of the 'feel for the game' is rather more evident than was Robert Saxton's. It is a demonstration of how a composer could take on board the unwritten rules of the game, and produce works that, while being individual and distinctive, nonetheless stuck closely to the unwritten expectations which had been established for Proms commissions. The works Buller composed are a manifestation of everything a composer needed to know and furthermore they outline a discourse that was developed at the BBC to express what was viewed as success, or 'consecration', to use Bourdieu's term. Lutyens's case is more complex: the three works that she was commissioned to write for the Proms had very different outcomes: the first was a near-miss, the result of neglecting some of the unwritten rules of Proms commissions; the second hit the nail right on

the head, a textbook case of a composer adapting her style to requirements that were well understood without abandoning her aesthetic; and the third was a disaster, a work that was never performed at the Proms, and which never received a public performance by the BBC, a direct result of her misunderstanding, whether deliberately or not, what every composer needed to know to fulfil a successful commission.

part three

Chapter Eight: John Buller

This chapter is a detailed study of the composer John Buller (1927–2004), the two works commissioned for the Proms, *Proença* (1977) and *The Theatre of Memory* (1981), the relationships he had with the individuals at the BBC, and also with his publishers. Here, the elements from the preceding chapters are interwoven: the narrative that was constructed around the importance of the Proms, and the part that new music played in that narrative; the role money took in the narrative; and the relationships between composers and their networks in the music industry and at the BBC. Buller's is an example of an ideal scenario. In this chapter, it is demonstrated, firstly, that he was able to establish strong and positive working relationships, which resulted in satisfactory outcomes for him as a composer, and for the BBC. This was Buller establishing himself in the appropriate field of cultural production, the field in which composers get commissioned to write for the Proms. Buller established himself considerably later than most composers, in his late twenties and early thirties, and this late development makes explicit how this process, which often appears to be the result of innate personal qualities, is in fact learnt. Secondly, it is shown how the staff of the BBC Music Department took on and advocated for a composer and his music, not only within the BBC's own productions, but elsewhere in the music industry. This narrative defines the language of success that the BBC used: although there may have been informal congratulations to composers in Green Rooms after first performances, nowhere was there any official recognition of the success (or otherwise) of BBC commissions. The occasional comment in an internal memo was about as far as that went. On the other hand, the continued support, of the sort provided to Buller, was the way that a composer would know that the BBC Music Department approved of what they were doing. Buller's file at the BBC's Written Archives Centre¹²⁵ charts this relationship in some detail, including as it does substantial material relating to his two commissions for the Proms. During this period Buller was highly

¹²⁵ BBC WAC R83/868/1 BULLER, JOHN 1975–84

successful, and the contents of this file, along with evidence of other actions on the part of the BBC, constructs a language of success, not always explicit, which is a paradigm of the commissioning process during this period, when that process ran smoothly. There are demonstrations of the kind of rapport that Stephen Plaistow wished to build between BBC staff and composers; the importance of networking to aspiring composers; and the way a composer could be taken under the BBC's collective wing, nurtured and encouraged. The BBC's wing was just one part of a fluid and constantly evolving network, a network that on occasion 'congealed' (to use Mosco's expression (2009: 131)) into a commission, a performance, a commercial recording or even something as small and apparently ephemeral as a kindly phone call. The negative side of this protective network is the potential for professional nurturing to turn into personal favouritism, which is also addressed. The culmination of this process was one of the first – possibly the very first – attempts the BBC made to get a commercial recording made of one of its commissions for the Proms.

Buller establishes himself in the field of cultural production

Buller was a late-starter as a composer. He was a musical child, but his parents discouraged him from pursuing a career in music, and he acquiesced to their expectations that he would join the family business, and trained as an architectural surveyor. He had a piece accepted for broadcast by the BBC when he was only 19 and serving in the navy, but the untimely death of his mother left him unwilling to go against his grieving father's wishes, and he followed his family's bidding. While he was working, though, he took part-time courses at Morley College, studying composition with Anthony Milner, sat an external BMus at London University, and, crucially, attended music summer schools. Martin Anderson recognised this in an obituary he wrote of Buller:

An important stage in his development came in 1965, when he attended the Wardour Castle summer school, run in a Wiltshire girls' school by its music teacher, the composer Harrison Birtwistle, aided by his fellow-modernists Alexander Goehr and Peter Maxwell Davies. Buller had a piece performed there, took a lesson with 'Max' and founded a friendship with Birtwistle which lasted for the rest of his life (Anderson, 2004: 35).

Buller would have been 28 at the time, just a couple of years younger than Maxwell Davies and Birtwistle, but coming into contact with these three composers would have been formative, especially as he would, as a member – even a junior, part-time member – of this group, then be introduced to a wide range of influential figures in the new music village. By 1965 both Goehr and Davies had been commissioned by the BBC for the Proms: *Hecuba's Lament*, Op 12 (1961) and the *First Fantasia on an 'In nomine' of John Taverner* (1962) respectively. Birtwistle was going to join the club in 1968 with *Nomos*. Anderson's obituary goes on to trace Buller's subsequent progress:

In 1970 Buller wrote his first score to attract serious attention: *The Cave*, an eight-minute piece for flute, clarinet, trombone, cello and tape which the Nash Ensemble premiered on the South Bank in 1972. Another milestone came in 1974 with the performance of the 22-minute *Le Terrazze* (for a 15-strong ensemble of woodwinds, brass, strings and tape) in a BBC Invitation Concert. Then Buller was named composer-in-residence at Edinburgh University for the academic year 1975–76 and his life as a professional creative artist had at last taken off [...] Official recognition came with an Arts Council bursary in 1978; another residency as composer was spent at Queen's University, Belfast, in 1985–86. Meantime, the next popular success came in 1981, with another Proms commission, *The Theatre of Memory* [...] conducted by Mark Elder (Anderson, 2004: 35).

The Nash Ensemble, founded in 1964 by their enterprising director, Amelia Freedman, was establishing itself as a force to be reckoned with, and an important string to its many-stringed bow was a devotion to new music. Having a work premiered by the Nash was quite an

achievement for a part-time composer in their 30s. It was around this time, according to Plaistow's obituary of Buller (Plaistow, 2004, online) that Plaistow and Buller became acquainted – they were to become lifelong friends, and, as Anderson reported, Buller's next break came with a piece done at a BBC Invitation Concert, a series Plaistow ran for the BBC, promoting new music concerts around sympathetic British university music departments. This concert was given at Lancaster University by the London Sinfonietta, and conducted by another influential composer, Gilbert Amy. The other composers on the programme were all leaders in European new music: Berio, Dallapiccola and Ligeti: distinguished company, and an indication from Plaistow that he was confident that Buller could punch his weight in such a context. On the other hand, this could equally be seen as the BBC's version of the refiner's fire, and having thrust Buller into this company, Plaistow could sit back and see whether he came out purer and stronger, and what was burnt up in the process. The London Sinfonietta, founded in 1968, had already established itself as one of the pre-eminent new music groups in the UK, and was highly-esteemed internationally. The Associate Professor of Composition at Lancaster was Edward Cowie (himself commissioned for the Proms in 1975), who would have been Plaistow's contact there, and no doubt influential in bringing the BBC to the University. Those ensembles, those composers, the South Bank, the BBC; Buller was moving in the right circles. As a result of this attention, he was appointed composer-in-residence at Edinburgh University, and, with well-found confidence, he was able, at the age of 38, to resign as a director of the family business, and take his chances as a full-time composer. This will have been a crucial moment in his development. Nothing is more important to a creative artist than the time to create, and being appointed to a position like this would have bought Buller the time he needed. In some ways, it could be seen as something of a self-fulfilling prophecy: the adult prodigy (if he may be so described) gets the attention of the most influential movers and shakers in the new music world; they recognise that he is one of them, and deserves his place in their club – Bourdieu's consecration – and their support buys him the vital commodity that he needs, time, so he is able

to compose, and other music is taken up, commissions are made, his network expands and his reputation burgeons. Without casting any aspersions on Buller's remarkable talent – genius, some might say – if he had not been given the opportunity, he might not have had the subsequent success. His is a powerful case for this argument, in that he struggled along as a part-time composer for so long, and only got his big break in his late 30s. Other composers get this support almost from the word go, while they are still studying, and their apparently effortless rise does not recognise that without the support of their older peers, this success might not have seemed so self-evidently based on their ability alone.

The first Prom commission: Proença

Anderson describes *The Theatre of Memory* as Buller's next 'popular success' (Anderson, 2004: 35), but that was in fact his second Prom commission, and it came on the back of a previous success, *Proença*, also commissioned for the Proms, and where his BBC file begins, with a letter, dated 6 July 1976, from Buller to Ponsonby:

I first wanted to write and thank you for commissioning Proença for the BBC. As you know, it is a piece I have long wanted to write, and now you have given me the opportunity, and very generously too with the studio recording preceding.¹²⁶

Whether Buller had discussed the commission directly with Ponsonby is possible, but unlikely. It seems far more likely that it was brokered entirely by Plaistow, and this is Buller formally thanking the official holder of the BBC's purse strings; he makes it clear that he is writing the new work 'for the BBC' rather than for Plaistow, or Ponsonby or the BBC Symphony Orchestra, or any other individual or group. Buller refers to a studio recording: at this time, it was standard practice at the BBC to take commissioned works into the studio ahead of their first public

¹²⁶ BBC WAC R83/868/1 BULLER, JOHN 1975–84, 6 July 1976

performance, rehearse them, and record them. This had four advantages: firstly, that the orchestra, soloists and conductor would have the work thoroughly under their fingers before the first public performance at the Proms, having brought it to performance pitch a month or two ahead of the premiere. The second is that the BBC, would, under the conditions of the orchestral contracts of the time, be able to play that recording and a repeat as well as the live Proms broadcast and its repeat, giving the radio audience the chance to hear the new piece four times, if they chose to. Thirdly, the studio performance also acted as something of a safety net, giving the opportunity to iron out any mistakes in the score and parts, even do a little tweaking on the part of the composer, and also to have a performance in the can that, while it might not have the excitement of a live performance in front of an audience, would at least benefit from retakes and editing, so if the live performance was less than accurate, at least another recorded performance existed that was at the very least respectable. Lastly, it saved rehearsal time during the Proms period itself, always something of a marathon for the BBC Symphony Orchestra. Buller's letter also introduces the strategy adopted by Plaistow and Ponsonby during this period, of seeing what composers wanted to write, and if it tied in with what they, or rather 'the BBC', wanted, then they could knit these aspirations together to the mutual benefit of all parties. In Plaistow's obituary of Buller, he emphasises how critical this is to composers, especially a late-starter like Buller:

In what was to be quite a short career, John was singleminded in writing only the music he wanted to write, when he wanted to write it – no diversions (Plaistow, 2004, online).

From Buller's letter to Ponsonby, the transaction seemed both straightforward and transparent. He had a piece in mind, Ponsonby wanted it for the Proms, and was prepared to pay him to write it. The reality was much more complex, as has been described, with a network of support from performing groups, promoters, university departments, composers alongside the BBC, all

playing their part in the activities which eventually led to ('congealed in') a commission for the Proms.

Plaistow's memo to Ponsonby was dated 27 August 1976:

Just to tell you that if you'd like to pursue the idea of asking Sir Adrian [Boult] to do the Elgar Second Symphony, as the second half of the concert, John Buller and I would be delighted. The Elgar is 57 minutes and John's piece will not be less than 35.¹²⁷

It would appear that some discussion had been developing about the context in which Buller's new piece would find itself. Plaistow had already tested Buller in the context of the leading European composers of the day, in the BBC Invitation Concert outlined above. Now, in the very much higher profile of the Proms, Buller was to weather a very different challenge. It seems unlikely that Boult, then very much the grand old man, would have conducted the new piece:¹²⁸ it was common practice to bring in a younger, more specialist conductor to conduct new pieces. In this context, Plaistow seems to be forming an alliance here with Buller, the creatives, as opposed to the administrators who would be juggling the often-conflicting demands of repertoire, conductors and orchestras that make up the complex jigsaw that is the Proms. He was making a pitch for the ideal solution to planning the programme, rather than the expedient solution that so often needs to be found. Ponsonby replied in a handwritten addition to the original memo, spelling out some of those practical issues that might scupper this creatively-motivated programming proposal: 'Buller–Elgar noted. At this stage I must keep my options open. Various factors: need for Brahms somewhere; Tuesday or Saturday; availability of the Walkers; etc.' It became apparent that Ponsonby had several balls to juggle: even in a big festival like the Proms, balancing the core repertoire can be a headache, and it might become noticeable, even at quite a

¹²⁷ BBC WAC R83/868/1 BULLER, JOHN 1975–84, 27 August 1976

¹²⁸ Boult's very considerable enthusiasm for new music earlier in his career is charted in Doctor (1999).

late stage of the planning, that a composer like Brahms had been left out entirely. As to ‘Tuesday or Saturday’, there is no evidence that these were preferred days to present new works: in the years 1974–6, of ten new works, only three were placed on a Tuesday or Saturday; perhaps it was to do with Boult’s availability, or the scheduling of the BBC Symphony Orchestra at the period the commission was likely to be placed. ‘The Walkers’ refers to the soloists for Buller’s new piece, the mezzo soprano Sarah Walker and the guitarist Timothy Walker. These two (not related) were in Buller’s mind from the earliest stages of planning the work, which had the unusual requirement of a solo electric guitar, played by a virtuoso guitarist who could play complex modern music from a score: Timothy Walker was one of very few appropriately-qualified candidates. As Michael Tippett explained:

When I first began writing for the electric guitar, in *The Knot Garden* [1970] and *Songs for Dor*, [also 1970] I knew relatively little about the potential of the instrument. It was also a bit of a gamble, since there were few executants with the essential combination of abilities: fluency, accuracy in reading music, and experience in following a conductor (Tippett, 2001: 267).

Buller was not, therefore, the first classical composer to write for the electric guitar, but its use in this context was still not widespread. Nonetheless, the example of a much more senior figure among British composers had set an example, and so Buller was not straying so very far from the accepted aesthetic of the time in choosing to include an electric guitar. As shall become clear, its function was to add a demotic voice to his score, in very much the same way Tippett had already used it. As far as the concert programme went, it was Brahms rather than Elgar who won out in the end, and Boult conducted his Third Symphony in the first part of the concert on Saturday 6 August 1977, and the second part, conducted by Mark Elder, consisted of Buller’s new piece, and the *Rhapsodie espagnole* by Ravel. An ingenious piece of concert-building, as the Brahms is difficult to programme: it ends quietly and conductors dislike ending a concert with it, as the

audience goes away in a downbeat mood; *Proença* also ends on a contemplative note, but the Ravel, situated a little further south from Provence, but maintaining the Mediterranean mood, is as rousing a finisher as any conductor or audience could want. This was the musical context in which *Proença* found itself, but it is also worthwhile to see how the BBC put the work in context in other media: the BBC's 'representation' of the work, to use Stuart Hall's expression (Hall, Evans and Nixon, 1997). 1977 was the Queen's Silver Jubilee year, and the Proms prospectus described the three works commissioned for that year (Edwin Roxburgh's *Montage* and Peter Maxwell Davies's *The Martyrdom of St Magnus*, as well as the Buller) as 'BBC Jubilee commissions'. By badging these new works in this way, the BBC appeared to be characterising them as celebratory works, which none of them were. Roxburgh described his work as 'complex [...] abstract [and] explosive' (Roxburgh, 1977: 6), and Maxwell Davies's chamber opera sets the martyrdom of St Magnus in 'a police cell in any contemporary totalitarian state' (Maxwell Davies, 1977: 3).

In the 1977 Proms prospectus there are paragraphs on each of the 'Commissions for Jubilee Year', including a quotation from Buller:

In a way [...] the piece is about song – and how song always reflects the moment, from the early troubadours, with their spring-like desire to sing new songs and to “make it new”, to the last of the troubadours – after the collapse – singing only that he was born too late (Buller, 1977a: 10).

Quite apart from this making very little sense on its own, with its unexplained reference to 'the last of the troubadours', it also missed the critical context of this sentence, which was only made clear in the programme note for the concert. This note was written by Buller himself, and the first part goes into some detail about the troubadours' production of 'the first European vernacular poetry' (Buller, 1977b: 5), creating a 'society [that] was finally wiped out by the

medieval equivalent of big-power politics, Northern Frank and Church combining in the so-called Albigensian Crusade' (Buller, 1977b: 5). He explains where the texts he chose came from, and who wrote them, including 'lines from Guiraud Riquièr, the "last of the troubadours" singing only that he was born too late' (Buller, 1977b: 5). Which at least explains who the 'last of the troubadours' was. The political motivation for the work became a little more explicit in Buller's final paragraph:

An electric guitar is used in the Arnaud Danièl sections; it is an instrument dominating a good deal of music today, and in *Proença* it finally takes over from the voice during the highly mannered (and virtually untranslatable) language of Danièl. I find it musically symbolic too; in the description of the young people in Lincoln Park, Chicago, at the time of the 1968 Democratic Convention – and in the context of the political and physical violence perpetrated on them – Norman Mailer writes of the electric guitar and its music as 'a variety of true song'. Well, 'song' is, in a way, what this piece is 'about' – verbal, instrumental and vocal; the joy it can represent; and the violence it can meet (Buller, 1977b: 6).

The events of the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago might still have been familiar to an audience in 1977.¹²⁹ Held against the background of the Vietnam War, the Democrats had nominated the pro-war Hubert Humphrey as their electoral candidate. A largely peaceful anti-war protest was met with disproportionate violence from the police, described in the Walker Report (1968) as:

[U]nrestrained and indiscriminate police violence on many occasions, particularly at night. That violence was made all the more shocking by the fact that it was often inflicted upon persons who had broken no law, disobeyed no order, made no threat. These included peaceful demonstrators, onlookers, and large numbers of residents who were

¹²⁹ This was the subject of the film *The Trial of the Chicago Seven* (2020), directed by Aaron Sorkin.

simply passing through, or happened to live in, the areas where confrontations were occurring.

Newsmen and photographers were singled out for assault, and their equipment deliberately damaged. Fundamental police training was ignored; and officers, when on the scene, were often unable to control their men. As one police officer put it: 'What happened didn't have anything to do with police work' (Walker, 1968: 1).

The guitar is symbolic of democracy, and the opposition to big-power politics by young, peaceful protestors: the electric guitar is also demotic ('dominating a good deal of music today'). What Buller does not say is that music is largely pop or rock music, and the associations of the electric guitar are inevitably with pop, rather than classical, music. However, what Buller does with the guitar is anything but pop-orientated, although when the guitarist plays with distortion from about halfway through the work, there are inevitably echoes of progressive rockers – for example Jan Akkerman in some of his more self-indulgent solos on albums by Focus: compare the 23-minute instrumental *Eruption* from the album *Moving Waves* (Focus, 1971, available on YouTube, online) with this segment from the Buller:

♩ = 132
With Fuzz

The musical score is written for guitar and consists of seven staves. It begins with a tempo marking of 132 beats per minute and the instruction 'With Fuzz'. The first staff includes dynamic markings of *mp* and *f*, along with a triplet of eighth notes. The second staff features a triplet of eighth notes and two quintuplets of eighth notes. The third staff contains several triplet markings. The fourth staff also includes triplet markings. The fifth staff has a triplet marking and a dynamic marking of *mf*. The sixth staff features a triplet marking and a dynamic marking of *ff*. The seventh staff includes a triplet marking and a dynamic marking of *f*. The score is characterized by complex rhythmic patterns, including many triplet and quintuplet markings, and a variety of dynamic markings ranging from *mp* to *ff*.

Music example 1: Buller Proença, Section X

It would appear that Buller was quite unfazed by the challenge of writing this commission for the Proms. If he had any misgivings about joining this club, he kept them to himself. *Proença* was his first work for orchestra: all his previous music was written for chamber ensembles, the largest

up to this point being his previous piece, based on a text by James Joyce, *The Mime of Mick, Nick and the Maggies*, a music theatre score for two vocal soloists, a small chorus and just 12 instruments. In *Proença* he chose to set texts by 11th, 12th and 13th-century troubadours from the Languedoc region of France. The music divides into 11 sections, although four of them include words by more than one poet. Buller described the subjects of the sections in his programme note for the Prom:

[T]he piece – which is continuous – falls into eleven groups or sections. The first, from the early troubadours [...] deals with their spring-like desire to sing new songs and ‘make it new’. The second, largely from Bernard de Ventadorn and the Comtessa de Dia, deals with sexual love. The third, from Bertrand de Born, illustrates the aristocrat’s feudal love of war – showing that however rich the period it was not romantically utopian – whilst the fourth, in contrast, speaks in calm wisdom. The sixth and eighth sections, based on Pèire Cardenal, describe the mounting pressures on the society from without, and these alternate with the fifth, seventh and ninth sections of Arnaut Danièl [...] The short instrumental tenth section of the piece derives from the final collapse, symbolised best perhaps by the ruins on the top of Mont Ségur in the foothills of the Pyrenees where, in 1244, some two hundred and thirty men and women were burnt in the field below. The final section is of lines from Guiraud Riquièr, the ‘last of the troubadours’, singing only that he was born too late (Buller, 1977b: 5).

Whether Buller was familiar with Pierre Bourdieu’s writings, the very first poem he chose to set encapsulates Bourdieu’s theory of the field of cultural production, and the importance of originality for any newcomer wishing to join a field. As Bourdieu puts it:

‘Making one’s mark’, initiating a new epoch, means winning recognition, in both senses, of one’s difference from other producers, especially the most consecrated of them; it means, by the same token, creating a new position, ahead of the positions already occupied, in the vanguard (Bourdieu, 1993a: 60).

While the medieval poet wrote (in the uncredited translation used in the BBC Prom programme):

I'll sing, for I see I must write
The new song groaning within my jaw;
But singing has tormented me –
How to sing so that it resembles
No-one else's song?
For no singing is ever worthwhile
Which resembles that of others (Buller, 1977b: 7).

The image of the 'song groaning within my jaw', a song which already exists and is bursting to get out, is a vivid metaphor for the act of artistic creation, reflecting Buller's comment to Ponsonby that *Proença* was 'a piece I have long wanted to write'. The 'torment' of the composer striving to be original could hardly reflect more powerfully Bourdieu's concept of the critical importance of the necessity of 'difference' from the already consecrated producers (composers). The sheer scope of Buller's work is impressive: a 40-minute orchestral song-cycle, with a solo electric guitar alongside the mezzo-soprano. Buller's independence and ambition were noticed by Susan Bradshaw in her review of the first performance:

The first performance of a new work of the imaginative quality and emotional intensity of John Buller's *Proença* is rare enough to be a genuinely thrilling event – especially when such a piece is the first for large orchestra by a relatively little-known composer [...] Remarkably, whereas the originality of Buller's earlier music (mostly large-scale chamber works for voices and instruments) had occasionally seemed to draw attention to itself as the result of an unintentional eccentricity of expression, *Proença* gives no hint of awkwardness or angularity, or of needing to be manoeuvred in performance; in fact, the music seems to play itself – just as it explains itself to the listener.

Perhaps the very size and scope of the undertaking dictated the need for simplification: in any case, the complex linear activity of the piece is laid out with a clarity that gives it an always audible logic [...] The overall impression is that of a logically-evolving melody, apparently shaped and propelled by and of itself without recourse to evidently developmental devices – it seems rather that the cantabile flow of the predominantly song element (instrumental as well as vocal) casts continual reflection upon itself, and so acquires a 3-dimensional depth that includes rhythmic impetus (Bradshaw, 1977: 35–36).

Size, scope, simplification: Buller knew how to tell his story with ‘clarity [...] and audible logic’ which would, without compromising his own artistic voice, appeal to that all-important Prom audience. Bradshaw hints at the compositional technique of a single constantly evolving melody that draws the listener through the piece; this technique is characteristic of Harrison Birtwistle, to the extent that he called one of his pieces *An Interrupted Endless Melody* (1991), although Buller pursues a similar idea through very different vistas. It is also worth pointing out the vivid use Buller makes of the large orchestra, painting the different sections of the music in contrasting colours, rather as Wagner does with his characters and locations in the *Ring*, although here there is nothing like a melodically-recognisable *leitmotif*.

For example, this excerpt from the very end of Section I, setting the words ‘eyes, heart, and mind’, with the mezzo duetting with the keening alto flute, against the sustained white-note chord in the strings, which sinks away to nothing in the flutes and horns:

11

Alto flute

pp *p* *pp* *p* *pp* *p* *pp* *p* *mf* *a niente*

p *mp* *p* *pp* *p* *p* *mp*

e'ls uelhs e'l cor e'l sen

11

Strings

pp *ppp*

12

Flutes

Horns

ppp *a niente*

a niente

12

a niente *a niente*

Music example 2: Buller Proença, Section I

The simplicity of the harmony, not so far away from a pair of diminished seventh chords, the spare vocal line, and the flute and voice in contrary motion, sometimes colliding, sometimes in imitation; this is Bradshaw's clarity and simplification. This contrasts strongly with this next excerpt, from the beginning of Section II, setting the words 'Love is like a spark, smouldering

beneath soot, which suddenly flares up and sets straw and wood ablaze. Listen!’ with its vividly crackling woodwind, strings, and percussion, the complex overlapping arpeggios almost like Lutoslawski. The entry of the trumpets is quite hair-raising, while the voice is supported by just a pair of horns, allowing it to communicate clearly:

3 soprano saxophones
Woodwind/brass
Percussion
Claves/w.block/t.block
Xylophone
Strings

Measures 12-13. The score shows complex overlapping arpeggios in the woodwinds and strings, with percussion providing a rhythmic foundation. Dynamics range from *p* to *f*. A box with the number 13 is present in the strings staff.

Horns
Oboe/cor anglais
very nasal
fff
A - mors vai com la be-lu - ja
Que coa'l fu-ec en la

Measures 14-15. The score features the voice part with lyrics and the horns. The woodwinds continue with complex arpeggios. Dynamics include *f*, *mfz*, and *mp*.

Piccolo

Ob/cor a.

Bassoons

Horns

sfz *p*

14

su - ja

Ard lo

Piccolo

Ob/cor a.

Bassoons

Tpt 1

Tpt 2

Tpt 3

Harp

bis.

p

intenso p

fust e la fes-tu-ja

Es-cou-tatz!

pp

The image shows a musical score for 'Buller Proença, Section II'. It includes staves for Horns, Woodwind, and a vocal part. The Horns part starts with a *sfz* (sforzando) marking. The Woodwind part has a *f* (forte) marking. The vocal part has a *ff* (fortissimo) marking and includes the lyrics 'E non sap vas qual part fu - ja'. The score features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and quintuplets, and a measure number '15' is visible in a box.

Music example 3: Buller Proença, Section II

The superficial activity of the writing here conceals the very limited means Buller uses: the repetitions of the voice part, which stays within the range of a fifth, and the static harmony, a chord containing all 12 semitones. Later in Section II the horns murmur an accompaniment to the cor anglais, oboe and soprano saxophone, while the strings slide between a pair of harmonies. The mezzo sings 'I've given it [love] my heart and body, wisdom and strength, sense and power; the bridle so leads me towards love that I'm attracted by nothing else'. The lyrical, sensuous lines of the mezzo are supported by the simple beauty of the orchestral writing. This expressive, colourful scoring, painted with a broad brush, is typical of the whole score, which communicates its message with great clarity:

♩=40

17 Cor anglais *pp* Oboe

Horn 1 *pp* Horn 2 *pp con sord* Horn 3 *pp con sord*

Trombones *gliss.* *gliss.* *pp*

Cor e cors e sa-ber e sen E for-ca e po-der i ai_mes

Strings *gliss.* *gliss.* *gliss.* *gliss.*

Sop sax *p* **18**

Si'm ti-ra vas a-mor lo frens Que vas au-tra partn'om a[tend]

Music example 4: Buller Proença, Section II

This same straightforward approach is found again in Section 4, where the mezzo speaks, rather than sings, the lines, ‘Ah, foolish hope has so often taken joy from my grasp that my hair’s

turned grey, and my heart, which knows that happiness is too rare, wanted me to sing gay songs, for until its eyes were opened it had justice quite reversed, so much was it lost in love. No man can so utterly fulfil that which he hath in his heart but that as soon as it is spoken out or done, it seemeth a little thing', these words reflected so beautifully in the woodwind chords, building and disintegrating, each attack given a little ping from the percussion, while the strings pile up a ghostly eight-note chord, the whole given a listless character by the direction to play without vibrato:

34

Flutes 1&2 *non vib*
ppp

Flute 3 *non vib*
ppp

Clarinet 1&2 *non vib*
ppp

Clt 3 & Bsn *ppp*

Harp *ppp*

pp

Glockenspiel

Bells *ppp*

Celeste

Vibraphone *ppp*

ppp

with pedal, no motor

Voice [speak, slowly, regretfully]

4/4

Ai, tantas vètz m'a trach mas per qu'esdevenh liars, pose n ren s'aficha Don't s'alegra tant
nècis parlas Jòl d'entre'ls, E'l còr, ni quand,

Strings (solo) *pp*

ppp

pp

35

Fl.

Fl.

Cl.

Cl./Bsn

Hp.

Glock.

Bells

Cel.

Vib.

Voice

amar esmers! Nulhs òme non pòt complir adrechament Çò qu'a en còr,

Vln/Vla

Vc.

36

Fl. *pp*

Fl. *pp*

Cl. *pp*

Cl./Bsn *pp*

Hp. *pp*

Glock. *pp*

Bells *pp*

Cel. *pp*

Vib. *pp*

Voice

si tot quand el es fait No'l sembla pauc, ni ama ab còr verai Pos que cuja amar tròp finament.

Vln/Vla *pp*

Vc. *pp*


Music example 5: Buller Proença, Section IV


The work ends quietly, the mezzo duetting with the solo flute and clarinet. The strings are playing a huge clustered chord, heavily divided, where each player drops out one by one, to leave the solo viola alone. The words are '[Lady, mother of charity] obtain for us, through pity of your son, our Redeemer, grace, pardon and love' and this plea to Mary, with its repetitions of 'and love' seems to echo the ending of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*, and its final cries of 'Ewig'; 'forever':


Fl./Cl. 


Voice 


Viola 
ppp

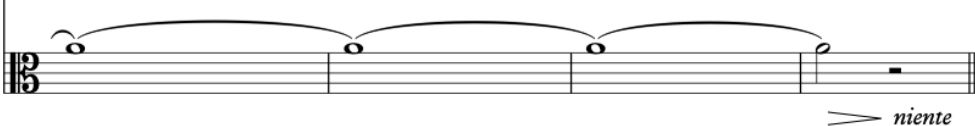
Fl./Cl. 

Voice 

Vla. 

Fl./Cl. 

Voice 

Vla. 

> niente

Music example 6: Buller Proença, Section XI

The BBC's language of success: critical responses and subsequent performances

The first performance was critically well-received. Susan Bradshaw again:

The exhilarating effect of its first performance could be seen in the expectant faces of a promenade audience genuinely captivated by the sweeping curve of the music for all of its 40 minutes' duration, a length absolutely justified by the quite uncontrived narrative design of a work which rivets attention throughout – from a beginning that emerges from a haze of orchestral tuning to an end that sinks into a [sic] echoing silence (Bradshaw, 1977: 35).

It is worth noting that Bradshaw draws attention to the work's impact on the Proms audience; Ponsonby's strategy of mixing core repertoire with new commissions appears to have paid off on this occasion, as did Buller's 'uncontrived narrative design'. Other critics were equally effusive, including Paul Griffiths in *The Musical Times*. After discussing Proms performances of other recent music by British composers, he goes on to discuss Buller:

More impressive, partly because more unexpected, were the qualities of beauty, depth and grace in John Buller's *Proença* [...] The introduction of [the electric guitar], with its powerfully expressive twangs and flurries, was enough to make one recognise the contemporary relevance of the story: but there was no need for the gesture towards rock which Buller makes in a rare lapse of sophistication. At all other points this translucent fabric, subtly woven around shreds from the original songs, makes its effects with compelling distinction (Griffiths, 1977: 841).

Quite why Griffiths felt the need to criticise the use of the guitar, and its metaphorical function of clarifying the 'contemporary relevance of the story', is not clear: Griffiths explained the basic arc of the story, the rise and fall of medieval Provençal culture, but he omitted to mention Buller's explicit reference to the Democratic Convention in Chicago in 1968, so his

‘contemporary relevance’ is left hanging. Nonetheless, this positive review is representative of the critics, and so now Buller could add their influential names to the list of his supporters.

John Buller’s *Proença* must be seen, in the light of these reviews, to have been a success, both with the critics, and, if Susan Bradshaw was correct, with the audience in the hall. Plaistow’s policy of commissioning a work that the composer already had in mind paid off. As Plaistow put it: ‘you couldn’t predict [success] with absolute certainty but if you did get behind a piece that a composer wanted to write the chances were that it would be good and worth hearing at least. Or at least not a disaster’,¹³⁰ and Buller’s work was anything but a disaster. *Proença* was, for Buller, ‘a piece I have long wanted to write, and [...] you have given me the opportunity.’¹³¹ The BBC, in the shape of Plaistow and Ponsonby, had given Buller the opportunity, indeed they had thrown down a challenge, and Buller had risen to that challenge with, as Griffiths put it, a work of ‘beauty, depth and grace’. What is not clear from the material in the BBC’s Written Archives Centre is whether there was any formal debrief on the Proms season; if there were, it must have been an informal affair, without minutes, or else not deemed to be significant enough to archive. There was certainly no official recognition of the quality of any individual Prom commission, in the form of a letter, for example, and so it must be assumed that the only feedback the commissioned composer would have received would have been informal, a chat or phone call, perhaps. The most significant feedback the composer could receive would have been by way of how they were treated in the future. This is the direction this thesis takes next, to look at the language the BBC developed to express its approbation of a composer after a successful commission.

¹³⁰ Plaistow, personal communication, 16 May 2018

¹³¹ BBC WAC R83/868/1 BULLER, JOHN 1975–84, 6 July 1976

A little less than a month after the first performance Buller wrote to Ponsonby, in a letter dated 2 September 1977:

You must know what a great joy it was being able to write *Proença* for a Prom commission. I've only seen one or two reviews but thank God at least one acknowledged our debt to the BBC! Also of course I was wonderfully served by Sarah [Walker], Timothy [Walker] and the orchestra, and of course by Mark [Elder] who gave it a great amount of study and care. I think he was enormously impressive. Yes, it would be good if it could be given again before too long: the Albert Hall is an exciting place and to give it before that big appreciative Prom audience is a tremendous experience, but it would be good to hear it in a better acoustic (tho' the Maida Vale tape is very good – probably slightly more accurate but without that 'performance' excitement).¹³²

Without wishing to read too much into a hastily handwritten letter, it is intriguing to speculate on the phrase 'our debt to the BBC', and who 'we' are. Buller could perhaps be referring to himself, the royal 'we', but then in the next sentence he writes 'I was wonderfully served...'. Might he mean himself and Ponsonby? This would separate Ponsonby off, rather uncomfortably, from the BBC, which he represents and for whom he acts, so it could be a rather roundabout way of thanking Ponsonby personally. Or would he mean to include Plaistow? Or even the performers he lists in the next sentence. He might also mean the 'big appreciative Prom audience' too. The importance of the Proms audience again. All of which points to his acknowledgement of the importance of all these participants in bringing his work to fruition. Becker's film credits grow longer and longer, and Buller's network, his supporters' club, bigger and bigger. What is clear from the letter is that Ponsonby had already suggested that the BBC might programme *Proença* again. When and how he might have proposed this is open to conjecture: possibly in the excitement of a post-concert party, or in the Green Room immediately after the performance. If that was the case, then it implies that a promise made in the euphoria of the moment might take

¹³² BBC WAC R83/868/1 BULLER, JOHN 1975–84, 2 September 1977

precedence over a decision taken after the excitement had died down, when a more objective assessment could be made. The next letter from Buller to Ponsonby in his BBC file, dated 23 February 1978, is a five-page discussion of his music theatre work, based on a text by James Joyce, *The Mime of Mick, Nick and the Maggies* (1977). This is not relevant here, other than to wonder at the kind of relationship Buller and Ponsonby had developed, that the composer felt it appropriate to write at such length, and in such detail, quoting bits of text, alluding to specific bars of music, and drawing sketches of stage layouts. The letter closes with the news that:

By this morning's post I heard that I'd got an Arts Council bursary of £4500. Obviously I came to the right sponsor! My gratitude is enormous [...] One piece I didn't tell you of [...] is on Mandelstam, some of those extraordinary poems interleaved with music of the prose of Nadezhda Mandelstam – 'Hope against Hope' and 'Hope Abandoned' – tenor and mezzo and orchestra [...] Some time perhaps [...] with the time for which I bless the Arts Council.¹³³

This reinforces two of the points already made above. Firstly, that money buys time: a bursary, not tied to a specific work, is a different proposition from a commission, but Buller is aware that money from the Arts Council buys him time to write '[...] only the music he wanted to write, when he wanted to write it – no diversions' (Plaistow 2004, online, quoted above). Secondly, that success breeds success, and the reception that *Proença* received, and the concomitant support he could expect from the BBC – from this letter it is not entirely clear, but it would imply that Ponsonby supported his application to the Arts Council, 'the right sponsor' – led to further financial support, continuing the self-fulfilling prophecy of success. In this way Ponsonby was not only supporting Buller directly, through commissions and performances, but also indirectly,

¹³³ BBC WAC R83/868/1 BULLER, JOHN 1975–84, 23 February 1978

by acting as sponsor to his applications for funding from elsewhere, in this case, the Arts Council.

Buller had hoped that *Proença* would be performed again, after its first performance at the Proms, and the BBC was prepared to offer that support: the BBC Symphony Orchestra programmed it again in its Winter Season on 7 November 1979, at the Royal Festival Hall, with the same soloists and conductor. The concert was broadcast live on Radio 3, and from a letter from Buller to Ponsonby, dated 15 November 1979, it would appear that the two of them gave some kind of pre-concert talk together:

Thank you for your kindness and support last Wednesday: I don't do these talk things very easily and you made it very easy [...] I'm glad that I've heard from several sources that the broadcast of the concert came over very well; the piece was splendidly played again: I've written to Bill Railton [sic]¹³⁴ but the orchestra was superb. I am, of course, pleased that the piece itself seems to go down generally well [...] it did make me wonder whether it would be possible to get any performances of it by the BBC Symphony Orchestra on the continent. Schirmer have made tentative approaches abroad, but I'm afraid in a rather limited way owing to their lack of contacts and European organization generally. But the orchestra plays it so superbly and I have a feeling it might reach audiences abroad if given a chance.¹³⁵

It is worth noting that Buller was particularly concerned about the audience's reaction to his work: he was pleased that it 'came over very well' on the radio, which would have been by far his largest audience; and he was pleased that it seemed to 'go down generally well', by which he presumably meant with the audience in the hall. Having had the commission, a first performance at the Proms, a studio recording, and a second performance within two years, asking for the

¹³⁴ William ('Bill') Relton was the General Manager of the BBC Symphony Orchestra.

¹³⁵ BBC WAC R83/868/1 BULLER, JOHN 1975–84, 15 November 1979

BBC Symphony Orchestra to take *Proença* on tour might appear to be pushing the BBC's support a little too far. Ponsonby's reply, of 20 November 1979, was the very soul of diplomacy: after explaining that forthcoming tours of Germany, Paris and China would be conducted by the orchestra's chief conductor, Gennadi Rozhdestvensky, who presumably would not be prepared to learn this long and complex score, although Ponsonby does not spell this out, he continues:

In the Spring of 1981 we hope to go to Japan and I suppose Proença might just be a possibility, though what the Japanese would make of it is another question! Perhaps Australia in 1982 would be more appropriate?

Seriously – it is Europe who should hear the piece and, if our plans change, they shall.¹³⁶

This is not the only instance of Ponsonby's casual racism, but it would appear that he was not discounting the idea of touring Buller's piece; or perhaps he was just letting the composer down gently: if it were up to him, they would do it 'if our plans change', but his hands were tied by the conductor and (his perception of) the tastes of the audience. Blaming the Japanese for a lack of appreciation for contemporary Western music was, perhaps, a reflection of attitudes prevalent at that time.

The second Prom commission: *Theatre of Memory*

The next document in Buller's file is a letter, dated 27 May 1980, from Stephen Plaistow to Terry Edwards, the director of the vocal group *Electric Phoenix* which specialised in new music, especially with extended vocal techniques. It is a good example of what Plaistow meant when he explained how he saw his function in his interview for this research:

¹³⁶ BBC WAC R83/868/1 BULLER, JOHN 1975–84, 20 November 1979

I could help by involving myself as somebody to whom all the [BBC Radio 3] producers with some interest in new music [could refer] and some composers, just in the way artists got attached to a certain producer, so a composer might be getting to know a colleague [...] and I could be the spider at the centre of the web and pull it all together.¹³⁷

In this case the spider wrote to Edwards about a work John Buller was going to write for *Electric Phoenix*; not a BBC commission, so Plaistow had no specific professional interest in it.

Nonetheless, Plaistow wrote:

I think I mentioned the other day that John Buller is making very good progress after his heart attack. He's by no means forbidden to work – and for all I know he may have started on the *Electric Phoenix* piece. He knows pretty well what it is he's going to do for you, that I do know; and it occurs to me (since I'm a friend of his) to suggest, if I may, that you ring him up about it. He's had a rough year so far, what with illness and some uncivilised treatment from his publisher. He could do with encouragement.¹³⁸

The piece Buller was working on was *Kommos*, which had its first performance at a concert in St Bartholomew's, Smithfield in London on 12 June 1982. *Electric Phoenix* recorded the work for the BBC on 21 November 1985, which was broadcast on Radio 3 on 13 March 1986 (*Electric Phoenix*, online). So back in 1980 Plaistow had no particular interest in this particular work.

Nonetheless, as a friend of the composer, he took it upon himself to get in touch with another figure in the new music village and ask him to give the composer some encouragement. It was a gesture at a personal level, in that Buller had been seriously ill, but also at a professional level: he had had problems with his publisher.¹³⁹ It would seem that even when the composer was not working directly for the BBC, it (in the shape of Plaistow) was keeping an eye on his interests

¹³⁷ Plaistow, personal communication, 16 May 2018

¹³⁸ BBC WAC R83/868/1 BULLER, JOHN 1975–84, 27 May 1980

¹³⁹ Without going into detail, Buller's publisher, Schirmer, had an office in London but was based in the USA, and at this time the New York operation took over the autonomous running of the London office, with disastrous consequences, especially for the roster of composers. Buller subsequently moved to Oxford University Press, a much happier experience for him.

and nurturing him. As well it (he) might, because after Buller's 'consecration' with *Proença*, he had been commissioned by the BBC to write another work for the 1981 Proms, and so his well-being was very much in the BBC's interest. To be commissioned for two works for the Proms just four years apart was something of an exception: previously this had happened only four times, and two of those composers, Malcolm Williamson (1961 and 1965), and Malcolm Arnold (1969 and 1970) had written one of the works in a lighter vein to include audience participation on The Last Night of the Proms. William Alwyn was asked to write a piece for the Henry Wood centenary concert in 1964 (he produced his Concerto grosso No. 3) having written the overture *Derby Day*, Glock's very first commission, at very short notice (and as a second choice to Malcolm Arnold) in 1960. The second more substantial commission might be seen as a sort of thank-you gesture. Only Hugh Wood had been commissioned for two large-scale works, *Scenes from Comus* in 1964, and the Cello Concerto in 1969. Buller was joining august company in this particular field of cultural production, and this second commission was an explicit gesture on the part of the BBC, part of the language developed to demonstrate its appreciation of the first of Buller's Prom commissions.

Buller's second Prom commission, *The Theatre of Memory*, was given a studio recording, conducted by Nicholas Cleobury, and its first public performance was at a Prom on 7 September 1981, conducted by Mark Elder, as the first half of a rather eccentric programme, the second part being shared by the BBC Singers and the Grimethorpe Colliery Band. When Buller wrote to Ponsonby, on 4 October 1981, after the Prom performance, he described Cleobury's recording as 'magnificent' and Elder's live performance as 'marvellous'.¹⁴⁰ The studio recording was broadcast on BBC Radio 3 on 23 September 1982, as the first programme in a new series of *Music in Our Time* (BBC, 1982a), and the work was revived in a concert broadcast live from the

¹⁴⁰ BBC WAC R83/868/1 BULLER, JOHN 1975–84, 4 October 1981

Royal Festival Hall in the series *Music of Eight Decades* on 16 December 1983 (BBC, 1983a, online), a performance repeated on BBC Radio 3 on 2 February 1986 (BBC, 1986a, online). Buller continued to be supported at the BBC, and indeed *The Theatre of Memory* was one of the first – perhaps the very first – of the BBC’s Prom commissions that the BBC actively worked to get recorded commercially: the original Unicorn Kanchana LP of *The Theatre of Memory* was released, coupled with a previous recording of *Proença* (Buller, 1981), in 1986 (Buller, 1986); it was issued on CD in 1992 (Buller, 1992), and reissued under licence by NMC again in 2003 (Buller, 2003). That is a subject for further research, and indeed the subject of the afterlife of the BBC’s Proms commissions would make a substantial study. Briefly, Ponsonby, Plaistow and Anthony Sargent (Manager, Concerts Planning for the BBC Symphony Orchestra) collectively invested considerable amounts of the BBC’s time, effort and indeed money in this project. It was also supported by the Arts Council and commercial sponsorship. Once again, the approbation of the BBC was demonstrated through this activity. This was an example of political economy in action: Mosco used the example of a ‘DVD of a Hollywood film that appears in a video store’ as an example of ‘a congealed set of social relations that connect capital to the commodity labor in a struggle for control over the value generated from production and exchange’ (Mosco, 2009: 131). The use of the term ‘congealed’ might suggest cold porridge more than a shiny disc, but Mosco’s idea was that the product, or commodity, in the consumer’s hand, contains within it all those expenses and negotiations which led to its production. In the example of this CD, it represents the ‘congealed set of social relations’ between CD company staff, BBC staff, Arts Council bureaucrats, composer, publisher, performers, administrators and management, producers and technicians whose efforts led to the appearance of the CD on shelves. The level of ‘struggle over who will profit from the value generated from sales in stores and from distribution over the internet’ is less obvious, perhaps. The BBC, as a not-for-profit organisation, was not looking for a return on their capital outlay, but rather was happy to subsidise what was likely to be a borderline commercial venture; nobody got rich selling CDs of modern classical

music. The BBC appeared to be happy for any surplus value to be purely cultural capital. In the rarefied atmosphere of Radio 3 and new music commissions, decisions were taken not simply for financial reasons, but for artistic, or perhaps even moral reasons: as Mosco has argued, political economy has a moral element (Mosco, 2009: 32ff), and when he asks:

Do we continue to trust the market as the best and perhaps the only way to organize and distribute our resources, including communication and the media? Or should government intervene to regulate or even manage communication and the media so that everyone is ensured access to a fully diverse array of content and to the full range of the media? (Mosco, 2009: 49).

The answer to the first part of the question from the BBC would appear to be ‘no’, and to the second part a qualified ‘yes’. If the BBC can divert funds and resources into producing a recording of the music of John Buller, enabling widespread access to this particularly specialised corner of the media market, then it can act *in loco* government, and make that artistic or even moral choice.

This support and nurturing of Buller, and the enormous resources the BBC piled behind two works by one composer, seems to answer, at least in part, a question posed by Jean Seaton, already quoted in Chapter Two:

There was always a consensus that work from new composers had to be commissioned, so that ‘British’ music should not become a heritage trinket. Glock, Ponsonby and notably Stephen Plaistow developed this policy [...] It was certainly the case that the composers the BBC espoused – Maxwell Davies, Alexander Goehr, Maw, Birtwistle – became accepted into the repertory. But was this for the circular reason that the BBC promoted them? (Seaton, 2017: 91).

Seaton does not name Buller among those that the BBC promoted, but it would appear from the evidence here that staff at the BBC took it upon themselves to promote this composer and his works with considerable vigour. It seems doubtful that Buller's music has been 'accepted into the repertory' in the way that Maxwell Davies's has: Buller's publisher, Oxford University Press, does not list performance history of its works on its website, unlike other publishers, but after the flurry of performances and broadcasts of both *Proença* and *The Theatre of Memory* by the BBC in the 1980s, neither work seems to have been taken up, and Buller's and Ponsonby's hope that *Proença* should be heard elsewhere in Europe did not come to fruition. Nonetheless, the NMC recording is available, both as a physical CD and on streaming services, the scores are available from OUP and in libraries, and in that sense the work is there 'so that everyone is ensured access' to it. From the point of view of this research, this is the key issue: the works that the BBC commissioned from a favoured composer are still available, a demonstrable, physical representation of the support that the BBC gave, and it is possible to brandish a copy of Buller's NMC CD, or download the recording from the NMC website, or stream it on Spotify, and say, 'There! That is what success looks like, in the eyes of the BBC'.

John Buller's admission into the network which included composers, publishers, performers, critics, the Proms audience, and BBC staff has been charted in this chapter. Through a close reading of the material in Buller's BBC file, this has been shown to be the club that was able to consecrate Buller, a consecration that took physical form in the commission of *Proença*, and then *The Theatre of Memory*, for the Proms. Buller's 'feel for the game', because it developed later than many composers, makes explicit how this process, which might otherwise seem innate, is in fact learnt. As Maton puts it,

Actors [in the sociological sense] do not arrive in a field fully armed with god-like knowledge [...] they come to acquire a sense of the tempo, rhythms and unwritten rules of the game through time and experience (Maton, 2014: 53).

The support that BBC staff extended to Buller, from a recommendation for an Arts Council bursary to a kindly telephone call, has been established as the language of success which Buller enjoyed at the BBC. This culminated in the commercial recording of *The Theatre of Memory*, a tangible asset that is still current today, even if, in other ways, Buller's star has waned somewhat. The final chapter of findings is on the composer Elisabeth Lutyens, whose story parallels Buller's in its success, while clarifying what happened to composers who failed to adhere to the unwritten rules which governed the commissioning of music for the Proms. Although Lutyens undoubtedly had 'a sense of the tempo, rhythms and unwritten rules of the game', when she chose to ignore them, she came a cropper, as will become clear.

Chapter Nine: Elisabeth Lutyens

This chapter looks at a figure whose name has already cropped up in several contexts, Elisabeth Lutyens. Given her extensive network throughout the music world, her roster of outstanding pupils, and her success as a commissioned composer, it would appear that her ‘feel for the game’ was impeccable, and yet she struggled to be accepted into the field of cultural production occupied by those composers who were commissioned for the Proms. This examination of why that should be investigates the way she was accepted into that field, or network. Further, it shows how Lutyens was able to fulfil the requirements of that field by adapting the nature of her work: how she was able to modify her aesthetic to what she understood was required. She did this without specific instructions from anybody at the BBC; rather, she implicitly understood the unwritten commissioning brief. Finally, it is shown how it was possible for Lutyens to follow a written brief, however vague and informal, and by misunderstanding it, whether by accident or design, and applying it literally, rather than in the light of the unwritten rules, to produce a work completely unsuitable for the Proms. The majority of the material in this chapter is drawn from Lutyens’s BBC file,¹⁴¹ along with the biography by Harries and Harries (1989), programme notes and CD booklet notes, the scores Lutyens composed for the Proms, and seven brief quotations from Lutyens’s autobiography (1972). These materials, all subjective to a greater or lesser degree, are combined to create the discourse of Lutyens’s contribution to new music at the Proms. Each of the perspectives arising from these different types of evidence is inevitably partial, but through their combination and interaction, it is possible to gain an insight into the conflicting agendas of the different members of the network involved in the process of commissioning Lutyens for the Proms. Those members might all be working towards the same goal, but with disparate and sometimes conflicting motivations: in examining these multiple and contradictory truths about the same artwork, the understanding of that artwork is considerably enriched.

¹⁴¹ BBC WAC R83/133/1 LUTYENS, ELISABETH 1955–1974

While Bourdieu seems to assume that individuals only work in one field of cultural production, Elisabeth Lutyens is interesting in the way she was a composer who straddled two distinctive fields within music composition. She earned her living writing music for TV advertisements, film scores and incidental music for TV and radio documentaries, but aspired to be taken seriously as a composer of concert music; she was a leading figure in the British avant-garde. Her relationship with the BBC reflected that dichotomy, and the BBC's structure seemed almost designed to make it difficult for a composer to cross from one field to another.

Of the three works Lutyens was commissioned to write the Proms, the first was a failure (at least in the composer's eyes), the next a success (in the view of the critics), and the last was never actually performed at the Proms. In the first of these, *Symphonies*, Op. 46 for piano, wind, harps and percussion (1961) Lutyens certainly made accommodation for the Royal Albert Hall's notorious acoustic (this was before the booming resonance was tamed somewhat by the mushrooms in the roof and a canopy over the stage), but failed to consider the conservative nature of the members of the BBC Symphony Orchestra and a tight rehearsal schedule: she asked for the orchestra to be laid out in an unfamiliar way, guaranteed to put the musicians' backs up. In the second, *Essence of Our Happinesses* (1970) she followed the unwritten commissioning brief to the letter and got everything right, and the work was a success, described in the press as 'likely to be by far the most enduring of the several works specially commissioned by the B.B.C. for this year's Promenade Concerts' (Harrison, 1970: 7). The last work commissioned for the Proms by Glock, *The Linnet from the Leaf* (1979) never got performed there, due to a catastrophic misunderstanding of the unwritten commissioning brief on the one hand, and an equally catastrophic breakdown of communications between the composer and the BBC on the other. This last example also demonstrates that despite the BBC's own self-appointed role

as midwife to the commissioned work, when the composer overstepped or misunderstood the parameters of the commissions, its executives could be brutal in their treatment of the offender.

Lutyens's acceptance into the Proms field of cultural production

On the face of it, Elisabeth Lutyens would appear to have been, as far as any non-staff freelancer could be, a BBC insider. She was married to Edward Clark, a leading personality at the BBC between 1926 and 1936, particularly influential in the Corporation's contribution to new music. Clark's BBC story is told in detail in Doctor (1999). Lutyens also provided scores for BBC TV and radio programmes: between 1946 and 1956 no fewer than 45, according to Harries and Harries (1989: 281–286). These were commissioned by the drama and features departments of the BBC. During the same period, however, there is a string of damning reports on her serious music from the BBC's Reading Panel, part of Music Department, from composers like Herbert Howells, Gordon Jacob and Benjamin Frankel.¹⁴²

Lutyens's success with the drama and features departments, and rejection by the Music Department was partly a result of BBC bureaucracy, which divided these departments off from one another, and so when musical decisions needed to be made about a drama production, drama producers need not necessarily consult the Music Department, although they often did. According to Harries and Harries:

Between 1952 and 1956 she conducted a running battle with the renamed Music Division [...] [T]o be 'blacklisted', or branded as a potential trouble-maker, all that is necessary is to fall out with every producer individually, and this Liz had contrived to do in the 1950s – greatly helped, it should be said in her defence, by their uniform conservatism (Harries and Harries, 1989: 186–187).

¹⁴² BBC WAC R27/601 MUSIC REPORTS ELIZABETH LUTYENS

At the same time, the BBC Music Department had cut all ties with her husband: he fell into the category of ‘people we cannot possibly regard as qualified musicians’ (Harries and Harries, 1989: 185). This despite the hundreds of programmes he had conducted and produced for the BBC during his employment there. On the other hand, Lutyens was a popular interviewee on BBC radio, appearing on the Third Programme and Radio 3 talking about her own and other composers’ music, as well as appearing on more general programmes like *Woman’s Hour*, and panel discussions. Dozens of contracts for her appearances are in four files in the BBC’s Written Archives Centre.¹⁴³ She was busy enough with this activity to warrant having an agent, David Higham Associates.

This distinction between her success with BBC Features and Drama, and BBC Music Department, is mirrored in that between her serious and commercial work. This is put into stark contrast by Harries and Harries, describing her public persona:

One well-worn motif was the marked contrast between her ‘serious’ and her ‘hack’ careers. Looking at her serious music by itself, the BBC had been correct in observing in the 1950s that there was no living for her in composing. Though she was by no means at or even near the bottom of the earnings table for serious composers, in 1971 all her BBC broadcasts added together earned her less than a single showing of *Dr Terror’s House of Horrors*¹⁴⁴ in Spanish cinemas. Her total earnings from *O Saisons! O Châteaux!*, one of her more popular works, was £1 3s 10d; and she claimed to have been paid for her Prom commissions in Green Shield stamps (Harries and Harries, 1989: 226).

This would appear to almost entirely miss the point, that a composer’s success cannot be measured in purely financial terms: licking the Green Shield stamps was what gave Lutyens the

¹⁴³ BBC WAC RCONT15, File I 1949–1962, File II 1963–1967, File III 1968–1972, File IV 1973–1982

¹⁴⁴ A 1965 horror film for which Lutyens wrote the score

taste of success as a composer to be accepted into Bourdieu's field of cultural production as a serious representative. According to Grove Online, 'She was always to consider her commercial work artistically insignificant' (Payne and Calam, 2001, online).

Lutyens's BBC fortunes were to change in 1959, with the appointment of William Glock as the BBC's Controller, Music. Her childhood friend Anne Geoffrey-Dechaume had married Glock in 1952. Lutyens and Glock were colleagues on the ICA's music section in the 1950s. She was enthusiastic about Glock's influence in the music world even before his appointment at the BBC:

'You, with your enthusiasm, work and plans are the best news for contemporary music that we have had in a long while,' she told him. The Glocks visited Blackheath¹⁴⁵ for a mixture of good food and cricket, and Liz went on holiday with them more than once. William Glock found her one of her first publishers and arranged most of the scattered performances her work did receive. 'Life would be very grim without your help and goodwill,' she wrote to him in 1957 (Harries and Harries, 1989: 164).

Glock had invited her to teach at the Dartington Summer School, which he founded in 1953 and ran until 1979. In his autobiography, Glock lists the composers he had invited to teach over the years:

Luciano Berio, Bruno Maderna, Luigi Nono, Witold Lutoslawski, Stefan Wolpe, Elliott Carter, Aaron Copland, Elisabeth Lutyens, Roberto Gerhard, Boris Blacher, Harrison Birtwistle and Peter Maxwell Davies. I suppose only Olivier Messiaen and Pierre Boulez were lacking, to make it an incomparable galaxy of teachers (Glock, 1991: 62).

¹⁴⁵ Lutyens's family home

Auspicious company for Lutyens to find herself in, even if she was the only woman. Lutyens was most definitely at the top table, and had no reason to feel that she was treated as anything but a member of Bourdieu's most elite field of cultural production, one of those artists making art solely for her peers.

After Glock was appointed Controller, Music at the BBC in 1959, but before he started, according to Lutyens's autobiography *A Goldfish Bowl*, he informally invited Edward Clark to help him revitalise the programming on the Third Programme and at the Proms (Lutyens, 1972: 263). Clark expected to be offered a job, and began plotting ambitious plans for the Third Programme. He was over 70 by this time, well past the BBC's compulsory retirement age of 60, and Glock was unable to employ him, instead appointing young and – in Clark's and Lutyens's eyes – inexperienced planners and producers. This precipitated in Clark something like a breakdown, and Lutyens never forgave Glock. Clark died three years later (Harries and Harries, 1989: 190–192). In her autobiography Lutyens wrote: 'Though he shared half my adult life, my years with Edward did not, alas, include those exciting times at the BBC but their corollary – neglect for twenty-five years!' (Lutyens, 1972: 115). Although Clark was ignored by the BBC's Music Department after he left in 1936, Lutyens managed, with the help of drama producer Reggie Smith, to get him to conduct her scores for radio features and drama programmes, despite his being 'debarred from Music Department' (Lutyens, 1972: 175). That her husband, who was instrumental in setting up the BBC Symphony Orchestra and worked tirelessly for the BBC for ten years, was ignored by the Corporation thereafter, must have coloured her attitude towards the BBC considerably.

BBC departmental structure has been relatively little studied, and a detailed history of the development of this is beyond the scope of the present study. The somewhat Byzantine workings of the BBC's departments is described in, for example Seaton (2015: 89) and Hendy

(2007: 155), where the independence of BBC Departments, identifying more strongly with the industries they represented outside the BBC, often degenerated into outright suspicion. This silo mentality, coupled with some unhealthy distrust of the professional competence of their colleagues in other departments, would have meant that a composer working with the Drama Department would inevitably be looked at askance by the members of the Music Department. Gerard Mansell, who as Controller of the short-lived Music Programme had run-ins with Glock over the amount of new music broadcast on his more populist channel, put it like this:

One of the characteristics of Broadcasting House [...] [is] that it is made up [...] of a whole collection of bodies which are sufficient unto themselves., and for whom broadcasting is represented only by the output of their own department: everything else is not broadcasting. The Drama Department regards drama as being the only important thing in broadcasting. The Music Department, above all, regards only music as being of any importance. They also tend to regard the judgement of anyone who is not actually a member of Music Division as being not worth the paper on which it is printed, or written, and with great condescension regard most [...] top executives as being a bunch of philistines (Mansell, 1983, online).

This echoes Bourdieu's distinction between what might be described as high- and middle-brow culture, or as he put it, the field of restricted production and the field of large-scale production; although there is even greater distinction between the fields of Public Service Broadcasting (the BBC) and commercial radio, this division would also be discernible between the highbrow Third Programme and the populist Home Service, or between Radios 3 and 4. This is also an example of institutionalization, whereby although Lutyens was not an employee of the Drama Department, she became, by association, subsumed into that Department's culture, and, given the silo mentality, she would have been viewed with suspicion by those toiling in the grain store of the Music Department. Nonetheless, Lutyens was a beneficiary of Glock's positive new commissioning policy: between 1959 and 1974 when Robert Ponsonby succeeded Glock, she

received eight commissions from the BBC, more than any other composer. Two of these were for the Proms, in 1961 and 1970, and another was planned but only came to fruition much later, as shall be seen.

Although Lutyens had a reputation for being a rather prickly character, she was clearly well-liked by BBC staff, and her files at the Written Archives Centre are full of memos and letters from William Glock, Robert Ponsonby, Hans Keller, Stephen Plaistow and Misha Donat referring to her as 'Liz', 'Lizzy' and 'Betty'. The tone of the correspondence between Lutyens and Glock was friendly beyond normal professional courtesy, and in a letter to Ponsonby, dated 14 December 1973, asking for a meeting to discuss funding for a Proms commission (more of this later), she ended by suggesting instead he might 'like to pop round one Sunday for champagne'.¹⁴⁶ She dedicated her String Quartet, Op. 139 (1980) to Stephen Plaistow, who was the newly-appointed Chief Producer, Contemporary Music. Even so, Plaistow was not above laying down the law to her. In a letter dated 19 February 1979 he replied to some previous communication (not on file; perhaps this was a phone call or a conversation) about the BBC commissioning a piece Lutyens had already composed. From Plaistow's description, this was probably the Cantata, Op. 130, to words by Ursula Vaughan Williams. Plaistow wrote:

Dear Liz,

Send me a score of your new piece for soprano and twelve instruments and I'll see what can be arranged. But you must be prepared for the answer to be 'no' to a commission. Our commissioning fund is not there to be 'touched' when a composer requires. I administer the fund and advise Robert Ponsonby on commissions. I should much prefer to be discussing with you the possibility of a BBC commission for an important piece you'd really like to write – and the BBC would like to have – rather than resisting pressure from you to buy in something already written. You make me uncomfortable.

¹⁴⁶ BBC WAC R83/133/1 LUTYENS, ELIZABETH 1955–1974, 14 December 1973

love,

STEPHEN PLAISTOW

CHIEF ASSISTANT TO CONTROLLER, MUSIC

Drafted by Mr Plaistow and signed, in his absence, by Secretary

copy: Miss Slater¹⁴⁷

This is an uneasy mix of the chummy, ‘Dear Liz’ and ‘love’; and the formal, ‘I administer the fund and advise Robert Ponsonby on commissions’. Lutyens, Plaistow and Ponsonby were all on first name terms, and this formality strikes a false note. On the other hand, Plaistow was here representing the BBC, and this is the institution of ‘the BBC’ talking. Plaistow had to toe the line, and explain that BBC policy was not to buy pre-existing scores ‘off the peg’, but he felt awkward having to do so, and especially to a friend. The rather passive-aggressive last line ‘You make me uncomfortable’ might indicate that Plaistow felt he was on thin ice here: surely it was Lutyens who was going to be made to feel uncomfortable by this rebuke? She may well have felt embarrassed to ask for the money in the first place, and in this situation it was Plaistow who was in the position of power: he had the salaried job, he held the commissioning purse-strings, he administered and advised on commissions. Here he is, reminding Lutyens, the creative artist, that she is in fact the hired hand, writing to order. It is interesting that Plaistow tried to ease the discomfort by suggesting he would rather be talking to Lutyens about a new piece, and not just new but important (such flattery) which she wanted to write, which reinforces the discourse developed around the BBC acting as an enabler. This discourse contradicts the message that the composer is the hired hand, but Plaistow also implies that the existing piece is not important, nor is it new. This is ambiguous. In a sense it suggests that the BBC had the upper hand in this

¹⁴⁷ BBC WAC R83/1219/1 LUTYENS, ELIZABETH 1975–84, 19 February 1979

power relationship, but also that by commissioning her, ‘the BBC’ would be granting her its seal of approval. Plaistow did not write ‘that *me* (or even *I*) would like to have’. No, it is ‘the BBC’ itself that wants Lutyens’s important new piece. The sense of ownership here, that the BBC will ‘have’ her work is curious, and runs contrary to Kurowksi who explained that the BBC was not looking to exploit commissions beyond their origination.¹⁴⁸ Plaistow refused to do more than peek out from behind the skirts of ‘the BBC’ by having his secretary sign the letter, and by copying it to a colleague, Miss [Veronica] Slater, a Music Department producer with a particular interest in contemporary music. It is worth noting the date of this letter, early 1979, when Lutyens was in her early 70s, and only four years before her death. Why Plaistow took this line rather than cutting the composer a little slack will become apparent as this narrative unfolds further.

The first Prom commission, a failure: *Symphonies*, Op. 46

The first of Lutyens’s Prom commissions was offered to her by Glock in August 1960, less than a year before it was to have its first performance. Lutyens remarked that:

This was my first-ever Music Department commission (at the age of fifty-five) and fourteen years after first working for Feature and Drama Departments. The rate I was offered in 1947 for incidental music was £5 a minute, but for an orchestral work for the Proms in 1961 the offer was £50! (Lutyens, 1972: 268).

¹⁴⁸ Andrew Kurowski, personal communication, 24 October 2017

Given that incidental music would have been for a modest chamber ensemble, and the Proms piece was for full orchestral wind section, plus harps, percussion and a solo piano, and likely to last 20 minutes or more, £50 was a good deal less than half the earlier fee.

The resulting work, *Symphonies*, Op. 46, had its first performance on Friday 28 July 1961. The programme was characteristic of Glock: Sir Malcolm Sargent conducted the BBC Symphony Orchestra in a Beethoven Overture and the *Eroica* Symphony, which sandwiched a Mozart concert aria sung by tenor Charles Craig. Then, after the interval, John Carewe conducted the new work, and the concert finished with two solo organ works, by Bach and Liszt. According to Harries and Harries (1989: 199) this was not a happy occasion for the composer. Her husband thought very highly of her new work:

I wrote the *Symphonies for Solo Piano, Wind, Harps and Percussion* in February-March 1961. Edward [Clark] paid me what to *him* was a compliment, thumping the table and saying, 'This is your first composition; this should give you your breakthrough' (Lutyens, 1972: 269).

In her programme note for the first performance Lutyens wrote:

This work, commissioned by the BBC for this season's Henry Wood Promenade concerts, was written for and is dedicated to Katharina Wolpe.

To be asked to write for the 'Proms' naturally involves a first performance in the peculiar acoustic conditions of the Royal Albert Hall and awareness of these, including the inevitable echo, suggested the form of the work and the lay-out of the instruments. The piece is scored for the wood-wind and brass of the modern symphonic orchestra including two harps and six percussionists [...] The groups sit fan-wise in Indian file, two groups on either side of the conductor (Lutyens, 1961: 8).

It is striking that Lutyens immediately acknowledges the part that the young pianist Katharina Wolpe (daughter of Lutyens's Dartington colleague Stefan Wolpe) played in the work. Equally striking is her recognition that this work was commissioned by the BBC, specifically for the Proms, and that it would be first performed in the Royal Albert Hall. This is rare among composers writing programme notes, who tend to be much more abstract about their compositional approaches and methods, ignoring the specific circumstances of the composition and first performance. In fact, as the composer points out, the work would not exist, or would be a quite different thing, without the BBC's patronage, the acoustic of the Royal Albert Hall, and the young pianist Katharina Wolpe and her inspirational playing. In an earlier letter of 6 April 1961 to Dorothy Wood, Assistant Concert Manager, Lutyens had explained the seating plan, and Wood, in a letter dated 11 April 1961, had promised to pass this information on to the BBC's Press Office, and to the Studio Managers (the sound engineers responsible for the microphone placement and balance of the radio broadcast).¹⁴⁹ Lutyens's concern for the solo pianist and the acoustics of the hall was sadly not matched by a similarly pragmatic approach to another group involved in this particular division of labour. Orchestral musicians are notoriously conservative, and asking them to sit in an unusual formation would immediately provoke a negative response. Even the BBC Symphony Orchestra, well used to playing complex new music, would have grumbled at this. To then have to play a complex, unfamiliar work in these conditions – and in a difficult acoustic to boot, one where it is hard to hear your colleagues even when you are sat in the familiar orchestral layout – is asking for trouble; and trouble, according to Lutyens, there was:

The performance, however, was a complete flop – in spite of Katharina's superb playing. I had never envisaged the possibility of only *one* rehearsal at Maida Vale¹⁵⁰ and a run through at the Albert Hall (with its completely different and difficult acoustics). The

¹⁴⁹ BBC WAC R83/133/1 LUTYENS, ELISABETH 1955–1974, 11 April 1961

¹⁵⁰ The BBC Symphony Orchestra's rehearsal and recording studios

piece was unrecognizable to me and not helped by a percussionist dropping his triangle, which provoked some laughter. The work was killed stone-dead at birth. Under those conditions the party I gave afterwards, at which Luigi Nono was one of the guests, was for me a wake (Lutyens, 1972: 269).

This in spite of a letter from the Assistant Concerts Manager, Dorothy Wood, to Lutyens dated 8 June 1961 with a schedule for *three* prior rehearsals at Maida Vale, as well as the run-through at the Royal Albert Hall.¹⁵¹ Nonetheless, according to Harries and Harries:

Liz wrote jingles for Be-Ro flour and Cusson's Imperial Leather; the money was comforting, but she found it profoundly irritating, while her most important serious works consistently suffered from under-rehearsal, to be allocated three hours in which to perfect thirty seconds of music whose cues read 'tablet of soap', 'mother and child lathering' and 'petal soft – it laaasts and laaasts' (Harries and Harries, 1989: 150).

As well she might. Lutyens's assessment of *Symphonies* was fairly accurate. The publisher of the work, Schott, lists only two subsequent performances on its website, in 1969 in Zurich and on 19 July 1971 in London, with Katharina Wolpe again, and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Elgar Howarth (Symphonies, online). The London performance was recorded by Radio 3 and broadcast on 15 August 1971 (BBC, 1971b).

The second Proms commission, a success: *Essence of our Happinesses*, Op 69

¹⁵¹ BBC WAC R83/133/1 LUTYENS, ELISABETH 1955–1974, 8 June 1961

Lutyens's second Prom commission was a work for solo tenor, chorus and orchestra, *Essence of our Happinesses*, Op. 69, a setting of words by Abu Yasid, John Donne and Arthur Rimbaud. It was written in 1968, and first performed at a Prom on 8 September 1970. Given Glock's reputation as an innovative concert planner, the programme was strangely similar to that for the first performance of *Symphonies*, with Colin Davis conducting the BBC Symphony Orchestra in Mozart's G minor Symphony, K550, then Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto with Stephen Bishop (as he was then known: Bishop was his mother's second husband's name; he later became Stephen Kovacevich, readopting his father's name) as soloist; after the interval Norman Del Mar conducted the Lutyens, and the concert ended with the organist David Sanger playing Bach's Fantasia and Fugue in C minor. In her programme note for the concert, Lutyens wrote:

The insemination of this work was a question put to me by a young man when, two years ago, I was asked to give a talk to a group of music students: 'Do you understand being interested *only* in music written *now*?' That '*now*' immediately evoked for me the line from Donne: 'Before you sound that word, *present*, or that *Monosyllable, now*, the present, and the *Now* is past....' [...] Shortly afterwards, reading R. C. Zaehner's '*MYSTICISM sacred and profane*', I was particularly interested in the parallel he drew between similar states of time-suspended ecstasy and the sense of eternity produced by such different means as mysticism and mescaline [...] The experience of these ecstatic states, and even their description and forms of expression, are so similar in both the case of Indian, Muslim, Christian and other religious mystics and what Professor Zaehner calls 'nature mystics' – as Rimbaud and many others [...] I shaped this work, basing it on words from three poets from different periods, race and tradition (Lutyens, 1970b: 6–7).

She then went on to describe the form of the piece, and the complete text followed. Zaehner was a Professor at Oxford who published on Zoroastrianism and Hindu, as well as relating the mysticism of these religions to the burgeoning youth counter culture of the 1960s. Lutyens was reasonably happy with the first performance, writing in her autobiography:

Richard Lewis sang the tenor role in great style and Norman del [sic] Mar conducted the B.B.C. Chorus and Orchestra with his usual assurance. But with all this admirable effort, three rehearsals – spread over three months – is really *not* adequate and does not give the work, the performance, or, most important, the public a fair chance (Lutyens, 1972: 311).

Lutyens returned to her familiar gripe of rehearsal time, or lack of it, but in a letter dated 28 April 1970, the Assistant, Public Concerts, Christopher B. Samuelson wrote to Lutyens:

Apart from piano rehearsals with Richard Lewis, all rehearsals for “Essence of our Happinesses” have now been arranged. They are as follows:-

Thurs. 9 July	10.30-1.30	MV1	Percussion only
Fri. 10 July	10.30-1.30	MV1	Orchestra only
Wed. 19 August	10.30-1.30	MV1	Orchestra only
Wed. 26 August	10.00-1.00)	Studio to be	Chorus pno. Reh with
	2.00-5.00)	arr.	Chorus Master
Thurs. 27 August	10.00-1.00	Studio to be	Chorus pno. Reh with
		arr.	Chorus Master
Wed. 2 Sept.	4.00-5.00	MV1	Orchestra and Lewis
Thurs. 3 Sept.	10.00-1.00	Studio to be	Chorus piano reh
		Arr.	With del Mar
Sun. 6 Sept.	4.00-5.00	MV1	Tutti
Tues. 8 Sept.	11.45-1.00	RAH	Tutti

I do very much hope these prove adequate.¹⁵²

MV1 is Studio 1 at Maida Vale, the BBC Symphony Orchestra’s usual rehearsal and recording studio, and RAH is the Royal Albert Hall. This demonstrates that the work received a good deal more than three rehearsals, the full orchestra alone rehearsing five times, and the chorus six.

¹⁵² BBC WAC RCONT 12 ELISABETH LUTYENS/COMPOSER FILE III 1968–72, 28 April 1970

The work was generally well received, ‘the response from the Promenaders was warming; and several of the critics selected *Essence* as the most distinguished of the season’s new works’ (Harries and Harries, 1981: 212). Among them was the music critic of *The Times*, Max Harrison, who wrote, under the headline ‘Most likely to last’:

Elisabeth Lutyens’s *Essence of our Happinesses*, which received its first performance last night, seems likely to be by far the most enduring of the several works specially commissioned by the B.B.C. for this year’s Promenade Concerts. [...] The music has an ejaculatory expressiveness seemingly fragmented by the strong cumulative inner tensions which direct it, but sometimes, at least in the orchestral passages, a strangely acid gaiety is achieved. And Miss Lutyens’s writing for both voices and instruments is as inventive in its means as it is original in its effect, so almost constantly the ear is as surprised and delighted by fresh sounds as by new shapes and meanings (Harrison, 1970: 7).

Whether Harrison’s prediction of longevity was justified is doubtful. *Essence of our Happinesses* is now published by the University of York Music Press, whose website suggests that it has never received a second performance. This difficulty dogged Lutyens throughout her career, as she herself acknowledged. Her sheer fecundity was a problem:

As Liz herself conceded, her output was almost unmanageable. ‘From the publisher’s point of view the ideal composer is one who produces two new works a year and has fifty performances of each. I produce fifty new works and have about two performances of each.’ [...] One of her publishers commented glumly, ‘By the time you’d focused on Music for Orchestra I, Music for Orchestra II was upon you’ (Harries and Harries, 1989: 247–248).

The publisher in question was Michael Vyner, then working for Schott’s, later to found the London Sinfonietta with David Atherton and Nicholas Snowman. Nonetheless on the same subject, here is Frank Hauser (Director of the Oxford Playhouse, who commissioned incidental

music from Lutyens in the 1950s and 60s and remained a lifelong friend) drawing a comparison between John Donne and Elisabeth Lutyens:

‘Edith Sitwell once said that if you only had the first lines of about a dozen Donne poems you’d think he was the greatest poet that had ever lived,’ remarks Frank Hauser. ‘If you could make a selection of Liz’s music, you could make one believe that she was a very great composer.’ The Wittgenstein motet; *And Suddenly It’s Evening*; *Requiescat* for Stravinsky; *Essence of Our Happinesses*; *O Seasons! O Chateaux!*; *Quincunx*; Chamber Concerto 1; *Driving Out the Death* – if Liz had written nothing else, she would deserve to be remembered for these pieces (Harries and Harries, 1989: 274).

As of December 2021, all of Frank Hauser’s favourite works are available on commercial CD recordings; all except *Essence of Our Happinesses*. Why this should be is not clear. On a practical level, the work had only received one performance, and although BBC tapes of first performances of new works have often appeared on commercial CDs, perhaps this first performance was not of a quality to bear repeated listening. It is also the largest-scale of all the pieces: most are intimate, finely-wrought, and although they all have moments of extroversion, they make their effect through intensity of expression rather than gesture. Despite the difficulty of Lutyens’s vocal lines, with wide-ranging intervals and tricky pitching, all her works remain nonetheless essentially lyrical, from the free-wheeling expressive *O saisons, ô châteaux!*, which the composer herself described as ‘a soaring lyrical lament’ (Williams, 2005: 4), through the almost exclusively syllabic setting of William Blake in *Requiescat*, the vocal line only moving from a single note when it seems absolutely essential to do so, to the ecstatic quasi-instrumental soprano in *Quincunx*. Northcott (2006: 7), writing about the *Motet (excerpta Tractati Logico-Philosophici)*, Op. 27, explained where her approach to writing for voices had come from:

Lutyens often recalled the premiere of Webern’s cantata *Das Augenlicht* at the 1938 ISCM festival in London as the major revelation of her earlier years [...] her development [...]

seems to have been largely inspired by a desire to reconstitute in her own terms the experience of those intense few minutes. And never more so than in her Motet, Op. 27, which was commissioned by her long-standing supporter, William Glock, for performance at his Dartington Summer School [...] she set [Wittgenstein's words] in the original German as a sequence of chants and litanies which, while relatively straight forward in rhythm, were probably beyond the capacity of almost any British choir of the day to pitch. Lutyens recalled the 1954 Dartington premiere, by six solo voices with harpsichord (!) as unrecognisable [...] But [...] the Motet acquired an almost talismanic standing among younger composers who sought Lutyens's guidance as a model of how to shape serial lines and balance atonal chord progressions with purity of style and luminosity of sound (Northcott, 2006: 7).

It is this luminosity which is striking in a really accurate performance, such as the one recorded by Exaudi and James Weeks (Lutyens, 2006), the chords ringing with an internal logic rare in atonal choral music.

Essence of Our Happinesses is an altogether more public statement when compared to the intimacy of the works discussed above. Payne and Calam describe a simplification in Lutyens's music during this period:

The less complex harmony, the simpler gestures and the block structuring of *And Suddenly it's Evening* (1966), for example, provide a strong contrast with the fluidly evolving lyricism of previous works. The full implications were realized in the magnificent choral and orchestral *Essence of our Happinesses* (1968) where airy textures and intercalated silences are crucial. Repetition and reduced eventfulness are carried to daring limits, giving a sense of timelessness and exactly conveying the metaphysical texts from Donne and Islam (Payne and Calam, 2001).

To ignore the circumstances for which the work was written seems to be putting the aesthetic cart before the contextual horse. As in the case of the *Symphonies* already discussed, Lutyens

would have been aware of the where this new work was going to be heard, and from the very outset, she seemed to have been determined to fill the Royal Albert Hall with sound. This is the very opening:

This musical score shows the opening of a piece, measures 1 through 10. The tempo is marked as $\text{♩} = 72$. The score is divided into three main sections: Brass, Timpani, and Percussion.

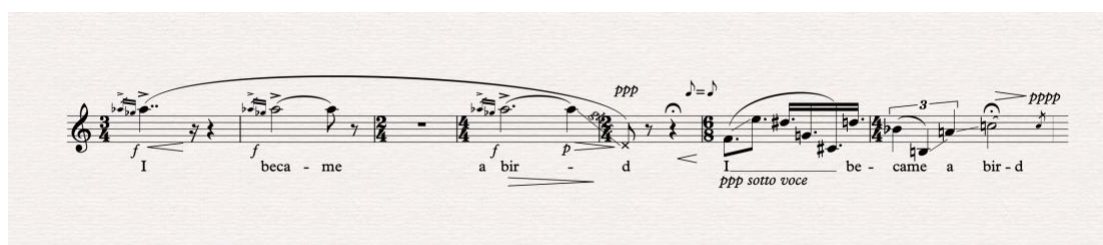
- Brass:** The section includes staves for 4 Trumpets and 4 Horns. The Trumpets play a series of notes, starting with a *sfz* (sforzando) dynamic, followed by *fff* (fortissimo). The Horns play a similar pattern, also starting with *sfz* and *fff*.
- Timpani:** The Timpani part features a series of notes, starting with a *p* (piano) dynamic, followed by *pp* (pianissimo), and then *pp* again.
- Percussion:** The Percussion section includes staves for Thunder sheet, Claves (4 players), and Whip. The Thunder sheet plays a series of notes, starting with *pppp* (pianississimo), followed by *ffff* (fortississimo), and then *pppp a niente* (pianississimo to nothing). The Claves play a series of notes, starting with *fff* (fortissimo), followed by *pp* (piano), and then *pp* again. The Whip plays a series of notes, starting with *p* (piano), followed by *ffff* (fortississimo), and then *pppp a niente* (pianississimo to nothing).

This musical score shows the opening of a piece, measures 11 through 20. The tempo is marked as $\text{♩} = 72$. The score is divided into three main sections: Brass, Timpani, and Percussion.

- Brass:** The section includes staves for 4 Trumpets, 4 Horns, and 4 Trombones. The Trumpets play a series of notes, starting with a *ff* (fortissimo) dynamic, followed by *p* (piano), *f* (forte), *ff* (fortissimo), *fff* (fortississimo), and then *ppp* (pianissimo). The Horns play a similar pattern, starting with *ff* (fortissimo), followed by *p* (piano), *f* (forte), *ff* (fortissimo), *fff* (fortississimo), and then *ppp* (pianissimo). The Trombones play a series of notes, starting with *mp* (mezzo-piano), followed by *f* (forte), *ff* (fortissimo), *fff* (fortississimo), and then *ppp* (pianissimo).
- Timpani:** The Timpani part features a series of notes, starting with a *gliss.* (glissando) dynamic, followed by *pp* (pianissimo), and then *f* (forte).
- Percussion:** The Percussion section includes staves for Claves. The Claves play a series of notes, starting with a *pp* (pianissimo) dynamic, followed by *f* (forte).

Music example 7: Lutyens *Essence of Our Happinesses*, 1. *The Mi'raj of Abū Yasīd*, bars 1–18

A public gesture, designed not just to fill the hall, but to blow its roof off. The entry of the solo voice a few bars later is all but unaccompanied, and the demands it makes on the tenor are considerable. The singer at the first performance was Richard Lewis, a British tenor famous for his interpretations of Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* and also as a fine exponent of both Britten's and Tippett's operatic roles. Lutyens's vocal writing was arduous, to say the least, from the very first:



Music example 8: Lutyens *Essence of Our Happinesses*, 1. *The Mi'raj of Abū Yasīd*, bars 26–32

An entry on a *forte* high A flat, some very awkward intervals of major and minor sevenths and ninths, portamenti, a dynamic range from *forte* to *pppp*, some tricky rhythms and changes of time signature, plus the requirement to phrase across a full bar's rest; that is all in the first seven bars. Whether this degree of subtlety could be heard in the cavernous acoustic of the Royal Albert Hall is a moot point (it would certainly have been picked up by the BBC's microphones), but in this highly-stylised, almost expressionistic writing, Lutyens was certainly making a statement. On the other hand, the experience of writing the *Motet* led her to adopt a simpler, more singer-friendly approach to the choral parts, as this excerpt, from the beginning of the second section, *Their Criticall Dayes*, demonstrates. Although it is rhythmically a little complex, by and large the writing is homophonic, and the intervals, while often dissonant, are fairly easy to pitch from one to the next, and, with good intonation, the chords ring beautifully:

Soprano

in - jure man, *mf*

Alto

A man. can-not in - jure man, *mp mf p*

Tenor

in - jure man, nor un-der va - lue him. *p*

Bass

man, This much must be pre-sen-ted

10

Soprano

to his re-mem-bran - ce

Alto

to his re-mem-bran - ce that those false hap-pin-ness-es

Tenor

to his re-mem-bran - ce those false which he hath in this

Bass

to his re-mem-bran - ce

15

Soprano

wor - ld, have their times day - es

Alto

wor - ld, and their cri - ti-call day - es

Tenor

wor - ld, and their sea- sons day - es

Bass

wor - ld, sea- sons day - es

Music example 9: Lutyens *Essence of Our Happinesses*, 2. *Their Criticall Dayes*, bars 1–18

Perhaps the most striking, and also least characteristic, element of the work is the sustained rhythmic, dancing pulse sustained throughout the purely orchestral sections, in the second of which, *Chronikos*, Lutyens describes, in her programme note for the piece, its ‘emphasis on metric time in the form of a clock-like ostinato on marimba and harp against which the orchestra plays’ (Lutyens, 1970b: 7). Although there are moments of dance rhythm in some of Lutyens works – the oboe quartet *Driving Out the Death*, Op. 81 (1971) for example – these tend to be fleeting, and the rhythmic writing tends to be more fluid and flexible. *Chronikos*, on the other hand, is almost jazzy in its cross-rhythms and syncopations:

[illegible]

The musical score for 'The Great Wall' by Tan Dun is presented in a multi-staff format. The instruments and their parts are as follows:

- W. W. (Western Wind):** Features Oboes and a string quartet. The Oboes play a melodic line with dynamics *mp* and *pp*. The string quartet provides harmonic support with dynamics *mp* and *pp*.
- Perc. (Percussion):** Includes Claves, Wood blocks, and Chinese wood block. The Claves play a steady rhythmic pattern. The Wood blocks and Chinese wood block play syncopated rhythms with dynamics *pp* and *mp*.
- Vib. (Vibraphone):** Plays a melodic line with dynamics *pp* and *p*.
- Mar. (Maracas):** Provides a steady rhythmic pattern with dynamics *pp* and *p*.
- Harp:** Plays a steady rhythmic pattern with dynamics *pp* and *p*.
- Str. (Strings):** Provides harmonic support with dynamics *pp* and *mp*.

The score is written in 7/8 time and includes various musical notations such as dynamics, articulation, and phrasing. The overall mood is contemplative and evocative, reflecting the historical and cultural significance of the Great Wall of China.

15

W.W. Oboes Flute/clarinets Bassoons

Horns

Perc. B Bongos Maracas

Vib.

Mar.

Hp.

Str. pizz ord f col legno

22 *Cor anglais*

W. W.

pp *mf* *mf* *f* *ff* *fff*

Tutti

mf *f* *ff* *fff*

Tambourine

Perc.

pp *f* *mf* *f* *ff* *fff*

Tom toms

Perc.

pp *f* *mf* *f* *ff* *fff*

Wood blocks

Chinese wood block

Xylophone

Vib.

pp *mf* *f* *ff* *fff*

Mar.

Hp.

Str.

col legno *fff*

28 *ff* *f* *mf* *mp* *p* *pp*

W.W.

Perc. *ff* *f* *mf* *mp* *pp*

Perc. *ff* *f* *mf* *mp* *pp*

Vib. *ff* *f* *mf* *mp* *p*

Mar.

Hp.

Str. *ff* *f* *mf* *mp* *p*

33 *pp* *ppp* *a niente*

W.W.

Perc. *ppp*

Perc. *ppp* *pppp*

Vib.

Mar.

Hp.

Str. *pp* *pp*

Music example 10: Lutyens *Essence of Our Happinesses*, 2. *CHOROS 2 [Chronikos]*

All these elements contribute to the public nature of this work: the clarity and (relative) simplicity of the choral writing, designed not only to make it possible for a choir to learn the

piece in a realistic time, but also for it to speak clearly to the audience in the expanses of the Royal Albert Hall; the declamatory, dramatic nature of the writing for the solo tenor; and the dance-like, rhythmically stable orchestral interludes. This is not to suggest that Lutyens was simplifying her writing in order to pander to the audience, but that she was acutely aware that this music needed to communicate clearly both in the hall, and on the radio, and on a single hearing. There may not be such a thing as a Proms piece, but the way that a composer as distinctive as Lutyens could accommodate her style to the occasion would imply that she knew what was required. As well as the paying audience in the hall, and that listening on the radio, Lutyens would have been aware of her audience in the BBC Music Department. The tone of the words used in the correspondence between BBC employees and the composer has been noted: friendly on some occasions, patronising on others, but in terms of critical discourse analysis, the music Lutyens wrote would have constituted a text just as much as the letters back and forth. Although there is no direct written response to Lutyens's first two Proms pieces, *Symphonies* and *Essence*, on file at the BBC, the dialogue continued in the form of subsequent commissions, and this response from Glock would indicate that what Lutyens had produced was a good fit with the BBC's expectations. From being the composer of music for soap advertisements and incidental music for radio plays, Lutyens had become institutionalized into the culture of the Music Department. Nonetheless, things did not always work out as well as they did in this instance, as the last commission Lutyens received for the Proms demonstrates.

The third Prom commission, a catastrophe: *The Linnet from the Leaf*

In several ways, it is the third and last Prom commission Lutyens received that is the most illuminating, despite the resulting work never actually being performed at the Proms. The journey began with a letter from William Glock to Elisabeth Lutyens, dated 6 April 1972. After

some preliminary remarks about a lecture-recital at the Round House that Lutyens had been involved with, Glock wrote:

As to the 1973 Proms, I think you may have heard that we hope to include your *Dei* [sic] *amore*; and as to the 1974 season, would you be willing to write a 25-minute work, of whatever kind you choose? Do please let me know about this. We could offer a fee of £300.

With much love from us both¹⁵³

As far as *De Amore*, Op. 39 was concerned, Glock was as good as his word: it received its world premiere performance at the Proms on Friday 7 September 1973. The tone of the letter is remarkable; although it was written from the BBC, Glock signed off on behalf of his wife – presumably – as well as himself, ‘with much love’ (as noted already, Lutyens and Anne Glock had been friends since childhood). As a commissioning letter and brief its informality is breathtaking: ‘a 25-minute work, *of whatever kind you choose?*’ This begs a particularly interesting question. Andrew Kurowski denied that there is such a thing as a Proms piece, and indeed went so far as to suggest that any composer who approached Roger Wright when he was Director of the Proms with a proposal for the perfect Proms piece was unlikely to get a commission.¹⁵⁴ Despite Glock’s very catholic taste, his enthusiasm for breaking barriers – such as the appearance of the prog-rock group *Soft Machine* at the Proms in 1970 – when he invited Lutyens to write ‘whatever [...] you choose’, he surely expected her to understand that this was not to be taken literally, and that she would implicitly understand the unwritten parameters within which she was expected to operate. It would appear that Glock assumed that Lutyens would self-censor, and write something appropriate: appropriate for the Proms, its audience, the BBC, the likely performers

¹⁵³ BBC WAC R83/133/1 LUTYENS, ELISABETH 1955–1974, 6 April 1972

¹⁵⁴ Andrew Kurowski, personal communication, 24 October 2017

and the Royal Albert Hall. Lutyens, however, had rather different ideas, and Glock's open-ended offer, a blank cheque effectively, had repercussions, as will become clear.

Lutyens replied to Glock in a letter dated 12 April 1972, accepting the commission for the 1974 Proms. Glock then wrote to Lutyens on 24 April, extending an invitation for her to come and stay the weekend with Glock and his wife Anne at their house in Faringdon, Oxfordshire, and then the correspondence went quiet over the summer, until 6 October 1972, when Lutyens wrote to Glock:

I can at long last answer – rather than just acknowledge – your letter of 6 April which included an invitation to write a work for the 1974 Proms ‘of whatever kind you choose’.

Firstly, I decided not to write another orchestral work, as I find I have 19 orchestral/symphonic works already published. Of these only four have had a single public London performance, only five one public performance anywhere, and some few no performance at all. Almost the same applies to chamber music works (commissioning bodies want ‘world premieres’ or first performances more than ever before). I find this hardly encouraging and should the BBC wish to perform any orchestral or chamber work of mine at the Proms, there is certainly a wide selection available. I have chosen, therefore – as you invited me – to write a piece of what is called, ‘modishly’, music theatre, a genre that as you know I have done from the late ’40s. (Do you remember Infidelio scheduled with a work by Malcolm Arnold at the ICA?)

I have always – in the past – been professionally ‘obedient’, but in 1974 I shall be nearing 70 and have therefore allowed the work to take its own time. I have finished the scenario (my own), and first draft of the score, and can give you all the details when/if we meet. The full score should be ready in a few weeks. Meanwhile some information: the piece lasts 45 minutes, there are five singers and two instrumental groups of nine and seven players respectively, – 16 players in all. It will require simple production but not more than that which has already taken place at the Albert Hall, with two conductors – one for

each instrumental group. I write you this in confirmation while you are still at the BBC.
Please give me your approval.¹⁵⁵

Lutyens's motives for writing this letter seem clear. Glock had commissioned her to write a piece 'of whatever kind you choose' (she even quotes his exact words back to him), and she had taken him at his word. Not only had she decided to write a work largely inappropriate to the commission, she had already gone ahead – without consultation – and it was now practically finished. Knowing perfectly well that she was never intended to do this, she had cold feet, and with Glock about to retire from the BBC, she wanted to ensure that all the work she had done would not be wasted. Lutyens laid out her reasons for not writing another orchestral work. By giving her excuses here she made it clear that she knew this is what Glock would have been expecting. Nonetheless, this was an extraordinarily pragmatic approach, and an example of a composer trying to diversify their portfolio, in the hope of maximising her performance opportunities. Lutyens conveniently forgot that she had been promised a performance of *De Amoris* in the 1973 Proms season, a first performance for a work already 16 years old. She then explained that she was writing something 'modish', a piece of music theatre, but rather undermined her up-to-the-minute credibility by reminding Glock that this was a genre she had been working in for some 30 years. Even so, it was a genre that her much younger contemporaries like Peter Maxwell Davies and Harrison Birtwistle had been pursuing with some success. If this was an attempt to claim a space in that particular field of cultural production then it seems misguided: to imitate leading figures in a particular field rarely works, in that to be admitted into a new field requires originality, and to be seen to be copying younger contemporaries smacks of desperation. Lutyens went on to admit that she knew that what she was doing contravened the unwritten rules of a Proms commission, and that she was being professionally disobedient. When she said she was allowing the piece to 'take its own time' she

¹⁵⁵ BBC WAC R83/133/1 LUTYENS, ELISABETH 1955–1974, 6 October 1972

surely meant its own *course*; the issue of time was irrelevant here, unless she was apologising for late delivery, which she was not: the work was practically finished. Finally, she bolstered her credentials as a practical musician. The work might be inappropriate, but it was not impractical, being written for a reasonably-sized ensemble. She gave the game away, though, by acknowledging that it would require production, always expensive, but no more than other works had received in the Royal Albert Hall. The response she received was from Glock's secretary, in a letter dated 16 October, telling her that Glock had spoken to his successor, Robert Ponsonby, about the commission, Ponsonby was keen to know more, and suggesting that the Round House might be a better venue, given its more sophisticated lighting facilities. And with that, Glock retired from the BBC, leaving Lutyens's modish music-theatre commission to Ponsonby.

Lutyens and Ponsonby met in January 1973, and this meeting was followed up by a letter from Ponsonby to Lutyens, dated 30 January 1973:

I greatly enjoyed our meeting on Sunday.

I have had a first, hurried look at 'The Linnet from the Leaf'.¹⁵⁶ It is obviously strong and should be very effective. I must say my initial feeling is that it is a Round House rather than an Albert Hall piece but I know you have firm feelings to the contrary! Lighting in the Royal Albert Hall is primitive and a real "blackout" virtually impossible – but I dare say that would not matter.

I am inclined to offer it to the London Sinfonietta since BBC Symphony Orchestra musicians would need to be paid chamber music rates anyway. (Also, the London Sinfonietta would be more likely to repeat the work.) This suggests David Atherton and

¹⁵⁶ This was the title of Lutyens's new Proms piece

Elgar Howarth as conductors. Would they please you – in principle anyway? We would also need a “producer”. Perhaps Anthony Besch?¹⁵⁷

Lutyens’s files at the BBC Written Archives Centre provide a vividly detailed narrative of the progress of this project, including wrangles over appropriate venues, the relative merits (and costs) of different performing groups, the involvement of a producer (Anthony Besch), the difficulties (real or imagined) of hiring black singers, the number of rehearsals that the new work might require, and an unfortunate interlude over some radio audience research on two other music theatre works by Lutyens, which was capped by a memo from Stephen Hearst (Controller, Radio 3) who described the broadcasts as ‘a disaster’, ‘banal’, and ‘an incomprehensible, wrong decision’. The possibility of Arts Council funding was sought and fell through, and the project was presented to the incoming Head of Arts at BBC TV, Humphrey Burton. In 1976, the year of her 70th birthday, two works of Lutyens’s were performed at the Proms: the first Proms performance of *Music for Orchestra II*, Op. 48 on 4 August, conducted by Ole Schmidt; and *And suddenly it’s evening*, Op. 66 on 9 August with the London Sinfonietta conducted by Simon Rattle, making his Proms début at a late night concert at the Round House. Lutyens was grateful for this, but it would seem that by this time *The Linnet from the Leaf* was becoming, if not a *cause célèbre* exactly, then at least a subject of gossip. In a letter written just after the end of the 1976 Proms season, Lutyens wrote to Ponsonby:

My dear Robert,

First of all thank you so much for including 2 of my works in this years’ Proms [...] May I raise one point? A joke is a joke and I had no objection to your jocular remark that – being asked by the BBC to produce a work for orchestra – I produced a chamber opera

¹⁵⁷ BBC WAC R83/133/1 LUTYENS, ELISABETH 1955–1974, 6 January 1973

with “5 singers – two black!” But I gather your remark has been repeated to U.E. (Colleran)¹⁵⁸ as a fact, which is far from the truth.

I was not asked to produce an orchestral work – but a work, tout court. I am too professional (& also aware of ‘costing’ having been on so many committees) to have behaved as you stated.

[There follows a page on the problems of ensuring adequate rehearsal for new works at the Proms, a familiar trope. Then Lutyens goes on:]

Forgive the pre-amble, just to explain that a work for 5 singers (and black singers cost no more than white) & 16 instruments, produced (with adequate rehearsal & 3 pre-Prom performances) would solve all problems. (I deliberately chose exactly the same number of singers and players as Harry Birtwistle’s ‘Down by the Greenwood [Side]’, played at the Albert H[all] after a production.) Singers (including ‘black’!) had been auditioned & the casting almost complete & agreement reached with L[ondon] Sinfonietta – when, without previous warning the Arts Council support was not forthcoming. So I am left with another work unperformed! But I cannot admit that what was done for Harry B[irtwistle] could not be extended to me and the ‘accusation’ of unprofessionalism does me only harm. I hope the inaccurate ‘story’ is scrapped & my good name restored. (I’m old-fashioned & feel the client (or commissionee) must be considered.)¹⁵⁹

There is no direct response from Ponsonby on file; perhaps he telephoned Lutyens. It would appear that in her 70th year, she no longer felt obliged to toe the BBC party line, and was able to express herself more freely than she had in the past (although it is worth remembering that according to Harries and Harries (1989: 187), quoted above, she did have a propensity for falling out with BBC staff). She called Ponsonby out on what might have been casual racism; explained the background to the problem that the Proms performance ran into, and the withdrawal of Arts Council funding; compared her treatment to that of a rather younger colleague, Harrison

¹⁵⁸ The publisher Universal Edition, whose influential new music promotions head was William (Bill) Colleran

¹⁵⁹ BBC WAC R83/133/1 LUTYENS, ELISABETH 1955–1974, 14 September 1976

Birtwistle; and – perhaps most tellingly of all – questioned the power balance between the creative artist and the BBC. She was clearly upset by the implied accusation of a lack of professionalism, as well she might have been: all those scores for radio features were not commissioned from a composer who failed to deliver, or was unable to follow a brief or work to a budget. The implication in her last sentence ‘I’m old-fashioned & feel the client (or commissionee) must be considered’ would appear to imply that the BBC was used to wielding its corporate power to ride roughshod over the individual artist. The language of the letter is also revealing: ‘fact’, ‘truth’, ‘story’, ‘old-fashioned’ all appeal to values that a senior employee of the BBC must be seen to espouse. BBC journalists all describe their work as pursuing the ‘story’, but that story must factually correct. The use of the word ‘client’ at the end of the letter is puzzling. Surely it the BBC that is Lutyens’s client, in that she is in the BBC’s employ, and they are paying her for a service? Unless perhaps she means a dependant or hanger-on, in which case the reiteration of her professionalism might be an attempt to redress the power balance in this relationship, and imply a lack of professionalism in Ponsonby’s inaccurate gossip.

As was absolutely clear from the correspondence between Lutyens and Glock, she was indeed commissioned to write ‘a work of whatever kind you choose’. This correspondence would have been on file for Ponsonby to consult had he chosen to, but his next written communication on *The Linnet from the Leaf* was to the Radio 3 producer Elaine Padmore, who specialised in opera. The memo was headed ‘LUTYENS’ THE LINNET FROM THE LEAF’ and was dated 11 January 1979, more than two years later:

As you know, this was a BBC commission. William [Glock] asked for an orchestral work of 20’ – 25’ and got a chamber opera of about 45’.

It has not been performed (even in the studio) and I wonder whether we don't owe it to Elisabeth – before she dies – at least to broadcast it, if not to give it a full public performance.

May we discuss please.¹⁶⁰

Repeating this untruth is quite breath-taking, especially alongside the implication that this was a favour to be done for Lutyens 'before she dies'. Ponsonby even says that Glock had specified the duration of 20-25 minutes, when in fact it was 25 minutes; a small point, but telling nonetheless. This callous attitude contradicts quite spectacularly the nurturing approach to creative artists that the BBC liked to present in public, and given that Ponsonby was happy to commit this to paper, albeit in an internal memo, it does beg the question of what might have been said about this composer and her work behind closed doors. After another exchange of letters from an unhappy Lutyens and an intransigent Ponsonby, Radio 3 did broadcast a studio recording of *The Linnet from the Leaf* on Sunday 11 November 1979 at 15.15 (BBC, 1979b).

This examination of Lutyens's three Proms commissions demonstrates several key elements in the relationship composers had with the BBC during this period. Firstly, that structural divisions within the BBC mirrored the division between serious and commercial work in the outside world: the difference between writing large scale concert music, as opposed to music for soap commercials or horror films. There was a mutual suspicion between the BBC's Music Department and its Features Department, reflecting Bourdieu's concept that the 'loser wins', and the 'relations between the field of restricted production and the field of large-scale production' (Bourdieu, 1993c: 125). Secondly, the importance of the individual personalities involved, and their relationships: Lutyens, Clark, Glock, Plaistow, and, later, Ponsonby. The concept of a monolithic organisation, 'the BBC', soon begins to crumble as we see the individual staff as

¹⁶⁰ WAC R83/1219/1 LUTYENS, ELIZABETH 1975–84, 11 January 1979

people, drinking champagne and going on holiday. Except that those people hold offices within the BBC's hierarchy: there is a disjunction between the BBC's bureaucracy continuing uninterrupted as personalities change. The BBC office of Controller, Music remains unaltered even while William Glock leaves it and Robert Ponsonby takes up the post. That is the theory, but as we have seen, the practice is a very different story, and the arrival of Ponsonby in the period between the commissioning and the composing of *The Linnet from the Leaf* demonstrates clearly that the institution and its titles might remain the same, but put a different person in the office, and there can be unforeseen and unexpected outcomes. This is not to suggest that Ponsonby should be expected simply to continue Glock's work as a sort of clone, but more that in a bureaucracy like the BBC, if 'Controller, Music' commissions a work, then it is expected that this commission will be honoured, even if the office-holder changes. It should be said that this is nearly always the case, which makes Lutyens's commission such an important exception. Thirdly, Ponsonby was quite prepared to smear the good name of a composer, a well-respected figure in her 70s with an enviable track record with the BBC, in order to duck his (inherited) responsibilities, if that was expedient. The reputation of the BBC as midwife to the unmediated production of art by composers untrammelled by the requirements of a commissioning brief, takes something of a knock when previously unexamined documentation tells a more rounded version of Lutyens's story. This more rounded version has been made possible by looking at the various conflicting perspectives of the different people involved in the process. It has even been possible to see how individuals could demonstrate contradictory motivations. For example, Ponsonby first told Lutyens that *The Linnet from the Leaf* was obviously a strong work, and he worked hard to facilitate its performance, before deciding that it should go on the 'too difficult' pile, at which point he started to spread rumours that she had failed to follow the commissioning brief. Through what he said, wrote and did, however contradictory, he illuminated that the process of commissioning and writing music for the Proms was an anything but straightforward undertaking. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it is possible to see the way the BBC was

able to commission without a detailed brief, because the unwritten brief was itself understood perfectly well by the composers who were asked to write for the Proms. Lutyens was clear that she was writing *Symphonies* for the Proms, allowing for the infamous acoustic of the Royal Albert Hall, for example. Although she was able to adapt her style to accommodate that, she did not consider the reluctance of an established orchestra to sit in an unusual formation. Although she tried to blame the failure of the work on lack of rehearsal time, the evidence is there that there had been plenty, had the work been more straightforward in nature; if Lutyens had been more of the ‘Integrated Professional’, in fact. For her next commission, Lutyens avoided that problem, and could be seen to be simplifying her style – without betraying her fundamental compositional aesthetic – to mould her work to the circumstances of the performance. The resulting work was a success with the audience, the critics, and – given the subsequent commissions she received – with staff at the BBC. The last commission did not meet the expectations of the BBC’s unwritten commissioning brief, through an over-literal interpretation of such brief as there was. This was made clear on both sides: by Lutyens in her apologetic letter to Glock, admitting that she had (deliberately?) ignored the unwritten and unspoken brief; and by Ponsonby in his assumption that Glock’s commission had been for an *orchestral* work, when no such stipulation had been made. It has become clear that under the circumstances such a stipulation should not have needed to be made.

What this narrative elucidates is that Lutyens certainly knew the right people: she was a respected member of the new music club, with her own network, and considerable influence. At the same time, Lutyens’s experience demonstrates that she had a perfectly clear ‘sense of the tempo, rhythms and unwritten rules of the game’ (Maton, 2014: 53), a sense which she demonstrated in the success of *The Essence of Our Happinesses*. However, when she deliberately chose to ignore that sense, it threw the necessity for this knowledge into stark relief: what she needed to know, as well as who she needed to know, as described in Chapter Eight of this thesis. Ponsonby’s

accusation, that she had been commissioned by Glock ‘for an orchestral work of 20’ – 25’ and got [instead] a chamber opera of about 45’,¹⁶¹ in its wilful distortion of the truth, could not make the unwritten expectations of a Prom commission more clearly.

¹⁶¹ WAC R83/1219/1 LUTYENS, ELIZABETH 1975–84, 11 January 1979

Chapter Ten: Conclusions

This thesis has sought to illuminate music produced at the intersection of the worlds of the music industry on the one hand, and a broadcasting industry on the other, through the exemplar of music commissioned for the Proms between 1960 and 1985. The fields of musicology and radio studies have previously been seen as only distantly related, and in drawing on these different academic disciplines, and also on methodologies from the sociology of science, it has been possible to create a novel framework to examine music as part of the milieu in which it was created. This multifaceted and innovative approach has led to a deeper understanding of the music beyond being an aesthetic object, a thing in itself, and its social situation as being more than stuff happening at the same time that it was composed. The thesis has argued that the reinvention of the Proms during this period was a discourse created by a number of disparate voices, challenging the Great Man theory of history that has pertained previously. Furthermore, it has been shown that this narrative was developed by individuals with a vested interest in the pre-eminence of the Proms. It has been argued that the allocation of funds to the commissioning budget for the Proms, far from following an established policy at the BBC, was the result of serendipitous interventions by individuals both within and outside the BBC. Lastly, it has been argued that through an established but nonetheless constantly fluctuating network at the BBC and in the music industry, it was possible that the commissioning of music could be controlled through a process of ‘precedence and experience’ (Hendy, 2013: 81). Composers did not require a detailed written commissioning brief, because they already understood what was required of them.

In researching a previously overlooked subject area, and in developing an innovative methodology in order to do it, this work is necessarily provisional. In this conclusion, the extent to which the research questions have been answered is addressed. In doing this, it is suggested

what contribution has been made to the fields of musicology and radio studies, and, furthermore, what wider impact this work could make, in the area of methodology which, while potentially enriching both disciplines, could also be applied elsewhere. In looking at possible applications of the methodology, it is possible to consider where this research might go next, and areas which were not pursued due to restrictions of time and space. In looking at where else this approach might be useful, the extent to which this field of study, commissioning new music for the Proms, is unique, is addressed.

The research questions set out in this thesis were, how and why were composers commissioned for the BBC Proms? And why did those composers write what they did? Through an examination of secondary literature, and a close reading of primary materials, principally drawn from the BBC's Written Archives Centre, and a series of interviews with composers, publishers and BBC staff, light has been cast on this previously obscure and mysterious process. Looking beyond the straightforward lists of composers and works commissioned for the Proms, the process whereby these works came into existence has been clarified.

The dominant narrative that BBC staff created around commissioning during this period, was that the BBC was a simply facilitator of ideas that composers already had in mind, that they helped make those ideas realities, through the provision of money and support of various sorts. This selfless, altruistic, narrative was also supported by others in the music industry, in particular publishers, and the composers themselves, who believed that they were commissioned without any constraints. By comparing this narrative, what was said, with what was done, a more complex discourse emerged, one which indicated that rather than presenting composers with a blank slate, in fact the staff of the BBC Music Department worked with the composers and their publishers to institutionalise these apparently independent, creative individuals. This institutionalisation took the form of creating a set of expectations that were understood clearly

by all the interested parties, such that they were never committed to paper, but passed from person to person as a series of unwritten rules that needed to be followed in order to fulfil a Proms commission successfully. In order for this to work, the staff at the BBC needed to create a narrative of success, which, as was seen in the case of John Buller, consisted in offering support through further commissions for the BBC, along with help with other artistic activities beyond the BBC. When a composer did not follow these unwritten rules, as was seen in the case of Elisabeth Lutyens, the consequences were professionally catastrophic. The counter examples, for when commissioning briefs were required, as was the case with the early commissions for specific occasional pieces from William Alwyn, for example, threw the normal process into even more vivid relief.

A subsidiary question was, how was the importance of the commissioning of new music for the Proms constructed during this period, and who was involved in that construction? A detailed reading of how the BBC presented the Proms to the outside world, through the BBC Handbook – ostensibly aimed at the listening and viewing audience, but also a valuable political tool, used to present the BBC in the best possible light to politicians and other influential decision-makers – it was possible to chart the way the Proms became a jewel in the BBC's cultural crown during this period. Comparing this with what the Director of the Proms wrote in the prospectus, and with how other BBC staff, composers and publishers talked about the Proms, a discourse around the Proms, and in particular the new music commissioned for them, emerged. This discourse, that the Proms combined the highest quality with the greatest access, was mutually beneficial to all parties, and created the Prom commission as the greatest validation for a composer, bestowed by 'the BBC' as a consecration, a sort of musical kitemark.

A further question was, how did these relationships between the various stakeholders – BBC employees, composers, publishers, agents, performers – manifest themselves? Although the

answer to this question is largely subsumed in the answer to the principal research questions, it has also been possible, especially in the chapters on Buller and Lutyens, to see how the BBC staff, the composers, their publishers and performers worked together, their relationships evolving over time. During this evolution, as professional relationships grew into stronger personal friendships in the case of Buller, or soured in the case of Lutyens, power shifted, and the dominant discourse of BBC as enabler became less sustainable. As the support offered to Buller went far beyond merely enabling him to compose, so the withdrawal of support from Lutyens exposed the BBC to be as much a disabler, when the unwritten 'feel for the game' was contravened. In examining these shifting relationships, the way the Music Department associated, on the one hand, with the music industry outside the BBC, and, on the other, with the hierarchy of the BBC of which it was a part, the autonomy of the Department within the BBC, and its integration within the music industry, was demonstrated. This duality of BBC departments has been commented on before, by Gerard Mansell (1983, online) for example, but this research is a thoroughgoing exemplar of this principle in action.

This research also sought to look at music, and especially its creation, in its social context. When musicology has claimed to do this, to locate music in 'the social milieu in which it is produced and consumed' it has still tended to treat music as 'autonomous in significant ways' (Locke, 1999: 500). Even the best efforts to do this, as outlined in the literature review, have, to a greater or lesser extent, had music surrounded by other stuff that was happening at the same time. In this way, the music remains a discrete and independent element among the many other historical narratives operating synchronically. In borrowing from theorists of the sociology of science, in particular Bruno Latour and John Law, it has been possible to de-centre the composer and the music, and in looking at the creation of the art object from many perspectives, allow the music to emerge as a crucial, but not independent, element in the discourse of the commissioning process. Given that this is a radical approach, it is necessarily provisional, and it will be necessary

to apply this approach in a much wider variety of contexts to test its validity, and to see whether it is possible to develop its usefulness, and extend its application, both to music in other contexts than commissioning, and in other fields of creativity. In doing this, it will be possible to see to what extent this approach can enrich both musicology and radio studies.

In looking at other places where this approach might usefully be utilized, there are many avenues that this research opened up, but had to be put on one side. The first is the afterlife of the commissioned works. Although the commercial recording of Buller's *The Theatre of Memory* was touched upon, the material on this in the BBC Written Archives Centre is particularly rich. This would appear to be the first work commissioned for the Proms where staff at the BBC actively worked to get recorded and released on LP by a commercial company, and the lengths BBC staff went to in order to facilitate this contradicts the dominant discourse around commissioned works at the BBC, which holds that:

[T]he life of the composition after we've done it, once it's out there, has to be moved on to other spaces, to other opportunities. And the BBC cannot administer opportunities for every single work it creates, otherwise the whole of the BBC would be spent administering that particular issue. So, that thing about responsibility is: the works have to go on and have a life of their own. The BBC's name is attached to it, but we are not the father raising that child any more.¹⁶²

In the case of Buller's *The Theatre of Memory*, the staff of the BBC put a considerable amount of time, money and resources into raising this particular child. Nonetheless, there was never any intention to make money from the recording, as Kurowski said:

We are not about the commercialization of music, we're about the encouragement of art. And without being high and mighty, it's not what we're about, I don't say to a composer,

¹⁶² Andrew Kurowski, personal communication, 24 October 2017

try and write a piece so great that we want to put it on CD the next day [...] you can't look at a composer's score and think, 'How much money can we make from this?'¹⁶³

Apart from *The Theatre of Memory*, many of the works commissioned for the Proms during this period, and subsequently, have appeared on LP and then CD, and this process would be a fruitful subject for further research, as would the afterlife of these works in the concert hall. Buller's Proms commissions might exist on CD, but after the flurry of early performances (all promoted by the BBC, it must be said) they have not had any further performances, and have not been taken up by other performing groups. In the field of reception theory, it would also be possible to look at works that were commissioned for the Proms, and had an unsuccessful first performance, but were subsequently taken up and flourished in other places: a recent example would be Julian Andersen's Piano Concerto *The Imaginary Museum*, first heard at the Royal Albert Hall on 26 July 2017, a work of intricate subtlety, rather lost in that hall, but heard to greater effect in subsequent performances in more intimate spaces, and indeed on the radio. Writing about the first performance, Andrew Clements remarked that:

Listening later to the BBC broadcast of the concert, *The Imaginary Museum* seemed a more impressive work and a far more convincing concerto than it ever had in the Albert Hall, where the impression was rather diffuse. The microphones gave [Steven] Osborne's playing a much more forward balance against the orchestra than it had live, when too much detail of the piano-writing, especially Osborne's perfectly poised playing in the concerto's long quiet stretches, was obscured. Some of the immense refinement of Anderson's scoring – which includes the use of sampled piano sounds tuned a quarter-tone flat that “shadow” the soloist at various points – was lost live, too (Clements, 2017, online).

¹⁶³ Andrew Kurowski, personal communication, 24 October 2017

The reverse has often been the case: Lutyens's *The Essence of Our Happinesses*, for example, was well-received on its first performance, being described as the work 'most likely to last' (Harrison, 1970: 7), but that has not proved to be the case, and the first performance appears to have also been the last.

Although this research looked at the way that Proms Directors wrote about new music in the prospectuses, the mediation of new music by the BBC, or music more generally, would be a fruitful area for further research. The way the Proms prospectus developed during this period is striking. In 1960 it was a very straightforward listing of the concert programmes and performers. By the time of Ponsonby's retirement in 1985, the prospectus was more like a glossy lifestyle magazine, with copious advertising, articles on the music and performers, features on the new music, even a crossword. The concert programmes developed along similar lines. There is material in the BBC Written Archives Centre on plans to develop the concert programmes even further, and to exploit their commercial potential more fully, a plan that never came to fruition.¹⁶⁴ The way the Proms were presented in the *Radio Times* is also of interest. It might seem astonishing today that in 1982 every day during the Proms season over a quarter of a page of *Radio Times* was given over to a preview of that evening's Prom concert, with a specially commissioned illustration, and a short essay on the music to be performed. A copy of the *Radio Times* from this period seems as exotic today as a medieval manuscript, and an investigation of what was written about the Proms during this period would make a fascinating study. Alongside the *Radio Times* is *The Listener*, effectively the BBC in print. Every week during the Proms season there would be a review of the broadcast concerts. These reviews were often by figures who had a close association with the BBC, like Hans Keller, or would go on to work for the BBC, like Peter Paul Nash. How these figures wrote about new music at the Proms is significant, in that it

¹⁶⁴ BBC WAC R27/1,076/1 HENRY WOOD PROMENADE CONCERTS GENERAL 'Y'

is one of the few places where a composer would get direct feedback on their new work from a representative, albeit an arm's length representative, of the BBC.

If reading a copy of the *Radio Times* from 1982 is a curious experience, listening to broadcasts of Proms concerts from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s is equally intriguing. Paddy Scannell interrogated the way that the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II was mediated on radio and television (Scannell, 1996: 80–86), and in particular how Richard Dimbleby's commentary became a model for how all such national events should be presented, a style that still influences the broadcasting of such events today. In the same way, the presentation style of announcers at the Proms developed its own particular mode of address, and this could well be explored further. The way that new music has been presented on the radio, what is said, what is left unsaid, and how it is said, could be analysed and conclusions drawn. In the later 1980s there was a new development, where an interview with the composer of a new piece would be recorded at a prior rehearsal, and the interview played in as part of the presentation. This mirrors the trend for composers to write about their music in the Proms prospectus, and to write the programme note for their new work, a trend that was no doubt intended to make the composer a more human figure, and to attempt to present them to the audience unmediated. Around the same time, the broadcast concert would often include, as the interval, an instant review of a new work just heard, or a preview of a work about to be heard. A striking example of this was the interval in the concert on 4 September 1989, at which John Tavener's *The Protecting Veil* was first performed. In the interval of that concert the composer Steve Martland described Tavener's new work:

I think it's one of the most unbelievably beautiful and moving pieces that I've heard for...I just don't know when, I think it's absolutely incredible. It's so beautiful (Minna Keal's Symphony and John Tavener's 'The Protecting veil', 1989)

These words became part of a discourse around a work that was, arguably, one of the greatest successes in the history of Proms commissions. This work would make a fine case study, with extensive amounts of primary materials available, not only from the BBC, but also a TV documentary on Channel 4, and considerable press coverage. The BBC materials include the broadcast of the concert, the interval feature, an article in the *Radio Times*, a review in *The Listener*, coverage on the weekly magazine programme *Prom Talk*, and Tavener's appearance on *Desert Island Discs*. The work was given its first commercial recording within three years, and has been recorded at least eight times since. This would be an ideal opportunity to delve deeply into an individual work, and to use the methodological approach of this study to see to what extent it is possible to locate *The Protecting Veil* in its social milieu.

In locating composers and their work in their social milieu, it would be worthwhile to look at composers' other activities working for the BBC. As has been noted above, composers were often asked to write introductory material to their new works in the Proms prospectus, and also to write programme notes. It became commonplace during this period to invite composers to conduct their works, if it was appropriate. Some, like Hugh Wood and Robert Saxton, never pursued this activity. Others, like Thea Musgrave, would conduct their own works, and indeed Musgrave frequently conducted her music all over the world, and has recorded some of her works, as conductor and also as pianist. Other composers became as well-known as conductors as they were composers. Oliver Knussen was one such, who was Artist-in-Association with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, 2009–2014. Peter Maxwell Davies also had considerable success as a conductor, and held the post of Associate Composer/Conductor of the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra for 10 years, conducting a wide repertoire of music, not just his own. Several composers also had parallel careers as performers: Richard Rodney Bennett, Roger Smalley and Malcolm Williamson were all fine pianists, and appeared frequently on the Third Programme and Radio 3 performing their own, and other composers', music. A very few composers also did

stints at the BBC as a producer. Alexander Goehr was one of Glock's early appointments, but he stayed only a relatively short time. Peter Paul Nash, although he was never commissioned for the Proms, worked as a producer at Radio 3 for several years during the 1980s, and also presented programmes, including *Prom Talk*. Other composers have worked for the BBC presenting specialist new music programmes: a particularly successful early exponent was Hugh Wood, who presented Glock's innovative *Invitation Concerts*. The influence one activity might have had on others situates the composer even more firmly within the BBC: Malcolm Williamson is a good example, and his files at the BBC Written Archives Centre reveal a run-in he had over recordings he made for Radio 3 as a pianist and organist, which almost certainly influenced his standing as a composer. This episode would make a compelling study in its own right. All of these examples would deepen understanding of the process of institutionalisation of creative individuals by the BBC.

Throughout this study the phrase 'BBC Music Department' has been used to include anybody employed on a full-time contract by the BBC and working primarily in the area of classical music. This is a simplification of the way that the BBC organised its music production over the years, and this is an area that is very little studied. Doctor (1999) covers the internal organisation of this department to some extent in its earliest years. A more thorough investigation of the changes it went through during the 1960s to the 1980s would give further insight into the way that the BBC operated as an institution, how it absorbed and controlled maverick figures like Hans Keller and Robert Simpson, and how individual members of staff might arrive from trusted institutions outside the BBC, stay for a while, influence activity there, and be influenced in their turn, and then leave and take some of that BBC culture which they had absorbed with them. Alison Garnham's study of Hans Keller's career at the BBC (Garnham, 2003), while being a fascinating examination of a charismatic figure, does not pursue this opportunity. A historical ethnography along the lines of Born (2004) would be revealing, and give insight into the way that

the BBC Music Department operated as part of the BBC, while still being a significant player in the music industry beyond the BBC.

The chapter in this study which charted the way that money was directed to the commissioning budget was, of necessity, focused on one strand of financial decision-making. This approach to how money was allocated could be applied much more widely, and indeed political economy, in Mosco's definition as 'the study of the social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources' (Mosco, 2009: 2), could be applied much more widely to studies of the BBC in general. As was shown in this example, the distribution of funds was one element of how a discourse could be built around, in this case, new music and the Proms. This approach could illuminate many of the BBC's activities, in programme-making at the micro level, but also how whole broadcast networks were funded, or regional centres, and how this would then influence the output. On the evidence of this project, it would be fruitful to start at the micro level and work upwards, rather than the other way around; it would be illuminating to see how the spending of individual programme budgets might have influenced decision-making at higher levels. Born (2004) examined this to some extent, in looking at John Birt's introduction of an internal market at the BBC, Producer Choice, and the financial implications of the development of the independent sector in production, but there is still more detailed work to be done. How these innovations influenced the programmes that got made is as yet under-investigated.

How money gets allocated and spent is, however, only part of the picture, and it would be fruitful to test the methodology of this thesis in other areas of the BBC's output, or, indeed, elsewhere in broadcasting. In that the composition of music is traditionally taken to be the work of the individual creative artist, the obvious areas to look for in broadcasting are those that share that characteristic of the auteur. This would suggest that drama might be a good place to start,

and to compare the contrasting institutional practices of different types of programmes. On the one hand, there are long-running serials, like *Dr Who* or *The Archers*, where there is structure in place, with an overall Editor (in the case of radio) or Show Runner (in television), Executive Producers and Producers, all of whom are normally staff members, alongside the freelance talent, the writers and actors. In radio the technical staff are likely to be employees, whereas in television the much larger teams of designers, make-up artists, camera, lighting and sound crew are almost certainly either freelancers or working for external companies. Throw the Contracts and Finance Departments into the mix, and a complex set of social relationships begins to emerge. Investigating the way these teams operate would cast a great deal of light on the creative processes, and might lead a researcher to question many common assumptions about individual creativity in the production process. Comparing these long-running serials with one-off dramas, or short stand-alone series would cast light on both processes.

Comedy would be another similar area, and in this case the commissioning process could also be significant, and the extent to which individual writers, like Victoria Wood, are given autonomy, and how much they are controlled by the institution. Wood famously fought against the interference of the BBC suits (see, for example, Purves, 2004), but a detailed study of Wood's relationship with the BBC might indicate the extent to which even such a powerful and independent figure was institutionalised.

To apply this approach to other areas of BBC programme-making is one thing, but to apply it elsewhere in music is another. The relatively recent emergence of the academic study of recording as a creative practice, part of the interest musicology is taking in music as performance, would be an area where this approach should be applied. It is commonplace to describe recordings, as a shorthand, as the output of single artist: Solti's *Ring*, Kleiber's *Tristan* or Knappertsbusch's *Parsifal* (to look no further than three classics among Wagner recordings), but

these enterprises were the collective work of many hundreds of individuals, and the written archives of record companies, orchestras, studios, opera companies, as well as first-hand accounts by those involved, could make for particularly rich and nuanced accounts of recordings as musicology, going beyond the analysis of changing approaches to performance practice, for example, to see the recording as the product of the social relationships of all those participants, incorporating Latour's associations of people, objects, and politics (Latour, 1993).

There are also several institutions which have been closely involved in commissioning music, and it would be valuable to investigate organisations, which, like the BBC, would have rich and varied archives of material. Three examples spring to mind, all in different parts of the music industry and all with different perspectives. Firstly, a publisher like Boosey and Hawkes, with one of the longest-established lists of composers. Boosey and Hawkes will have files on all of their composers, including correspondence with the publisher, but also with performing groups, promoters and other composers, in a similar vein to the BBC. This would open up another exciting avenue, barely touched on in this study, of the significance of the printed score in the discourse that develops around composers and their work. How and why these scores and performing materials are produced, distributed and marketed would create an entirely different network of social relationships to investigate. Whereas the BBC is funded by the licence fee, a publisher is a fully commercial operation, and the financial aspect would contrast with the Proms, which, while it is subsidised, still needs to balance its books through ticket sales. Boosey and Hawkes have recently given their archive to the British Library, and that would be a rich seam to mine. Secondly, a performing group with a particular function in the music industry for commissioning. The London Sinfonietta would make a fascinating subject to study, in that as an organisation it has commissioned hundreds of new works over the period of its existence. It has always been run by a single Artistic Director, with input from a succession of Artists-in-Association. It has also had a small, and very stable, membership of players, with a considerable

commitment to the new music in which they specialise. The financial aspect would be different again, in that the group is a charity funded by the Arts Council, a string of Trusts and Foundations, along with commercial sponsors, and individual supporters. This will bring with it a quite different series of responsibilities and expectations, and will have considerable influence on the artistic running of the group. Finally, a promoting organisation like the Aldeburgh Festival, begun as a small community-based summer festival by Benjamin Britten in 1948, this is now a company, Britten Pears Arts, which owns and runs the Snape Maltings, an arts centre with a small retail park attached. It is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity, governed by a board of trustees. The transformation of the organisation through its history would make a compelling study, as would its relationship to the many composers commissioned to write for the festival. Anecdotally, in the early years of the festival Britten was rather prescriptive in his commissioning, especially in his dealings with younger composers, unlike the approach taken at the BBC. Nonetheless, Britten's own ensemble, the English Opera Group, commissioned works from senior figures including Malcolm Williamson, William Walton, and Lennox Berkeley, as well as younger composers, including Gordon Crosse, Thea Musgrave and – perhaps the most surprising – Harrison Birtwistle's *Punch and Judy*.

Finally, to what degree is this subject, the commissioning of music for the Proms, during this period, 1960–1985, unique? To some extent, it is. For one thing, there is extraordinarily rich primary source material. As Nicholas Kenyon wrote in the introduction to his history of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, 'The BBC, it has been said, has lived by the memo and may yet perish by it' (Kenyon, 1981: xi). While the BBC's Written Archives Centre is by no means exhaustive, and there is no way of knowing what is not there, it is nonetheless an Aladdin's Cave of memos, correspondence, contracts and press cuttings. However the selection process was made, and however the material got arranged the way it did, there is an enormous amount of material available, and in an organised form; far more than any project could possibly cover. The

period under discussion is particularly rich, in that earlier periods have less material preserved, and later items are not yet available to researchers. To what extent the archive will be able to accommodate the email in a post-paper world remains to be seen. Other institutions will no doubt have generated just as much paper, and been equally scrupulous in preserving their archives, but they may be less forthcoming in making them available to non-official researchers, engaged in their own projects. While it is impossible to know what has been redacted, the nature of the material that is available indicates that, on the whole, the Archive is more, rather than less, inclusive, and there is material there that other organisations might have preferred to have kept private. As well as this written material, many of the composers commissioned during this period are still alive, and happy to talk to a researcher about their experience of working on a Proms piece. The same goes for former BBC staff.

The BBC and the Proms might be unique in having full time employees whose responsibility it was to oversee the commissioning process on behalf of the organisation. Although they would have been engaged in other programme-making activities, dealing with commissions was a significant part of their job. This is no longer the case at Radio 3, where the role of Editor, New Music no longer exists, and commissioning is done by committee, according to Stephen Plaistow and Sally Cavender.¹⁶⁵ For most organisations, like orchestras and festivals, decisions over commissioning are most likely to be in the hands of the conductor or artistic director, and that person is not going to be able to take quite such a close interest in the process. Nor is it likely that there will be more than one or two commissions in progress at any one time. The funding for commissions is also going to come from elsewhere, a trust or foundation; orchestras and festivals do not have commissioning budgets in the way the BBC does, and so the commissioning process would require detailed written applications to the Arts Council, for

¹⁶⁵ Sally Cavender, personal communication, 24 September 2020 and Stephen Plaistow, personal communication 16 May 2018

example, a process that would probably be delegated to an administrator. It would be fruitful to compare the practice of other broadcasting organisations, particularly those in Europe and Scandinavia, such as Norddeutsche Rundfunk (NDR) in Hamburg, Radio France, and the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR). According to Doctor, the earliest motivation for the BBC to start commissioning new music in 1929 was ‘a scheme that had been initiated in Germany, in which radio companies commissioned young composers to create pieces specifically for broadcasting’ (Doctor, 1999: 156). How commissioning developed among foreign broadcasters would be a profitable subject for further research.

The Proms were also unique during this period in that there were always several commissions in each season: since Glock began commissioning in 1960, there has only been one season with no commissioned works, 1978. The reason for this is not clear; perhaps commissions were made but composers failed to deliver them. 1994 was also exceptional, with just one commission, John Tavener’s *The Apocalypse*: this was the first of two centenary Proms seasons, and featured repeats of several previous commissions, including three deemed to be the most successful, *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie* by James MacMillan, *Earth Dances* by Harrison Birtwistle and Hugh Wood’s *Scenes and Arias*. Why these three were chosen would make an interesting subject for study in itself. Other organisations tended to commission on a one-off basis for special occasions: for example, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Serge Koussevitzky commissioned works from 10 composers, including Stravinsky’s *Symphony of Psalms*, and the orchestra commissioned several works for its 75th, 100th and 125th anniversaries.

The British orchestra that has been involved in commissioning more new works than any other (apart from the BBC) is the CBSO, and this would make an interesting comparative study. The funding for the CBSO’s commissions has come from the Feeney Trust, set up by John Feeney (1839–1905) to champion the arts, heritage and public open spaces in Birmingham. The CBSO

tapped into this resource in the mid-1950s (Bratby, 2019: 220) and since 1955 the CBSO and the Feeney Trust have commissioned 53 works. According to Bratby, these commissions followed the taste of successive Music Directors, with, for example, Simon Rattle commissioning new works from Robin Holloway, Judith Weir, Mark-Anthony Turnage and Thomas Adès. In 1989 Rattle was instrumental in setting up the CBSO's composer-in-association scheme, funded by the Radcliffe Trust, a role that has been filled successively by Mark-Anthony Turnage, appointed in 1989, Judith Weir, appointed in 1995, and Julian Anderson, appointed in 2001. The scheme was wound up in 2005. On the face of it, there is very little distinction to be made between the Proms commissions and these CBSO/Feeney Trust commissions, and certainly reading Bratby (2019) alongside, say, Wright (2007) there would be nothing to choose between them. However, I would predict that an examination of the social relationships involved in the CBSO's commissioning process would produce findings that would reveal that the two practices, while having some similarities, are in fact very much more different than would seem to be the case on a cursory glance.

Rather than providing a model of how commissioning can or should work, this thesis presents a way to study artistic creation, and in particular how creative artists interact with the people working at the institutions that commission work from them. Since 1985, and the historical moment at which this thesis concluded, the BBC has continued to commission music for the Proms. For many years the processes described here were maintained, although since the retirement of Andrew Kurowski in 2013 the post of Editor, New Music has ceased to exist, and the commissioning process is no longer concentrated in the hands of a small number of BBC staff, but is done by committee. How this process might develop will be fascinating to watch, and how it evolves over the next decades should be the subject of future scholarship. More broadly, commissioning new work remains intrinsic to the activities of many artistic organisations. While it is not the function of this thesis to suggest there is a right or wrong way

to go about commissioning, this investigation of how it was done at the Proms during this period presents a study of the commissioning process during one fairly brief period in history at a single institution. Whether in the rather different cultural environment of today this approach would still be viable is open to question. Nonetheless, in applying the methodology developed in this study to other organisations and other art forms during different periods, and through asking simple questions about who gets commissioned and why, and what they produce and why, further complex webs of relationships around the creation of artistic objects will be discovered, placing these objects in the social and cultural milieu in which they were made.

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