Calling the Tune: Hollywood and the Business of Music

Cory Luke Joseph Messenger
BA (Hons, First Class) Griff

School of Humanities
Humanities and Social Sciences
Griffith University

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

September 2010
CALLING THE TUNE: HOLLYWOOD AND THE BUSINESS OF MUSIC combines historical research on the US film and music industries with textual film analysis in order to examine how the growing conglomeration of these two institutions affected outcomes in cultural production in the twentieth century. Ultimately, this study argues, the relationship between commercial film and popular music led, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, to the emergence of New Hollywood, a term which encompasses both aesthetic and economic considerations, and which still describes contemporary commercial film production.

This thesis traces the origins of New Hollywood back to the late 1920s and the advent of talking motion pictures. During this period issues surrounding the licensing of musical copyrights for inclusion in films led the major Hollywood studios to invest heavily in music publishing, so as to absorb the processes of music composition into the established studio system. After buying the key publishing firms on Tin Pan Alley, the studios soon learned that cross-media ownership enabled them to spread financial risk across interrelated commercial products. Hollywood also came to dominate the board of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers, the licensing body which controlled the promotion and dissemination of American popular music. In the 1930s the Hollywood musical emerged as the ideal medium with which to promote new copyrights, which in turn could promote the films they featured in via radio play. But as radio grew in size and influence due to its own reliance on popular music, the major film studios and the US radio networks clashed over licensing fee rates.

Radio broke away from ASCAP to form its own licensing body, Broadcast Music, Incorporated, and set about publishing styles of music that Tin Pan Alley had largely disregarded. With the might of radio behind it, BMI stimulated sectors of American music that had previously been denied access to the mainstream music business. In doing so it also empowered the recording industry, which had thus far been a relatively minor player in the music business. As record sales grew to unprecedented levels in the late 1940s and early 1950s—and sheet music sales fell—the established systems of music promotion developed by ASCAP and Hollywood broke down. Having lost control of the music industry, in the 1950s Hollywood attempted an intervention arguably even more dramatic than its investment in
publishing in the 1920s, and by 1958 all of the major studios had staked a claim in the recording industry.

With the US government’s Paramount Decree of 1948 leading to the dismantling of the vertically-integrated studio system, the rise of independent package productions allowed for musical styles other than conventional Hollywood orchestration to infiltrate the film soundtrack. Rock and roll—a musical style that evolved from BMI’s focus on the R&B and country markets—had expanded the market for recorded music, but in Hollywood it was marginalised in low-budget teen films produced by small independent studios. As the audience for Hollywood’s big-budget family movies dwindled throughout the 1960s, Hollywood’s investment in the record business helped save several studios from financial collapse. The corresponding rise of the rock industry not only contributed much-needed revenue, but also alerted emerging entertainment conglomerates such as MCA and Warner-Seven Arts to the possibilities of horizontal integration. As the record business grew into a billion dollar industry in the late 1960s, the major studios, adapting the marketing innovations of their record divisions, began to target a crucial segment of the marketplace they had to that point largely ignored—the youth audience.

A new generation of ‘movie brat’ filmmakers allowed Hollywood to capitalise on the youth market’s interest in art cinema by adapting European innovations in sound design, combining art cinema aesthetics with recent rock hits released by the studio labels. The affiliation between film and popular music thus allowed the new entertainment conglomerates to fully capitalise on the emergence of the youth market, via corporate synergy. By the late 1970s unprecedented revenues generated by cross-media packages such as Saturday Night Fever and Grease firmly established New Hollywood. This study argues, then, that as with the contemporary global entertainment conglomerates that underpin it, New Hollywood is, essentially, a product of the film industry’s investment in popular music. With the youth market dictating the terms of contemporary entertainment in the late twentieth century Hollywood transformed itself, with the aid of rock music, into New Hollywood.
This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.
Contents

List of Abbreviations x  
Acknowledgments xi  
Introduction—  
‘Sing a Song of Cash’: Cinema, Music and the Advent of New Hollywood xiii  
Methodology xv  
Literature Review xx  
Defining ‘New Hollywood’ xxiv  
Chapter Outlines xxvii  

Chapter One—  
Hollywood and Music: Origins of the Entertainment Conglomerates 1  
After ‘After the Ball’: Music Publishing in the 1890s 3  
Mechanical Reproduction, Performance Rights, and the Formation of ASCAP 6  
Cinema Exhibition and Music 9  
The ‘Wagnerisation’ of Silent Film Musical Accompaniment 10  
ASCAP and Cinema Exhibition 14  
One Hundred and Ten-Piece Orchestras in Every Small Town 17  
Conclusion 23  

Chapter Two—  
‘Turn Your Dreams to Gold’: 29  
Hollywood and the Battle for Control of Popular Music  
‘Tasting big money’: the Early 1930s Publishing Boom 29  
The Talkie, Technology and Musical Labour 31  
‘Like Wagner, Only Louder’: King Kong and the Studio Film Score 36  
‘We Got a Lot of What it Takes to Get Along’: Warner Bros. Revives the Musical 41  
Hollywood, ASCAP and Radio 47  
‘A major and permanent irritation’: Radio and Music Licensing 49  
The Advent of the National Radio Networks 52  
Conclusion 54  

Chapter Three—  
The Wages of Synergy: Hollywood Takes on the Radio Networks 59  
Competition and Collusion Between Hollywood and the Radio Networks 60  
The Warner Bros. Radio Boycott 65  
Warner Bros. Goes Off the Air 71  
The Immediate Origins of the 1939 ASCAP/Radio War 76  
Conclusion 83
Chapter Four—

‘The music people like is the music people hear’:

Outcomes of the ASCAP/BMI Split for Hollywood and Popular Music

- Ten Months of Silence on Tin Pan Alley
- Opening the Pop Stream: the Rise of the ‘Have Not’ Publishers
- The Rebirth of the Recording Industry
- A ‘New Racket’: The Record Industry and Music Publishing
- ‘Hitler and Tojo and Shellac and Petrillo’
- Hillbilly and Race Music on the Jukebox
- ‘Stratosphere Boogie’: Capitol Records and the Commercialisation of Regional Sounds
- The End of Traditional Song Plugging
- Conclusion

Chapter Five—

Scoring for a New Industry: Film Music in the Early Post-Studio Era

- Bad Investments: Studio ‘Disk Company Affiliations’
- Till the Clouds Roll By: The Hollywood Musical Sustains Tin Pan Alley
- The Proper Setting: Industrial Self-referentiality in Singin’ in the Rain
- The Classical Hollywood Score in the 1940s and 1950s
- Jazz, Pop and Hollywood Scoring Convention
- Preserving the Composer
- The Post-Studio Score: Packaged Movies, Packaged Music
- Conclusion

Chapter Six—

‘Infamous! Barbaric!’: Hollywood and the Problem of Rock and Roll

- ‘Rock Around the Clock’ and the Rise of the Youth Audience
- The Record Business in the Mid-1950s: R&B, Hillbilly, and Rock and Roll
- Rock and Roll and the Diegetic Realm of the Teen
- Rock Around the Clock: Addressing the Unknown Audience
- ‘Rocksploitation’: Negotiating Generational Division through Rock and Roll
- The Girl Can’t Help It: Defending the Teen Audience
- The End of 1950s Rocksploitation
- Conclusion

Chapter Seven—

‘An early clue to the new direction’: Narratives of Cross-media Synergy

- The Elvis Oeuvre: ‘Twelve songs and lots of girls’
- Elvis and the Remnants of the Studio System
- Elvis and the ‘Juvenile Audience Sector’
- ‘Their first full length, hilarious action-packed film’: A Hard Day’s Night
- A Day in the Life: Comparing Loving You and A Hard Day’s Night
- ‘An Odd, Metatextual Creature’: European Influence in A Hard Day’s Night
- The ‘Elvis model’, the ‘Beatles model’, and the 1960s LP Market
- Capitalising on Cross-media Success
- Conclusion
List of Abbreviations

ABC—American Broadcasting Company
AFM—American Federation of Musicians
AIMP—Associated Independent Music Publishers
ARC—American Record Company
ASCAP—American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers
AT&T—American Telephone & Telegraph
BMI—Broadcast Music, Incorporated
C&W—Country and Western
CBS—Columbia Broadcasting System
ERPI—Electrical Research Products Incorporated
FCC—Federal Communications Commission
FRC—Federal Radio Commission
GE—General Electric
GEC—Global Entertainment Conglomerate
MBS—Mutual Broadcasting System
MPTOA—Motion Picture Theatre Owners of America
MPPA—Music Publishers Protection Association
NAB—National Association of Broadcasters
NADJ—National Association of Disc Jockeys
NAPA—National Association of Performing Artists
NARM—National Association of Record Merchandisers
NBC—National Broadcasting Company
NRA—National Recovery Act
R&B—Rhythm and Blues
RCA—Radio Corporation of America
RIAA—Recording Industry Association of America
UIB—United Independent Broadcasting
Acknowledgments

I would like to sincerely thank the following people for their encouragement, assistance and advice during the preparation of this thesis: my supervisors Amanda Howell and Anthony May, the administrative staff of the School of Humanities (especially Janice Mitchell, Rebecca Ward and Tracey Michel-Innocend), David Baker, Albert Moran, Kay Ferres, Peter Freeman and the University of Queensland School of Music, Elizabeth Davies, Rea Turner, and the rest of my fellow postgraduate students. Finally, this work would not have been possible without the support of Marilyn and Paul Messenger and Gianita Ricato.
Introduction—

‘Sing a Song of Cash’: Cinema, Music and the Advent of New Hollywood

Talking machines, talking pictures, records, radio sets, microphones, were all utterly dependent on pop music.¹

Let’s all be thankful that we’ve weathered the crash,
From now on let’s all sing a song of cash.
- ‘The Goldiggers’ Song (We’re in the Money)²

The study of the relationship between popular music and film is still an emerging field, with many as yet unexamined areas. This is partly seen as the result of a perceived language barrier separating the visually preoccupied area of film studies and the aural concerns of musicology and music theory. Film musicologist Anahid Kassabian has complained of an ‘expert discourse ideology’ associated with music studies, which has dissuaded film theoreticians from attempting sustained analyses of the processes of film scoring as they feel unqualified to discuss music.³ Yet even areas requiring little or no musical knowledge—industrial assessments of the use of film in music, for example—have received relatively little scholarly attention.

Such projects are not helped by the paucity of industrial analysis dealing with popular music, especially the recording industry. Two essays in particular, one lamenting perceived inadequacies in the study of popular music, the other highlighting omissions in the field of film studies, have inspired this dissertation. Cultural studies scholar Lawrence Grossberg argues that ‘rock theory’ cannot progress until a sustained project of industrial musical analysis has taken place, noting that ‘even as we learn more about some aspects of popular music, we seem to know less and less about other absolutely crucial dimensions of its existence: namely its institutional and economical conditions’.⁴
Grossberg asserts that, unlike film studies, popular music studies has suffered from its inability to establish a standardised vocabulary with which to ground research, analysis and discussion. This is due to the lack of an ‘appropriate starting point’, such as any extensive industrial and economic work on the music business and its history. Because of this no ‘argument can begin’, as popular music studies ‘has never undertaken such a project in a serious and collective way; in fact, for whatever reasons, it seems unwilling and apparently unable to take on this project’. One needs only note the scarcity of any substantive analysis of the two musical careers that had the largest commercial and cultural impact in the twentieth century—those of Elvis Presley and the Beatles—to understand why popular culture scholars such as Grossberg have expressed dissatisfaction with the state of popular music studies.

Film historian Douglas Gomery, meanwhile, has detected a similar unwillingness to examine the day-to-day workings of the film industry, but stresses that ‘although we may wish that cinema was not a business, we none the less need to study the industrial character of film in order to understand fully the impact and influence of motion pictures’. As key examples have shown—in particular Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson’s 1985 work *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*—industrial and economic concerns have a manifest influence on all forms of cultural production, and Hollywood, the institution that produced ‘the dominant art form and format of the twentieth century’, lies at the centre of such production. Elsewhere, Gomery has stressed that by ‘understanding how...corporate strategies have changed, historians of Hollywood can better understand how the “film industry” as business, social and cultural practice has continued to dominate mass entertainment image making’. Noting Hollywood’s impact on the film industries of other nations, Gomery argues that further
investigation is needed to gauge American cinema’s influence over all cultural industries that have been forced to deal ‘with the power of Hollywood’.

With Grossberg’s and Gomery’s calls for further research in mind, *Calling the Tune: Hollywood and the Business of Music* takes the form of a cross-disciplinary industrial history of the relationship between Hollywood and the US music industry between the 1920s and the 1970s. These decades are here identified as a crucial timeframe in the emergence of the modern entertainment conglomerates that dominate contemporary cultural production.

**Methodology**

Outlining the historical realist approach to film studies, Robert C. Allan and Douglas Gomery cite critical realist philosopher Roy Bhaskar’s contention that the world “consists of mechanisms not events.” The primary concern of this study, then, involves delineating the generative mechanisms set into motion by Hollywood’s sometimes solicited, sometimes mandatory relationship with the US music business, and assessing noteworthy industrial events and aesthetic outcomes. To do so, this work will employ the four stages of film history methodology suggested by Allan and Gomery: isolating points of historical convergence; analysing individual mechanisms within that convergence; examining the numerous interrelationships between generative mechanisms; and assessing the impact of these mechanisms.

This thesis thus highlights relevant aspects of historical convergence, including but not limited to: the takeover of the US music publishing industry by the major Hollywood studios in the late 1920s; the formation of Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI) by the national radio networks in the late 1930s as a bulwark against the studio-dominated music licensing body the American Society of Composers, Authors
and Publishers (ASCAP); widespread investment in the recording industry by the major studios in the 1950s; and the mergers and acquisitions that by the 1970s triggered the formation of the modern entertainment conglomerates.

Also, *Calling the Tune* analyses the key individual mechanisms within that convergence: the formation of ASCAP in the 1910s; the advent of sound-on-film in the 1920s; the rise of radio in the 1930s; the post-war ascension of the record business at the expense of music publishing; the growth of the youth audience for film and music in the 1960s, and so on. In doing so, it takes into account the numerous interrelationships between these generative mechanisms: for example, the studios’ investment in music publishing in the late 1920s was necessitated by the sharp increase in music licensing fees after the transition to sound film; the comparable investment in record labels in the 1950s was a by-product of the success of BMI, the latter a product of ASCAP’s conflict with radio in the 1930s, a clash sparked in large part by Hollywood; and it was via these recording divisions that the major studios discovered the importance of the emerging youth audience in the 1960s.

Ultimately, this study assesses the impact and relative importance of these causal mechanisms for film history. These include the adoption of sound film, which was spurred in part by Warner Bros’ desire to standardise film music accompaniment; the conventionalisation of the film score resulting from issues of labour that arose during the transition to sound; Hollywood’s control of the dissemination of popular music in the 1930s, which the studios viewed primarily as an adjunct to a new film genre, the movie musical; the reshaping of the post-war landscape of American popular music, a direct consequence of the formation of BMI; the revival of the movie musical in the 1950s, necessitated by the studios’ desire to restimulate their publishing catalogues in the face of the BMI-led onslaught of regional and urban
musical styles previously marginalised under ASCAP’s dominance; Hollywood’s part in the rise of rock and roll in the 1950s; and how rock and roll led the studios to a new understanding of the audience for film.

As Allan and Gomery argue, ‘generative mechanisms in history do not operate in isolation from each other’. Yet despite this understanding, outside analyses of the post-1970s era of conglomeration and synergy, there appears to have been reluctance by film historians to draw from, or even acknowledge, relationships between Hollywood and other branches of the entertainment industry. Likewise, with the notable exception of work by Russel Sanjek and his son David, popular music studies seemingly has little to say about other cultural industries with which it is intertwined; indeed, the scant industrial analysis afforded the music business even at this late stage—with the major record labels seemingly in their death throes tends to view even those crucial, inexorably interlocked divisions of the music industry itself (publishing and recording, for example) in isolation.

In order to redress these perceived imbalances, Calling the Tune presents a bi-disciplinary historiographical analysis of key studies of both film and popular music history. It also draws heavily on film and music trade journals published between the 1910s and the 1970s, with approximately 350 citations drawn from articles dating back to 1914. These trade publications and industry journals include Variety, Boxoffice, Cashbox and Billboard. By ‘cross-matching’ causal mechanisms associated with two of the key cultural industries of the past century—processes that have for the most part remained segregated within both film studies and popular music studies—this thesis serves to support Allan and Gomery’s contention that,

...film is a complex historical phenomenon (an art form, economic institution, technology, cultural product) which, since its inception, has participated in many networks of relationships. In other words,
Put simply, then, this study seeks to learn more about Hollywood by looking at how it has interacted with another predominant commercial medium, music.

*Calling the Tune* is an historical-industrial examination of the ‘roots’ of modern marketing synergy, but one that also looks at the formal and stylistic outcomes for the prime texts of the film and music industries, the commercial Hollywood film and the popular music recording. Perhaps because of the lack of an historical account encompassing both the film and music industries, film music studies has appeared primarily concerned with the ‘imposition’ of the pop score on contemporary film soundtracks in recent decades, which has superseded the traditional musical language of film, the orchestral score. At the same time, few histories of popular music acknowledge the influence of industrial forces on popular music style. But an adequate assessment of the complex role of music, both as a film element and more generally as a key component of cultural production, must at least in part be based on an accurate historical description of the relationship between the industries involved in its creation. With these issues in mind, this study asks, ‘How much influence has Hollywood had on the music we listen to, and, in return, how has popular music impacted the film text?’
In conjunction with a review of theoretical work on film, music, and, of course, film music, the historical industrial material herein provides a structure within which to analyse the reciprocal spheres of influence between cinema and music. In order to locate any such influence, textual analyses of relevant films from key periods in the industrial relationship between cinema and music are provided. These have been designed to compliment and provide justification for the synthesis of material outlining the interconnecting histories of the film and music industries throughout the twentieth century. For example, Chapter Two offers an extended analysis of the musical soundtrack for *King Kong* (1933), as this film represents a key moment in the conventionalisation of the Hollywood film score. The next critical stage in the textual relationship between film and soundtrack, according to the concerns of this thesis, takes place within the post-war musical, thus several textual analyses of relevant Hollywood musicals appear in Chapter Five. Via these and other textual analyses of relevant films, we will see numerous examples of Hollywood’s power over popular music marketing and production, and in turn track music’s influence on film form.

Some caveats are here necessary. It should be stressed that this study is concerned primarily with the industrial processes at work within the production and dissemination of popular culture, and not issues surrounding audience reception for film or musical performance (although at times it will be necessary to touch upon those areas). Also, while the role of the radio networks is dealt with in extensive detail throughout chapters Two, Three and Four (in particular, the undermining of ASCAP’s power via the formation of BMI), the main focus here is the US film industry and its relationship with the US popular music industry. The term ‘popular music industry’ is itself in some ways misleading as, to state it broadly, there were two popular music industries in the twentieth century: music publishing dominated until the 1950s, from
which time the recording industry began to generate the bulk of music revenue. As will be demonstrated here, Hollywood played an integral role in the processes leading to the transition from a publishing-based industry to one reliant on record sales.

This study, then, primarily examines the period between the mid-1920s, when cross-media conglomeration began, and the late-1970s, by which time Hollywood had effectively consolidated the processes of commercial synergy. Since 1977, Hollywood has in many ways conducted a bi-polar marketing strategy. On one hand it focuses on the flagship mainstream family action blockbuster genre picture, films that attempt to maximize profits by appealing to the largest possible audience, as in the Star Wars, Indiana Jones and Lord of the Rings series. On the other hand, though, are youth-oriented films such as Saturday Night Fever, Grease, Flashdance, Top Gun, 8 Mile, Get Rich or Die Tryin’, Hannah Montana: The Movie, and Scott Pilgrim vs. the World. These more specialised films rely heavily on tie-in soundtrack albums and hit singles to both attract an audience and to function effectively within a horizontally integrated entertainment industry. It is these types of films that will be identified as the one of the chief outcomes of the processes examined herein.

Literature Review

While the bulk of this dissertation’s review of relevant literature is embedded throughout the entirety of the text, it is necessary at this stage to briefly survey some of the key writing on film and music relevant to its concerns. As noted, the key methodology at play here will involve an attempt to synthesize what little historical-industrial material there is on popular music—studies by Russell Sanjek (1988, 1996), Philip H. Ennis (1992) and Reebee Garofalo (2008) stand as rare examples—with similar work on the industrial history of cinema. Film scholars such as Jon Lewis
(2001), Thomas Elsaesser (2001), Thomas Doherty (2002) and the aforementioned Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, have all convincingly proposed that Hollywood was the dominant cultural institution of the twentieth century, and that the omnipresence of American commercial cinema impacted other related cultural products. Thus this study seeks to investigate the effects, both economic and aesthetic, of this domination on one particularly high-profile cultural industry of the past century, popular music; in turn, it seeks out evidence of any reciprocal impact that the music industry may have had on filmmaking.

Writers such as Justin Wyatt (1994), Fred Karlin (1994), Tony Thomas (1997) and Stephen Prince (2000) have all suggested that the use of popular music in cinema is rarely motivated by the structural, thematic, or aesthetic requirements of a film, but rather the purely commercial interests of the global entertainment corporations that emerged in the 1960s and had consolidated their power by the 1980s. Some critics (Strauss 1996, for example) have argued that record labels force commercial music on filmmakers in order to sell soundtrack albums. While not denying such possibilities, the hypothesis presented here has it that the record labels are in reality an intricate part of an industrial structure that Hollywood itself has long dominated, and has drawn financial and formal sustenance from since the 1920s.

While authors such as Gorbman (1987), Flinn (1992), Kalinak (1992), Kassabian (1992), Prendergast (1992), Brown (1994), Karlin (1994), Marmorstein (1997), Thomas (1997), Lack (2000), and Dickinson (2008) have offered thorough analyses of the relationship between film and music, there remains a lack of historical analysis that encompasses both the film and music industries. Exceptions include exemplary work by Jeff Smith (1998) and John Mundy (1999), but this general neglect remains a substantial critical oversight. Such disregard becomes even more
conspicuous when one considers not only the ubiquity of popular music in film since the 1960s, but the measures Hollywood has often taken to control a medium that for much of the twentieth century it viewed as competition within the leisure industry. These actions took the form of the film studios’ extensive investment in music publishing in the late 1920s at the dawn of sound era, and their establishment, en masse, of in-house record labels during the 1950s. As will be demonstrated, Hollywood’s interventions into the music business created a type of industrial co-dependency that altered both film form and popular music style.

While many of the authors listed above provide analyses that encompass broader musical categories, Mundy’s and Smith’s remain the two most sustained and extensive examinations of the relationship between film and popular music published thus far. Mundy’s *Popular Music on Screen* contains relatively little on the industrial aspects of popular music, but his ‘visual economy of music’ theory examines music’s influence on film form, and effectively supports his claim that the ‘alliance between popular music and the screen media—cinema, television and video—sits as the heart of contemporary popular culture’. Mundy, though, focuses mostly on the ‘closed’ world of the film musical. While the Hollywood musical also plays a key role here, this study concerns itself more with genres in which popular music did not conventionally ‘belong’ during the classical Hollywood period; that is, one of its key threads traces the progress of pre-recorded pop music as a surrogate for conventional nondiegetic music scoring in the dramatic feature film during the New Hollywood era. To do so, it first examines those industrial structures which encouraged such an evolution.

Smith’s *The Sounds of Commerce*, on the other hand, is thoroughly grounded in the interrelationship between the film and music industries. Ultimately, though, his
analysis only goes as far as emphasising the emergence of the film soundtrack album as key element in film promotion and a staple of the recording industry, in turn charting the effect of this development on film scoring convention. This is mostly due to Smith’s conviction that the move towards incidental music in the 1950s—that is, the emergence of non-orchestral music as part of the film score—expanded the market for soundtrack albums and paved the way for the rock music compilation score. Hollywood’s gradual move toward screen realism in the 1950s did indeed allow the film composer more flexibility, as the increasing inclusion of quotidian items such as stereos and radios within the diegesis expanded the possibilities of the film soundtrack; but equally important were the mounting corporate ties between the studios and the record labels. Smith’s book of course examines this aspect at length, but this current study outlays additional causal elements—including issues of labour—and posits alternative industrial and aesthetic outcomes.

Despite the fact that, as Toby Miller has noted, ‘the screen is a cluster of cultural industries’, the film and music industries have too often been studied in isolation from each other. Many of those scholars listed above who have embarked on studies of film and music did so in an attempt to counter the pervasive visualist bias of film studies which ignores much that we hear in the cinema (even Miller’s use of the word ‘screen’ inadvertently marginalises crucial film elements). As Richard Maltby argues, any ‘overview of Hollywood’s post-war industrial history must emphasize convergence, consolidation and synergy among the audio-visual entertainment industries’. Calling the Tune surveys the co-mingling of film and music within the context of their respective modes of production while also attempting to develop effective cross-disciplinary methodologies with which to consider film and musical texts.
Defining ‘New Hollywood’

These broader considerations of film and music have here been given a specific focus by implicating their industrial and aesthetic relationship in the emergence of a ‘New Hollywood’ in the late 1960s. Indeed, the central argument of this thesis is that the advent of New Hollywood was a direct product of the affiliation between movies and pop music. In the film studies compendium, *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, scholars such as Steve Neale, Murray Smith, Richard Maltby and Douglas Gomery appear to wrestle with concrete definitions and points of origin for New Hollywood. The spectre that looms over this discourse of provenance is Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson’s *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, a ‘landmark work’ which provided substance to the ‘notion of a “classical” American cinema’ by outlining clearly the industrial underpinnings of the conventions of film style.\(^{20}\)

By limiting their study to the period 1917 to 1960, Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson prompted much deliberation as to the appropriate scrutiny of the post-classical period. As Neale and Smith note,

> ...the precise nature, indeed the precise temporal parameters, of...“contemporary Hollywood cinema” remain relatively unexplored and hence open to debate and further research. Is the “New” Hollywood most usefully described as “post-classical, postmodern” (or neither)? Are the most revealing criteria industrial, institutional or aesthetic”? What exactly has changed since the 1940s?\(^{21}\)

Smith also notes ‘the sheer number of “New Hollywoods”’.\(^{22}\) For some writers, New Hollywood begins where Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson leave off, at the dawn of the 1960s; others trace it back further to the 1948 ‘Paramount Decree’ anti-trust ruling that spelled the end of the major studios’ vertical integration system.\(^{23}\)

More commonly perhaps, points of origin tend to fall into two camps, one for the most part aesthetic, the other primarily economic. The former cites the emergence
of the ‘Hollywood Renaissance’, heralded by the release of *Bonnie and Clyde* in 1967, as the starting date for New Hollywood; the latter nominates the advent of the summer ‘corporate blockbuster’, following the success of *Jaws* in 1975, as a more appropriate marker for lasting changes in film economics and style. This present thesis argues that the ‘Hollywood Renaissance’, largely an aesthetic construct, also marked the beginnings of ‘New Hollywood’, for the most part an economic construct, and that popular music played the key role in merging these considerations. In other words, to answer Neale and Smith’s question, what changed after the 1940s was the relationship between Hollywood and music.

Conglomeration within the entertainment industry of course figures in this hypothesis. Some scholars argue that this process began in the 1950s, largely due to post-war changes in leisure, as ‘the studios looked for ways…to diversify their media interests [as] a response to post-war boom in entertainment and leisure activities [and] the increasing segmentation of media audiences in a period of general prosperity and population growth’. In the provocatively-titled film studies compendium, *The End of Cinema as We Know It: American Film in the Nineties*, Jon Lewis writes of the ‘growing conglomeratization’ throughout the 1980s and 1990s which transformed ‘what were once upon a time just film studios’.

While it is correct that, as Schatz argues, a ‘New Hollywood’ emerged as a product of this diversification, the process that he and other authors describe begins much earlier in Hollywood’s history than is commonly acknowledged. This dissertation takes issue with the critical consensus that corporate synergies at work within the global entertainment industry are exclusively a post-studio phenomenon. Conglomeration alone cannot explain the advent of New Hollywood; as we will see, the major studios have been a part of—indeed have been the mechanism behind—the
emergence of multimedia entertainment conglomerates since as early as the 1920s. In other words, once the talkie era began, Warner Bros., Paramount, MGM, Fox et al. were already much more than ‘just film studios’.

So, while the origins of the period of US film industry transition referred to as New Hollywood are indeed located in the formation of the Global Entertainment Conglomerates, it is here argued that those conglomerates began to be assembled during the Hollywood studio period, in the era in which the silent picture gave way to the sound film. In fact, as this thesis will explain, from 1927 onwards Hollywood owned, controlled and shaped the two major commercial entertainment forms of the twentieth century, film and music. One of the ‘Big Five’ studios in particular, Warner Bros., was so aggressive in claiming a stake within the music industry, that the corporate strategies it employed in the 1930s almost single-handedly reshaped American popular song.

In outlining these corporate ties and other confluences between the two major entertainment arms of the twentieth century, it will become apparent that most of these companies were in truth ‘just film studios’ for no more than a decade. A significant portion of this thesis will argue that Hollywood dominated the cultural production of popular music throughout the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. This dominion not only encouraged a closer relationship between Hollywood and the music business—and film and music; it also provided the catalyst for later industrial, social and cultural changes that would redefine Hollywood’s relationship with its audience. The process escalated in 1950s as the studios entered the recording industry, and reached a climax in the late 1960s when the rise of the youth audience brought the spheres of film and popular music together, crystallising in the form of New Hollywood.
Chapter Outlines

The key periods in the relationship between film and music noted above include the consolidation of the Classical Hollywood film score in the early 1930s, the two ‘golden eras’ of the Hollywood musical in the mid-1930s and the early 1950s, the teen exploitation/jukebox musical period of the mid-1950s rock and roll era, and the art cinema-influenced New Hollywood era of the late 1960s. All of these phases provide evidence of Hollywood simultaneously attempting to maintain authority over a competing cultural industry while also trying to negotiate a place for that industry within the film text; thus textual analyses of exemplary films from these periods, such as *King Kong*, *Till the Clouds Roll By*, *Rock Around the Clock*, *The Graduate* and others, also help provide this dissertation with meaning and structure.

But the roots of this relationship predate the classical Hollywood film score. Chapter One outlines the historical background of music publishing in the US, and in particular the formation of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), the music licensing body that dominated the US music business for the first half of the twentieth century. After court rulings during the 1910s empowered ASCAP to collect payment for the public use of copyrighted music, cinema owners quickly became their most prominent clients. Musical accompaniment was of course performed live throughout the silent era, so the advent of the sound motion picture in 1926 and 1927 saw ASCAP shift its attentions from the exhibitors of films to the producers of films. Rather than pay what they felt were exorbitant licensing fees, the major Hollywood studios opted instead to buy the key publishing firms and thus control the process of creating musical accompaniment for motion pictures in-house, as part of the studio system.
This annexation of the music business by Hollywood set into motion mechanisms that shaped film and popular music for decades to come. As Chapter Two shows, by the early 1930s Hollywood controlled ASCAP and thus was in effect responsible for the overall supervision of American popular music, moulding it to suit its own means. This meant that Tin Pan Alley was almost exclusively drafted into the service of the Hollywood musical. Meanwhile, the end of the silent era had also triggered turmoil within the arena of musical labour. Negotiations between the studios and the American Federation of Musicians—whose members constituted the bulk of theatre musicians made redundant by sound technology—resulted in the establishment of large studio orchestras as a mandatory presence that would dictate film score convention throughout the studio era. Together these developments would govern Hollywood’s relationship with film music, enshrining the orchestral score as the requisite style for nondiegetic film accompaniment, while consigning popular music to either the Hollywood musical, or the diegetic realm within other genres, until the 1960s.

While Hollywood was consolidating its relationship with film music, off screen the studios’ new-found power within the music business was creating discord, as Chapter Three demonstrates. At the same time that the movie musical was proving to be the greatest promotional tool music publishing had ever known, radio was rapidly growing in power by cultivating an equally contingent relationship with Tin Pan Alley. Popular music helped the recently-formed national networks attract a mass audience, but CBS and NBC began to resist the constraints placed on them by the Hollywood-controlled ASCAP. As the Depression took hold, many film studios struggled; yet radio continued to earn record profits, relying on the pop song to attract millions of listeners for advertisers. Warner Bros., the most powerful presence on the
ASCAP board, argued that network license fees were disproportionately small and withdrew its copyrights—almost half of ASCAP’s catalogue—in protest.

The gambit failed—radio audiences seemed not to care—so Warner Bros. tried another tack, rejoining ASCAP and applying increased pressure on the board to raise radio fees. In this the studio proved successful, and thus triggered a rupture within the music industry that would have far-reaching consequences. When, in 1940, ASCAP announced that it would double licensing fees for radio, the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) responded by banning all ASCAP copyrights from the air and announcing the formation of a new music licensing firm, Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI).

Chapter Four outlines how, as ASCAP controlled virtually the entire American songbook, BMI turned to public domain material and those musical styles ASCAP had demonstrated little interest in, rural and urban styles such as hillbilly and blues. Once more the radio audience appeared untroubled by the disappearance of ASCAP material from their favourite programs, so the Society was forced to acquiesce to the NAB’s demands for more equitable licensing rates. But, after gaining a foothold in the music business, BMI quickly transformed it and began to erode ASCAP’s power. BMI’s focus on non-mainstream material stimulated sectors of music production that had hitherto been denied access to radio play and other elements of the national music industry infrastructure. This in turn prompted the establishment of hundreds of new independent publishing and recording companies based in cities far removed from Tin Pan Alley, and led to the commercial rise of R&B and country music.

Hollywood’s failed attempts to maintain dominion over popular music thus resulted in the gradual collapse of established modes of song promotion designed
around catalogues of enduring copyrights or ‘standards’. As Chapter Five shows, BMI empowered the recording industry, long considered the final and negligible link in the traditional Tin Pan Alley system. But by 1951 recorded music was generating the bulk of music industry revenue, creating ‘instant’ hits with untested material. The studios’ catalogues of standards had thus been rendered moribund, so to re-stimulate interest in this older material, Hollywood began producing musicals featuring well-known songs from the pre-war era. Elsewhere in other film genres, despite the dissolution of the studio system after the Paramount Decree, the classical Hollywood score continued to dominate, although the rise of independent package productions encouraged a moderated incorporation of non-orchestral styles such as jazz.

However, one newer musical style, rock and roll, found few sympathetic ears among Hollywood producers, composers, and orchestrators. Appearing in the mid-1950s as a hybrid of country and rhythm and blues, rock and roll was a direct product of BMI’s stimulation of the independent sector, and Chapter Six examines Hollywood’s response to its commercial rise. Rock and roll helped boost record sales to unprecedented levels, but cinematically the genre was marginalised in a string of independently-produced, low budget teen exploitation films. The two most successful rock and roll acts of the 1950s and 1960s, Elvis Presley and the Beatles, help illustrate the evolution of the film industry’s relationship with popular music at this crucial juncture, as Chapter Seven shows.

Having seen their control of the music industry eroded by BMI, in the 1950s Hollywood attempted an intervention arguably even more dramatic than its investment in publishing in the 1920s: by 1958, after two years of frenzied activity, all of the major studios were directly involved in the recording industry. Chapter Eight outlines how, through their newly-established (or acquired) record labels, the studios
used the traditional promotional methods of the Hollywood star system to develop their own ‘clean-teen’ rock and roll stars and reclaim power in the music business. This provided their publishing firms with re-entry to the pop market, which ASCAP publishers had largely been shut out of since the rock and roll era began, and gave the struggling studio record labels, which had enjoyed minimal success marketing soundtrack albums, a foothold in the record business. Several of the studio labels were thus perfectly positioned when the market for rock and pop albums exploded in the mid-to-late 1960s after the arrival of the Beatles.

The timing of this expansion into the rock market proved fortuitous, as the film industry was in the midst of a financial crisis. Hollywood seemed unable to detect any connection between the dwindling box office returns suffered by its big budget family movies and the rise of the youth market for recorded music. As their record subsidiaries grew into their most profitable divisions, however, the major studios began to realise that there might indeed be some correlation between the market for rock music and the cinema audience. Chapter Nine discusses some of the outcomes of this belated discovery, including the emergence of a fragmented audience for cinema, the introduction of rock music into the film score during the Hollywood Renaissance, and the concomitant rise of entertainment conglomerates such as MCA and Warner Communications.

Finally, Chapter Ten analyses how these processes coalesced as the economic and aesthetic construct ‘New Hollywood’ in the late 1960s and 1970s. While the Hollywood Renaissance proved to be a false dawn in terms of industry stability, many of its textual and marketing innovations continued into the blockbuster era of the mid-1970s. Rock music proved ideal as both a formal element that could help bind the increasingly fragmented film text, and as a merchandising lure for young audiences.
Around the same time that *Jaws* and *Star Wars* established the summer blockbuster model, *Saturday Night Fever* and *Grease*—entertainment packages that spawned blockbuster movies as well as blockbuster albums—confirmed the efficacy of corporate synergy, and set the template for Hollywood’s conglomerated, high concept future.

When it became obvious in the 1960s and 1970s that entertainment had largely become the domain of the young, Hollywood was forced to act. Throughout its history, Hollywood has called upon its considerable resources in an attempt to ensure primacy among the chief leisure industries, constantly devising methods to combat or capitalise on threats from radio, the recording industry, television, video games and the internet. With the youth market dictating the terms of contemporary entertainment by 1968, Hollywood transformed itself into New Hollywood which, like the contemporary global entertainment conglomerates that underpin it, was a product of the film industry’s investment in popular music. Put simply, the term New Hollywood refers to a new paradigm of formal film possibilities brought about by an altered industrial model. *Calling the Tune: Hollywood and the Business of Music* specifically locates cinema’s relationship with music at the centre of these industrial and stylistic changes.

Endnotes

1 Whitcomb 1994, p.96.
2 Written by Al Dubin and Harry Warren, M. Witmark & Sons Publishing, 1933. This line is taken from a verse of the song that was included only in sheet music printed in Britain (see http://www.harrywarren.org).
5 Ibid, p.63.
6 Ibid, p.67.
7 Gomery 1998, p.245.
8 Lewis 2001, p.2.
10 Quoted Allan & Gomery, p.15.
11 Allan & Gomery, pp.17-21.
12 Ibid, p.16.
13 See, for example, Morley, Paul 2010, ‘Are we witnessing the death throes of pop music? Take a look around you and the signs are everywhere’ in The Observer, 14 November, p.29.
14 Allan and Gomery, pp.16-17. Italics in original.
18 Miller 2001, p.308.
19 Maltby 1999, p.28.
20 Smith 1999, p.4.
24 King 2002, pp.8, 11, 54.
26 Lewis 2001, p.2.
Chapter One—

Hollywood and Music: Origins of the Entertainment Conglomerates

I myself would not go across the street to see or hear a talking picture. But music! That’s another story.

Harry Warner

Global entertainment conglomerates are a key element in the organisation of contemporary Hollywood, and the site of origin for the New Hollywood that emerged in the late 1960s. They are not, however, exclusive to these eras. This chapter will trace the origins of these conglomerates back further, to the 1920s. In 1927 Hollywood executed a dramatic intervention into the US music business, buying up most of the key US music publishing firms. Ostensibly this move was designed to reduce music licensing expenses for talkies, but the major studios—in particular Warner Bros., MGM and Paramount—soon realised the cross-marketing opportunities permitted by ownership of the two major commercial art forms of the twentieth century, film and music. Hollywood’s music publishing takeovers during the transition from silent to sound cinema altered both the dissemination and form of popular music, which during the 1930s became bound to the movie musical. For, by gaining majority ownership in the major music publishing houses, Hollywood also seized control of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP). As a result, for the better part of twenty years Hollywood managed American popular music.

Film historians and popular music scholars alike have tended to downplay or ignore the links between the US film and music industries. In addition to the takeovers discussed here, there are striking parallels between the two histories, as well as a notable exchange of key players, especially during Hollywood’s formative years. As Ian Whitcomb notes, Tin Pan Alley—the colloquial term for the New York-based song writing and publishing business—was ‘linked closely to Hollywood as many of the movie pioneers had served apprenticeships
in and around her’.  

Carl Laemmle was a music publisher before he founded Universal Studios, and others, such as Columbia head Harry Cohn and Paramount producer Buddy De Sylva, began their entertainment careers as song-pluggers.  

The recording industry, like music publishing, is another site of connection with Hollywood. As subsequent chapters will show, until after the Second World War the music publishing and music recording industries for the most part operated autonomously, often conducting an adversarial relationship. Hollywood developed separate relationships with both, and these relationships played a key (if inadvertent) role in consolidating the US music industry in the post-war era. Likewise, since the 1920s the film and recording industries shared a host of sound technologies and valuable attendant patents. Such confluences have been of little interest to film theorists and historians, but have piqued the curiosity of some popular music historians. Russell Sanjek, for example, begins *Pennies From Heaven*, his exhaustive study of the twentieth century music business, with a chapter devoted to early cinema history. Whereas film scholars have stressed that the apparatus of cinema developed out of a late 19th century culture of the visual, Sanjek notes the importance of the aural: Thomas Edison attempted to develop a ‘machine that would do for the eye what his talking machine was doing for the ear’. Edison initially adapted the cylinder apparatus of his phonograph to enable it to display a continuous stream of pictures when viewed through a magnifying lens. The early Kinetoscope was abandoned when Edison learned of the new Kodak camera, which utilized a roll of film, pointing the Edison Company in a different technological direction. This technological detour would not be the last time that developments in film and sound technologies would coincide.
After ‘After the Ball’: Music Publishing in the 1890s

Around the same time that the apparatuses of cinema and sound recording were being conceived and assembled, the music publishing industry was consolidating itself, albeit it in a somewhat disorganized and haphazard fashion. Pockets of publishing activity were based in cities such as Philadelphia, Chicago, and Baltimore, but the lack of any nation-wide coordination of sheet music publishing and promotion resulted in little ‘commercial drive’ in the music business to capitalise on the domestic popularity of the piano. In 1892, however, the sheet music for Charles K. Harris’s ‘After the Ball’ sold two million copies for Boston’s Oliver Ditson & Co., going on to sell a further three million by the turn of the century. The success of ‘After the Ball’ alerted the scattershot US music publishers to the previously hidden potential of their industry. Thanks to ‘After the Ball’, New York publishing houses such as M. Witmark & Sons, Feist and Frankenthaler, T.B. Harms and G. Schirmer glimpsed the true possibilities of the market for popular sheet music, and learned valuable lessons in marketing and promotion that would help forge ‘the most efficient music machine the world had yet seen’, Tin Pan Alley.

A notable example of post-‘After the Ball’ music industry consolidation was the establishment of the Music Publishers Association of America in 1895, which was initially formed ‘to elevate the tone and character’ of the music business. Self-regulation as a means to improve public standing via the formation of professional organizations was a tactic common to both the music and film industries, and in the late 1890s, the new music publishers association’s first order of business was to apply pressure on the US government to review copyright protection in the wake of the emerging popularity of the phonograph.

The subsequent 1897 revision to the US Copyright Act extended the original 1856 statute to cover music in the same way that it already sought to protect theatrical material from unlicensed public performance. The Berne Convention of 1886 had established an
international system of copyright for the protection of literary and artistic works between sovereign nations. Prior to the adoption of the Berne Convention, nations could refuse to recognize copyright held by foreign nationals; a work protected by copyright in the United States, for example, was freely reproducible in other countries. Although the United States did not join the Berne Convention, as it would have necessitated major changes to US copyright law, American songwriters nonetheless benefited from the strengthening of European regulations.

At this time, American music—particularly songs associated with minstrelsy, such as those by Stephen Foster (‘Oh! Susanna’, ‘Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair’, ‘Beautiful Dreamer’, etc.)—was indeed growing in popularity throughout Europe. The post-Berne Convention influx of royalties to the US from overseas, combined with those generated locally by ‘After the Ball’ and other successful sheets such as ‘Daisy Bell (Bicycle Built for Two)’, ‘Bill Bailey’ and ‘Shine On, Harvest Moon’, enabled the music business to grow and stabilize, encouraging publishers to standardize methods of promotion and song creation. The growing power of Tin Pan Alley, according to Reebee Garafalo, instigated a sea change in popular music, as unlike ‘the older, more traditional music-publishing houses, which issued a broad range of material, the “song factories” of Tin Pan Alley promoted an overwhelmingly successful formulaic pop mentality’. Indeed Tin Pan Alley’s output became so standardized that the more common chord sequences were referred to by songwriters as ‘Sears Roebuck’, ‘Montgomery Ward’, and ‘Woolworths’. The development of such commercially successful formulas—an institutionalized framework of creation for what had previously been considered a developing folk music—quickly encouraged a homogeny of musical style.

Music publishing benefited from the same social changes that improved the prospects of the nascent motion picture business at the turn of the century: most important was the growth of the leisure market, which expanded as real incomes rose and work hours
The mounting commercial success of sheet music in the 1890s also encouraged more players to enter the business, and the newer popular music song publishers encouraged and supported song style uniformity with aggressive marketing techniques and expanded promotional budgets.

By 1900, Tin Pan Alley had adopted the basic precepts of salesmanship established by John Henry Patterson’s National Cash Register Company. Thus was born the ‘song-plugger’, whose main task it was to convince popular vaudeville artists to feature the publisher’s latest tune in their acts, with offers of ‘everything from personal favours to songwriting credits’. In this way publishers actively subsidized potential hits, knowing that national exposure through vaudeville could generate enough sheet music sales to cover the cost of promotion—which could include up to $75,000 paid to a headline performer—many times over. Russell Sanjek lists some of the other methods employed by pluggers: audience ‘plants’ who would loudly request the latest additions to the catalogue; the free provision of sheet music arrangements to orchestra leaders (with the publisher’s name visible in large type); and stereopticon slides with printed lyrics designed to encourage audience sing-a-longs at vaudeville theatres where this older style of visual entertainment shared the bill with the latest entertainment fad, the motion picture.

With the early realization that vaudeville and theatre were ideal venues for song-plugging, songs began to be custom-made to suit these mediums. By 1906, theatrical performance was a $200,000,000-per-year industry in the United States, and so Tin Pan Alley concentrated on crafting ‘production music’ for plays and musical comedies, as well as songs custom-written for the stereopticon slide shows used as bumpers between live performances. The overt references to theatricality in Edward Madden and Gus Edwards’ ‘By the Light of the Silvery Moon’, first published in 1909, can, in this light, be read as a
self-conscious reference to music’s main site of dissemination, as well as handy stage directions for local vaudeville producers:

Place, park. Scene, dark
Silver moon is shining through the trees.
Cast, two—me, you
Sound of kisses floating on the breeze
Act One, begun. Dialogue, ‘Where would you like to spoon?’
My cue with you, ‘Underneath the silvery moon’

Chorus:

By the light of the silvery moon,
I want to spoon
With my honey I'll croon love’s tune.
Honey moon, keep a-shining in June
Your silvery beams will bring love dreams
We’ll be cuddling soon
By the silvery moon

Act Two, scene new
Roses blooming all around the place
Cast, three—you, me, preacher with a solemn-looking face
Choir sings, bell rings
Preacher says ‘You’re wed forevermore’
Act two, all through, every night the same encore

As Sanjek notes, a small body of theatrical producers controlled the stages of America, and their collusion with the publishers ensured a ‘virtual stranglehold over popular entertainment’ until 1916—until, that is, the rise of the ‘picture palace’ cinema strengthened the cultural power of motion pictures.

Mechanical Reproduction, Performance Rights, and the Formation of ASCAP

In 1910, over one hundred song sheets sold one million copies each, and the increased profits further spurred the New York publishing houses to marshal their growing interests into a cohesively organised industry. In the words of Philip Ennis, in the first decade of the twentieth century ‘the music publishing business was simple’, as the sole activity of music publishing firms was selling sheet music. Ennis also notes, however, that commercial expansion also engendered a ‘general crisis about intellectual property’, which was
manifested particularly in disagreements between sheet publishers, piano roll manufacturers, and the emerging recording companies.\textsuperscript{22}

In 1900, 3.75 million cylinders and discs (the latter soon to become the industry standard) were sold in the US; by 1909 the figure had grown to 12 million discs.\textsuperscript{23} This boost in sales was largely a product of recent consolidation in the fledgling recording industry: Columbia Graphophone, established in 1889, and The Victor Talking Machine Company, established in 1901, pooled their recording and pressing patents in 1902. This collusion ensured that the two companies survived the technological confusion of the early recording business, emerging virtually unchallenged as industry leaders by 1910, after most of their independent competitors had fallen by the wayside.

As the record business grew, though, there was no system in place for music publishers to capitalise on the recorded reproduction of their copyrights. With this deficiency in mind, the MPAA reactivated its pressure campaign on the US government, which lead to the 1909 amendment of the Copyright Act.\textsuperscript{24} This landmark licensing regulation immediately provided the publishers with access to two further, potentially huge, sources of musical income: property rights for mechanical reproduction, and public performance. The former, known in the industry as ‘mechanicals’, covered the player piano as well as the phonograph, while, even more lucratively, performance rights accounted for any live public performance of copyrighted material. Together these new points of collection would reshape the music business, as the publishers began to define the relationship between music and the music consumer:

It took considerable time and ingenuity for the publishers to harvest these routes to profit. The system they devised, with only slight modifications, operates to this day. The trick for the publishers was to find a connection between the out-of-home listener and the in-home purchaser.\textsuperscript{25}
The 1909 amendments to the copyright law also granted songwriters ownership of their material for the first time; previously composers had sold their songs to publishers outright, relinquishing any future claim on ownership or royalties. However, the right to seek compensation for any public performance of their work also presented the composers, and their publishers, with a massive logistical problem: the responsibility of collecting the monies generated by these performances. The impracticality of a composer attempting to account for every public performance of his or her work wherever that performance may take place throughout the country—be it in vaudeville theatres, concert halls, restaurants, or movie houses—prompted some of the more prominent composers, Victor Herbert and John Philip Sousa among them, to organise. Herbert was ‘perhaps the first popular American composer to realize the potential monetary gains writers might make from their work’.\textsuperscript{26} To the composer of ‘Ah! Sweet Mystery of Life’ it was readily apparent that a national organisation was needed to oversee the dispensing of licenses and the collection performance royalties.

In the wake of the 1909 amendment to the Copyright Act, in 1911 the world’s first performing rights society, France’s Société des Auteurs, Compositeurs et Editeurs de Musique (SACEM), opened an office in New York, quickly signing local songwriters such as Irving Berlin. By 1914, Herbert, with the backing of Sousa, had marshalled 170 of his fellow American composers to form the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP). Variety noted the secrecy surrounding these formative meetings involving the leading lights of the ‘precarious’ popular sheet music business.\textsuperscript{27} The new licensing body, which included 160 publishers,\textsuperscript{28} adopted SACEM’s Articles of Association on the 13\textsuperscript{th} of February.\textsuperscript{29} ASCAP would distribute blanket revenues to its members at rates based on a survey of public performances; the more performances a composer’s work garnered, the higher their rating, and thus the larger their royalty share. According to Ennis, ‘By far the most important task the Society would undertake was…monitoring the changing technologies
and uses of music and ensuring that its members got recompense for all of them’. In doing so, ASCAP was to exercise unprecedented control over American popular music, and several protracted licensing battles waged by the body—first with the film industry and later with radio at the behest of the film industry—would shape both the music business, and popular music itself, for the first half of the twentieth century.

*Cinema Exhibition and Music*

ASCAP’s first test case was a success, with the licensing body managing to extract royalties from Shanley’s Restaurant in New York for the public musical performance of Victor Herbert’s work. Ennis emphasises the significance of the Shanley’s case for the publishers: by the early teens, cabaret restaurants had developed into a ‘new strategic venue for publishers’, a key promotional link between the aforementioned ‘out-of-home and in-home audiences’. In addition, restaurants offered access to domestic respectability in that they attracted married middle-class couples rather than working class immigrants, unlike the soon-to-be extinct nickelodeons, or worse, burlesque houses. The Supreme Court ruled that, legally, Herbert and his publisher must be compensated by the management of Shanley’s for the public use of the composer's music, as “…the purpose of employing it is profit, and that is enough.” With a legal precedent set, and the Hotel Association thus obligated to pay license fees, an emboldened ASCAP went after the most prolific and profitable users of copyrighted music—the nation’s movie houses.

Moving picture shows had been accompanied by music since their inception, following the lead of pre-cinematic entertainments such as the Phantasmagoria and the Magic Lantern which had used accompaniment to enhance dramatic effect. In 1894 The Edison Company supplied cylinder recordings with almost all the shorts featured in its Kinetoscope peep-show machines, while Russell Lack lists a ‘dazzling array of recorded sound systems’
that were in use by 1900 for various forms of cinematic exhibition. Throughout the silent era various attempts to incorporate dialogue were attempted and abandoned, yet musical accompaniment remained a constant. By 1907 musical accompaniment was standard in nickelodeons, with theatres accommodating a phonograph, player piano, pianist, or a small orchestra. The musical styles played during this early period would help determine the relationship between cinema and music for decades to come.

Camille Saint-Saëns’ ‘Opus 128’, written for the French film *L’Assassinat du Duc de Guise* (1908), is often cited as the first specially-composed film score. More generally the type of music used to accompany early film exhibition in the US was left to theatre managers, who often acted on suggestions touted in industry trade publications. Mostly these tips consisted of ‘solemn, over-simplified accounts’ of musical accompaniment. In 1911, for example, *Motion Picture World*’s ‘Music for the Picture’ columnist Clarence E. Sinn explained how useful the ‘Wagnerian leitmotif’ could be in supporting filmed drama. Such pronouncements proved extremely influential; by the mid-teens, just as the fleapit nickelodeon had given way to the more prestigious picture palace, exhibitors attempted to attract a higher-class clientele by switching from ‘jackass’ ragtime accompaniment to classical music. The perceived cultural value of late-Romantic era orchestral music shaped much of the initial relationship between the film and music industries—and beyond—so it is worth outlining some of the theories designed to explain Richard Wagner’s hold over the film score.

The ‘Wagnerisation’ of Silent Film Musical Accompaniment

The work of late-Romantic composer Richard Wagner served as the ideal template for dramatic film scoring due to the influence of his ‘Wagnerian principles’ within operatic composition. Wagner has been credited, for example, with introducing the leitmotiv and
musical parallelism, and is recognised as the first composer who strove to fit music to his libretto. In 1947, Frankfurt School critics Theodore Adorno and Hanns Eisler described leitmotifs as aural ‘trademarks’ associated with characters and emotions, essential to the base pleasures and comprehension of a mass audience:

They have always been the most elementary means of elucidation, the thread by which the musically inexperienced find their way about. They were drummed into the listener’s ear by persistent repetition. It was natural to assume that this device, because it is so easy to grasp, would be particularly suitable to motion pictures…. Just as visual repetition, or motifs, had become central to an audience’s comprehension of film narrative by the mid 1910s, so too was the musical leitmotif adapted to aid audience perception in the silent era.

While the narrative efficacy of the leitmotiv is easy to understand, another Wagnerian principle, the ability of the composer to unerringly ‘match’ music to emotion, is more complicated. As Caryl Flinn has shown, musicologists have tended to assume an unquestioned relationship between music and emotion: music possesses an ‘undeniable power’ to render emotion tangible, to act as indelible shorthand for love, fury, fear etc. However, these connotative associations are in reality conventional, and ‘are often little more than well-worn cliches’. In addition, critics have simultaneously alluded to music’s mercurial or abstract nature, elements that raised music above the banalities of the everyday. Key to the Romantic conception of music is its supposed immateriality, which ‘lends it a transcendent, mystical quality [making] it quite difficult for music to speak to concrete realities’. For Marxist critics, this Romantic conception of music’s transcendent versatility ultimately rendered the art form passive and susceptible to ideological encoding. Adorno and Eisler thus called for critical ‘insight into the nature of industrialised culture [as] it is no accident that this culture thrives parasitically on the products of the old individualistic age’. 
As Flinn argues, ‘we are still bombarded with the idea of music as a transcendent phenomenon, particularly in the conception of music as a “universal language”’. The notion that any music, especially music influenced by the late-Romantic era, can serve as a type of emotional Esperanto becomes all the more questionable when we consider the cultural forces at play in its creation. Anahid Kassabian observes that the apparent emotionality identified by many musicologists in symphonic music ‘only serves to make any...ideological work seem personal or private and thus removes the messages from the realms of the political, social, or public’. For example, the work of both Wagner and Richard Strauss is inextricably linked with rising late nineteenth-century German nationalism, which complicates claims to its inherent universality and its prescribed role as the aesthetic embodiment of individuality.

Wagner’s strongest influence on the film score was manifested in his concept of the Gesamtkunstwerk, or ‘total artwork’. Scott Paulin writes of ‘the rapturously enthusiastic prose of film musicians and theorists who looked to him as an inspiration and claimed him as an ancestor since near the birth of cinema’. Music critics have interpreted the Gesamtkunstwerk as a form in which all the various elements of artistic endeavour, aural and visual, are incorporated equally, in effect creating one whole, unifying work of art. Wagner applied the total artwork concept to opera, but the fledgling US film industry likewise saw itself in the image of the Gesamtkunstwerk. It is the muddling of Wagner’s theories in the 1910s within industry discourse—the ‘over simplified accounts’ offered to exhibitors and their musicians in trade magazines such as Motion Picture World for example—that played a crucial role in the union of film and music, ultimately awarding the German composer the talismanic role that he continues to enjoy in film scoring.

Wagner’s ‘sheer persistence as a figure in [film musicology] literature has had a tendency to naturalise his position in the genealogy of cinema’. When it was suggested to Max Steiner, responsible for the convention-setting classical Hollywood score for RKO’s
King Kong in 1932, that he was the inventor of movie music, the composer demurred to the true master of film scoring, Richard Wagner, despite the fact that the composer had died over a decade before the birth of cinema. Claudia Gorbman sidesteps the Romantic underpinnings of the popularity of Wagner and his peers within film scoring, arguing that

…the nineteenth-century Romantic orchestral idiom of Wagner and Strauss predominated for so long in classical cinema [because] it was [and is] tonal and familiar, with easily understood connotative values. A musical idiom must be thoroughly familiar, its connotations virtually reflexive knowledge, for it to serve correctly, invisibly, in classical filmic discourse.

While Gorbman rationalises assessments based on Romantic notions of individualism, connotation and audience conditioning do not fully explain how Romantic music became a standardised industrial component of the Hollywood film text. The history of cinematic musical accompaniment leading up to the advent of the sound film is the history of an industry attempting to standardise production and establish control over exhibition and presentation. This standardisation was so comprehensive that during the formative years of the talking picture the industry itself circulated the ‘reflexive’ musical knowledge that Gorbman speaks of, teaching its audience to comprehend the aural codes of narration, just as, through repetition, it had conditioned them to understand its visual codes.

In the 1910s, despite both the urging of trade publications and the eventual rise of the picture palaces, much film accompaniment remained as it had during the nickelodeon era: a style of ragtime piano that many associated with the whorehouse (and the coloured races), rather than white middle-class leisure. To reformers, ragtime was primitive Negro ‘jackass music’. If a more respectable clientele was to be courted, then obviously more respectable music—classical orchestral music—should be included on the program. Yet few movie houses had the financial means to employ sizeable orchestras, and throughout the silent era there was little consistency or uniformity in regard to what, or how, music was played.
ASCAP and Cinema Exhibition

Music publishing’s relationship with the picture business evolved as the film industry wrestled with issues of cultural value and commercial respectability. The persistence of low-brow ragtime piano accompaniment vexed those film studios attempting to court a more respectable middle class audience and distance themselves from the seedier connotations of early cinema exhibition. Film industry trade papers insisted that ‘a new, moneyed clientele could be cultivated with a developed attention to the musical aesthetics of exhibition’. In the early 1910s, a music publishing clerk named Max Winkler began to compile cue sheets in which he used his encyclopaedic knowledge of classical music to match pieces of music to the types of action on screen. Attempting to both raise the cultural cachet of cinema and maintain tighter controls over the aural accompaniment to their filmed product, the movie studios also began to supply their own scores.

Among US filmmakers it was, inevitably, D.W. Griffith who first saw ‘the value of preparing a complete score specifically designed and shaped to the needs of his films’. Griffith elicited the help of composer Joseph Briel to create a score for Birth of a Nation (1915). However, unsatisfied with the results, Griffith in the end opted for familiarity: the film’s orchestral accompaniment was a compilation of Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, and, of course, Wagner pieces. The sheet music for this proto-compilation score was supplied to theatres, and its success went some way toward changing industry practice. Soon after, according to Fred Karlin, ‘orchestral accompaniments became standard for any theatre that could afford the musicians’.

But few theatres had the means to employ even a modestly-sized orchestra, and few directors had the power to commission original film scores. Most film accompaniment thus remained at the mercy of the cue sheet system, which guaranteed little in the way of musical
quality control. There was never any obligation for theatres to use cue sheets, nor was there an assurance that suitable musicians would be on hand to reproduce the music supplied. By 1922, 85 percent of US cinemas provided some form of live music; however, only about 30 percent employed an orchestra, and of that percentage, around two-thirds had ‘orchestras’ of fewer than five pieces. With most theatres offering a continuous, all-day show and changing their programs daily, it was ‘nearly impossible for a musician to be prepared for what he or she was to play.’

Musicians were more likely to rely on whatever pieces were already in their repertoire: classical standards, popular hits, and of course ‘jackass’ ragtime.

Other problems encumbered the cue sheet system as well: many exhibitors re-edited films, or ran the projector at increased speeds in order to fit more sessions into their schedule, so often the cued scores did not match what was on screen. Ultimately, the cue sheets ‘testif[ied] to the wishes of producers and distributors, not actual performance practice in most theatres’. Throughout the silent era, then, Hollywood distributed a markedly unstandardised product, a sore point for an industry increasingly under the spell of Taylorist uniformity and quality control.

So, while the fledgling Hollywood studios attempted to capitalise on the aura of classical music as an ‘artistic justification through which film could hope to gain both prestige and profits’, exhibitors could not or would not conform to Hollywood’s idea of quality musical accompaniment. While the scores provided, featuring excerpts from Beethoven, Wagner and Tchaikovsky, had the added advantage of being public domain—and thus free from licensing fees—many theatre owners opted for more crowd-pleasing, populist fare. The hit tunes of the day helped bring in audiences, and their more modest arrangements could be accommodated by all but the most inept theatre musicians. For the theatre owner not particularly concerned with the prestigious associations of classical music, an added bonus
was that popular music, like public domain classical pieces, was free also of charge—until 1914 and the formation of ASCAP.

It took ASCAP almost three years, until May 1917, to decide upon an appropriate licensing fee for music performed in movie theatres, a blanket license that permitted cinemas the right to host a performance of any registered composition in the ASCAP catalogue for the length of the contract period. Their proposed rate of ten cents per seat immediately angered exhibitors, who estimated this would cost their industry a total of $1,000,000 dollars per year.\textsuperscript{66} Threatened action by both picture exhibitors and musicians unions almost lead to ASCAP’s demise, with several prominent members and directors resigning because of the conflict.\textsuperscript{67}

Thus began a long and protracted series of negotiations between the licensing body and exhibition organisations. By 1924, the studios and their exhibitors had become so angered by ASCAP’s demands that they attempted to create their own licensing body, pooling $75,000 in order to launch a tax-free publishing venture to rival ASCAP. After issuing only 130 songs to accompany films, the enterprise folded when the songs proved unpopular with theatre managers. Overall, the failed plan cost the film industry $120,000, and the animosity against ASCAP continued, spurring several of the studios over the next few years to investigate other methods with which to combat the music licenser.\textsuperscript{68}

With the collapse of their own music venture, in 1926 the bulk of US theatre owners—11,000 in all—were forced to sign on as ASCAP licensees, and immediately found themselves ‘paying over half their income in fees’,\textsuperscript{69} despite the fact that E. Claude Mills, chairman of the Music Publishers Protective Association (MPPA) had gone on record estimating that music represented only forty per cent of the value of a cinema program.\textsuperscript{70} The exhibitors’ disquiet would prove short-lived, however, as by this time Warner Bros. and Fox had other plans for cinema music: they were going to attach it to the film itself.
I have always believed that the coming of sound opened up a great new opportunity. The accompanying music came at last entirely under the control of the people who made the picture.

Alfred Hitchcock, 1934

The US film industry’s uneasy relationship with music publishing came to a head during the massive industrial overhaul that accompanied the transition from silent film production to the sound motion picture. Popular histories of the early sound era often paint the transition from silence to sound as a natural teleological progression, spurred on by the audience’s innate desire to hear what the actors were saying. Despite the nomenclature ‘talkie’, the development of the sound film is in truth much more closely linked to the necessities of musical accompaniment. Most notable were the above-discussed issues surrounding industrial standardisation and Hollywood’s continued attempts to court the more affluent middle class audience through music in order to divest itself of the lingering taint of lower-class associations. In both instances it was music—not dialogue—that prompted the film studios to invest in sound technology, with Warner Bros. at the forefront. This transition would revitalise the film industry, and at the same time it would force Hollywood to initiate business relationships with supporting industries. These connections, specifically those in sound production and music publishing, would help lay the groundwork for cross-media convergence.

As noted above, the name ‘talkies’ has tended to mask the true motivation for introducing sound. In the mid-1920s, Western Electric and RCA had extolled the virtues of their newly-developed Vitaphone sound technology by basing their pitch on the long-term savings that would be realised by theatres after the phasing out of costly house musicians. According to John Izod, Warner Bros., the studio which lead the charge toward sound,
…had no interest in reproducing talk, and meant sound only as a means of enabling theatres that could not afford them to do without orchestras. [This was] particularly attractive to the struggling independents and small theatre chains that made up a large part of Warner Brothers’ clientele.74

Sound pictures would also help counter any lingering competition for audiences from vaudeville and other types of live performance. In a single musical short, Warner Bros. would be able to assemble a roster of talent from opera, musical comedy and vaudeville that few theatres could afford to match.75

Prior to their investment in sound in the mid-1920s, Warner Bros. had been a small struggling film studio, operating in the constant shadow of Fox, MGM, Paramount and Universal. The four Warner brothers, Harry, Albert, Sam and Jack, had begun in the film business in 1903 in Ohio, when father Ben pawned his watch so that Sam Warner could buy a projector. The brothers took the projector on the road, presenting a program package in local opera houses consisting of worn prints of features, various shorts, and a vaudeville act that featured youngest brother Jack leading the audience in a slide-assisted sing-a-long.76

Eventually the Warners abandoned the travelling show, and set up a permanent nickelodeon in a hall in New Castle, Pennsylvania. In 1907 they opened a film exchange in Pittsburgh, and by the end of the First World War were producing their own films from their new base in Hollywood, with Harry handling the financial end back in New York.

The brothers quickly became frustrated by the slow pace of their company’s growth in relation to the likes of Universal and Paramount, and began to formulate plans for vertical integration and expansion. By the mid-1920s, Sam Warner had become convinced that the quickest way out of poverty row was to take a very expensive gamble on producing moving pictures with sound. Despite many years of failed promises by sound technicians and inventors, technophile Sam convinced his brothers to attend a demonstration of Western Electric’s Vitaphone sound-on-disc technology. So convinced of Vitaphone’s potential was
Sam, that he had briefly contemplated taking the process to the more established Paramount rather risk its future at his own still-fledgling studio. However, an impressed Harry Warner immediately saw the solution to exhibitor-controlled, unstandardised musical accompaniment, declaring, ‘Do you realise what this means? From now on we can give every small town in America, and every movie house, its own 110-piece orchestra’. Indeed, once the studio decided to adopt the system, they primarily began to take advantage of its musical application, rushing into production shorts featuring operatic performance and vaudeville singing stars.

The first Warner Bros. sound feature was not *The Jazz Singer*, as popular belief would have it, but rather *Don Juan*, which premiered in August 1926; it contained no recorded dialogue, but did boast sound effects and a full orchestral score performed by the New York Philharmonic. However, it was indeed the ecstatic public reception for *The Jazz Singer*, the first feature to incorporate both recorded music and dialogue, in October 1927 that convinced Warner Bros. to convert to all-sound production. Despite featuring less than two minutes of dialogue, *The Jazz Singer* confirmed that audiences did indeed desire sound features. The success of the Al Jolson musical (costing $442,000 to produce, the film grossed $2,600,000) and the subsequent Warner all-sound features represented not only the immediate reimbursement of the studio’s massive investment in sound, but a sizeable return and a two-year head start on the other studios. *Variety* emphasised the gamble the four Warner brothers had taken, ‘almost going broke’ in their rush to synchronise pictures and sound. Once the talking picture had been established, however, the trade journal announced that sound ‘didn’t do any more to the industry than turn it upside down, shake the entire bag of tricks from its pocket and advance Warner Brothers from last place to head of the league.’ The studio’s growth was undeniably impressive: in 1925 Warner Bros. had posted a gross profit of $1,100,000, but in 1928, thanks in large part to *The Jazz Singer*, their net
profit reached over $2,000,000. In 1929, though, the all-singing, all-talking Warner Bros. boasted a net profit of over $17,000,000.\textsuperscript{83}

The income derived from their success with ‘talkies’ allowed Warner Bros. to expand into areas other than production and distribution, an expansion that appeared to emerge out of an impulse towards vertical integration and industrial consolidation. With a $100,000,000 loan from Wall Street, late in 1928 the studio absorbed the 300 theatres of the Stanley Circuit chain, as well as its subsidiary First National Pictures, through an exchange of stock, in the process heading off a rival takeover bid of Stanley by Fox.\textsuperscript{84} This move into exhibition, as with those by the other major studios, has of course garnered much critical attention in film studies, being as it is the foundation of the vertical integration system. The horizontal investments that the studios made in the world of music publishing at around the same time, though, have received far less consideration, despite the fact that they have proved no less influential in shaping commercial cultural production.

‘The Smothering Talker’: Hollywood Colonises Music Publishing

In an industry overview written at the height of the sound revolution in November 1928, \textit{Variety} reported that one of the more notable outcomes of the era had been an apparent reversal of power in the entertainment business. It facetiously noted that the ‘music men have the picture business working for them’, and that armies of uniformed ushers were being drafted into selling sheet music in cinema theatre lobbies. However, the trade paper also identified a significant economic outcome: each sheet sale represented ‘a cut on the gravy or royalty to some film executor, as in the cases of Paramount and MGM (which have) direct control of their own subsidiary music publishing firms’.\textsuperscript{85} Other articles in the same issue noted that the big sheet sellers of the week were all ‘picture themes’, the biggest of which
was ‘Sonny Boy’, as performed by Al Jolson in the new Warner Bros. talkie, *The Singing Fool*, the follow-up to *The Jazz Singer*.\(^{86}\)

Not long after investing in the Stanley Circuit, Warner Bros. had purchased the music publishing house M. Witmark & Sons for $900,000.\(^{87}\) Cass Warner Sperling and Cork Milner paint this expansion as Harry Warner’s desperate grab for prestige within the industry, an attempt to bury ‘their image as a penny-pinching studio specializing in schlock’.\(^{88}\) However, the purchase of one of the major music publishers—quickly followed by two more, Jerome H. Remick and T.B. Harms—was more than mere window-dressing. It was a tactical move, designed both to spread financial risk by diversifying across other media interests, and to gain the studio a position of power on the board of the national music licensing body, the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers.

The takeover of Witmark, as with similar investments made by Paramount, who purchased Spier-Coslow (later Famous), and MGM, new owners of Robbins Music Corp, was motivated by an unforeseen expense resulting from the arrival of sound: music licensing.\(^{89}\) Sound pictures meant that musical accompaniment was no longer the responsibility of the exhibitors, but rather now an element of film production, the cost of which needed to be carefully managed. The added expense of music licensing threatened to quickly erode the profits generated by the talkie.

After the success of *The Jazz Singer*, ASCAP switched its attention from the theatre owners to the studios themselves, demanding that Hollywood begin paying license fees for all published music. As the movie musical quickly established itself as the key genre of the period, for Warner Bros. alone licensing meant an added annual outlay of $100,000.\(^{90}\) Also, as soon as music publishing houses realised the value of sheet music to a sound-equipped Hollywood, licensing fees rose accordingly. Collectively, the studios now found themselves outlaying millions of dollars for music reproduction rights.\(^{91}\)
Faced with this new and significant expense, owning the rights to original music became essential, and the studios began to investigate their options. They settled on two solutions: on the one hand, in-house music composition and recording could be slotted into the existing studio production system via the establishment of music departments. The other plan was much more expensive, but would in the long term prove more economically attractive than paying licensing fees to ASCAP: major investment in the music industry itself. Russell Sanjek, though, argues that whereas most of the major studios merely sought more economical access to popular songwriters, one studio, Warner Bros., ‘looked to the day when it might be freed of onerous and increasingly exorbitant synchronization fees’. Then Warner Bros. bought the venerable New York publisher Witmark, which, more than any other similar move, signalled the film community’s ‘more aggressive stance toward ASCAP’. In May 1929, Warner next purchased the most successful publisher of the era, Dreyfus, whose Chappell-Harms subsidiary alone accounted for an annual profit of $500,000, and which provided ‘the exclusive services of the pick of the country’s best songwriters and first call on the scores of Broadway’s most important musical comedies and operettas’. However, Warner Bros. openly appeared more interested in the lure of power within the music business than having easy access to pop music. For Variety, Warner was ‘the pacemaker in the music absorption’, noting that its ownership of multiple publishing firms provided the studio with instant majority control of the ASCAP governing board, with the attendant power to ‘rule and dictate importantly on performing rights revenue’. Many publishers on the ASCAP board of directors suddenly found themselves Warner Bros. company men.

Ownership of key music publishing firms, with its attendant control of ASCAP, allowed for more efficient management of the emerging confluences between film and popular music. Hollywood’s acquisition of the music publishers sowed the seeds of the
modern global multimedia conglomerates, as the two primary US entertainment industries—
ostensibly in competition for the world’s leisure dollar—could now feed each other’s expansion. At the beginning of 1929, *Variety* reported that the introduction of sound pictures ‘has meant almost as much to the music publishers as anyone else’.97 According to the trade paper, talking pictures had alerted the music business to the true value of musical copyright, noting the ‘almost overnight’ success of several publishing firms whose film theme songs became ‘immediate and big seller[s] at a minimum of expense’.98 The national exposure given a song by a successful talkie meant that publishers could circumvent the laborious and expensive conventions of vaudeville song plugging; instead of ‘one Al Jolson plugging a song, 100 screens with 100 Jolsons...would be blasting forth a Tin Pan Alley number’.99

On May 14 1928, Paramount, MGM and United Artists finally signed contracts with Western Electric, which represented, for *Variety* at least, the moment ‘American filmdom went sound’.100 Most of the studios rushed musicals into production, as this new film genre most effectively showcased the soundtrack and helped condition audiences to sound. Hollywood came to rely on the musical as the ‘most natural type of film for an era in which it was felt the presence of music needed to be accounted for’.101 As the rise of the musical expanded studio music departments accordingly, music had not only altered film form, it had transformed the studios themselves.

**Conclusion**

This year in the field of music has seen the sudden elevation of the value of musical copyrights into new importance, more than ever before, due to sound pictures. The picture talkers’ effect, as with almost every other branch of the show business, bore directly on music.

*Variety*, 1929102

While some film histories stress that the development of sound film technology was dictated by the desire of audiences to hear actors talk on the screen, in truth there is no real
evidence that before *The Jazz Singer* audiences yearned for dialogue in movies. It wasn’t the concept of talking actors that excited Warner Bros.: motion picture actors were more prized for their abilities to express themselves with their faces and bodies; some of them couldn’t speak English, while still others had voices that didn’t really suit recorded sound. What impressed Warner Bros. was the fact that sound technology would finally allow them to control the music that accompanied their pictures, thus standardising their product. At last, audiences in Duluth would see and hear the same movie that audiences in New York and Los Angeles saw. No more would a Warner Bros. movie be ruined for an audience by a rickety, out-of-tune piano playing jackass music.

The poor quality of musical accompaniment for silent film thus helped accelerate the most dramatic technological change in cinema history: the transition from silent film to the sound motion picture. Technicians had been attempting to combine film and sound ever since the cinema apparatus was invented, but two difficulties always stood in the way: how to synchronise sound and image, and how to amplify the sound. Once these problems were overcome in the mid-1920s, however, Hollywood still wasn’t interested. Only two studios, Fox and Warner Bros., took the idea seriously: Fox thought sound would work well in newsreels, while Warner Bros.—the smallest of the studios—was prepared to try almost any novel idea to get the public’s attention. Warner Bros. experimented with sound in a series of musical shorts, but the success of *The Jazz Singer* in 1927, starring vaudeville veteran Al Jolson, established the new technology as commercially viable. The film established Warner Bros. as a major studio, and convinced all the other film studios to convert to sound and begin producing talkies, especially musicals.

By 1928, the silent film was no more, and the relationship between Hollywood and the music industry began in earnest. During the silent era, music was the province of the exhibitors; the theatre owners had to pay the musicians, and also pay licensing fees to the
music publishers. When the music was wed to the film itself (either with an accompanying
disc, or as a sound track on the film strip), the studios had to pay for the right to play it in
public, and ASCAP’s annual licensing fees proved exorbitant. Rather than paying the
publishers for the use of their music, Hollywood decided to buy the publishing companies
themselves. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Warner Bros., Paramount, Fox, MGM and the
other studios bought up much of the US music publishing business, with Warner Bros. alone
investing $8,000,000 in 1929.\textsuperscript{104} Hollywood took control of American popular music, and
made sure that their new song catalogues of hits and standards received constant exposure in
a steady stream of Hollywood musicals.

The advent of sound motion pictures, with their reliance on pre-recorded music,
prompted ‘the full realization of the authors, composers and publishers’ ambitions as to the
value of their copyrights.\textsuperscript{105} In response, Hollywood ‘virtually took over Tin Pan Alley’, as
the film studios set about buying up the cream of the New York music publishing houses.\textsuperscript{106}
The origins of the modern entertainment industry conglomerates are located here, in the late
1920s, the direct result of financial necessity. Ostensibly this move was designed to reduce
music licensing expenses, but the major studios quickly realised the cross-marketing benefits
facilitated by the control of the two key commercial art forms of the twentieth century, film
and music.

Endnotes

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{1} Quoted in Hutchinson 2002, p.40.
  \item Whitcomb 1994, p.118.
  \item Sanjek, R. 1996, p.36.
  \item Ibid, p.3.
  \item Mundy 1999, p.33-4.
  \item Miller 1999, p.165.
  \item Garofalo 1999, p.321. Tin Pan Alley, the name given to the popular song industry, was in effect a cluster of
  publishing houses situated near 28th Street and Broadway in New York City (Sanjek 2001, p.10). Harry Von
  Tilzer, co-writer of ‘Only a Bird in a Gilded Cage’, partner in the firm Shapiro Bernstein & Von Tilzer, and a
  charter member of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers, allegedly coined the term
  around 1900.
\end{itemize}

The Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC), formed in 1908, was the first of several attempts by film producers to affect improved public perception of their product and forestall government intervention (Thompson & Bordwell 1994, p.36).

Garofalo 1999, p.322.

The United States would not join until 1988.

As popular as Foster’s songs were in the mid-1800s, they achieved perhaps their greatest success once out of copyright in the early 1940s, a direct result of the Hollywood-fuelled music licensing war discussed in Chapter Two.

Garofalo 1999, p.322.


Garofalo 1999, p.322. If a songwriter plugged his own wares for the publisher, he could make an extra twenty dollars per plug, on top of the thirty he had earned for writing the song (Sanjek, R. 1996, p.33).


Ibid.

Ibid, p.x-xi.

Ibid, p.xi.


Garofalo 1999, p.322.

Ennis 1992, p.43.


‘Precarious music publishing may be followed by reforms’ in Variety, January 9, 1914, p.7.

This included the seven largest music publishing firms, Leo Feist Inc, Henry Waterson Inc, Irving Berlin Inc, T.B. Harms, Shapiro, Bernstein & Co, Berlin & Snyder Co., and Francis, Day & Hunter.

Garofalo 1999, p.322.

Ennis 1992, p.46.


Ennis 1992, p.46.

Ibid, p.46.


Toward the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, at the height of the nickelodeon era, theatre owners experimented with actors performing dialogue from behind the movie screen. Similarly, until 1920, it was not uncommon for a film screening to be accompanied by a lecture (Koszarski 1990, p.47).


See Anderson, Tim 1997, ‘Reforming “jackass music”: the problematic aesthetics of early American film music accompaniment’ in Cinema Journal 37, no.1, Fall.

Flinn 1992, p.14. As prescribed by Wagner, the leitmotiv is a brief musical theme associated with a specific character, place, or dramatic situation.

Adorno & Eisler 1994, p.4.

Bordwell & Thompson 1997, pp.80-1.


Ibid., p.7.

Adorno & Eisler 1994, p.liii.


Kassabian 2001, p.29.


Paulin 2000, p.78.

Ibid., p.68.

A cursory sample of the work of John Williams, Howard Shore, James Newton Howard or any of their blockbuster fantasy/action/adventure-scoring peers quickly confirms the lingering influence of Wagner.


In regard to the establishment of film scoring conventions in the 1930s—as well as perceptions of European art music in general—several scholars also stress the ‘overwhelming influence’ of a massive influx of German musicians and musicologists into the United States in the wake of Hitler’s rise to power. Their fondness for the German musical canon in particular was to exert a ‘tenacious narrowness’ on composition and criticism for decades to come (Neumeyer, Flinn & Buhler 2000, p.22).

Gorbman 1987, p.79.

Paulin 2000, p.66.

Anderson 1997, p.3.


Karlin 1994, p.106.


Paulin 2000, p.6.

Koszarski 1990, p.43.

Paulin 2000, p.66, 78.


Ennis 1992, p.47.

Quoted in Watts 1934, p.81.


Izod 1988, p.75.


Quoted in Karlin 1994, p.175. Harry allegedly walked behind the screen in search of the live band, convinced his brother was playing a practical joke.


Eyman 1997, p.145.


‘Pictures’ most sensational year’, Variety, January 2, 1929, p.5.

Eyman 1997, pp.66, 341. Fox’s 1929 net profit of $9,400,000 was up $3,500,000 from the previous year; Paramount’s increased from $8,700,000 to $15,500,000, and MGM’s from $8,500,000 to $11,700,000.

The aggressive Fox studio had already made a $20,000,000 bid for Warners itself, while Paramount and Western Electric also considered making bids. The brothers headed off all takeover moves by setting their price at $40,000,000 (‘Pictures’ most sensational year’, p.5).

‘Film houses working for song selling’ in Variety, November 21, 1928, p.57.

‘Sonny Boy’ had been written by De Sylva, Brown and Henderson.


Engel 1941, p.133.


In the late 1920s music publishing was still nominally ‘the music industry’, responsible as it was for the bulk of music business revenue; the record industry, experiencing one of its periodic slumps, would not match publishing revenues until the 1950s (see Chapter Four)


Abel 1930, p.119.

‘The smothering talker’, p.17.


Green 1930c, p.47.

‘Pictures’ most sensational year’, p.5.
For an analysis of the power of the musical to ease audiences through moments of jarring soundtrack rupture, see Berliner, Todd & Furia, Philip 2002, ‘The sounds of silence: songs in Hollywood films since the 1960s’ in Style, vol.36, no.1, Spring.

‘Year in music’, p.21.


‘Year in music’, p.21.

Izod 1988, p. 82.
Chapter Two—
‘Turn Your Dreams to Gold’:
Hollywood and the Battle for Control of Popular Music

So far, everything’s been hunky-dory for the musico-picture interests.

Variety, 1930

It is necessary for us to be in the music business to protect ourselves...the movies have bought most of the music houses...we have to control the music situation. It is a simple business proposition with a little touch of sentiment in it.
Merlin Aylesworth, President of NBC

The initial popularity of talking pictures was driven by the movie musical, and Hollywood quickly realised the economic viability of owning—rather than simply licensing—the songs in these films. With ownership of the major music publishing houses, Hollywood also gained control of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers, and thus the administration of American popular music. This coup was the culmination of years of antagonism between the two fledgling commercial entertainment industries, as each attempted to increase its power; in the process they laid the foundation for the consolidation of the entertainment industry itself. The publishing takeovers, designed to keep film production budgets in check, altered both the dissemination and form of popular music, which became shackled to the classical Hollywood movie musical. As this chapter will show, by the 1930s the studio system and related labour relations would define the formal affiliation between film and music, a relationship that in turn altered Hollywood’s relationship with music publishing, and popular music itself.

‘Tasting Big Money’: the Early 1930s Publishing Boom

In their round-up of the entertainment industry highlights of 1929, Variety made the bold claim that the ‘screen has been the savior of the (music) industry’. The talking picture
had apparently not only rescued music publishing from oblivion, reviving ‘what threatened to become a doddering by-product of the show business’, but had ultimately ‘established the music trade as a big business.’ Four years later, as the market for music copyrights continued to expand, the trade magazine heralded 1933 as the year ‘the music men started tasting big money’, with ASCAP collecting over $2,500,000; the following year the figure reached over $3,750,000. As Philip Ennis has argued, the ASCAP catalogue that generated this income ‘was the key entity in assembling, retrieving, and shaping the main reservoir of American popular music’.

Hollywood now controlled a revitalised music publishing industry, and the studios’ desire to extract maximum profitability from their publishing catalogues by managing the field of popular music helped shape popular entertainment throughout the 1930s. Music publishing companies slotted into the extant studio system, and American popular music became largely an adjunct to cinema as Tin Pan Alley was reformatted as a production house geared to maintaining a steady supply of songs for the Hollywood musical. As a result, the film musical became the chief propagator of the American songbook, far outstripping all of Tin Pan Alley’s previous methods of song promotion.

The rise of film and music synergy was, however, paralleled by network radio’s ascension as a powerful and competitive leisure medium. Hollywood may have exerted control over popular music licensing via its domination of the ASCAP board, but by the mid-1930s radio was also beginning to rely on popular music, drawing heavily on ASCAP-licensed music in order to attract audiences for their advertisers. The US radio networks’ growing power forced a confrontation between the film and radio industries, and radio’s reluctance to absorb licensing fee increases demanded by Hollywood would ultimately result in the bifurcation of the music business itself. As this chapter and the next will show, this split triggered enormous changes within the music industry: it loosened Hollywood’s grip on
popular music; it undermined music licensing’s dominance of the music business; it reconfigured radio’s relationship with music; and it dramatically improved the standing of publishing’s poor cousin, the record industry.

In order to evaluate the largely unexamined impact of Hollywood’s relationship with popular music throughout the 1930s, first we must investigate the industrial underpinnings of that association, which remained closely tied to the same issues of cultural prestige and product standardisation outlined in the previous chapter. A key facet here is the industrial change that was dictated by those impulses, in particular how Hollywood’s relationship with the music industry was defined by the necessities of standardised film music. The studios became bound to an industrial model which encouraged the production of musicals, entrenched Hollywood studio orchestras, and dictated how movies should sound.

The Talkie, Technology and Musical Labour

Music in the sound film…is thought solely as a commercial reduction in costs, as a commercial advantage to the small house, [and] as a commercial attraction to the audience.

Harry Alan Potamkin, 1929

The pervasive musical codes which coloured the early years of standardised film scoring during the classical Hollywood era of the 1930s have become so ingrained that modern film composers still find it difficult to subvert them. After years of constant repetition, they now often appear as marks of musical authenticity. The concept of musical appropriateness in film likewise shapes assumptions in film music histories: Roy Prendergast, for example, has suggested that the aesthetic choices of film producers were the main influence on the evolution of nondiegetic film scores after they were introduced in the early 1930s. However, as the previous chapter indicated, the establishment of film scoring
conventions was closely tied to issues such as labour, technology and industrial standardisation.

It would take over half a decade after the introduction of the talking picture in 1926 before the Hollywood studio system began to truly master the various production phases of the new technology. Before 1932, for example, ‘it was impossible to have a sustained edited synch-dialogue scene with background underscoring’. To capture all of the necessary audio—dialogue, sound effects, and music—there was only a single recording track, feeding off the limited number of inputs available in the primitive mixing consoles. Producers and technicians settled on various solutions to best incorporate sound while attempting to circumvent the attendant technological inadequacies. Some opted to restrict music to the functions of title and end credit themes, those which helped herald the commencement and tone of the narrative and signalled closure: James Whale’s *Frankenstein* (1931) provides a good example of this use of music.

Other films featured wall-to-wall musical accompaniment, a continuous piece played uninterrupted from the beginning to the end of the film, without any concession to narrative, dramaturgy, mood, or emotion. It was of course also possible to alternate between those scenes featuring only live sound and those with a recorded music track. Some producers, conscious of both the technical practicalities of film music and harbouring concerns that audiences would be unsettled by the unexplained presence of a score, opted for diegetic source music painstakingly accounted for by the appearance of a radio or phonograph, or the onscreen presence of musicians, often to the point of undermining narrative verisimilitude. Finally, a nondiegetic score could be had by recording the orchestra live off-screen during the actual film take, a laborious and potentially very time-consuming practice. This method was by necessity also adopted by animation studios, remaining in practice until as late as 1934: the music, sound effects, and character voices were all recorded live to the animation reel in
one continuous take; any mistake meant the entire process had to be repeated from the top of the reel.\textsuperscript{15}

Of these methodologies, wall-to-wall sound with a live orchestra proved to be the cheapest and most technologically practical option, and the genre in which wall-to-wall music could most effectively be sutured into the film text was the musical. Hollywood musicals of the early sound era were almost exclusively ‘backstage’ narratives based around live musical performance, an indicator of apprehension on the part of producers who were not confident that even audiences accustomed to stage musicals would be suitably conditioned to accept the unexplained appearance of nondiegetic music on a film soundtrack.\textsuperscript{16} As it was not subject to the same narrative conventions as other genres—indeed, the cast was expected to burst into song and musicians were always on hand—the musical thus proved to be the ideal medium with which to display the novelty of sound, and the genre came to dominate studio release schedules throughout the late 1920s.

For Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, though, the major outcome of the conversion to sound production was the modification of the studio structure via the creation of new departmental subdivisions.\textsuperscript{17} Sound and music departments slotted into the existing centralised continuity script system, a Fordist (or Taylorist) method of film production developed in the mid-1910s through which,

\begin{quote}
...Hollywood had honed an efficient means of producing large numbers of feature films....the system organised production around a central producer who oversaw a large, fully-staffed studio containing talent, technical workers, and craftsmen. Using the continuity script as a blueprint, production was divided into discrete parts, such as script development, art and costume design, cinematography, directing, and editing....\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

The music department—which managed the selection, composition, arrangement, orchestration, and recording of film music—was thus subject to the same standardised
practices and guidelines which had been developed to improve efficiency in all aspects of production. The particularities of the new sound and music departments in turn impacted filmmaking itself. As we saw in the previous chapter, the transition to sound was motivated industrially and economically, and likewise the studio system and labour relations would play no small part in shaping the developing formal relationship between film and music.

Throughout the mid-to-late 1920s, the idea of talking picture exhibition had caused understandable concern among theatre musicians. With the arrival of the first talkies, musicians unions had demanded full pay for any ‘idle time’—that is, periods during which a sound film was being screened—their members had to endure. In June 1928, in a last-ditch effort to stave off the redundancy of thousands of theatre musicians across the United States, the American Federation of Musicians (AFM) organised a national strike. In the face of public enthusiasm for the talkie, the strike had little impact, and by the end of 1928 between 25,000 and 35,000 theatre musicians were out of work.

As Robert Sklar puts it, the ‘real losers in the talkie revolution were musicians’, and from a national perspective this was true. But one pocket of musical labour viewed the transition from silent film to talkies rather differently. Local 47, the strong Los Angeles branch of the AFM, were the only members not to join the strike, realising very quickly that the shift to a centralised, Hollywood-based film music industry would benefit their professional sight-reading members enormously. They also exercised enough power in Los Angeles to be able to win from the studios extremely favourable conditions for their members as they joined the ranks of the music departments, guaranteeing ten hours of session work per week, fifty-two weeks a year.

The compromises reached between Hollywood and the musicians unions in the late 1920s and early 1930s thus obliged MGM, Warner Bros., Twentieth Century-Fox, Paramount and RKO to maintain large union-staffed orchestras. These studio orchestras would come to
shape the sound of Hollywood until the end of the 1950s, when subsequent labour action—also spurred by the introduction of a new technology, television—would hasten their demise.26

Once the orchestras had become entrenched, studio heads encouraged their producers to include music wherever possible, often overriding commonly accepted conventions of diegetic appropriateness. The use of synchronised musical accompaniment often clashed with a producer’s desire to achieve cinematic realism, the possibilities of which had only recently been enhanced by the advent of sound. As late as 1930, Variety reported on experiments with dramatic underscoring conducted at Paramount which ‘proved to have no merit for pictures’.27 Efforts to reconcile these ostensibly opposing impulses—the expressive qualities of music versus the realist potential of live sound—produced some curious results:

Even those films which placed the highest priority on realism succumbed to the power of music to heighten dramatic effect. In Thunderbolt (1929), Josef von Sternberg’s gritty example of social realism, a small musical ensemble of prisoners mysteriously materialises on death row. During a particularly dramatic moment in the film…the musicians coincidentally decide to practice, providing offscreen but diegetic music which underscores the action.28

For the studio musicians, paid by the hour and receiving double time after midnight,29 the technological particularities of early sound recording could prove lucrative. The fact that many producers required that the studio orchestra be on set to supply ‘live’ accompaniment during the entire shooting schedule proved a boon for contracted musicians, who were paid for whatever time it took to play through multiple takes, fluffed lines, camera resets, and the various other time-consuming activities of a film shoot.

These examples provide a glimpse into the processes of finding a place for music, aesthetically and technically, within film. With perhaps one hundred staff required on set, attempting to match orchestration dynamics to dialogue,30 or simply waiting until an actor got
his or her lines right, it became crucial that more economically feasible sound technologies be developed. The studios pressured their technical departments to work apace to improve recording and mixing techniques.

‘Like Wagner, Only Louder’: *King Kong* and the Studio Film Score

By January 1930, Hollywood provided permanent work for 800 ‘technical people’ within the studio music departments. Warner Bros. and First National between them employed four conductors, sixty-four musicians, four arrangers, four music librarians, twenty-two composers and lyricists, and twelve miscellaneous workers and executives. Fox’s music department employed 57, MGM 69, Paramount 63, and Universal had 48 permanent music staff; the smaller studios Columbia, United Artists, RKO, Pathe and Tiffany, employed on average 44.

Initially these departments had largely been preoccupied creating material for studio musicals designed to appease public demand for the novelty of sound. By the end of 1930, however, that novelty was fast wearing off as the glut of musicals reached saturation point and audiences began to tire of the genre. From January 1929 to June 1930, 128 musicals had been released, representing an average of two per week; by 1931, only one musical appeared on the end-of-year box office lists. Hollywood responded by essentially halting musical production and dispensing with the services of all but 20 of the 143 songwriters who had been under contract during the musical boom.

However, the agreements that Local 47 won from the studios meant that large orchestras would be on hand whether Hollywood was producing musicals or not. Each studio was required to employ a minimum number of union musicians: Warner Bros., Twentieth Century-Fox and MGM were obligated to employ at least 50 musicians; Paramount employed 45, while Columbia, Universal, RKO and even Republic were obliged to provide work for 36
musicians each. As previously noted, their contracts also specified that these musicians be payed whether sessions took place or not: MGM, for example, was obligated to guarantee 26,000 paid hours per year to AFM musicians.

Throughout even the busiest years, a studio might still only need—or be able to provide enough scores for—90 percent of the agreed total hours; some studios could only book enough sessions to account for less than half of the hours they were paying for. According to one music editor who worked at Paramount in the 1930s, although weeks might pass without any work for the music department, pay checks continued to arrive on schedule. By December 1930, of the 1500 AFM members employed by the studios, several hundred were sitting idle. With the resources of huge orchestras not only readily available but eating away at profits, studio and music department heads looked for ways to keep their musicians gainfully occupied. As it was much cheaper for a studio to use full symphonic accompaniment than not, musical accompaniment began to be forced on producers.

Amidst these conditions, the studio owners, long enamoured of the highbrow connotations of classical music, gave their producers and music directors two briefs: stress quality and emphasise magnitude (as producer Sam Goldwyn once instructed a composer, ‘Make it sound like Wagner, only louder’). As had happened during the silent era, Hollywood sought to capitalise on the perceived high cultural associations of orchestral film accompaniment. According to Royal S. Brown, during the early 1930s, the sound of the fledgling Hollywood score was moulded by the tastes of studio owners and their music-department heads who ‘translated their own philistine sensitivities into dollars-and-cents worries over the reactions of imaginary audiences’.

For example, when the studios began to hire composers and musicians for their music departments, they might just as easily have turned to jazz or dance band musicians on the AFM’s books. Instead, just as they had (unsuccessfully) attempted to raise the cultural tone of
their product during the silent era, the studio bosses once again turned to Wagnerism, seeking,

...something on a grander scale [believing that] a film joined with music to construct a Gesamtkunstwerk is made more marketable as high-quality entertainment [and] is allowed to illusionistically transcend its own commodification and nostalgically recapture a lost utopian culture of art for art’s sake.\(^{43}\)

As we saw in the previous chapter, musical accompaniment in the silent era had been the domain of the exhibitors, most of whom ignored the studios’ suggested arrangements. Now that new technologies presented the studios with the wherewithal to control the quality of the film score, they once more called upon the talismanic power of late-Romantic composition. The desire to market film as ersatz high-culture by accommodating perceived standards of taste—standards possibly alien to the bulk of the film audience\(^{44}\)—subsequently re-established late-Romantic music as the template for appropriate musical accompaniment for film throughout the 1930s, 1940s, and beyond.

In addition, by 1933 technological advances permitted the simultaneous reproduction of dialogue and music tracks—it was now possible to record them separately for mixing during post-production—enabling producers provide as underscoring musical accompaniment akin to that which had been heard in only the best picture palaces in the silent era; Harry Warner’s dream of large orchestras in every town had come true.\(^{45}\) RKO’s David O. Selznik claimed to be the first producer to use dramatic scores under dialogue.\(^{46}\) Selznick ordered composer Max Steiner to use the otherwise idle RKO orchestra for *King Kong* (1933), the film that more than any other established the conventions of Hollywood film scoring. Steiner duly employed Wagnerian leitmotif, anchoring drama and emotion through recognizable musical codes such as the use of minor chords for sadness and tragedy, increasing the tempo or pitch for heightened suspense, and the rhythmic accenting of action.
sequences. For Robert Fiedel, Steiner’s score achieved ‘a landmark stature in the development of film music composition. Never before had a film score been such an integral part of the film experience’.47

Yet, apart from the theme music featured over the opening credits, King Kong’s score only enters, tentatively, 23 minutes into the narrative. The suspension of dramatic underscoring until this point is illustrative of the unease with which the score was still perceived in 1933: its late introduction allows the film to negotiate the problematic aspects of verisimilitude associated nondiegetic music in the early talkie period. As we have seen, for some the advent of sound film emerged from an impulse for film to more accurately capture and represent reality. Nondiegetic music, however, worked against realism: where was the music coming from? Steiner had clashed with Selznick over this very point, fearing that the presence of nondiegetic music would confuse audiences.48

Steiner’s score thus displays some amount of trepidation in regard to the status of nondiegetic music. The early scenes of King Kong are set in the urban environment of 1930s New York, and are presented without musical accompaniment. The score proper only commences when Carl Denham (Robert Armstrong) and his film crew approach the otherworldly environs of Skull Island, home of the mythical giant ape Kong. The orchestra gradually increases in volume under the dialogue track as the ship drifts through the fog. In this way the score ‘sneaks up’ on the audience, introduced as the aural embodiment of the Other and heralding the characters’ entrance into the unknown.

It is in the next sequence, in which the film crew encounter the natives of Skull Island, that Steiner begins exploring the boundaries of the diegetic/nondiegetic divide, the fluid space in which music is permitted to alternate between the roles of source music and underscore.49 The natives are encountered in the midst of a frenzied tribal dance, replete with pounding drums and melodic chanting. The soundtrack here is an impossible mix of diegetic
sound (percussion and voices) and Steiner’s score (a Western orchestra), which both mimics and augments the tribal music. The merging of the otherworldly, exotic aural regime and the studio orchestra go some way toward conditioning the audience to nondiegetic music, ensuring that the score proves less problematic once the action returns to New York.

Over the next half-decade—by the end of which Hollywood was producing 500 to 600 scores per year—the conventions of film scoring were established and popularised by the composers and music department heads employed by the Big Five studios: Steiner, Twentieth Century Fox’s Alfred Newman, Columbia’s Dimitri Tiomkin, Paramount’s Miklós Rózsa, and MGM’s Franz Waxman. Most of these men were European immigrants—many of them had fled Hitler’s Germany—and all were products of traditional music schools in which the works of the European Masters held sway.⁵⁰

For critics of Hollywood film scores these composers often did little more than plagiarise from the Masters. In the 1940s Frankfurt School Marxists Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler argued for an end to imitative Romantic film scores, in favour of a more integral, structural role for modernist music, the compositional style that succeeded Romanticism and that was more contemporaneous with the classical Hollywood era. They felt this more cerebral form of music had been passed over by Hollywood in favour of the Romantic style, as it contained none of the ideological underpinnings of its nineteenth-century predecessor. Adorno and Eisler believed that the jarring dissonance of serialist compositions by modernists such as Arnold Schoenberg and Alban Berg could help awaken the audience from the passive state induced by the commercial mass production of culture.⁵¹

Instead the conventional, uniform scores composed in the classical Hollywood of the 1930s and 1940s became so prevalent that the Romantic style of orchestral score quickly became recognised as the ‘natural’ musical language of cinema. Most often critics mocked the film composers for the formal excesses of their bombastic scores, but as we have seen the impulse
to utilise the full studio orchestra was dictated by issues of labour and economy: composers rarely had final say over the uses of their work, and studio orchestrators were under instruction to always orchestrate for the full complement of musicians employed by the studio.\textsuperscript{52}

Thus the classical Hollywood film score was a product of industrial conditions created by the demise of the musical. But, at the same time that the conventions of the film score were being assembled, that moribund genre was on the verge of being resuscitated. Warner Bros., the studio that ushered in the sound era in a dramatic bid to establish itself as a major Hollywood power, was in 1933 once again facing financial ruin and casting around for ways to avert a crisis. As they had in 1926, the three remaining Warner brothers—Sam had died in October 1927, one day before \textit{The Jazz Singer}’s debut—decided to invest in a concept that the rest of Hollywood viewed as folly: the movie musical.

\textit{‘We Got a Lot of What it Takes to Get Along’}\textsuperscript{53}; Warner Bros. Revives the Musical

Despite its innovation and importance in establishing the sound picture, the Vitaphone sound-on-disc system had eventually been eclipsed by the more reliable and less unwieldy sound-on-film technologies developed by RCA and Western Electric (who had also been responsible for Vitaphone). By the end of 1929, Warner Bros. was the only studio persisting with sound-on-disc, but by 1933 they too were forced to abandon it.\textsuperscript{54} With the Depression allowing little leeway for technological missteps—the studio lost $8,000,000 in 1931, and $14,000,000 in 1932—Warner Bros. was threatened with receivership.\textsuperscript{55} As they had done with the talkie in 1926, the Warner brothers resolved to risk their company’s future by investing in the type of product that by now the other studios considered a losing proposition. The studio marked its adoption of sound-on-film with the release of a new musical, \textit{42nd Street}, in March 1933.
While musicals may have been considered box office poison by most studios, media diversification was gradually altering the way Hollywood—or at least Warner Bros.—did business. By buying into music publishing, the studio had invested in song catalogues that required constant nurturing, and as had been proven in the late 1920s, musical films were the most efficient method of song plugging music publishing had ever known. Banking on the potential for movie-and-music cross-promotion—42nd Street would feature songs by Warner Bros. studio songwriters Al Dubin and Harry Warren—the studio allocated the musical a $400,000 budget, despite the production originally being conceived as a low budget remake of their 1929 ‘backstager’, On With the Show.

The backstage musical is another example of early talkie-era attempts to negotiate issues surrounding diegetic music and narrative verisimilitude. As noted, when musicals first went into production at the beginning of the sound era, producers wrestled with the problems of explaining the presence of music to a potentially perplexed audience—just as they would with the introduction of nondiegetic scores in the early 1930s—despite conventions already established within musical theatre. Early film musical narratives thus nearly always concerned professional singers who sang when only they were rehearsing or performing for an onscreen audience, in order to provide a realistic justification for musical numbers.

The Jazz Singer established cinema’s ‘song-as-performance’ convention, with Al Jolson bursting into song only when he performs, rehearses, or sings for his family. Unlike later musicals, the songs he sings do not express his emotions or include narrative information; in fact, in The Jazz Singer they are all well-known popular songs of the era, hits already associated with Jolson. As Richard Barrios outlines, in the years after The Jazz Singer, Hollywood produced a series of backstagers, such as On With the Show and Broadway Melody (1929), in which characters sing and dance as they prepare to put on a
show. These films established the backstage musical, in which the lives of the characters provide the pretext for production numbers.\textsuperscript{60}

As with \textit{The Jazz Singer}, in most of these early backstage musicals the songs’ lyrics bear no relation to character or narrative. With closer relationships between song creation and film production now encouraged by corporate synergies, after 1933 the songs in Warner Bros. musicals began to be more effectively integrated. In films such as 42\textsuperscript{nd} Street, \textit{The Gold Diggers of 1933}, and \textit{Footlight Parade} (all 1933), ‘gritty scripts, jazzy songs by Al Dubin and Harry Warren, and the spectacular choreography of Busby Berkeley all resonate with one another’.\textsuperscript{61} Songs now functioned simultaneously as commentary on the characters’ lives (‘You’re Getting to Be a Habit with Me’ in 42\textsuperscript{nd} Street), as commentary on the real world experience of the Depression (‘We’re in the Money’ in \textit{The Gold Diggers of 1933}), and as songs performed within the show (‘You’re Getting to Be a Habit with Me’ and ‘42\textsuperscript{nd} Street’ are sung in rehearsal in 42\textsuperscript{nd} Street, and ‘Shuffle off to Buffalo’ features on opening night). Ultimately, though, these tunes functioned as product Warner Bros. marketed via their publishing firms.

The subsequent success of 42\textsuperscript{nd} Street marked a modest rebirth for the musical genre, although not enough to encourage other studios to follow suit. Warner Bros., though, were reaping rewards from 42\textsuperscript{nd} Street away from the box office, confirming for the studio the benefits of spreading risk across more than one of their divisions. The decision by Warner Bros. to increase the production of musicals after the success of 42\textsuperscript{nd} Street can thus now be seen as an innovation in entertainment industry practice, motivated not by the proven box office success of a genre, but by the promise of the synergistic benefits afforded by media diversity.

Since 1918 and the success of ‘Mickey’ from the film of the same name, Hollywood had realised the promotional value of a tie-in song, but licensing fee demands from ASCAP
had discouraged wider exploitation of film and music synergy.\textsuperscript{62} At the height of the Depression, with ASCAP in their control and the last hold-out studios Universal and Tiffany also invested in music publishing,\textsuperscript{63} Hollywood found itself able to profit from both a film and the music featured therein, and thus no longer having to rely solely on movie ticket sales for revenue.

MGM, Paramount and Warner Bros. had already experimented with cross-promotional strategies early on. MGM had realised quickly the benefits of having film titles match those of their songs, as with the Buster Keaton vehicle \textit{Free and Easy} (1930) and its MGM-Robbins-published title tune. Paramount automatically registered new song titles published by its subsidiary Famous Music as potential film titles.\textsuperscript{64} Warner Bros., meanwhile, were attempting to exploit their musical copyrights across a burgeoning media empire in features, shorts, and cartoons, and via their modest radio station interests. The studio also briefly owned the Brunswick record label, home of Al Jolson and the blues subsidiary Vocalion, purchased in 1930 for $10,000,000.\textsuperscript{65} Brunswick was one of the many disc outlets established in the 1910s by manufacturing concerns in order to help bolster sales of their lines of phonographs, in this case the sporting goods and piano company, Brunswick-Balke-Collender.\textsuperscript{66} Throughout the 1920s Brunswick was one of the ‘Big Three’ record labels along with Victor and Columbia, from whom they stole Jolson.\textsuperscript{67}

To industry observers it appeared that Warner Bros. bought Brunswick so as to capitalize on the disc sales Jolson was garnering for the label by recording songs featured in his Warner films, most notably the number one hit ‘Sonny Boy’ from \textit{The Singing Fool}. However, Harry Warner was far more interested in the patents and pressing plant owned by Brunswick-Balke-Collender.\textsuperscript{68} As with RCA’s purchase of Victor in 1929, Harry saw the cost-cutting potential in owning the presses needed to handle the, at that stage, increasing demand for Vitaphone sound discs. While the rest of Brunswick-Balke-Collender’s pool table
and bowling equipment interests were sold off, the huge presses were promptly shipped
cross-country to Sunset Boulevard, and were modified from their original ten- and twelve-
inch capacity to accommodate the sixteen inch Vitaphone discs. When optical sound-on-
film became the industry standard, forcing Warner Bros to discontinue the disc system in
1932, Brunswick began to be seen as a redundant investment for the studio, and after the
Depression decimated the disc market in 1932, Warner Bros. offloaded the label to the
American Record Corporation.

Cross-promotion proved far more successful in Warner’s shorts and cartoons.
Released in November 1933, the musical short Harry Warren: America’s Foremost
Composer is a prime example of early multimedia exploitation. In it Warren and Margie
Hines perform excerpts from ten songs featured in recent Warner releases, interspersed with
relevant clips from the films and shots of available sheet music. Three years previously,
Warner Bros. had contracted with producer Leon Schlesinger to create two series of cartoons,
Merrie Melodies and Looney Tunes, featuring narratives based around whichever Warner
music copyrights were currently circulating in their musical features. Schlesinger’s contract
with Warner Bros. required that he produce ‘animated musical cartoons’, and gave him
‘complete access to the (Warner) musical libraries’. According to cartoon director Chuck
Jones,

The primary purpose of the Merrie Melodies was to plug Warner Brothers songs. So whenever they had a song in a feature, they put out a Merrie Melody, and it had to carry at least a full chorus of the song running at least a minute and a half within the cartoon, which you built around the song.

For example, Young and Healthy (1933) was based around the Dubin and Warren tune of the
same name featured in 42nd Street (and in Harry Warren: America’s Foremost Composer).
Indeed the titles of most of the early Looney Tunes and Merrie Melodies cartoons were
simply the titles of the songs they were designed to plug, such as ‘Lady, Play Your Mandolin’, both a 1931 Merrie Melody and an Oscar Levant song heard in Big Business Girl (1931). Often songs were forced on Schlesinger’s directors, ensuring that Warner cartoon characters ‘never walked when they could dance’.

For Variety, the revival of the screen musical meant that the ‘songs from pictures virtually underwrote themselves as commercial entities’, gaining ‘a fair quota of sales with a minimum of effort’. Such cross-promotion paid off handsomely with 42nd Street. Through their subsidiary Witmark, the money Warner Bros. earned from the Dubin and Warren songs featured in the film—including ‘Young and Healthy’, ‘Shuffle Off to Buffalo’ (which also inspired a cartoon) and the hit title song—ultimately exceeded the film’s $400,000 budget.

But Warner Bros. had ambitions above and beyond mere cross-promotion, and the studio’s next move was a tactically astute manoeuvre which signalled clearly the movie studio’s intentions to exert influence over the music publishing industry itself. Warner Bros. leveraged the promotional power of the movie musical to increase its power on the ASCAP board. Optimistic that their next musical, Gold Diggers of 1933, would repeat the success of 42nd Street, the studio transferred the rights of the new film’s Dubin and Warren songs from Witmark to a smaller subsidiary, Remick. By shifted the copyrights to Remick—and duplicating the move with subsequent musicals and subsidiaries such as T. B. Harms—Warner Bros. improved the standing of these publishers and earned more votes on the ASCAP board.

Gold Diggers of 1933, another backstage musical—in fact virtual copy of 42nd Street—was indeed a box office success, reteaming its predecessor’s stars Dick Powell, Ruby Keeler, Guy Kibbee, and Ginger Rogers. Its songs proved even more successful, especially ‘We’re in the Money (The Gold Diggers Song)’, which garnered 425,000 sheet sales by the end of 1933, and spawned hit recordings by Powell (second only to Bing Crosby as a hit-
maker that year), Ted Lewis and His Band, and Hal Kemp and His Orchestra. It was, of course, also produced as a Merrie Melody title, as were ‘I’ve Got to Sing a Torch Song’ and ‘Pettin’ in the Park’.

By the end of 1934, thirty of the top fifty most performed ASCAP songs were tied to films, including eight of the top ten. Eighty-four musicals and other features—sixteen of them produced by Warner Bros.—included songs. By now, copyrights associated with musicals dominated sheet music and record sales, the genre proving to be the greatest promotional tool Tin Pan Alley had ever known. During 1935, however, the balance of power within the music business once more began to change, as the newer medium of network radio began to usurp cinema’s role as the main disseminator of new popular music copyrights. But Warner Bros., publishers of one quarter of the top 100 songs played on radio in 1934, were not about to concede power to the broadcasters without a fight.

**Hollywood, ASCAP and Radio**

The mid-1930s revival of the musical established the genre as one of the cornerstone genres of the classical Hollywood era. In addition, the discovery of the cross-marketing possibilities available to a film studio with ties to other media companies is the point of origin of Hollywood corporate synergy. In altering the commercial relationship between the US film and music industries, this burgeoning synergy would prove somewhat problematic in the ensuing years, in particular for the music publishers and those key areas of entertainment besides movies which relied on popular music to court both audiences and advertisers. Most notably, the strategy Warner Bros. utilised to strengthen its position in ASCAP had repercussions that altered the balance of power in the music business, affecting its relationship the US radio networks. Having shored up its power within ASCAP, and seeking to take full advantage its publishing catalogues, Warner Bros. set its sights on controlling the
terms of music licensing. The studio’s aggressive stance sparked a conflict between ASCAP and radio that would consume the music industry throughout the rest of the 1930s and lead to its rupture.

As Warner musicals continued to draw crowds, other studios also resumed production of the genre, in particular fellow publishing giant MGM, whose purchase of the Robbins Music Corporation, Olman Music Corp. and Leo Feist, Inc. made its music holdings second only to those of Warner Bros. 81 Fox Film, soon to merge with Twentieth Century Pictures, added the Sonnemann Music Company and Edwin F. Kalmus Inc. to its Movietone Music Corporation portfolio, and launched a series of highly successful musicals with a recent signing, five-year-old Shirley Temple. By 1938 over half of the top box office movies were musicals. 82 MGM also followed Warner Bros. by redistributing the copyrights featured in its musicals among its three publishing subsidiaries, in order to increase its power within ASCAP. 83 The rebirth of the musical was also reflected in the improved fortunes of the studio songwriters, many more of whom arrived from Broadway. In January 1936, Dubin and Warren signed a joint $3,000-a-week contract with Warner, while between them newcomers Harold Arlen and E. Y. Harburg earned $2,500 a week; at RKO Irving Berlin received both a flat fee of $75,000 per film score and a percentage of gross receipts. 84

It is perhaps tempting to imagine the four major branches of the entertainment industry—film, music publishing, radio and music recording—revelling in the cross-promotional possibilities created by the emergence of mass media in the first decades of the 20th century. In truth, though, by and large they conducted an inconsistent, sometimes adversarial relationship until the Second World War. Even those industries now inextricably linked in the public mind, music publishing and recording, maintained an uneasy alliance until as late as the 1960s. Likewise, Russell Sanjek notes that cinema and radio, ‘the two major sources of America’s favourite entertainment’, had much in common in seeking the
widest possible audiences, but were essentially competing for the same leisure dollar. The mass audience for film and radio, Sanjek continues,

...paid an average of twenty cents to see movies, but got radio programs without charge, though they were expected to spend a substantial portion of their income for products advertised on the air. Sensitive only to box-office figures and time-sales billings, [Hollywood and radio] catered to the most homogenized tastes. Each placed much dependence on music to attract customers, and both were in frequent dispute with ASCAP.85

Thomas Elsaesser has shown how Hollywood has traditionally exhibited a desire ‘to oust and/or compete with other providers of the same service, whether we call it mass entertainment or performing arts, leisure activity or popular spectacle’.86 Throughout the 1930s Variety continually reported on Hollywood’s efforts to marshal ‘all show business within its borders and keep it there’.87 Philip Ennis, on the other hand, sees the formative years of the US entertainment industries mainly in terms of a struggle to control US musical culture, and thus popular culture itself:

A much deeper issue was at stake...America’s popular musics defined the contours of everyday life...the pleasure and pains of being an American, how one’s ease was to be taken, how the display of pride was to be manifested, what it was like to be in love and out of love. This musical framing of experience marked the range of its listeners’ aspirations, telling them what to expect as they journeyed from poor to rich, from country to city, from downtown to uptown.88

From the 1920s to the 1940s, then, the relationship between Hollywood, ASCAP and radio oscillated between the openly combative and the cultivation of the mutually beneficial.

‘A major and permanent irritation’: Radio and Music Licensing

Commercial radio broadcasting began in the US in November 1920 when amateur Pittsburgh radio station 8XK was taken over by Westinghouse and relaunched as the first
licensed broadcaster, KDKA, reporting the returns of that year’s presidential election live from the roof of Westinghouse’s Pittsburgh factory. While news and drama quickly emerged as staples of broadcasting, it would not take long for the bulk of radio programming to consist of live music performance. Many of the early pioneers of broadcasting, in particular RCA’s David Sarnoff, foresaw an educational role for radio. Thus, many early programmers ‘favored concerts of classical or semi-classical music to nourish the cultural sensibilities of the middle-class audience’. The growing power in broadcasting, sponsors and advertising agencies, on the other hand,

...paid more attention to popular tastes. They tended more toward...popular song. In this, they were closer to the inclinations of Tin Pan Alley than those of the programmers, and the popular publishing houses, acting through ASCAP, were quick to reap the benefits.

Ultimately the advertisers won the day, as they would continue to do throughout radio’s rise. By programming copyrighted music and accepting advertising sponsorship, commercial radio became subject to the 1909 Copyright Act, immediately drawing the attention of ASCAP, who felt they should be ‘reimbursed for the privilege of broadcasting copyrighted music for profit’. The publishers were also motivated by the fact that radio seemed to be having a negative effect on sheet music and piano roll revenues: *Variety* reported that the Victor Co. had issued royalty statements amounting to half of expected returns; the novelty of radio was also blamed for a reduction in record sales. For its part, the new medium would come to view the music licensing body as ‘a major and permanent irritation’.

In September 1922, ASCAP approached broadcasters to broker permanent licensing agreements after it became known that the now 200 radio stations in the US were not only making $2,500,000 in profits, but were relying on ASCAP for 90 percent of the music they broadcast. The large electrical corporations with radio interests, such as GE, Western
Electric and RCA, were well aware of the legalities involved in broadcasting copyrighted music, and had been dealing with ASCAP on a day-to-day basis, with each selection being preceded by an on-air announcement of legal permission. ASCAP floated several reimbursement plans, including an annual fee of one dollar per radio set sold, an hourly fee, and a zoning proposal, before settling on a new $5-a-day royalty fee. In the first week of November, every station received a circular letter revoking all previous temporary agreements, as well as an application form binding the broadcaster to the new fee system. Most stations refused to sign the agreement, prompting the music licensor to threaten prosecution over copyright infringement. In 1923 the broadcasters agreed to a blanket license fee based on gross time-sales revenue, but simultaneously set into motion litigation against ASCAP which would dominate the next several years.

In order to present a stronger united front in future negotiations, the radio stations formed the National Association of Broadcasters in April 1923. The NAB’s first call of business was to float the possibility of assembling its own non-ASCAP music catalogue. Though deemed impractical at this stage of the NAB’s development, it would not be the last time that a competing music licensing organisation would be floated by broadcasters as the solution to the ASCAP problem. For its part, ASCAP was also dissatisfied with the existing arrangement with radio. By the end of 1923 ASCAP had received only $35,000 from the 199 radio stations with which they had licensing agreements, and even the $130,000 garnered throughout 1924 was still far short of ASCAP’s initial expectations of $1,000,000 in annual revenue from radio. Thus the stage was set for almost two decades of conflict between ASCAP and radio over appropriate licensing rates, a quarrel that would only intensify after Hollywood’s annexation of publishing.

In 1926 the courts ordered WLW in Cincinnati to compensate ASCAP for the broadcast of their copyrights, thus confirming the society’s legal right to charge radio fees.
ASCAP set the blanket license fees at five percent of each broadcaster’s total income from all programs which featured advertising. These terms ignored whether those programs included music or not, further exacerbating the already tense relationship between radio and publishing. However, the embryonic state of national broadcasting—which by the mid-1920s was still only a loose collection of independent stations with limited transmitting power—produced relatively low returns for ASCAP. It was only with the formation the NBC and CBS networks between 1926 and 1928 that radio truly began to emerge as a significant nationwide entertainment medium. The two burgeoning media empires would marshal tens of millions of listeners for their sponsors, with ASCAP’s catalogues of popular music playing a crucial role in this assemblage of ready consumers.

The Advent of the National Radio Networks

The National Broadcasting Company (NBC) was launched on July 7, 1926 in a partnership formed by General Electric and its chief competitor Westinghouse. GE and its electronics subsidiary Radio Corporation of America (RCA) together claimed an 80 percent stake in the concern, with (RCA shareholder) Westinghouse contributing a 20 percent investment. NBC initially consisted of three networks: the Red network, with 23 stations broadcasting mostly in the Northeast, the 18 station Blue network, and the Pacific Network which included seven affiliates situated between Nevada and Washington. Then in 1928, 47 broadcasters initially grouped together as United Independent Broadcasters, reorganized as the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), the name reflecting the brief involvement of Columbia Records.

By this time radio relied on live dance bands and pre-recorded transcriptions of musical programs to attract advertisers and listeners, whose numbers were approaching 50 million, the vast majority now tuned to CBS and NBC’s Red and Blue networks. With massive
corporations now backing them, an invigorated NAB resumed its battle with ASCAP both in and out of court. Advertising rates soon topped $2500 per-hour,\(^{108}\) strengthening ASCAP’s argument that copyrighted music was being broadcast for profit. With the court ruling in ASCAP’s favour, CBS was forced to sign a blanket licensing agreement in 1928, with NBC following suit two years later.\(^{109}\) With NBC and CBS owning 50 of the 52 clear channel stations in the US,\(^{110}\) plus 75 percent of the most powerful regional stations,\(^{111}\) by 1931 the networks were earning combined grosses of $35,700,000.\(^{112}\)

But by the final stages of negotiations between ASCAP and the NAB, the balance of power within the music licensing body had shifted dramatically, as the Hollywood studios began their assault on Tin Pan Alley. When licensing income from radio peaked at only $757,450 in 1932, many on the ASCAP board—Warner Bros. in particular—felt that blanket agreements, which permitted full access to the ASCAP catalogues, provided inadequate compensation to publishers and songwriters.\(^{113}\) The publishing studios also soon noted how well radio appeared to be weathering the Depression. By 1935, Hollywood was relieved to see box office earnings reach $80,000,000, after having fallen from $110,000,000 in 1930 to $60,000,000 in 1932.\(^{114}\) In 1934, though, the radio industry earned $73,000,000, and out-grossed Hollywood in 1935 with a record income of $86,000,000. While some studios were still only just dragging themselves out of the red, NBC alone generated $31,148,931, an 11.9 percent improvement over the previous year, while CBS’s $17,637,804 represented a 19 percent increase on their 1934 profits; even the fledgling Mutual network managed to draw $697,821 from its four stations in the second half of 1935.\(^{115}\) Hollywood could not fail to notice that these figures did not seem to be reflected in ASCAP’s take.

More alarmingly for those studios tied to publishing, radio had begun to supplant movies as the dominant force in music promotion, as reflected in adjustments to the ASCAP rating system which placed increased points value on radio plugs. As early as December 1930
Variety could report that radio was ‘the thought by day and the dream by night of all song pluggers’. Three years later, with radio’s powers of music promotion increasing, ASCAP downgraded the classifications of several Hollywood publishers from ‘A’ to ‘C’ class, including the MGM-owned Robbins Music Corp and publishers affiliated with Fox. Although their firms remained relatively unscathed, Warner Bros. would soon attempt to rally ASCAP and the other studios against the radio networks.

Conclusion

In the late 1920s and early 1930s Hollywood was, by and large, preoccupied with sound. Studios invested heavily not only in the new technology itself, but in research to determine the best methods with which to present the aural sphere to the audience. Consequent adjustments to studio production methods naturally led to concomitant alterations in labour relations. With the introduction of the talkie, a deal was brokered between Hollywood and the Los Angeles branch of the AFM, Local 47. Labour negotiations tied the studios to a music production system which guaranteed a prominent role for orchestras in film production. The AFM, aware of Hollywood’s need for efficient, professional sight-reading musicians, brokered compromises between their members and the film industry which ensured that by the early 1930s the all of the Big Five studios employed large union-staffed orchestras.

By the end of 1930 the novelty of musicals—the genre deemed best suited to displaying the wonders of the sound feature film—had reached saturation point, with audiences tiring of the genre. However, the conditions won by Local 47 meant the studios were obliged to employ large orchestras whether Hollywood was producing musicals or not. Thus work had to be found for hundreds of idle, salaried session musicians. With the resources of huge orchestras not only readily available but eating away at profits, studio and
music department heads looked for ways to keep their musicians gainfully occupied; as it was much cheaper for a studio to use full symphonic accompaniment than not, musical accompaniment began to be forced on producers. Over the next decade the conventions of film scoring were established and popularised.

Meanwhile, Warner Bros. marked its adoption of sound-on-film by attempting to revive the floundering musical genre. In the midst of a financial crisis, diversification into music publishing permitted Warner Bros. to devise methods to spread risk across investments other than those associated purely with film exhibition. As had been proven in the late 1920s, the film musical was a remarkably effective vehicle for song promotion. These early attempts by Warner Bros. to create media synergy—producing films and commissioning music copyrights designed to market each other—can now be seen as the birth of modern corporate entertainment synergy, providing Hollywood studios with a model that later, in the post-studio era, would serve as their salvation.

However, there was some amount of apprehension in regard to effectiveness of media synergy during its formative days in the 1930s, much of it associated with the rise of radio. As MGM, Fox and Paramount also began to explore film and music synergy, these shifts in industrial film practice began to impinge on traditional business models at work within the music industry. With ASCAP now in their control, those studios used the promotional power of the revived musical to increase their power on the ASCAP board, and thus began to set the terms of music publishing and licensing. Those studios with music publishing interests quickly found themselves in conflict with radio, as the new medium proved itself to be a powerful tool in music promotion, with its own agenda in regard to music licensing. By 1935, network radio had begun to outpace the film musical as the most effective means of popular music promotion.
Endnotes

1 Green 1930, p.119.
2 Quoted in Barnouw 1966, p.232
3 Green 1930, p.119. According to Variety, 1929 had been a ‘gold rush’ for ‘past-proved songsmiths’, asking ‘where and when could a songwriter in the past be assured of a $25,000 annual income?’
4 Green 1936, p.189.
5 Ennis 1992, p.3.
6 Quoted Jacobs 1977, p.108.
7 Karlin 1994, p.70.
8 Prendergast 1992, p.22.
10 The single-dial sound console used during the production of The Jazz Singer is on display in the Warner Bros. studio museum in Burbank, California.
11 James Whale’s Frankenstein (1931) provides a good example of this technique.
14 Eyman 1997, p.310.
17 Bordwell et al. 1985, p. 246.
18 Balio 1993, p.73.
20 Gomery 1992, p.225. Strike action was particularly fervent in Chicago, fuelled as it was by the militant ire of future AFM national president James C. Petrillo, who would organise further musician uprisings against encroaching technologies in the decades to come (see Chapter Four).
21 Crafton 1999, p.220. The AFM put the figure at 25,000; a competing musical labour organisation, the Musical Mutual Protective Union of New York, estimated 35,000. Ennis (1992, p.47) states that in 1926 there were 22,000 musicians employed by 23,000 movie houses in the US.
25 The AFM negotiated a similar agreement with radio stations, who were also obligated to employ specific numbers of staff musicians, depending on their size. (Ennis 1992, p.59).
26 See Chapter Five.
27 Swigart 1930, p.121.
28 Kalinak 2001, p.69.
30 For example, a boom operator would be required to constantly move the microphone toward whichever instrument or section was to be featured (LoBrutto 1994, p.13).
32 Swigart 1930, p.121.
33 Ibid, p.121. On average the studios also hired 460 freelance musicians and chorus singers per day.
34 Green 1930c, p.47.
35 Fehr & Vogel, 1993, p.22.
37 Faulkner 1971, p.23. Fred Karlin argues that each studio orchestra, under the influence of its music director, had developed its own discernible sound; for example Fox scores can be identified by their particular string orchestrations (Karlin 1994, p.189). However, Newman may well have utilised strings for purely practical, rather than aesthetic, reasons. For example, the sound men of the 1930s discouraged the music departments from orchestrating for woodwinds, finding that they were too similar in tone to the human voice; strings were deemed less likely to clash with dialogue (Gorbman 1987, p.78).
38 Faulkner 1971, p.23. AFM members were only permitted to work for those studios party to the agreement, which went through numerous renegotiations and modifications throughout the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s.
40 ‘Union rule squawks keep musicians from extra studio dough’ in Variety, Wednesday, December 31, p.48.

Ibid., p.111.

A significant portion of the audience at the time would have been largely unfamiliar with classical music, for example (Koszarski 1990, p.44).


Behlmer 2000, p.130.

Fiedel 1977, p71.

Behlmer 2000, p.130.

For Claudia Gorbman (1987, p.22), music is ‘the only element of film’s discourse that appears extensively in nondiegetic as well as diegetic contexts, and often freely crosses the boundary line in between’.

Bruce 1985, p.5.

Adorno & Eisler 1994, p.35. This thread will be picked up in Chapter Five.

Flinn 1992, pp.19-20. In 1947 David O. Selznick, by this time an independent producer, wrote to Dimitri Tiomkin complaining that ‘the temptation to excessive orchestration and distracting tracks, in the scoring of pictures, is aggravated in many cases by the use of too large an orchestra’ (qtd. Behlmer 2000, p.397).

As with this chapter’s title, this line is taken from Al Dubin and Harry Warren’s ‘The Gold Diggers’ Song (We’re in the Money’).


Harry Warner had initially entrusted the management of Warner Bros.’ music holdings to his son Lewis, but Lewis died suddenly in 1931 at the age of 23. Music was subsequently banned from the Warner household for three years (Bros. Warner, The 2008).

Dubin and Warren also made uncredited cameo appearances as songwriters.

Fehr & Vogel 1993, p.98.


Sanjek 1988, p.47.

Green 1930c, p.47. Tiffany was a ‘Poverty Row’ studio which produced and distributed films between 1922 and 1932.

Green 1934, p.82.


Other examples include Paramount Records, owned by the Wisconsin Chair Company, and the Starr Piano Company’s Gennett Records (see Kennedy & McNutt 1999).

Sanjek 1996, p.66.

Eyma 1997, p.147.


Sanjek 1996, pp.159-60.

Quoted in Eyma 1997, p.709.

See also Smile, Darn Ya, Smile! (1931), One More Time (1931), You Don’t Know What You’re Doin’! (1931), Hittin’ the Trail for Hallelujah Land (1931), Red-Headed Baby (1931), Pagan Moon (1932), I Love a Parade (1932), Moonlight for Two (1932), It’s Got Me Again! (1932), and many others.


Green 1934, p.81.

Ibid, p.81.


Green 1935, p.107. The version by Hal Kemp and His Orchestra (with a vocal by Skinney Ennis), represented further synergy for Warner Bros., appearing on another of their music subsidiaries Brunswick Records.

Sanjek 1988, p.152.


‘Bitner stays at Feist with “piece” of firm under Metro deal; Chester Cohn of Chicago shifted to N.Y.’ in Variety, November 6, 1935, p.47.

Fehr & Vogel 1993, p.154.

‘Bitner stays...’, p.47.


Sanjek 1988, p.159.


Hellman 1938, p.135.
The limited playing time per side and the perceived inferior fidelity of records rendered them not suitable for radio broadcast at this time. Wald (2009, pp.92-3) notes that until the mid-1920s it was not possible to capture a direct signal from the gramophone needle to the amplifier, thus recordings were broadcast by placing a microphone near the gramophone speaker. In addition, the legal status of the public broadcast of commercial recordings remained in dispute until the mid-1940s (see Chapter Four).
Chapter Three—

The Wages of Synergy: Hollywood Takes on the Radio Networks

WB’s attitude has been that the music business, as a self-contained entity, is hardly worthwhile. There isn’t enough money in that.

*Variety*, 1936

Whereas Hollywood and the record industry suffered substantial losses during the early years of the Depression, radio seemed to draw strength from it. By 1930 there were radios in 12 million US homes and, with audiences staying in to enjoy free entertainment via the airwaves, advertisers continued to pour revenue into the medium. That same year, sales of recorded music fell by 39 percent, while sheet music suffered a 50 percent drop. With the radio networks’ advertising revenues outpacing Depression-era box office figures, the Hollywood music publishers argued that they were not receiving adequate compensation from radio for the use of the music copyrights that advertisers relied on to lure tens of millions of consumers. Warner Bros. fired the first shot in November 1935, when it withdrew its publishing firms from ASCAP, sparking a conflict between ASCAP and radio that would eventually lead to the rupture of the music industry in the 1940s.

In Hollywood all the major studios except MGM—the only film studio to remain in the black during the first half of the 1930s—were mired in financial difficulty. Warner Bros. had flirted with bankruptcy in 1931, but like MGM their diversified media interests helped them avoid filing for reorganization, a fate suffered by the majority of studios. Under Harry Warner’s guidance, the studio spread risk across interests other than film production. Encouraged by the revival of the musical and a healthier overall box office, by 1935 the studio had expanded its music publishing portfolio to encompass eleven companies under the Music Publishers Holding Corp umbrella: Witmark, Victoria, New World, Remick, DeSylva,
Brown & Henderson, the Harms group of publishers (T.B. Harms, Harms Inc., and Chappell-Harms), and those firms’ many subsidiaries.  

Buddy Morris, the Music Publishers Holding Corp operating manager, was replaced in 1935 by the more aggressive Herman Starr, a Warner Bros. Vice President, who also took Morris’s place on the ASCAP board of directors. The expanded publishing portfolio had given the studio not only more power within ASCAP (with Starr joining Warner-employed publishing chiefs such as Jerome Kern and T.B. Harms’ Max Dreyfus), but the control of 40 percent of the music broadcast on radio. Warner Bros. also claimed that their companies controlled 80 percent of all the Broadway musicals produced in the previous 20 years. Starr quickly sought to use his studio’s power within the music business to extract the maximum returns possible from ASCAP’s biggest customer, network radio.

**Competition and Collusion Between Hollywood and the Radio Networks**

Stressing that his acceptance of a position on the board should not be construed as an endorsement of ASCAP’s business management, Starr immediately demanded to see the society’s books. Noting the prominent role that popular music had played in radio’s success, he charged that the ASCAP board had “utterly failed to obtain adequate payments for the use of music,” and threatened to withdraw all Warner publishing interests from the licensing body. For their part, the National Association of Broadcasters considered the almost $6,000,000 that their members were paying annually to the society—the bulk of ASCAP’s income—already excessive.

Whereas Warner Bros. was preoccupied with fee rates, the music publishers themselves were concerned that the radio networks were interfering with long-established systems of song plugging. They believed the instant national exposure of new copyrights on network broadcasts, mainly via live performances from dance orchestras, was in effect
creating too many hits too quickly. CBS, NBC and the newly-formed Mutual network controlled 88 percent of the US airwaves, and together were ‘gobbling up songs crazily, creating a hit in seven days and killing her off in sixty’.\textsuperscript{12} Thirty years previously, the Tin Pan Alley promotion system had worked to keep a copyright commercially active for an average of three years.\textsuperscript{13} Thanks to radio, as \textit{Variety} put it, ‘by the time public got around to visit[ing] a music shop for a hit, something else had cropped up in the public fancy’.\textsuperscript{14}

Much to Tin Pan Alley’s amazement and Hollywood’s chagrin, the broadcasters, with their ever-expanding capacity to instantaneously expose songs old and new to a mass audience, were fast becoming the key gatekeepers for popular music. Complaining that radio was hurting sheet music sales by ‘making (hits) too fast and killing ‘em faster’,\textsuperscript{15} the Hollywood-owned publishers moved to limit radio plugs for songs tied to films, both to prevent over-saturation of new material and to rein in radio’s growing stranglehold on music promotion. Increasingly radio was usurping the Hollywood musical’s role as the medium via which Americans absorbed their musical culture.\textsuperscript{16}

This musical culture was, however, becoming increasingly homogenised, with network radio further refining the process of shaping public taste begun by Tin Pan Alley at the turn of the century, and later perfected by ASCAP.\textsuperscript{17} The virtual monopoly that NBC and CBS exerted over the nation’s airwaves created a very tightly controlled industry, with an extremely limited purview in regard to what styles of popular music were appropriate for a mass audience. In 1929 the NAB, which the two major broadcasters by then dominated, had established a code of ethics, according to which the broadcasting of ‘ethnic’ music, including blues and jazz, was discouraged.\textsuperscript{18} The technology of radio itself also played some part in the homogeneity of popular music, with professional songwriters taking seriously claims made by radio technicians that the musical range most suited for broadcast centred around five notes found in the middle of the scale.\textsuperscript{19} Within such a restricted set of practices designed to
cater to the ‘most homogenized tastes’; it can be seen that populist swells of musical interest—the rise of jazz, swing, hillbilly, rhythm and blues, and rock and roll, for example—invariably only take place when industrial conditions allow: unwittingly, by intervening in this controlled system, Warner Bros. were about to create the conditions that would indeed allow new styles of music to encroach upon Tin Pan Alley’s domain.

Conflict between Hollywood and radio predated disagreements over music publishing, with little cooperation between the industries before the mid-1930s. The studios resented the newer medium for stealing their glory and keeping movie audiences house-bound, as can be seen in the hyperbolic protestations of a Warner Bros. sales manager who claimed in the early 1930s that radio could not compete with Hollywood as it was “a fact that civilized man cannot live without motion pictures.” Hollywood had largely missed the opportunity to invest in radio during the medium’s rise to prominence in the late 1920s due to both a financial crisis and fear of government anti-trust action. Only Warner Bros., in the early stages of its media expansion, saw fit to buy into radio with the purchase of a small Los Angeles station. Technophile Sam Warner for one believed that ‘any opposition had to be joined, if not beaten’, and in 1925 established KWBC next door to the new Warner Bros. studio lot at 5842 Sunset Boulevard. In April 1925, brother Harry outlined his company’s policy in regard to competing media:

> My attention has been drawn to a general tendency within the amusement field to fight radio. The identical arguments of only a few years ago in an effort to minimize the popularity of motion pictures are being dragged out and pointed at an entertainment which now has millions of supporters. The cry of ‘the pictures will ruin the theatre’ is within easy memory. They didn’t…. To this is now added a new alarm: the radio will ruin the theatre and the pictures. It will not if it is used intelligently.

Unfortunately for KWBC, younger brother Jack had little inclination to use the station ‘intelligently’. According to Michael Freedland, each night, Jack would stroll over from the
lot and commandeering the microphone, reactivating his Vaudevillian persona, ‘Leon Zuardo’, last seen clearing the audience between screenings during the Warners’ Ohio road trips. The station proved not to be a profitable venture for Warner Bros.

Otherwise, there were few corporate links between film and radio. Apart from RKO’s ties to NBC, and Paramount’s briefly-held 50 percent stake in CBS, there were rumours in 1930 suggesting that both Warner Bros. and Fox intended to launch their own national networks, but they came to nothing. Some studios did however quickly see the promotional benefits afforded by the audience reach of the national networks: United Artists, for example, negotiated in March 1929 for Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, D.W. Griffith, Gloria Swanson, Norma Talmadge, Delores Del Rio and John Barrymore to appear on NBC’s first live coast-to-coast broadcast, the Dodge Victory Hour. But it was the exhibitors who felt most threatened by radio, and unlike the Big Five studios, UA did not have cinema chains to appease. Several of the big studios agreed with their theatre managers and ‘tried to do everything they could to discourage the listening habit’, including a massive publicity campaign designed to ‘remind audiences of the excitement that was theirs only in a theatre’. To the dismay of these studios, radio revenues continued to rise throughout the first half of the 1930s, while movie box office figures declined.

In December 1932 all the major studios (except RKO, owned by NBC’s parent company RCA) verbally agreed to keep their major stars off the airwaves. Exempt from this ban were those studio players with existing radio contracts, such as Paramount’s Marx Brothers and George Jessell, and United Artists’ Eddie Cantor. Contract negotiations between MGM and Buddy Rogers (whom the studio was attempting to lure away from Paramount) collapsed when the actor refused to agree to the radio ban. MGM also denied Jimmy Durante’s request to include a clause in his contract freeing him to perform on radio. According to Variety, the studios party to the ban believed that radio was ‘holding the fans by
Exhibitors also complained of theatres being used for live radio broadcasts, as when Warner Bros. allowed their Western Theatre in Beverly Hills to host the *High Jinks* radio show, ‘which put a terrific dent in the business of other theatres.’ By the beginning of 1935, however, Hollywood and radio appeared to have reached an accord, with most of the studios realising that the increasing reach of radio (NBC was about to expand its West Coast network) made it an invaluable promotional tool, with *Variety* estimating that some 150 ‘film names’ had appeared on radio in the previous 12 months, including Katherine Hepburn, Cary Grant, Carole Lombard, Jimmy Cagney, Jean Harlow, Joan Crawford and Clark Gable. The respite proved to be short-lived, and throughout 1936 exhibitors pressured Hollywood to prevent their contracts stars from ‘going on the air under any circumstances whatever.’ In early 1937, as claims were being made that ticket sales were halved on nights that popular radio programs aired, MGM’s Louis B. Mayer re-activated the ban on radio appearances by his contract players.

At the same time, the networks were moving more and more production to the West Coast so that 21 percent of all programming originated from Los Angeles by the end of 1937. The advertising industry, cognizant of the value of movie star endorsements, stepped in as mediator and convinced Hollywood to abandon their restrictions. By 1938 several studios were co-sponsoring network programs, such as the *Maxwell House-MGM Hour* and the Warner Bros./Lucky Strike co-production, *Your Hollywood Parade*, both on NBC. Commenting on the duplicitous relationship between the two industries, *Variety* noted: ‘There has seldom been such a farcical disparity between the things people said about a competitor and the deals the same people made with that competitor’.
For Warner Bros., though, the effect of radio on exhibition was negligible in comparison to the perceived shortfall in licensing fees from radio. In early May 1935 Harry Warner instructed Herman Starr that the company’s music holdings ‘must provide at least a million dollars annually by 1936’. The catalyst for this directive had apparently been a game of golf, during which CBS President William Paley let slip to Warner that his network was making $8,000,000 a year. Harry and Jack Warner were convinced that their music catalogues were playing a key role in radio’s success, and that they were not being adequately compensated. In total, Warner Bros. had invested $10,000,000 in music publishing by the end of 1935, a year in which that venture garnered a profit just $85,000 ($35,000 of which was received from the UK). With the recording industry almost decimated by the Depression, ASCAP’s revenues from ‘mechanicals’—royalties paid for the mechanical reproduction of copyrighted music—had been drastically reduced, so Starr set his sights on radio.

Unlike the record business, radio was proving seemingly Depression-proof. Its value to the Warner-dominated ASCAP was enhanced by the fact that it now provided the ‘largest slice of a much reduced pie’, especially as recent amendments to licensing classification standards had placed increased emphasis on the value of network radio play. At their annual general meeting in 1933 the ASCAP board had resolved to restructure the all-important publisher rating system around radio exposure, devaluing traditional methods of assessment such as sheet music sales, song plugs in live performance, and, most importantly for Hollywood, music use in movies. The true worth of a music publisher within ASCAP was now almost exclusively determined by the success of new copyrights on radio, although the simultaneous introduction of new AA and AAA ratings was designed to lessen the impact on older established firms by more highly valuing their aging catalogues of traditional Tin Pan
With the emphasis shifting to radio, tensions surfaced between long established and newer firms, and older and younger writers.

To the newer firms, most of which were owned by Hollywood studios, the revised classifications seemed designed to deny them their rightful share of radio royalties, despite the fact that these revenues were generated almost exclusively by their more recent, and more popular, copyrights. In December 1935 *Variety* published a complete list of the royalty earnings of every ASCAP member for 1933, including each writer’s classification and total number of performance credits. The list showed, for example, that the most performed songwriter of 1933 was the AA-rated Irving Berlin, who made $7085.46 from 74,733 overall performances. It also revealed the basis of a major grievance for many newer ASCAP members, who felt the classification and payment system to be outdated and unfair. Depending on seniority and classification, it was possible for two writers to receive comparable royalties despite one receiving as many as twenty times more performances of their copyrights. For example, the very active Berlin made only $250.00 more than the similarly AA-rated founding member George M. Cohan, whose popularity had peaked before the First World War and whose songs were performed 70,000 less times than Berlin’s. New member Mack Gordon garnered 45,424 performances with songs such as ‘Did You Ever See a Dream Walking?’ (featured in Paramount’s *Sitting Pretty*), but his DD class membership only entitled him to $200 of the $883,575 total ASCAP royalties paid to composers that year.

While the new higher rating system caused friction within ASCAP, the improved value of radio plugs in turn increased tensions between Hollywood and the radio networks. Hollywood, which claimed 65 percent of ASCAP’s yearly publisher distributions, watched as radio rapidly replaced movie musicals as the music business’s main generator of revenue, and so accordingly refocussed their attentions on the national broadcasters. Further fuelling
the increasingly combative relationship between Warner Bros. and radio was the studio’s failed attempt to purchase a third national radio network recently established by a coalition of smaller networks and the *Chicago Tribune*, the Mutual Broadcasting System, which many industry observers suspected had been thwarted by interference from NBC and CBS.\(^{47}\) Mindful of his boss’s demands that their music publishing interests bring in $1,000,000 annually, Warner’s Herman Starr put it to the ASCAP board that, considering both the networks’ vast advertising revenues and their increasing reliance on music to attract audiences for their sponsors, the extant blanket fee of five percent on gross earnings paid by the broadcasters was grossly inadequate.\(^{48}\)

Starr’s next manoeuvre involved further encouraging the networks’ reliance on copyrights held by Music Publishers Holding Corp. With radio exposure now more prized than ever by ASCAP, Starr pressured his teams of radio pluggers to redouble their efforts to target programmers, and by 1935 Warner Bros. copyrights accounted for 40 percent of all music played on network radio.\(^{49}\) The resulting increased royalty payments ensured ASCAP’s most profitable year thus far, but although Harms was the most successful publisher of 1935, this was still not reflected in the ASCAP classification system.\(^{50}\) Of the approximately $3,750,000 that ASCAP had collected during the previous twelve months, $1,750,000 came from radio; however, despite their 40 percent share of total performances, Warner Bros. received only 26 percent of ASCAP’s total distributions.\(^{51}\)

With this $326,000 falling far short of his million dollar target,\(^{52}\) Starr began to make threats to the ASCAP board: Warner Bros. were prepared to withdraw their entire catalogue from ASCAP unless performance royalty fees from radio were increased significantly. *Variety* noted drily that up until that point the most vociferous arguments against the raising of music licensing fees invariably originated from Warner Brother’s own theatre exhibitors,\(^{53}\) but Starr also argued that the networks were flaunting the rules of the current contract, and
rather than the agreed-upon rate of five percent, NBC and CBS were in truth paying closer to one percent.\textsuperscript{54} The ASCAP board agreed that radio should be paying more, but felt that in a depressed economy the market would not stand more than a moderate fee increase.\textsuperscript{55}

For their part, the radio broadcasters increasingly saw ASCAP as a Hollywood-dominated ‘music trust’, and began taking measures to undermine their power.\textsuperscript{56} Many observers suspected that NBC and CBS were behind a US Department of Justice antitrust suit filed against the Society on August 30, 1934.\textsuperscript{57} Around the same time the networks began to crack down on anything that could be construed as unpaid advertising for the music business or Hollywood: for example, they banned the common practice by radio bandleaders of plugging the names of movies which featured songs they performed on the air, for which the bandleaders had been duly renumerated by publishers.\textsuperscript{58} Starr and Jack Warner had also suspected for some years that NBC had been secretly blacklisting Warner copyrights in favour of music published by Feist-Fischer, the publisher owned by NBC parent company RCA.\textsuperscript{59}

Ultimately however, radio’s growing influence over the music business resulted from its newfound role as popular music’s most efficient vehicle of promotion, and the NAB exploited this power by prolonging fee negotiations with ASCAP. In response, the studios too were attempting to reassert their control: there was a palpable sense of unease at ASCAP’s semi-annual meeting in November 1935 when it came to light that none of the Hollywood-owned publishers had yet renewed their five-year membership agreements, with Warner Bros. singled out as the ringleader of a potential mutiny.\textsuperscript{60} In addition, several non-Hollywood publishers had clauses in their contracts which rendered their membership void if ASCAP failed to retain other major firms.\textsuperscript{61} It was also alleged that 70 percent of ASCAP songwriters with film deals had in effect unwittingly signed over the entirety of their rights, including performing rights, to the studios.\textsuperscript{62}
The import of this final revelation became clear when Herman Starr attended a special meeting of ASCAP directors on November 20, 1935. In an issue published the morning of the meeting, *Variety* predicted that Warner Bros. would break with ASCAP and establish its own performing rights organisation. They were right. At a second meeting six days later, as fee negotiations with the NAB reached an impasse, and with 20 of that week’s top 25 radio plugs being Hollywood-owned copyrights, Starr resigned as an ASCAP director and withdrew all Music Publishers Holding Corp firms from ASCAP. This in effect blocked access by ASCAP licensees to almost half of ASCAP’s entire catalogue. According to *Variety*, this unprecedented act by Warner Bros. might not only undermine the government’s antitrust suit, it also had the potential to force the rewriting of US copyright law.

Starr took out a full page ad in the December 11th issue of *Variety*, announcing that from January 1, 1936 ‘no performance for profit of a musical composition owned or controlled by [Music Publishers Holding Corp] may be given without proper license from us’. He then sent letters to the NAB, NBC and CBS outlining plans by Warner Bros. to introduce individual per-use licensing agreements for radio, an arrangement that the broadcasters had been attempting to win from ASCAP for two years. Starr assumed that his catalogues were viewed by advertisers as a vital part of radio’s appeal; *Variety*, too, believed that there was little chance that radio would jeopardise income by forgoing this new per-use deal. But when advertisers raised no protest, the broadcasters—already nervous about possible legal action from ASCAP—refused Starr’s offer. Rather, both CBS and NBC threatened to mount on-air campaigns blaming the absence of their listeners’ favourite songs on the studio’s ‘obstinate attitude’ and ‘prohibitive terms’. They also vowed to hold Warner Bros. liable for damages that may accrue from any possible infringement suits launched by advertisers.
In addition, there remained several areas of uncertainty as to the effectiveness of the Warner ban. One aspect that Starr had overlooked was the fact that extant licenses for recorded transcriptions of programs organised by the Music Publisher’s Protective Association remained valid until June 30, 1936, which guaranteed a good amount of popular music would still air legally in pre-recorded programs. There was also some question as to whether or not Music Publishers Holding Corp copyrights could legally be kept off the air, as it was not clear whether a publisher controlled anything more than the publication rights of a composition, with ASCAP perhaps legally retaining the performance rights.

The Warner cause had also not been helped by the fact that none of the other Hollywood publishers—indeed, no other publishers—joined them in their protest; instead ASCAP secured the commitment of all the other major firms to sign new five-year deals in the week before Starr’s official withdrawal. Berlin, Fischer, Marks, Schirmer, Feist and Robbins all renewed their contracts in the days leading up to Christmas 1935, apparently under pressure from their own songwriters, who threatened to organise individual licensing deals. MGM music lawyer Julian Abeles claimed also that failing to re-sign would hand too much power to Warner Bros. if Herman Starr was successful in organising exclusive licensing deals with the networks. However, proving unable to do just that, Starr instead attempted to negotiate individual licenses with program sponsors, and offered several individual stations exclusive access to his catalogues, but still to no avail. By Christmas, advertising agencies were already looking elsewhere for music copyrights to feature in their programs in the coming year.

On Christmas Eve 1935, Warner Bros. were forced to retrench 42 managers, song pluggers, arrangers, stenographers and piano players working in their music publishing arm—over half Music Publishers Holding Corp’s entire staff—and closed their offices in Detroit, Cincinnati, Cleveland and St. Louis. Those who remained were drafted in to
monitor network and independent radio broadcasts, as well as hotels and nightclubs, for unauthorised uses of Warner copyrights, as were those employed in regional Warner film exchanges.\textsuperscript{80}

\textbf{Warner Bros. Goes Off the Air}

As of January 1\textsuperscript{st} 1936 radio was no longer legally permitted to publicly broadcast any Warner Bros.-owned material, and so 36,000 songs—including those from hit musicals by the likes of Dubin and Warren, Noel Coward, Cole Porter, Jerome Kern, Hoagy Carmichael and George and Ira Gershwin—disappeared from network airwaves, concert halls and night clubs.\textsuperscript{81} An immediate casualty was bandleader Ray Noble, who could no longer publicly perform his self-composed signature tune ‘The Very Thought of You’, a Harms copyright.\textsuperscript{82} Paramount were displeased that their new musical \textit{Anything Goes}—featuring Harms-published Cole Porter compositions, including Bing Crosby’s rendering of the title song—would receive no promotion from radio plugs when it was released in January.\textsuperscript{83} Such outcomes, Starr had hoped, would provide him with the bargaining power he needed, and he confidently predicted that Warner Bros. would make $1,000,000 from licensing deals with independent stations alone, with a further million to be extracted from the networks when their listeners began to complain and they were forced to acquiesce.\textsuperscript{84}

Listeners, though, seemed not to care—or even notice—that Starr’s copyrights were absent from the air. The networks instead continued to expand their audience with the aid of other music publishers more than willing to fill the void with long-dormant material from their own back catalogues.\textsuperscript{85} Meanwhile ASCAP, already facing threats from the antitrust case, a pending Duffy bill on copyright revision, and a $1,000,000 tax debt, had allowed those NBC and CBS affiliates hesitant to sign new five-year contracts until the Warner issue was resolved to continue airing ASCAP-controlled music at the old rates until further
Although Warner Bros. did eventually sign three-month agreements with 143 independent stations,\textsuperscript{86} for the first six months of 1936 Music Publishers Holding Corp’s income from music publishing dwindled dramatically, deprived not only of royalties from network radio play, but suffering also from falling sheet music sales resulting from the lack of radio promotion.\textsuperscript{87} This loss of radio exposure also damaged the prospects of Warner musicals such as \textit{Sing Me a Love Song}, \textit{Freshman Love}, \textit{The Singing Kid}, \textit{Hearts Divided} and \textit{Colleen} (all 1936) and, of course, the songs featured therein. Starr’s strategy to make Warner Bros. a million dollars from music annually was backfiring disastrously.

The NAB believed that if they held firm, the loss of publishing revenue suffered by Warners—combined with the lack of exploitation for their musicals and the reticence on the part of songwriters to sign with their publishers—would eventually force Starr to capitulate.\textsuperscript{88} Conversely, the non-Warner publishers, although they declined to participate in the protest, quietly hoped that the studio’s actions would indeed ultimately force radio to agree to higher fees.\textsuperscript{89} ASCAP Executive Chairman E.C. Mills expressed hope that, ‘if the Warners are successful in achieving a greater yield for their music rights, maybe it will be a good thing all around’.\textsuperscript{90}

It seemed Herman Starr’s actions were benefitting everyone except his own studio. Despite the withdrawal of Warner’s copyrights, ASCAP earned a record gross of $935,000 in the first quarter of 1936,\textsuperscript{91} as other publishers reaped the rewards: by the second quarter Robbins was earning more money from ASCAP than any publisher before, with 70,000 performances of their copyrights helping to fill the void left by the ban.\textsuperscript{92} After years of decline, sheet music was also on the rise again, and by the summer sheet sales were showing a 50 percent improvement over the previous 12 months, while record sales, a major casualty of the Depression, were also improving. And, as if to add insult to injury, for the first time in years the best-seller lists were not dominated by movie songs.\textsuperscript{93}
The first indication of a weakening in Starr’s resolve came when Warner Bros. secretly attempted to off-load Music Publishers Holding Corp to NBC for $2,000,000 ($6,000,000 less than it had cost to assemble it), an offer the network declined. Harry Warner, with his publicity department hamstrung by the radio ban, had watched in horror as his carefully wrought system of in-house cross-media promotion crumbled: Warner Bros. musical features were suffering at the box office, just as other studios were capitalising on the genre’s growing resurgence. Many of his songwriters, under pressure themselves from their fellow ASCAP writer-members to relinquish their AA classifications due to inactivity, were also refusing to renew their contracts; some were even suing the studio over their failure to adequately exploit their wares. Finally, Cole Porter, George Gershwin, Richard Rogers, Oscar Hammerstein II and Jerome Kern (co-owner of T.B. Harms) deserted Warner Bros. en masse for Chappell. In July, at the suggestion of Harms’ Max Dreyfus, Harry Warner instructed attorney Joseph Hazen to travel to New York to discuss terms for Warner Bros. to return to ASCAP; Herman Starr was suspiciously absent from the negotiations.

After seven months and an estimated loss of over $500,000, Warner Bros. quietly returned all Music Publishers Holding Corp firms to ASCAP on August 2nd, 1936. Variety reported that ASCAP had accepted the studio’s terms ‘practically intact’, and that Warner firms would automatically reclaim their senior classifications. Warner Bros. immediately dropped $3,000,000 worth of outstanding infringement suits against radio and other ASCAP licensees accused of using their music illegally, and cancelled all individual licensing agreements signed during the ban, offering rebates where applicable. Buddy Morris returned to his position as general manager of Music Publishers Holding Corp, and also took Herman Starr’s place on the ASCAP board. With some amount of prescience, Variety predicted that capitulation by Warner Bros. would embolden ASCAP, and set the cause of radio license fee reform back five years.
Morris took out a double-page ad in *Variety* on August 12th announcing the availability of the ‘swellest songs in years’ from all four of their major firms. Most of these new songs, from the likes of Dubin and Warren, Hoagy Carmichael, Mack David and Harold Arlen, would soon be heard in the forthcoming Warner Bros. attractions *Gold Diggers of 1937*, *Sing Me a Love Song*, *The Captain’s Kid*, and *The Singing Marine*; also back was Jerome Kern’s ‘world-loved score’ from *Show Boat*. Warner Bros. had four musicals slated for release in the six weeks following the end of the radio ban, while renewed access to Music Publishing Holding Corp’s catalogues spurred what *Variety* referred to as a ‘grand plugfest’ on radio and record. The combined effect of 36,000 Warner Bros.-owned songs returning to the airwaves, and the continued growth of radio (CBS’s profits improved 42 percent over the previous year; NBC’s 10 percent), saw ASCAP’s returns from the medium reach an unprecedented $5,900,000 in 1937.

Rather than smoothing the rift between ASCAP and the radio networks, however, return of Warner Bros. seemed only to exacerbate tensions by rekindling the Federal Government’s antitrust action; the NAB felt that ASCAP’s bungling of the Warner issue had implicated network radio in an alleged conspiracy. According to a Justice Department official, the fact that even music publishing firms ‘backed by one of the largest enterprises in the motion picture field’ could not operate outside ASCAP only confirmed that the society operated as a monopoly in alliance with the networks.

But peace between ASCAP and Warner Bros. lasted little more than two months, until October 21st, when a *Variety* headline trumpeted a ‘New WB-ASCAP squabble’. In a ‘stinging letter of protest’, Warner Bros. threatened to sue ASCAP over reneging on its promise that their publishers’ classifications would remain unaffected; specifically they objected to Irving Berlin, Inc., Carl Fischer, Inc. and G. Schirmer Inc. being awarded the same ‘availability rating’ (catalogue value) as Hamns, which before the ban had held top
position in a class by itself. The studio’s renewed power within the Society was confirmed when ASCAP acquiesced in December, ensuring Harms was placed in an exclusive category by boosting its rating from 500 points to 600 points.

Despite this victory, it soon became apparent that Warner Bros. had changed tack, and, rather than targeting radio directly, had decided to focus on perceived imbalances in the ASCAP classification system, which determined the allocation of radio royalties to the publishers. At the end of 1936, on the eve of the launch of their new Pacific Network, CBS announced a further 32 percent increase in business, to $23,200,000; NBC announced a gross profit of $33,300,000, while Mutual had made $2,000,000 in its first year on air. ASCAP collected a total of $700,000 in the fourth quarter of 1936, but Warner Bros. earned only $42,000 from music in the same quarter, a figure Harry Warner deemed grossly inadequate.

And now Warner had proof of disparities in ASCAP’s evaluations of his publishers. In February 1937 Buddy Morris presented ASCAP with a list (also leaked to Variety) comparing actual usage of copyrights between August and November 1935 against each publisher’s set availability points. Despite their identical number of points (500), Harms’ catalogue had been accessed almost five times more than that of Berlin; New World, with its lowly rating of 30, had twice as many songs performed than other publishers boasting 200 points or more; T.B Harms was out-performing Chappell, yet was allocated less than half as many points. This list also reignited discord within ASCAP as the newer lower-rated popular music publishers, now dominating the airwaves with the latest musical craze, ‘swing’, protested the apparent immutability of the higher ratings enjoyed by the old guard of publishers. For the ASCAP board this system served as a bulwark preventing faddish, fly-by-night amateur publishers gaining too much power too quickly due to a single massive hit and thus undermining the traditional values of American song craft; for the pop publishers it
seemed more a case of desperate self-preservation on the part of a cabal of moribund Tin Pan Alley veterans, unwilling or unable to cater to an ever-changing audience.

As publishers old and new regrouped in order to weigh their future legal options, the rest of 1937 and early 1938 proved relatively calm on Tin Pan Alley, allowing ASCAP breathing space to re-establish itself as the central power of the music industry. However, two new factions of publishers soon emerged within the society, adding further complexity to the rift between the older publishers and the newer pop music firms: the dominant Hollywood-owned firms were set on ensuring that publishing refocus on its prime goal, promoting the film musical; many independents on the other hand felt that there should be more space for original songs not tied to, or shaped by, the demands of film narrative.

The heads of several non-Hollywood independents resigned from key ASCAP committees in protest at inequities within the classification system which favoured established publishers, though many of these same firms themselves soon became prey to a renewed bout of Hollywood publishing expansion. Although Paramount failed in its bid to add the Joe Morris Music Company to its portfolio, MGM successfully increased its ‘copyright dynasty’ by purchasing the Miller Music Company, as well as several smaller publishers. For many in the business, Metro’s rechristened Big Three Music Corp was now perfectly situated to challenge Warner’s dominance in the music business, a position strengthened when Big Three forged film-and-music alliances with Twentieth Century-Fox and Universal. Instead, MGM merely bolstered the Hollywood power bloc within ASCAP, providing Warner Bros. with enough purchase to once again take on the radio networks.

The Immediate Origins of the 1939 ASCAP/Radio War

During 1937 ASCAP collected $5,926,941 from its various licensees, as the ever-expanding realm of performance royalties finally overtook sheet music sales as publishing’s
chief source of income. By far the bulk of these performance royalties were received from radio, which now generated over three times as much revenue for ASCAP as film, even though the $3,800,000 received from radio represented a five percent drop from the previous year’s haul (due to the $2,000,000 contraction in income suffered by the networks during the ‘Roosevelt Recession’ of 1937—the Depression had finally impacted radio).

Around the same time Hollywood musicals began to fall out of favour, with belt-tightening audiences once again becoming wary of the genre due to its over-saturation at the box office. The combined aggravations of the recession, reduced revenues from radio, and the slump of the musical prompted those Hollywood studios invested in music to look for ways to shore up their returns. With radio by now relying on music for 75 percent of its programming, the Hollywood music firms once more began to pressure ASCAP over the inadequacy of fees extracted from the broadcasters. Throughout 1939 rumours emerged within the industry suggesting that ASCAP was seriously considering a one hundred percent hike in radio fees.

By this stage ASCAP was facing 34 pending federal and state antitrust suits, which many in the industry perceived to be a product of the growing influence of NBC and CBS. Under siege, ASCAP now appeared far more receptive to Hollywood’s call for an aggressive approach to negotiations with the NAB. The NAB itself had recently professionalised, appointing their first salaried president, and of course maintained long-held grievances of its own against the music licenser. With tensions already at boiling point, Harry Warner chose this moment to reinstate Warner Bros. Director and Vice President Herman Starr as the head of the ‘largest music publishing enterprise in the United States’, filling the void left by the recently departed Buddy Morris. During the intervening years, Variety claimed, Starr had ‘harboured certain embittering recollections’ over taunts he had received from high-ranking network officials after his defeat in the 1936 radio ban. Thanks to his simultaneous
inheritance of Morris’s chairmanship of the ASCAP Radio Negotiating Committee, the trade paper also noted ominously that ‘Starr is now in the driver’s seat’.128

ASCAP’s make-up had altered slightly in Starr’s absence, and he wasted little time turning this to his advantage. The record industry had rebounded from its near decimation at the hands of the Depression in the early 1930s, thanks largely to the rise of the jukebox, prompted by the repeal of Prohibition in 1933.129 Jukeboxes were responsible for 60 percent of record sales as constant wear-and-tear meant multiple sales of discs for each machine. Combined with the arrival of swing, the jukes triggered a rapid boom in disc sales, which doubled from 35 million sold in 1938 to 70 million just one year later.130

The twin record/jukebox and Tin Pan Alley/radio nexuses were still treated largely as separate industries. According to Ennis, no one ‘saw the necessity to connect them, and the publishers could not see any way of converting the massive exposure capability of the jukebox into a directed and selective exploitation mechanism’.131 However, the disc boom had encouraged the formation of scores of new publishing firms tied to the overnight success of swing bandleaders. As new ASCAP members, most of these small enterprises were seemingly unconcerned with the outmoded classification system, content instead to claim their share of the $750,000 in annual mechanical performance rights paid via the Music Publisher’s Protective Association.132 The established publishers were not only unable to profit from the record boom, but had suffered five years of steadily diminishing sheet music sales.133

Thus, with the publishers threatened by the encroaching record industry/jukebox partnership, it took little effort by Starr to convince the ASCAP board that their relationship with radio needed to be re-examined. As head of the Radio Negotiating Committee he pressured the ASCAP board to not only refuse the NAB’s demands for per-song or per-program rates, but to instead increase the blanket fees that already so irked the networks.
Accordingly, in late March 1940 ASCAP called a meeting with network executives in New York to announce adjusted rates for radio, effective from the conclusion of the existing agreement at the end of the year. The licensing body revealed that it intended to double the existing blanket fees. The shock announcement was seen by *Variety* as a surprise attack designed to unsettle the NAB (with whom ASCAP had discontinued negotiations in the weeks leading up to the meeting) and it had an immediate effect: CBS executive Vice President Edward Klauber stormed out of the room before the terms had finished being read out.  

The NAB knew that the ASCAP contract was designed to split the broadcasting industry into two opposing camps—Independent stations versus the major networks—by offering a sliding scale of fee rates that ranged from three percent for smaller stations, to seven-and-a-half percent of CBS and NBC’s gross advertising revenues, paid at the network source. Herman Starr, perhaps facetiously, claimed that the rate had historical precedence as it was modelled on RCA’s rates for the use of its radio patents in the 1920s. But the new proposal did indeed represent a 25 percent reduction for the independents, and would save 705 small US stations a total of $650,000 per year; conversely, for the networks it would mean a $4,000,000 annual increase in operating costs. Under the old plan, individual stations had been responsible for paying five percent of their advertising revenue to ASCAP, while the networks had in truth paid nothing; a seven-and-a-half percent fee paid at the network source would in effect double ASCAP’s income.  

The source payments for the networks were based on each network’s total overall advertising revenues, and thus factored in sponsored programs that did not actually use music, such as news and sports broadcasts. The NAB’s Neville Miller countered that the broadcasting industry already paid $5,000,000 per year for music licensing—five times as much as any other industry, representing two-thirds of ASCAP’s total revenue—condemning
the new proposal as ‘demands which the broadcasting industry must resist as a matter of life and death.’ ASCAP’s John G. Paine in turn accused network radio of markedly under-reporting its true income, and further claimed that small radio stations would save up to 50 percent under the new plan.

However, ASCAP’s tactics to divide the radio industry over song licensing were doomed to failure, as the NAB was about to unveil its own surprise plan to the music industry that would trump Paine’s promises to the smaller stations. At their 1939 national convention, NAB members had voted in favour of the formation of a music licensing body to compete directly with ASCAP. Broadcast Music Incorporated (BMI) had been quietly organised during the course of the NAB’s negotiations with ASCAP, although Variety claimed that the NAB had been compiling a list of public domain songs ‘suitable for radio use’ since as early as November 1936 (after the Warner ban) in case negotiations with ASCAP completely deteriorated. Organised by CBS lawyer Sidney M. Kaye, BMI represented the first concerted effort to break ASCAP’s hold on the music business since the film industry’s failed licensing venture in 1924. It was also the first attempt by radio to gain some amount of control over music publishing since RCA/NBC’s short-lived investment in several music firms in 1930, seen by some at the time as an attempted coup against ASCAP.

By way of incentive for non-affiliated stations, BMI’s music licensing charges would be partially absorbed as stock options, with one-fifth of the licensing fee in fact purchasing BMI shares. Not only would this award each station an interest in the company, the charges themselves represented a 50 percent reduction of fees previously paid to ASCAP. The networks themselves quickly took measures to encourage, if not ensure, BMI’s success: within months NBC was demanding that all on-air bands include at least one BMI song in each broadcast, despite the fact that the company had as yet only managed to license a small number of copyrights.
But the NAB did not stop at merely establishing a competitor for ASCAP—they also announced a future broadcast ban on all ASCAP music, effective from the 1st of January, 1941. Every ASCAP song—that is, popular music in toto—would disappear from the airwaves, in protest at the ‘demand[s] of the music monopoly that it be allowed to levy tribute on all radio programs, including those which do not use any music whatsoever’. Although many in radio still saw the proposed April 1, 1940 commencement of BMI operations as merely a threat designed to force the publishers to acquiesce, ASCAP did not waver: like Warner Bros. four years previously, the licensing body believed that public demand for songs by proven songwriters ensured them the upper-hand. The push by Warner Bros. may have failed, but this time the radio audience would not just be deprived of a percentage of their favourite songs; they’d lose all of them.

In order to remind the industry and general public of their worth, at the end of July ASCAP sponsored a special 90-page commemorative issue of Variety celebrating the 25th anniversary of American music licensing. Scattered among the pro-ASCAP articles emphasising the music publishing industry’s commitment to compositional quality and patriotism—and glowing testimonials from the likes of Damon Runyon, Walter Winchell and Ring Lardner—were several examples of anti-radio propaganda, including one article which directly implicated broadcasting in the decimation of the piano industry. ASCAP painted the approaching radio ban as a ‘blacklist’ against their songwriters, further claiming that the ‘broadcast barons’ were intent on creating a monopoly on music. The war in Europe coloured public pronouncements: ASCAP claimed the networks planned to broadcast ‘Nazi and Fascist songs’ via deals ‘not disapproved’ by Hitler and Mussolini; in response, the NAB and BMI released a joint statement vowing to ‘fight to secure freedom from the music monopoly’. With $75,000,000 at stake in music revenues for rest of the 1940s, the pro-
ASCAP Variety also accused the networks of being ‘out to control all non-Hollywood entertainment’.

Meanwhile BMI set about assembling a music catalogue to fill the void left once 40 years of Tin Pan Alley’s labours (in effect the twentieth century American popular music canon of 508,425 copyrights) completely disappeared from the airwaves. Much of BMI’s threadbare catalogue consisted of arrangements of public domain material, although they also licensed songs from several overseas sources. But they struck their first blow against ASCAP on the eve of the radio ban when disgruntled ASCAP publisher Edward B. Marks Music Corp shifted its catalogues to BMI in a five-year deal worth $1,250,000. An original ASCAP member founded in 1894, Marks were dissatisfied with their $85,000 share of ASCAP’s royalty payments during 1940, which were vastly inferior to the payments made to Hollywood publishers. Feeling that their 15,000 copyrights from 28 subsidiaries (many based in Latin American) were worth more, Marks signed with BMI on the 7th of December for a guarantee of $200,000 annually. As if to emphasise BMI’s potential might, the deal included an option for BMI to buy the company outright for $1,000,000 after five years, an offer the not-for-profit ASCAP could never hope to match.

The Marks deal eased radio sponsor fears in regard to the pending music ban. As with 1936, ultimate power lay in the hands of Madison Avenue, who would again tip the balance in the NAB’s favour. Throughout 1940, network radio gross income increased by 16 percent to $96,000,000. Fearing any pressure on radio to provide ‘quality’ music for sponsored programs would result in increased advertising rates, the major agencies did not protest the NAB’s ‘plan to eradicate ASCAP music from the air’, although they did resolve to monitor public reaction closely. However, as with Herman Starr’s ban, there was little sign of public opposition as the networks commissioned new BMI-licensed theme tunes for their programs, collected data on legally performable music, and began to gradually remove
ASCAP material from their schedules. By Christmas 1940, both NBC and CBS were already broadcasting ASCAP-free.

At the official commencement of the ban on the 1st of January 1941, NAB president Neville Miller released a statement summarising radio’s grievances, highlighting collusion between ASCAP and the studios. Stressing that the film industry ‘indirectly controls ASCAP’ through the 13 Hollywood-affiliated publishers which claimed 65 percent of the money collected from radio, Miller noted that radio stations were forced to pay ‘41 times as much as the film industry per dollar of income’ for music licensing. Despite Hollywood’s annual income of $1,100,000,000, ASCAP charged the studios ‘only $1,000,000 for all the music used in films’, compared to the $4,500,000 tax levied on radio’s far smaller annual gross of $120,000,000. Thus, Miller complained, ‘the 13 music corporations affiliated with the film industry actually received from ASCAP $625,000 more last year than the total fees which ASCAP charged the entire motion picture industry for use of all ASCAP music during the entire year.’

Conclusion

As Philip Ennis argues, during the 1920s and 1930s,

...legal and economic battles shaped the practices and strategies of the emerging phonograph, radio, and motion picture industries. The opposing views of these corporations and their offspring about what constituted proper musical fare for the nation, how that music was to be organized, presented, and paid for, set the trajectory for the development of popular music in the succeeding half century.

Cinema and radio grew to depend heavily on commercial music during the late 1920s, and thus both often found themselves in dispute with the music industry’s chief governing entity, ASCAP. Hollywood’s conquest of ASCAP had coincided with the formation of the national
radio networks in the US in the late 1920s, ensuring that the studios and the broadcasters would spend much of the subsequent decade battling over popular music’s capacity to lure audiences. Upon gaining control of ASCAP, the major film studios developed a proto-synergistic system of film and music promotion in which hit musicals instantly exposed an array of new copyrights to a mass audience, an audience that may well have come to see that musical after hearing several of its tunes on the radio.

Network radio had quickly become Hollywood’s most prominent competition as it struggled to tempt audiences to the cinema in the early years of the Depression. Yet radio’s growing revenues relied heavily on the studios’ music catalogues. As the largest investor in publishing, Warner Bros. especially felt that the licensing fees paid by radio were disproportionately small. Both mediums attempted to sway ASCAP to its own advantage, exerting pressure when each felt its own needs were not being met. The movie studios, with their publishing interests giving them voting power on the ASCAP board, could exercise influence from within; radio drew its strength from the fact that it was fast replacing the Hollywood musical as the principal conduit between Tin Pan Alley and the audience for popular song.

Harry Warner’s desire to see his Music Publisher’s Holding Corp catalogues operate at their full potential spurred a doomed boycott, but upon returning to ASCAP, Warner’s music chief Hermann Starr set his sights on extracting more money from radio. When ASCAP announced in 1940 that it intended to double the licensing rates paid by broadcasters, radio banned all ASCAP music from the airwaves and established a competing licensing body, Broadcast Music Incorporated, effectively splitting the music industry in two.
Endnotes

1 ‘Music men’s WB worry’ in Variety, January 1, 1936, p.188.
2 Maltby 2003, p.563.
4 Finler 2003, p.286.
5 ‘Bitner stays at Feist with “piece” of firm under Metro deal; Chester Cohn of Chicago shifted to N.Y.’ in Variety, November 6, 1935, p.47. By the end of 1935, DeSylva, Brown & Henderson had been dissolved and Chappell-Harms sold.
6 ‘Dilemma over WB walkout’ in Variety, December 4, 1935, p.35.
7 Sanjek, R. 1996, p.159.
8 ‘WB-networks prepare for legal action in ASCAP counter suits’ in Variety, January 8, 1936, p.49.
9 Green 1936, p.189.
13 Ennis 1992, p.43.
14 Green 1934, p.82.
17 Garofalo 1999, p.323.
19 Ibid, p.111.
20 Sanjek 1988, p.159.
22 Whitcomb 1994, p. 95. Hollywood was quite prepared to take measures to suppress the rise of a competing form of entertainment. In the early 1930s, exhibitors complained that the latest craze, dance marathons, were keeping audiences away from cinemas. In response, the studios pressured the US government to outlaw these dances, which they did in 1933
23 ‘Pictures’ most sensational year’ in Variety, January 2, 1929, p.5.
25 Sanjek 1988, p.159.
26 ‘Oppose films based on radio’ in Variety, December 27, 1932, p.3.
27 Ibid, p.3.
28 Ibid, p.3.
29 Ibid, p.3.
30 Green 1930b, p.47.
32 ‘Film stars kept off air’ in Variety, December 4, 1935, p.36.
Disc sales dropped from 150 million units in 1929 to 25 million in 1935, ‘forcing many small recording firms and a few big ones out of business’ (Baden-Fuller et al, 2001).


Green 1934, p.82.

Al Dubin and Harry Warren, who were contracted to Warner Bros but didn’t always write together, followed closely behind with 70,505 and 71,573 performances respectively.


Ennis 1992, p. 64.

Sanjek 1988, p.152. Both Variety and Billboard published charts which tallied network radio plugs, for which the publishers, not the performing artists, were credited (Ennis 1992, p.66).

Green 1936, p.189.

‘WB music co.’s quit ASCAP’ in Variety, November 27, 1935, p.58.

In fact, Warner Bros. wanted $2,000,000 annually from ASCAP, with the other million intended for songwriters (‘Dilemma over WB walkout’ in Variety, December 4, 1935, p.35).


‘Dilemma over WB walkout’, p.35.

Green 1936, p.189.


Bodec 1935, p.83.

Sanjek, R. 1988, p.112. The music publishers’ trade organisation, the Music Publisher’s Protective Association (MPPA)—distinct from ASCAP, which also included composers and song writers—was also concerned such practices could be seen as illegal bribes or payola (‘MPPA warns band leaders of possible “conviction” in letter on paid plugs’ in Variety, December 4, 1935, p.34). In turn, some bandleaders threatened to discontinue the plugging of movie songs after several had paid for arrangements of songs which ended up on the cutting room floor (‘Filmusic publishers who burn up radio bands may react vs. the pix’ in Variety, November 18, 1936, p.55).

Green 1936b, p.47.

Green 1936, p.189.

One of the larger independent publishers, Mills Music, would also have been affiliated with Hollywood by this time had Irving Mills managed to convince any of the studios to agree to his $1,500,000 asking price (Green 1936, p.189).

‘Writers have signed over rights to films, says Burkan; Russell, Caesar clash as ASCAP meeting’ in Variety, November 6, 1935, p.47.

‘Warners’ break with ASCAP looks likely this wk. following b’d meeting’ in Variety, November 20, 1935, p.51. There had been an eight week hiatus in negotiations between Starr and ASCAP while the Warner Bros. vice president appeared as a defendant in the US government’s antitrust suit against the major studios.

‘T.P. Alley goes wailing wall—minus studio tie, songwriters out o’ luck’ in Variety, November 27, 1935, p.45. As the title suggests, albeit in ‘Variety-ese’, this article reports on the difficulties experienced by those songwriters signed to ‘the few major publishing houses that have no picture background’. Ennis 1996, p.64.


‘WB music co.’s quit ASCAP’ in Variety, November 27, 1935, p.45. One immediate legal complication surfaced due to the fact that Warner Bros. owned copyrights by ASCAP members such as Jerome Kern, George and Ira Gershwin, Rodgers and Hart, and the late Victor Herbert, all of whom had pre-existing agreements with the society retaining each composers’ rights in perpetuity (‘Dilemma over WB walkout’ in Variety, December 4, 1935, p.35).

Variety, December 11, 1935, p.47.


‘WB music co.’s quit ASCAP’ in Variety, November 27, 1935, p.58.

‘Mailing Warner music contracts to stations this Thursday (26)’ in Variety, December 25, 1935, p.27.

‘MPPA wax royalties, $130,000’, p.24.

‘Jan. 1st is the date for Alley’ in Variety, December 18, 1935, p.45.

‘WB music co.’s quit ASCAP’ in Variety, November 27, 1935, p.58.


By the end of the first week of 1936, Warner Bros. had already compiled a list of copyright infringements by network affiliates in New York (‘WB-networks prepare for legal action in ASCAP counter suits’ in Variety, January 8, 1936, p.49).

As the networks continued to argue for per-song or per-program rates to replace blanket fees (Ennis 1992, p.107), Starr attempted to court smaller independent stations by offering to waive the controversial 50 cent manufacturers’ and advertisers’ fees on electrical transcription recordings, if those programs were aired on stations with Warner Bros. licenses (‘WB’s $500,000 loss’ in Variety, August 5, 1936, p.39).

Other sources claimed Warners owned 80,000 copyrights (‘Warners putting tune catalog to work on coast’ in Variety, August 19, 1936, p.44).

As Hollywood’s box office gross of $1,000,000,000—a return to pre-Depression figures—may have softened the blow (‘$1,000,000,000 gross in ‘36’ in Variety, January 13, 1937, p.3). ‘ASCAP 4th ¼ plum $700,000’ in Variety, December 23, 1936, p.47.

Although Hollywood’s box office gross of $1,000,000,000—a return to pre-Depression figures—may have softened the blow (‘$1,000,000,000 gross in ‘36’ in Variety, January 13, 1937, p.3).


111 ‘New WB-ASCAP squabble: WB demands higher ratings’ in Variety, October 21, 1936, p.53.

112 ‘ASCAP boosts Harms, Inc, rating after WB’s squawk; Remick as is’ in Variety, December 23, 1936, p.47.

113 ‘CBS biz up 32%, NBC 10%’ in Variety, December 23, 1936, p.33.

114 ‘ASCAP 4th ¼ plum $700,000’ in Variety, December 23, 1936, p.47.


116 Although Hollywood’s box office gross of $1,000,000,000—a return to pre-Depression figures—may have softened the blow (‘$1,000,000,000 gross in ‘36’ in Variety, January 13, 1937, p.3).


118 Green 1938, p.169.

119 Jungmeyer 1938, p.170.
The performance royalty subtotals were: radio, $3,878,751; film, $1,099,512; restaurants, $492,118; hotels, $209,649; dance halls, $127,806; miscellaneous, $119,100.

The downturn didn’t prevent CBS from buying the American Record Company—home of the Brunswick, Vocalion and Columbia Records labels—in 1938, a belated response to RCA’s 1929 purchase of Victor. Radio income partially rebounded in 1939, with a 12 percent rise to $4,300,000 (Garofalo 2008, p.56).

‘Starr remembers’ in Variety, March 27, 1940, p.33.

See Chapter Four.

In 1936 alone, RCA Victor’s business improved 300 percent (One firm’s record biz jumps 300%; post-prohibish “dirty” disc demand’ in Variety, October 7, 1936, p.1). The rise of the record business during the late 1930s will be examined in more detail in the next chapter.

For specific details of the proposal see ‘Hazy arithmetic on both sides of argument’ in Variety, March 27, 1940, p.33.

Garofalo 2008, p.57. The much smaller Mutual network claimed that its relationship with its more autonomous affiliates differed from CBS and NBC, and thus exempted them from paying source fees.


NBC ceased all broadcast of ASCAP-controlled copyrights on the 23rd of December; CBS followed suit on the 26th (‘ASCAP off CBS Dec. 26’ in Variety, December 18, 1940, p.26).

Warner subsidiaries Harms, Witmark and Remick earned $166,819, $109,000 and $104,000 respectively, while Robbins and Feist, purchased by Twentieth Century-Fox in October 1937, received $131,000 and $130,000 (‘Marks’ $125,000 BMI deal’ in Variety, December 11, 1940, p.41).

CBS reported a gross of $41,000,000, NBC $50,400,000 ($39,800,000 via the Red network, $10,600,000 via the Blue), and Mutual made $4,500,000 (‘Four major webs grossed $96,000,000 in 1940, 16% rise for new highs’ in Variety, December 18, 1940, p.1.).

‘Sponsors’ rights vague’ in Variety, December 11, 1940, p.19.

At first bandleaders resisted this enforced culling of their repertoires—and the reduction of income from plugging—until they realised more money could be made by forming their own BMI-affiliated publishing companies and plugging their own catalogues (Sanjek 1996, p.181).
160 Ennis 1992, p.50.
Chapter Four—

‘The music people like is the music people hear’:

Outcomes of the ASCAP/BMI Split for Hollywood and Popular Music

‘Where there’s music, there’s BMI’
- Broadcast Music Incorporated slogan, 1954

The network radio ban on ASCAP songs would last for only ten months, until October 1941, two months before the attack on Pearl Harbour. As with the Warner Bros. ban, it would end in timid capitulation on the part of the music publishers in the face of the growing might of network radio. The advent of BMI would also transform the content of US radio programming and alter the landscape of American popular music. Hollywood’s demands for increased revenues from radio spurred the national networks to search for alternate sources of music in order to woo audiences for their sponsors. In their aggressive attempts preserve a movie-centred model of popular music production, Hollywood had inadvertently undermined ASCAP’s power. Indeed, in an altered musical milieu, Tin Pan Alley itself would begin to lose ground to the true victor in the ASCAP/BMI split, the record industry.

Ten Months of Silence on Tin Pan Alley

As with the Warner Bros. ban of 1936—and just as the advertising agencies had hoped—the listening public once again seemed not to notice the absence of Tin Pan Alley’s wares from radio throughout 1941. This was partly due to the fact that radio was gradually becoming less reliant on music during certain time periods: in the daytime drama shows now filled 85 percent of the schedule, while shows devoted to entirely to pop music accounted for only eight percent of night-time programming. Variety shows still dominated at night, however, and these programs continued to rely on a regular supply of Tin Pan Alley fare.
As gleefully reported in several anti-radio newspapers, there were further glimmers of hope for ASCAP: some independent stations found it cheaper to sign with both BMI and ASCAP than employ staff to constantly monitor copyright infringements. One station, WWSW Pittsburgh, re-signed with ASCAP only two weeks after moving to BMI, due to the plummeting ratings of their request show, finding themselves unable to fulfil the majority of their listeners’ demands. Overall, though, surveys indicated that radio audiences were ‘unconcerned’ by the lack of ASCAP music. Not-so-subtly trumpeting network radio’s role as the nation’s prime disseminator of popular music, NAB president Neville Miller explained that, ‘The music people like is the music people hear’.

*Variety* reported on growing confidence within the broadcasting industry that this apparent public indifference proved once and for all that ‘ASCAP music is not indispensable’, and publishers would soon realise that they could not survive in the modern era without radio. With the network airwaves now exclusively reserved for their copyrights, BMI was already beginning to register success in the sheet music sales charts. Three of their new copyrights—‘There I Go’, ‘I Hear a Rhapsody’ and ‘I Give You My Word’—all featured in *Variety*’s top 15 list in January. BMI had sold 50,000 sheets by the end of that month while, deprived of radio plugs, ASCAP publishers saw their monthly sales fall by over 200,000 copies. With sales down by two-thirds, resolve among the ASCAP-affiliated publishers was already weakening as there were fears on Tin Pan Alley that the sheet music industry would soon be decimated thanks to the combined menace of the battle with radio and the poor quality of the material BMI was foisting on the public.

Those siding with the broadcasters continued to frame the radio ban on ASCAP copyrights as a battle against the Hollywood entertainment power bloc. According to Harry Engel, BMI’s Chief of West Coast Operations, complaints by ASCAP that they had been short-changed by network radio were somewhat undermined by the fact that the Hollywood-
controlled publishing companies operated ‘primarily as a publicity division’ for the film studios:

Where Lucky Strike, Chase & Sanborn and other well-known commercial programs were spending tens of thousands of dollars for radio advertising...the picture companies were getting their songs and the titles of their pictures announced on the air many times, day and night and every day of the week, at no advertising charge, so that their publishing affiliations became one of their most important advertising departments at no cost whatsoever.\(^8\)

Engel’s belief seemed to be confirmed by effects already being felt by the film and publishing conglomerates: whereas since 1934 copyrights with a musical tie-in had completely dominated sheet music sales, at the beginning of 1941 only three of the top 10 best-selling sheets were from musicals.

Broadcasting industry insiders thus believed that, as ‘film musicals need radio publicity’, Hollywood would soon yield and order ASCAP to recommence negotiations with the networks.\(^9\) The studios had in fact accumulated a substantial backlog of musical features that they dare not risk releasing without the benefit of radio plugs or trailers, the latter of which were not permitted to air if they featured any snippets of ASCAP music. MGM, 20\(^{th}\) Century-Fox, Paramount and Universal had six musicals each awaiting distribution; Columbia had three, while RKO was holding back Disney’s Dumbo. As the chief instigator of the anti-radio campaign, Warner Bros. had been more cautious, with only Blues in the Night and Navy Blues on the shelf.\(^{10}\) With an estimated $32,000,000 in box office receipts and song royalties at stake, and under pressure from their distributors and exhibitors, the other music publishing film studios urged the head of the Radio Negotiation Committee, Warner Vice President Herman Starr, to reopen negotiations with the NAB.

Starr refused to back down, but in March 1941 the broadcasters themselves made a surprise move towards rapprochement, with the NAB indicating it was prepared to re-
commence talks. Believing this to be the first sign of weakness on the part of network radio—and convinced that BMI’s relatively meagre sheet sales were not enough to sustain the new company—Starr declined the offer. Not long after, however, ASCAP’s assumed position of strength was undermined by two unanticipated stumbling blocks. With BMI’s copyright output still only at a trickle, and the licensing issue proving to be a administrative headache for many stations, radio allocated more and more programming hours to drama, game shows, and discussion programs concerning the war in Europe, thus further reducing the medium’s need for music.\textsuperscript{11}

More alarmingly for ASCAP perhaps, BMI publishers began to find success: by September, Cherio Music’s ‘I Don’t Want to Set the World on Fire’ was proving to be one of the year’s biggest hits, as were ‘You and I’ and ‘The Hut Hut Song’.\textsuperscript{12} BMI was also capitalizing on the growing Latin dance craze spurred by Marks’ and Peer’s copyrights, as well as from hit pop arrangements of Stephen Foster tunes and classical material such as ‘Intermezzo’, the latter of which would sell 500,000 sheets in 1941.\textsuperscript{13} Meanwhile, many ASCAP-affiliated publishers situated on Hollywood’s ‘Tin Pan Alley’ (which covered several blocks on Vine Street) were suffering, with some being forced to trim staff as a direct result of the radio ban.\textsuperscript{14} In all, radio’s boycott cost ASCAP $2,000,000 throughout 1941.\textsuperscript{15}

Thus, after ten months of radio silence, ASCAP’s bargaining power seemed to have completely eroded. In addition, unity and morale were also being undermined by ‘panicky’ and disgruntled songwriters, some of whom threatened to leave for BMI (although many were already suspected of writing for the competition under nom-de-plumes). There were also murmurings from smaller, struggling ASCAP publishers who, unlike the studio-owned publishers, were unable to weather the ban by spreading risk across other corporate interests (such as box office takings), to help amortize the ‘terrific overheads’ of publishing.\textsuperscript{16} With ASCAP seemingly about to capitulate, it was, rather, a surprise breaking of ranks within the
broadcasting industry that finally ended the boycott. Hoping to gain an advantage over its senior rivals, the fledgling Mutual Broadcasting Service signed a new blanket licensing agreement with ASCAP in October 1941.

Fearful of handing an advantage to MBS, at the end of October NBC and CBS followed suit, agreeing to revised blanket fee contracts. But this was by no means surrender on the part of the network broadcasters, who emerged from the boycott emboldened. Even the pro-Tin Pan Alley Variety conceded that ASCAP had ultimately lost the war with radio, emerging ‘seriously battered in both pocketbook and prestige’. NBC and CBS may have agreed to ASCAP’s two-and-three-quarters percent blanket fee, to be paid at the network source, but they had also forced the licensing body to agree to numerous concessions. By deducting items such as administrative costs and advertising agency commissions, the networks had managed to actually decrease their share of licensing fees by almost 85 percent, with the majority of the burden remaining where it had been previously, with the independent radio stations. In effect, CBS and NBC would be paying less for ASCAP music than they had before the ban commenced. As the dust settled, the networks claimed that victory over ASCAP represented a saving for the broadcasting industry of over $10,000,000.

Opening the Pop Stream: the Rise of the ‘Have Not’ Publishers

ASCAP music had not disappeared entirely from the airwaves during Herman Starr’s ban. Of the 796 commercial stations in the US, 136 independents remained virulently anti-network and thus sided with ASCAP. Many independent programmers felt that continuing to air proven ASCAP tunes was the best way to compete with local network affiliates, who were obligated to switch allegiance to BMI. Still, by the New Year 660 commercial stations had signed to BMI (with some holding licensing agreements with both organizations). BMI proved very popular with Southern broadcasters, and a majority of the stations located in
Florida, Georgia, and Alabama transferred their music licensing agreements to the new organisation.\textsuperscript{23} Throughout the 1940s, BMI would gain strength by capitalising on anti-network bias among station managers outside the big cities, licensing to them hundreds of copyrights based on the regional forms of music they preferred, in particular blues-, folk- and hillbilly-based styles that had hitherto been largely ignored in New York and Hollywood.

Much of this regional music was brought to BMI by several prominent publishers—none of them, of course, affiliated with Hollywood—that had chosen not to renew their ASCAP contracts. As noted in the previous chapter, E.B. Marks was the first major publisher to switch to BMI.\textsuperscript{24} Known as the ‘House of Hits’ due to the firm’s mostly ‘familiar pop fare’,\textsuperscript{25} Marks had also been one of the first Tin Pan Alley firms to publish blues tunes from the South in the 1910s.\textsuperscript{26} Like Marks, another ASCAP exile, Ralph Peer, brought with him a sizeable pool of Latin American music when he moved his stable of publishing companies to BMI.\textsuperscript{27} The first evidence of BMI’s impact on the commercial music business thus came with a ‘flood of Latin hits’ throughout 1940 and 1941.\textsuperscript{28}

As the name of his biggest company, Southern Music, suggested, Peer also published regional musical styles. Peer had developed an interest in regional genres such as blues and hillbilly while working as a recording manager for the Okeh and Victor record companies in the early 1920s. ASCAP, on the other hand, had prided itself on only licensing music crafted by professional song smiths for a broad discerning—that is white, middle class—audience. Since its inception ASCAP had studiously avoided music originating from the South, such as hillbilly styles and that from the race market.\textsuperscript{29} As ASCAP membership ‘was limited to the most “literate” writers of the Broadway-Hollywood axis of popular music—Rogers and Hart, Cole Porter, George Gershwin, Irving Berlin, George M. Cohan etc.’,\textsuperscript{30} music made by and for working class or rural audiences—African Americans and Southern whites—was on the
whole deemed beneath the professional composers of Tin Pan Alley. Those markets had been left largely to their own devices.

During the 1940s, however, Broadcast Music Inc., boasting that it would provide opportunities for the ‘budding young American genius that hasn’t been given a chance to get into ASCAP’, opened its doors to those ASCAP had spurned. More by necessity than design, BMI extended ‘the reach of the music business into almost every city (opening) the pop stream to creative resources beyond what could be found in the New York musical guilds’. In the rush to stock its catalogues, BMI brought former institutional outsiders closer to the mainstream, acquiring ‘its support from the “have not” publishers...in the grassroots areas’, particularly those catering to the race and country markets. BMI’s next prominent signings were Chicago-based hillbilly and cowboy song publisher M.M. Cole, as well as Acuff-Rose, ‘the first all-country publishing company’. Even established performers such as Jellyroll Morton, who in December 1940 assigned all of his publishing (which included a healthy catalogue of ‘negro composers’) to BMI, were permitted access to areas of the music industry that had previously been closed to them.

This opening up of an insular music industry monopolised by ASCAP was the most significant legacy of the battle between Hollywood and radio during the 1930s. Reebee Garofalo notes that though BMI ‘was originally envisioned as a throw-away bargaining tool’, instead it,

...emerged as a valuable source of music and ASCAP’s future primary competition. Moreover, for the first time the Tin Pan Alley/Broadway/Hollywood monopoly on public taste had been challenged...songwriting itself became more decentralised (playing) a major role in redefining popular music.

BMI would grow in stature throughout the 1940s as it shepherded the rise of an independent recording industry tied the growing popularity of regional music styles. Clinging to its
traditional methods of song promotion, and distracted by war, Hollywood and Tin Pan Alley appeared oblivious to this gradual shift in conventional popular music marketing practice. As a result, by the late 1940s, Hollywood would find that it was losing control of the music business.

The Rebirth of the Recording Industry

In the wake of the October 1941 truce between radio and publishing, ASCAP immediately returned to the top of the sheet music sales chart with ‘White Cliffs of Dover’. Within a month, the music business seemed to have returned to normal: only one BMI copyright remained in the top 25, and the music industry began to speculate over the uncertain future of the new music company. Some assumed BMI would cease publishing its own copyrights and concentrate solely on supervising the licensing for the more than 55 new publishing firms added to its books during the course of the ban. For others, BMI would be maintained by the NAB merely ‘as insurance against future ASCAP problems’. At the very least, BMI would ultimately save the radio networks a substantial amount of money: having cost $1,000,000 to establish, the new licensing body would soon be saving radio that amount in licensing fees annually. In fact, the money radio retained by not paying ASCAP during the course of the ban would have paid for BMI four times over.37

Variety, however, persisted with its anti-BMI campaign, welcoming the return of ASCAP to the airwaves as a victory for ‘class’. At the same time, though, it also noted some startling new trends within the music business concerning publishing’s poor cousin, the recording industry. Having been almost wiped out in the early years of the Depression, the disc market rebounded to double in size during 1938, and had continued growing in the years since. Together the major labels RCA Victor, Columbia and Decca sold a total of 130 million discs throughout 1941, ensuring the record business’s best year since the pre-Depression
era. This represented not only a dramatic recovery from 1932’s low of just six million discs sold, but also a marked shift in sales patterns.

Back in 1939, with swing music dominating the pop field, classical music discs still accounted for most of the profits garnered from the 58 million discs sold. The dominance of the classical market was thanks largely to the merchandising efforts of RCA’s Victor Record Society, which was modelled on the highly successful Book-of-the-Month Club. Two years later, however, almost 77 percent of records were being sold in the ever-expanding pop market. With its early identification and keen exploitation of the commercial links between pop music publishing and record promotion—a lesson learned from record men like Ralph Peer—BMI was profiting handsomely from the revitalization of the record business, despite the dire predictions of pro-ASCAP critics.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Peer had been one of few working in the music business to identify and encourage a close synergistic relationship between publishing and recording:

Ralph Peer alone fully appreciated how to make the control of copyrights profitable for himself and for the performers as well. In giving performers a financial stake in writing and finding new songs, he gained their personal loyalties and ensured the steady flow of new songs...Peer realised that records, like radio and live performance, were just a medium of exposing music and essentially this was the business of copyrights.

Active participation by industry modernizers such as Peer, who had despaired at ASCAP’s neglect of musical sources outside Tin Pan Alley and questioned their segregation of the roles of performer and songwriter, encouraged BMI to develop a business model quite removed from that of the established music industry. That model reassessed the importance of the recorded disc, not only placing further emphasis on its function in promoting published copyrights—a role that would soon expand greatly as the recording industry loosened
restrictions on radio play—but also worked to re-evaluate the cultural worth of the 78rpm record, especially for a younger audience. This adjustment would see BMI not only survive the war years, but soon grow strong enough to destabilize ASCAP’s—and thus Hollywood’s—hold on popular music.

As noted, ASCAP’s stringent membership requirements, based on presumed standards of professional song-writing craftsmanship, tended to ignore streams of music originating outside the New York/Hollywood nexus. Ralph Peer and the newer ‘recording publishers’ prompted BMI to view its relationship with its largely regionally-based songwriter members differently. Unlike ASCAP’s system, based on seniority and classification, BMI paid their writers for current performances of their works. This ushered in a system which relied more on the creation of new songs rather on catalogues of ‘standards’, copyrights which enjoyed years—or decades—of active commercial life via multiple performances and recordings by a variety of performers. BMI’s constant need for more material ‘pushed both publishers and record executives to search beyond the usual sources’ and seek out ‘more exotic’ forms such as country and race music. As Wartime restrictions on manufacturing materials and professional musician labour disputes encumbered the music business between 1942 and 1945, but the rise of BMI throughout the Second World War was viewed as an improbable example of rapid progress within an industry otherwise marked by stasis. This rapid progress would alter forever the shape of the US music industry.

A ‘New Racket’: The Record Industry and Music Publishing

In the years immediately preceding the Second World War, ASCAP too reaped rewards from the increase in disc sales, thanks largely to the advent of the record ‘album’ (actually a box of 78s), many of which were padded out with Tin Pan Alley standards. But although record royalties collected by ASCAP increased 30 percent to over $1,000,000
during 1941, the old-guard music publishers tended to eye the more capricious recording industry with suspicion, and oftentimes open hostility. As BMI prompted an increasingly hit-hungry record industry to undermine promotion of standards, a process begun by radio a decade earlier, Tin Pan Alley saw the lifecycles of their valuable copyrights reduced further. Established publishing firms also complained that record companies did little more than capitalise on the costly promotional work already undertaken by their teams of professional song-pluggers, by only recording and releasing a copyright once it had become a proven hit via movies and radio.

For Harry Link, General Manager of the MGM-owned Leo Feist Music (and co-writer of the 1936 hit ‘These Foolish Things’), the record business was still ‘a new racket’, and its sudden commercial rise was an ominous sign that the former customer was becoming a competitor. The Hollywood-controlled publishers also lambasted the current record craze ‘swing’, which they saw as the product of collusion between the record industry and the big band leaders (many of whom were now signed to BMI as composer-publishers). They also complained that swing was mostly unpublishable, as many recent hits were nothing more than improvised dance music arrangements, and were too difficult for the average sheet music customer to recreate on the family piano.

This rivalry between the record and publishing industries only increased once the recording industry, dominated by two labels closely affiliated with major networks, as radio and the labels began to establish a more compatible relationship. In April 1941, fourteen ASCAP-affiliated songwriters, claiming restraint of trade, brought a $1,280,000 antitrust suit against NBC, CBS, BMI and the NAB. Such tensions would only escalate over the coming decade, culminating in a $150,000,000 antitrust suit filed in 1953 by ASCAP members claiming that BMI, the major networks, Columbia and RCA Victor had taken part in a conspiracy against ASCAP music.
Columbia and Victor had been established as independent record labels in 1889 and 1901 respectively by the phonograph manufacturing companies Columbia Graphophone and The Victor Talking Machine Company. By the mid-1930s, however, they had been taken over by CBS and NBC, and ‘had become more or less dependent branch divisions’ of the broadcasting companies.⁵⁰ But the recording industry had yet to establish itself as a reliably viable entity, and if Columbia and Victor, the two biggest record companies in the United States, were viewed largely as adjuncts to the music publishing industry throughout the 1920s and 1930s, they were not necessarily prized any higher by their parent corporations. RCA President David Sarnoff purchased Victor in 1929 not for its recording interests, but because of its radio set manufacturing facilities: the record industry’s $75,000,000 in retail sales in 1929 paled against the $850,000,000 worth of radio sets sold in the US that year.⁵¹

During the Depression Columbia had languished as a sub-division of the American Record Company, which had bought the label for $70,500 in 1934 from the bankrupted radio manufacturer Grigsby-Grunow. In 1938, CBS head William Paley purchased ARC in order to expand into the manufacturing of electrical transcription discs for his network programs, reactivating Columbia almost as an afterthought in an attempt to undermine the RCA/NBC monopoly on classical music.⁵² CBS President William Paley also believed, ‘presciently as it turned out, that the record industry was about to make a comeback now that the worst of the Depression appeared over’.⁵³

Despite ASCAP’s attempts to undermine the influence of the record business—or, at the very least, its lack of enthusiasm for its expansion—it was its own extended squabble with the radio networks that had helped rescue the disc market from its Depression-era torpor. In particular, Herman Starr’s ten month boycott had itself been in great part responsible for the rise in record sales.⁵⁴ With their favourite songs absent from the airwaves,
music fans, teenagers especially, turned instead to the domestic record player, or sought out neighbourhood jukeboxes.\textsuperscript{55}

The jukebox market had expanded enormously in the late 1930s, and the record company in the best position to exploit that expansion during the ASCAP ban was a new label, Decca, keen to explore innovative marketing techniques overlooked by Victor and Columbia. Thanks to the jukebox, Decca had managed to more than double its annual income during the ten months of the radio ban.\textsuperscript{56} Decca president Jack Kapp, seeing Victor and Columbia as little more than pawns of Tin Pan Alley, was determined to throw off the shackles of the Hollywood music publishers and ‘make the phonograph record an independent industry within the realm of show business’.\textsuperscript{57} The advent of BMI was perfectly timed to suit Kapp’s plans.

Originally established in the UK in 1929 by stockbroker E.R. (Ted) Lewis, Decca had been launched in the US in 1934 after Lewis failed in his bid to acquire Columbia Phonograph’s struggling American division, then being offloaded by the newly-formed British firm Electrical & Musical Industries (EMI).\textsuperscript{58} EMI itself was product of the Depression’s devastating effect on the global record business: Columbia UK and the Gramophone Company—owners of His Master’s Voice (HMV)—were forced to merge as EMI in order to fend off bankruptcy; in contrast, Decca had thrived in the UK by selling its discs far cheaper than the competition.

Decca US was not a subsidiary of the UK company, but rather an independent entity for which Lewis provided substantial capital. Lewis’s resources enabled the new label establish its own distribution and manufacturing facilities so as to be able to compete effectively with market leader RCA Victor. Lewis partnered with Jack Kapp,\textsuperscript{59} who left his position as General Manager of Brunswick Records, the former Warner Bros.-owned label which by this time was (like Columbia) a subsidiary of the American Record Company.\textsuperscript{60} It
was Kapp who in 1928 convinced Brunswick to release Al Jolson’s ‘Sonny Boy’ in order to capitalize on the exposure it had received in the Warner Bros. musical *The Singing Fool*; the disc sold over one million copies, winning Kapp promotion to head of the company and forging the initial links between the film studio and the record label.

Although it had been barely two years since they had lost $8,000,000 in the record business with Brunswick, Warner Bros. provided Decca with a further $60,000 in start-up capital through their Brunswick Radio subsidiary, the one remnant of their previous foray into the recording business.⁶¹ As with Sarnoff’s purchase of Victor and Warner’s own investment in Brunswick for its transcription disc facilities, Harry Warner was not particularly interested in Decca’s potential success with pop records: rather, the sound technology-savvy studio claimed a 25 percent interest in the label in return for access to the recording facilities of United Research, a Decca subsidiary.⁶² Warner also still harboured desires to expand his company’s capacity to simultaneously exploit film and music, seeing a record label as an ideal adjunct to the Music Publishers Holding Corp; Jack Kapp, however, would see things differently.⁶³

Along with capital from Lewis and Warner Bros., Decca also benefited from Kapp’s access to commercially-proven talent. In the 1920s and 1930s, recording artists often signed personal contracts with a label’s manager, not the company itself; Bing Crosby, the most successful recording star of the era, insisted on a ‘key-man’ clause in his Brunswick contract that freed him from the label if Kapp were to leave.⁶⁴ Thus Kapp was able to bring with him to Decca a stable of Brunswick stars, including Crosby, Guy Lombardo, the Dorsey Brothers, Ted Lewis,⁶⁵ Fletcher Henderson and the Mills Brothers, instantly stocking the new label with a roster of known talent.

But big name stars featured on discs priced at half those of the competition were still not enough to sustain a record company at the height of the Depression. After a disastrous
first year of operation, Jack Kapp—known since his Brunswick days for embracing nonstandard exploitation tactics—hoped the jukebox might be Decca’s salvation. As noted in the previous chapter, the jukebox was discovered by liquor houses looking for an inexpensive form of entertainment when prohibition was repealed at the end of 1933. Within a year there were 25,000 jukes in operation in the US; in 1940, there were 500,000, by which time Decca thoroughly dominated that sector of the market, having under-cut Victor and Capitol by charging jukebox dealers only 22 cents per disc. More importantly for a new label like Decca, the constant wear-and-tear of jukebox play meant the regular need to replace discs, and by 1938 jukes accounted for 60 percent of all record sales.

‘Hitler and Tojo and Shellac and Petrillo’

Despite the corporate links between NBC and RCA Victor, and CBS and Columbia, the capacity for radio to promote a new recording during the 1930s and early 1940s was a far more indirect and limited process than it was to become by the 1950s. Until the 1940s the major record companies actively discouraged radio from broadcasting their wares, to the point that it was illegal to play records over the airwaves. Neither could most performers see value in having their recordings played on radio, viewing such exposure as a threat to other aspects of their careers. In 1936, in one of a series of cases in the pre-war era, the American Society of Recording Artists (headed by Al Jolson) filed a restraining order against KFWB Los Angeles, citing a violation of artists’ rights due to the ‘unfair competition’ of having their members’ recordings broadcast on radio.

The majority of music featured on radio was thus performed live in the studio, beamed from remote broadcasts, or recorded onto network-produced transcription discs as part of a specific program. Before the war, radio’s role in aiding record promotion was more akin to the Hollywood/Tin Pan Alley model of plugging films via songs, with a singer or
band performing their ‘latest record release’ live or on a transcript. Although the one major label of the era with no corporate ties to broadcasting, it was Decca which began to fully exploit the network’s power to plug their wares in this manner, thus becoming the first record company to ‘make of radio an ally rather than a competitor’. The other labels would soon follow suit: CBS, for example, realised it was able to promote the recording career of an ‘in-house’ artist such as Columbia Records’ Frank Sinatra via program appearances, without having to defy the ban and play his discs on air.

The arrival of BMI further altered the relationship between the record labels and radio. In a notable departure from ASCAP’s methods, BMI chose not to favour one form of song-plugging over another. Whereas ASCAP actively discouraged the playing of discs on the air by allocating such exposure a lower royalty than live performance, BMI rewarded both equally. This decision had the immediate effect of improving the cachet of the 78rpm disc within the industry, while at the same time reaping much-needed financial reward for the new licensing body: by 1942 radio accounted for $1,000,000 of BMI’s overall income. In addition, asserting its interest in those pockets of the music business based outside New York, BMI, unlike ASCAP, paid just as much for a performance on an independent station as it did for a plug on network radio.

Empowered by BMI, independent labels and new ‘mini-majors’ such as Capitol Records took Decca’s innovation a step further, circumventing restrictions on the broadcasting of records by supplying free discs directly to announcers. This new method of record promotion also took full advantage of the fact that music licensing fees and advertising costs had made electrical transcription programs too expensive for smaller stations. At the same time, the large studio orchestras employed by radio were becoming economically burdensome, gradually making records a more attractive proposition for the national networks as well.
The war, too, played a part in allowing the entree of records onto the airwaves (although restrictions on many of the materials necessary for the manufacturing of discs slowed the process somewhat). The reduced role for music on radio that had commenced at the beginning of the decade decreased further as the networks dedicated more airtime to the war: by 1943 CBS, for example, had turned 39 percent of its programming hours over to the war effort.\(^{78}\) In addition, World War Two had forced many of the big bands crucial for live remote dance broadcasts to disband, as musicians enlisted in the armed forces or, once petrol rationing began to make it difficult for large bands to tour, took jobs in factories and shipyards.\(^{79}\)

The gradual shift in radio programming from live studio orchestras to records heralded the beginning of a power shift in the music industry away from the publishing houses in favour of record companies.\(^{80}\) More immediately, in encouraging radio to play records the labels inadvertently sparked the most significant upheaval in the music industry since the ASCAP/BMI split, namely the American Federation of Musicians’ ban on recording, which commenced on July 31, 1942. The strike centred on fears by 138,000 AFM members that commercial recordings and radio transcriptions were increasingly depriving them of regular live radio work. AFM chief James C. Petrillo complained of an imbalance in radio’s dispersal of the $147,100,000 in broadcasting revenue earned during 1941: broadcasters spent $8,000,000 of that on transcription programs, but only $5,200,000 was paid to staff musicians.\(^{81}\) On top of this he charged that, by endorsing radio’s airing of discs, the record companies had contravened US patent regulations stating that records be used ‘only for non-commercial use on phonographs in homes’.\(^{82}\) In the 1940s, US copyright law still stipulated that music royalties only be paid to the copyright owner: musicians earned nothing from record sales or play on radio and jukeboxes.\(^{83}\)
The AFM recording ban curtailed the supply of new records from Victor, Columbia and Decca, but it provided a boost to newer record companies, especially those that catered to markets not necessarily associated with industry standards of professional musicianship, and thus operated outside Petrillo’s purview. This applied to the hillbilly market (in the 1940s, hillbilly music was classified as folk music), but was especially true of the race market. The AFM remained segregated until as late as the 1960s, and in the 1940s African American musicians joined the union only as ‘second-class citizens, with separate “colored” locals’. Apart from one-off sessions by the odd name jazz instrumentalist, black musicians were not hired by network orchestras or for major label recording sessions. At the same time, few were the independent labels that could afford to—or were inclined to—pay union rates.

These aspects of musical labour also go some way towards explaining the differences between the types of music recorded by major and independent labels in the 1940s and 1950s. Union-sanctioned sessions for major labels in New York and Los Angeles required that musical charts be provided for musicians—the ability to sight-read was at the time condition of union membership—featuring carefully written arrangements so as to effectively manage expensive recording time. Non-union recording sessions for independent labels, on the other hand, relied on ‘head’ arrangements created spontaneously by mostly self-taught and intuitive players who learned their trade in nightclubs and bars rather than music academies.

Some in the industry suggested that the recording ban also served to sustain the public profile of the otherwise on-the-verge-of-extinction big bands, as the major labels were forced to rely on re-releases of old hits to sustain them. After almost three years of re-issued swing records, however, the market was saturated and public interest in the big band craze was killed off once and for all. The demise of the big bands thwarted BMI’s initial plan to gain strength by allying itself with the pre-war stars of the music industry, the bandleaders, by
encouraging them to form their own BMI-licensed publishing companies which they could stock with their own original compositions. With the bandleaders suddenly yesterday’s men, BMI instead redoubled its efforts within the record industry, bolstering its catalogue via the vast untapped resources of music the independent record labels seemed to be discovering every day.

The recording ban lasted for over two years, until November 1944, when Columbia and RCA Victor finally capitulated and signed contracts stipulating that they would allocate a share of royalties to an AFM employment fund. Decca had signed a similar agreement in September 1943, and thus had claimed a position of strength by resuming the recording of new material fourteen months before its two key competitors. Rather than being an attempt to halt the playing of ‘canned’ music on radio, many felt that Petrillo’s strike, as evidenced by its resolution, represented an acknowledgement by the musicians union that recorded music would continue to play a dominant role in radio. The AFM realised that the more sympathetic relationship between radio and the record business would alter the shape of the music industry, a future being banked on by the hundreds of new labels formed during the war.

**Hillbilly and Race Music on the Jukebox**

Toward the end of the war, restrictions on the materials needed for disc manufacturing (mostly shellac, but also nickel and copper) began to be lifted, and record companies resumed their regular production schedules of weekly, as opposed to bi-monthly, record releases. More and more labels were furnishing radio with discs, and in January 1945 *Billboard* confirmed the growing importance of the revised relationship between the two media with the publication of the first ‘Disks with Most Radio Plugs’ chart. Even the staunchly pro-
ASCAP *Variety* conceded that records now embodied a far more effective method of song plugging on radio than live performance.98

The inaugural chart was dominated by Decca, the first major label to adopt the promotional innovations of Capitol and the independent sector and begin shipping its wares directly to radio stations. As with most of his peers, Decca president Jack Kapp had long complained about radio announcers such as KFWB Los Angeles’s Al Jarvis and WNEW New York’s Martin Block who had been flaunting the rules by broadcasting discs since the mid-1930s, sometimes passing them off as live performances.99 Kapp (allegedly the first to refer these announcers as ‘disc jockeys’) realised, though, that Block’s *Make Believe Ballroom* program had done much to ensure Decca’s early survival and so took the opportunity to capitalise on Capitol’s precedent.100 Columbia soon followed Decca’s lead, and in 1947 RCA Victor became the last of the majors to open a radio promotion department. The disc jockeys themselves acknowledged their new importance to the record industry by establishing the National Association of Disc Jockeys in August that year.101

Long-held fears by the major labels that audiences would demur from purchasing discs if they could hear them for free on the airwaves were finally proved baseless. With radio now plugging discs as never before, entertainment trade journals began to predict that the record business was on the verge of its biggest-ever boom period, and that sales would triple within a year thanks to, rather than despite, the fact that radio was now airing discs.102 *Variety* would soon claim that the record business was now not only making more money than radio, but was making over $200,000,000 from jukeboxes alone.103 Decca still dominated the jukebox market, thanks in large part to Jack Kapp’s understanding of the close relationship between jukes and the hillbilly and race music audiences that BMI was revealing to be more lucrative than had previously been believed.
Kapp had a long history with ‘old time’ and black music. In the early 1920s he and his brother David had owned a mail-order record business which catered to ‘minority customers’, after which Brunswick hired him to run the race music division of its subsidiary Vocalion. As head of Decca, Kapp named former jazz label owner and record store proprietor Milt Gabler as his A&R, man primarily due to Gabler’s experience with black music. Even during the height of the Depression, an era in which RCA Victor and ARC opted to in effect abandon the race music market, Kapp’s loyalty to African-American performers such as Louis Armstrong, jazz bandleader Fletcher Henderson and vocal group the Mills Brothers reflected his belief in the profitability of marketing specialist musical styles like jazz and blues, even in the most unfavourable economic climate.

Besides Armstrong, Henderson and the Mills Brothers, the Decca catalogue of the 1930s and 1940s boasted an array of successful black artists including the Ink Spots, Lucky Millinder, Lionel Hampton, Jimmy Lunceford, Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Jordan and Oscar’s Chicago Swingers. The success of pop music colossus Bing Crosby—the crooner was responsible for 30 percent of Decca’s sales—provided Decca within enough income to be able to scan other markets targeted by BMI for potential talent and regional hits (many of which Crosby then covered). Together Kapp and Gabler—who also signed country singer Red Foley to the industry’s first specialised country & western division—would ensure that Decca was the only one of the Big Three labels to reflect changes taking place in the lower tiers of the record industry, as the advent of BMI spurred the rise of an independent record sector that tapped into and expanded the audience for non-Tin Pan Alley music.

The growth of the disc business soon began to impact the more traditional areas of the music industry dominated by Hollywood. At the end of 1945 Herman Starr demanded an increase in the share of disc royalties owed to his Warner Bros.-affiliated music publishers. Many saw this move as an attempt to punish the record labels for undermining Hollywood’s
ability to create hits by colluding with radio to disrupt Tin Pan Alley’s established modes of song-plugging. That Starr’s demands echoed those he had made of radio a decade before confirmed for the entertainment industry not only the improved standing of recorded music, but the threat that record labels had begun to pose to Hollywood’s dominion over the leisure dollar.

By the end of the war BMI had grown immensely and was beginning to unnerve the Hollywood/Tin Pan Alley/ASCAP cabal, particularly with its attempts to empower bandleaders, musicians and songwriters by encouraging them to form their own publishing companies, and offering guarantees against royalties. The expansion of the disc industry also ‘began to make the phonograph record the major and common unit’ for all forms of music, eroding ASCAP’s sheet music-based economy and providing incentive for the establishment of hundreds of new record labels throughout the 1940s. Thanks to circumstances they themselves instigated in the late 1930s via the failed attempt to reclaim power from radio, in little more than a decade the music business landscape would appear almost unrecognisable to the old guard of Tin Pan Alley and Hollywood music professionals.


At the beginning of the Second World War, the ‘Big Three’ record labels—RCA Victor, Columbia and Decca—still exercised a monopoly over an expanding recorded music industry: of the 130 million discs sold in the US during 1942, 56 million were released by RCA Victor, 39 million by a resurgent Columbia, and 35 million by Decca. Soon trade magazines began to predict an imminent explosion of up to $600,000,000 in disc sales. Encouraged by this optimism—and with BMI dismantling long-established barriers-to-entry in the record business—a slew of wartime entrepreneurs established independent labels
throughout the country; in 1945 alone the Music Publishers Protective Association licensed 130 new labels.\footnote{116}

These small labels were also finding it easier to get their ware on the air. As BMI opened a space for records on radio, smaller independent and regional radio stations unable to afford live performances by name artists found they could now compete more effectively with local network affiliates by playing music more attuned to their audiences’ provincial tastes. In the South especially, independent labels garnered more and more exposure for their hillbilly and race releases as local radio stations altered programming and transmitted to expanding audiences via 50,000 watt towers; Chicago’s WLS and Nashville’s WSM, both of which had been featuring hillbilly music since the 1920s, enjoyed clear-channel status and could be heard all across the US.\footnote{117} Another Nashville clear-channel station, WLAC, capitalised on the expansion of these two markets by transmitting as a country & western station by day, and airing black music exclusively at night.\footnote{118}

A partial list of independent labels established from the mid-1940s onwards provides insight into the size and geographical spectrum of the post-BMI dispersal of the record business. Los Angeles claimed the bulk of the new independents, playing host to 79 indies by 1946, including Excelsior, Premier, Exclusive, Gilt-Edge, Black & White, Bronze and Four-Star.\footnote{119} In the years following the war, Los Angeles would also become the home of the key race music labels Modern (established 1945), Aladdin, Specialty (both 1946) and Imperial (1949). In the Southwest, Houston boasted five labels all established between 1944 and 1949: Gulf, Gold Star, Freedom, Macy’s and Peacock.

In the Midwest, Mercury formed in Chicago in 1945, followed in 1947 by Aristocrat, which would evolve into the influential blues label Chess three years later. Nearby Detroit was briefly home to Vogue from 1946 to 1947, while King began in Cincinnati in 1944. On the East Coast, Philadelphia hosted Cowboy, Center, Keystone, Holiday and Essex, and by
1945 New Jersey had Savoy, DeLuxe, Regal and Manor. New York City, hub of the mainstream music business, also experienced growth in the independent records sector, with the founding of Beacon in 1942, Apollo (based in Harlem) in 1943, and Super Disc in 1945. After the war, Atlantic Records emerged in 1947 from the ashes of the defunct National label.120

Down in Tennessee, Nashboro was founded in Nashville, Dot in Gallatin, and Memphis had Bullet; by the early 1950s, Memphis would also be the home of RPM, Duke, Meteor and Sun. Birmingham, meanwhile, housed the Vulcan and Bama labels. Surprisingly, New Orleans, a thriving musical centre, had no local record company, although the J&M recording studio did make its facilities available to, and supply talent for, the likes of Decca, Imperial, King, Atlantic, Specialty, Chess and Aladdin.121 All of these labels were a direct product of the formation of BMI: the more consistently successful independent labels of the post-war era—those, like King, Apollo, Atlantic, Imperial, Savoy and Aladdin capable of releasing the occasional half-million selling disc—published through BMI and were closely associated with local markets peopled by large numbers of African-Americans.122

For David Szatmary, the primary reason for the location of independent labels in the 1940s in urban areas such as Los Angeles was the massive influx of black workers seeking factory and munitions employment during World War Two.123 During the 1940s, approximately 1,600,000 black Americans moved interstate looking for work. In the main, they followed three routes: migrants from the Mississippi Delta headed to Chicago; those from Texas and the Midwest gravitated towards California; and those from Georgia and the Carolinas tended to settle in either New York or Boston.124 With this migration came improved standards of living: while the average family income for a white family doubled after 1942, for black families it tripled125 (though, of course, this increase said more about working conditions for blacks in the South than it did about their value to urban factory
owners). Thus hundreds of thousands of African-Americans for the first time found
themselves with access to disposable income, a fact which did not escape music
entrepreneurs in the more industrialised areas, nor the hundreds of musicians who followed
the same train routes out of the South.

These mass-migrations naturally had a significant impact on American leisure and
entertainment. Arnold Shaw offers further social underpinnings for the rise of R&B on
independent labels in the mid-1940s. The newly-moneyed black audience, ‘unwelcome in
white theatres and clubs’, was forced to seek home entertainment, in the form of domestic
record players, or instead frequented black bars and nightclubs which inevitably played home
to a jukebox.126 Central Avenue in Los Angeles, for example, was ‘flooded by affluent night
lifers and demobbed GIs’ after black club owners had descended on ‘Little Tokyo’ in the
wake of the mass expulsion of US citizens of Japanese origin.127

What also emerged from this migration were new forms of race music. According to
Ahmet Ertegun, head of New York independent Atlantic Records, the ‘more modern and
more bluesy’ performers had a galvanising effect on musicians from other regions.128 Relying
on amplified instrumentation and a more prominent dance beat to satisfy urbanised
audiences, by the late 1940s this ‘jump blues’ would be officially labelled ‘rhythm and blues’
(and abbreviated to either r.&b. or R&B) by Billboard.129 Rhythm and blues possessed a new
‘kind of frenzy’ that had not previously been present in most blues forms,

...as if a great deal of the Euro-American humanist facade
of Afro-American music had taken on had been washed
away by the war. Rhythm & blues singers literally had to
shout to be heard above the clanging and strumming of
the various electrified instruments and the churning
rhythm sections.130

The new independent labels sought to fill the gap in the market left by the reticence of
Columbia and Victor to endorse this new trend of ‘squashed down swing, country blues, and
boogie woogie’. For Arnold Shaw, the rise of independent labels after the Second World War ‘constitutes one of the most remarkable and fascinating chapters in the history, not only of American music, but of small business in this country’. While an independent could not hope to compete with the promotional power and distribution reach of a major, their small size granted them the advantage of being able to react quickly to changing musical tastes, and identify—and cheaply record and release—new sounds. As components of large media corporations, RCA Victor and Columbia were rendered sluggish in this regard, but Decca caught on quickly, boasting that it had the in-house capacity to select, record, release and distribute a song in 72 hours.

In this way Decca was able to quickly capitalise on the groundwork undertaken by the independent sector. Crucial to the popularisation of R&B were million-selling hits by Louis Jordan, produced for Decca by Milt Gabler, many of which were cover versions of independently-released discs already proving popular in the race market. With Decca behind him, Jordan was responsible for half of the number one-selling records on the race charts between 1945 and 1947, and throughout the 1940s registered nine top ten hits on the pop charts. Jordan’s records such as ‘Choo Choo Ch’Boogie’, ‘Ain’t Nobody Here But Us Chickens’ and ‘Saturday Night Fish Fry’ helped consolidate the new black dance sound via their distinctive boogie/shuffle meter and rhythmic horn arrangements, and proved popular with both black and white record buyers; Jordan even managed to top the folk (as country & western was then known) jukebox charts during the war.

‘Stratosphere Boogie’: Capitol Records and the Commercialisation of Regional Sounds

In 1948 Decca established its own ‘indie’, Coral Records, so as to compete in the lower tiers of the marketplace via independent distribution. Another new label, Capitol Records, also looked to the indies for business innovation and guidance as to the musical
predilections of the contemporary audience. As with Decca and the independent labels, Capitol quickly developed a close association with BMI, in part due to the firm’s proven ‘ability to measure the moving contour of the nation’s musical life’. Inspired by Decca’s capacity to compete with Victor and Columbia, Los Angeles record retailer Glenn Wallichs partnered with singer-songwriter Johnny Mercer and Paramount producer (and former Twentieth Century-Fox staff songwriter) Buddy DeSylva to establish Capitol in April 1942. With Capitol, Wallichs combined lessons he had learned about promotion from the independent sector with his knowledge that Decca’s standing was attained through the close management of manufacturing and distribution, and particular attention to the jukebox trade.

Wallichs also knew that his contacts in radio embodied the ‘most potent way’ to promote new product, and insisted that his label be the first to follow the lead of the independents and service radio announcers with free discs. Petrillo’s AFM strike—prompted in part by Wallichs’ own targeting of radio—boosted the fortunes of Capitol and the independents as the thriving jukebox industry relied on them for a constant supply of discs in the absence of new material from the majors. The strike had proved a particular boon for Capitol as the label cannily accumulated a substantial backlog of recordings in the month before the ban commenced, augmenting these by purchasing old or unreleased masters previously recorded by its artists, such as the King Cole Trio, from those performers’ previous labels.

The biggest impediment for independent labels in the 1940s was inadequate distribution. Despite their success on the West Coast, Los Angeles labels often found it difficult to ship their discs further east than the Rockies. Rather than relying on the myriad of notoriously unreliable independent distributors scattered all over the country, Wallichs, Mercer and DeSylva quickly set up their own national distribution network, and by the end of
1942 Capitol had offices in Los Angeles, New York and Chicago. Although a rapid increase in inflation forced many indie labels to close during 1946, Capitol was able to open a further 27 distribution branches throughout the United States thanks to an $8,000,000 company expansion underwritten by Wall Street. With the purchase of the Scranton Record Manufacturing Company that same year, Capitol was equipped with its own pressing plant, and thus joined with RCA Victor, Columbia and Decca as the newly-christened ‘Big Four’.

This expansion saw Capitol post a $10,300,000 gross profit in 1946; having managed $200,000 in sales during its first year of operation, by 1948 the label was selling $16,900,000 worth of discs. Like Decca, Capitol had targeted the lucrative jukebox market, although they recorded little in the way of jump blues (the label’s biggest race music artist was the smoother jazz-oriented Nat King Cole). Capitol’s jukebox fare, recorded by the likes of Tex Ritter, the Louvin Brothers, Tennessee Ernie Ford and Merle Travis, was designed to appeal more to the growing audience for hillbilly music. Among the label’s initial releases in 1942—and its first number one hit—was Ella Mae Morse’s ‘Cow Cow Boogie’, a cowboy song performed with a big band arrangement, while Western Swing performer Tex Williams’ ‘Smoke! Smoke! Smoke! (That Cigarette)’ sold over one million copies for Capitol in 1947.

The hillbilly market had grown substantially during the war as soldiers from the Northern states were stationed at boot camps throughout the South, becoming exposed to ‘old time music’ via the 600 or so local radio stations, PX jukeboxes, and army-produced ‘V-Discs’. The US Army’s Recreation and Welfare Section had begun shipping V-Discs to soldiers in October 1943. At first the discs—made from a new material, unbreakable vinylite—contained radio transcripts, but eventually V-Discs featured mostly new recordings. Despite the ongoing recording strike, James C. Petrillo lifted all restrictions on the recording
of music for servicemen and women, providing AFM member services to the army for free.\textsuperscript{152}

In 1944 alone 2,100,000 V-Discs were pressed by Victor and Columbia (Decca declined to be involved).\textsuperscript{153} Seventy percent of V-Disc material was of course pop—Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, Bing Crosby, Harry James, Frank Sinatra etc.—but many of the discs contained jazz, race and hillbilly music. Jump blues purveyors Louis Jordan, Sister Rosetta Tharpe and Lucky Millinder, boogie woogie pianists Meade Lux Lewis, Albert Ammons and Pete Johnson, and blues singers Big Bill Broonzy and Doctor Clayton all also recorded V-Discs, but some of the more popular discs featured hillbilly performers such as Roy Acuff, Ernest Tubb and Tex Ritter.

The End of Traditional Song Plugging

By 1943—the year Armed Forces Radio voted Roy Acuff ‘more popular than Frank Sinatra’—back home hillbilly discs now accounted for the majority of plays on jukeboxes.\textsuperscript{154} The jukebox proved a boon in both the hillbilly and race markets, providing crucial exposure to styles still not quite deemed acceptable for network radio. As the dominant jukebox label, Decca produced almost 50 percent of its releases for the hillbilly market,\textsuperscript{155} while Louis Jordan was second-only in jukebox play to his label-mate (and sometime duet partner) Bing Crosby.\textsuperscript{156} Jukes had become especially lucrative as the poor quality of shellac available during and just after the war ensured that the more popular discs could deteriorate within a week, thus requiring multiple re-orders.\textsuperscript{157}

In addition, the emergence of Top 40 radio programming in the late 1940s further highlighted the commercial possibilities of these formerly marginalised musical styles: in compiling their charts and playlists, radio programmers looked not only to the mainstream pop charts, but now factored in jukebox sales. Thus hillbilly and even some R&B discs began
to be granted airplay on mainstream radio. Of course, given their corporate ties to NBC and CBS, these trends did not go unnoticed by RCA Victor and Columbia, who soon caught on in regard to hillbilly more than race music. Columbia experienced unprecedented sales by 1950, with country & western (as hillbilly was becoming known) accounting for 40 percent of their 78rpm output. By 1950, over one-third of all popular disc sales would be from the country & western market.

Increasingly, however, the major labels were finding that they could no longer ignore the R&B market. During the 1940s, rather than signing black performers directly, the majors maintained corporate distance from the black audience by re-activating long-dormant race labels, as with Columbia’s Okeh and RCA Victor’s Bluebird; even Decca revived Brunswick as a nominal race label. By the early 1950s R&B would account for $15,000,000 in disc sales, and the majors took steps to ‘seize the increasingly lucrative rhythm and blues market away from the independent labels’ by creating new specialist labels, such as RCA’s Groove. Such attempts to ‘pass’ within the guarded independent sector failed, however, so the majors switched their efforts to re-recording proven R&B hits with white performers for the even more profitable pop market. It was a practice that had already proved extremely successful for several years with million-selling pop covers of hillbilly hits by the likes of Patti Page and Tony Bennett.

Cover versions of specialist BMI material represented a decisive blow for ASCAP’s traditional methods of song-plugging. Increasingly, rather than scouring Tin Pan Alley’s release schedules for potential hits, the major labels scanned the country & western and R&B charts. Capitol A&R man Lee Gillette outlined his label’s methodology in Billboard: regional field distributors were instructed to keep branch offices informed of customer requests for non-Capitol hits. If several branches reported similar interest in a song, a copy of the competitor’s disc was airmailed to head office. Capitol could thus have one of their own
artists record a copy of the original arrangement and have it ready to ship within a week, as they did with Kay Starr’s cover of ‘Wheel of Fortune’, an R&B hit by Sunny Gale for the small New Jersey label Derby.\textsuperscript{163}

Gillette estimated that the search for specialised hits for pop artists to cover constituted one third of an A&R man’s working responsibilities, time previously spent liaising with publishers. In addition, while major label A&R men were paying Tin Pan Alley far less attention, they were also paying them considerably less respect. If an A&R man’s interest was piqued by a new copyright, he no longer heeded the carefully-managed release schedules of the ASCAP publishers, ignoring the long-established five week embargo on recording new tunes.\textsuperscript{164} The voracious pursuit of radio and jukebox play meant that record companies now raced each other to record a potential hit before publishers had a chance to plug it effectively via other mediums. The likelihood of a new copyright becoming established as a standard, earning its publisher steady royalties over perhaps decades, was severely undermined if the song experienced weeks of incessant saturation over the airwaves and on jukeboxes, or worse, had already suffered the ignominy of being branded a failed pop record by radio and the trade magazines.

Conclusion

The battle between Warner Bros. and radio for the control of American popular music in the late 1930s created several unexpected, and unwanted, outcomes for Hollywood. The establishment of the new licensing body Broadcast Music Incorporated by the ever-more powerful radio networks constituted the first serious threat to ASCAP’s control over the dissemination of commercial music. BMI then nurtured unprecedented growth within the record industry—which had been virtually decimated by the Great Depression—by encouraging the formation of new labels, promoting in the national arena musical styles previously considered to be of marginal commercial interest, and overseeing a revised
relationship between the disc business and radio. Although an expanding record market also
benefited the older publishing firms, the record labels’ insatiable appetite for new hits
dislocated the Hollywood publishers’ long-established modes of song promotion, which had
been designed to extract maximum returns from a copyright over the longest possible period.

The major film studios’ aggressive attempt to regulate radio’s use of music thus
instead resulted in Hollywood losing a substantial degree of control over the direction of
popular music. The establishment of BMI undermined the strictures of the lucrative
ASCAP/Broadway/Hollywood system of promoting musical copyrights via the auspices of
the feature film, and spurred unprecedented publishing and recording activity in previously-
ignored regional pockets of the US. With access to radio and national licensing
infrastructures, hundreds of new independent publishers and record labels fostered the growth
of the race and country music markets in the late 1940s and early 1950s, further loosening
Hollywood’s grip on popular music.

Endnotes

1 The Billboard, August 28 1954, pp.51.
4 Quoted in Garofalo 2008, p.57.
5 ‘Radio men are saying...’ in Variety, January 15, 1941, p.21.
6 ‘15 best sheet music sellers’ in Variety, January 8, 1941, p.133.
7 ‘Music war’s casualties’ in Variety, January 22, 1941, pp.1, 26.
8 Engel 1941, p.133. Lucky Strike cigarettes sponsored various programs during radio’s heyday. The variety
   show The Chase and Sanborn Hour aired on NBC from 1929 to 1948, sponsored by Chase and Sanborn Coffee.
9 ‘Radio men are saying...’, p.21.
10 ‘ASCAP-radio accord in nick o’ time; flock of filmusicals need the plugs’ in Variety, November 5, 1941,
   pp.1, 16.
11 ‘Postmortems on ASCAP fight’ in Variety, October 29 1941, p.2.
13 Green 1942b, p.157.
14 Several found work with BMI and its licensors. Once the ban was lifted, ASCAP set about raiding these same
   firms for staff (‘Starr resigns from MPPA’ in Variety, November 12, 1941, p.47).
16 Green 1942b, p.157.
18 The music industry trade magazine Billboard often accused Variety of pro-ASCAP bias; Variety in turned
   alleged Billboard sided with BMI and radio.
19 Bodec 1942a, p.155.
20 Ibid, p.155. In a further blow to the publishers, the agreement from the networks to pay fees at the source rekindled the Roosevelt administration’s anti-trust investigations (although ASCAP would eventually win the case).
22 ‘Miller sees film ogre...’; p.19.
23 ‘Florida meeting clicks for BMI; Miller heckled by ASCAP attorney’ in Variety, December 18, 1940, p.26.
24 ASCAP and BMI quickly became embroiled in a legal wrangle over control of Marks’ 20,000 previously existing copyrights (‘Pluggers taunts sting’ in Variety, November 5, 1941, pp.47-48). In May 1945 the New York Supreme court decided that, as all the copyrights in question were written by songwriters who were at the time ASCAP members, the songs were in fact controlled by ASCAP (‘ASCAP-BMI decision cornerstone’ in The Billboard, May 12, 1945, p.15).
27 There is some amount of confusion in regard to Peer’s switch. Some sources at the time claimed that Peer’s BMI deal did not include his largest company, Southern Music, which remained with ASCAP, but rather Peer International and the United Publishing Company, which published mostly hillbilly fare, including songs by the Carter Family (‘Southern to remain ASCAP’ in Variety, December 11, 1940, p.41).
28 Ennis 1992, p.49.
31 Bodec 1941, p.131.
32 Ennis 1992, p.109. There were, however, charges from the Songwriters Protective Association (an institution closely aligned with ASCAP) that BMI’s songwriter contracts were not as fair as ASCAP’s (‘Irving Caesar says songwriters will picket radio with pianos, take air fight to the masses’ in Variety, December 11, 1940).
33 Shapiro 1965, p.6.
34 Garofalo 2008, p.57.
35 ‘Jellyroll in publishing biz, assigns tunes to BMI’ in Variety, December 18, 1940, p.41.
36 Garofalo 2008, p.58.
37 Bodec 1942b, p.155.
43 Green 1942b, p.157.
44 ‘Wax royalties top $1,000,000, pleases ASCAP’ in Variety, November 19, 1941, p.1.
45 ‘Tin Pan Alley’s air peeve’ in Variety, October 21, 1936, p.1
46 Green 1942b, p.156.
49 Jackson 1991, p.75. The radio payola hearings of 1959-1961 were also a product of ASCAP’s conviction that rock and roll was being forced on the public via the collusive practices of BMI, the record labels and radio.
51 Ennis 1992, p.60.
52 Marmorstein 2007, p.81.
53 Prial 2006, p.132.
54 ‘ASCAP-radio accord in nick o’ time; flock of filmusicals need the plugs’ in Variety, November 5, 1941, pp.1, 16.
55 ‘Public split...’; p.37
58 Marmorstein 2007, p.82.
59 Also key in Decca’s formative years were Kapp’s vice president E.F. Stevens Jr., and treasurer (and future company president) Milton R. Rackmil.

See Chapter Eight.


No relation to Decca’s British owner.

Sanjek, R. 1996, p.132. Initially, however, the jukebox almost led to Decca’s immediate downfall: the Brunswick pressing plants they had acquired from Warner Bros. cut ten inch discs, whereas jukes only accommodated nine and fifteen-sixteenth records. The majority of the label’s first 200,000 pressings were returned by jukebox distributors (‘A 20-year history of Decca...’, p.14).


‘Wee-watters would love platters with music, but find costs high’ in *Variety*, January 2, 1946, pp.27, 30.

Francis 1943, p.95.

These circumstances have also been cited to explain the emergence of smaller, high-energy dance bands such as Louis Jordan and His Tympany Five which led to the rhythm and blues style of the late 1940s.

Garofalo 2001, p.113.


Humphrey 1942, p.62.


Though new recordings were made: as singing was not recognised as a form of musicianship by the AFM, sessions featuring only vocals were permitted (Ennis 1992, p.124).

Roberts (2007, p.45) notes that as late as the 1960s, rock and roll bands such as the Beach Boys were still being denied membership in the AFM after failing sight-reading tests.


‘Dists saved “name” reps’ in *The Billboard 1944 Music Year Book*, p.150.

Since the 1920s, disc labels had featured the warning ‘Not licensed for radio play’.

ASRA lost the case in December 1936, a decision that proved to be a harbinger of things to come (‘Am. Society of Recording Artists in test suit versus KFWB, Hollywood’ in *Variety*, August 26, 1936, p.79).


Marmorstein 2007, p.118.

Bodec 1943, p.188. That same year ASCAP earned $3,750,000 from radio, a reduction from previous years, confirming fears that BMI was eating into ASCAP’s income.


‘Wee-watters would love platters with music, but find costs high’ in *Variety*, January 2, 1946, pp.27, 30.

Francis 1943, p.95.

These circumstances have also been cited to explain the emergence of smaller, high-energy dance bands such as Louis Jordan and His Tympany Five which led to the rhythm and blues style of the late 1940s.

Garofalo 2001, p.113.


Humphrey 1942, p.62.


Though new recordings were made: as singing was not recognised as a form of musicianship by the AFM, sessions featuring only vocals were permitted (Ennis 1992, p.124).

Roberts 2007, p.40.


Roberts (2007, p.45) notes that as late as the 1960s, rock and roll bands such as the Beach Boys were still being denied membership in the AFM after failing sight-reading tests.

Kraft 1994a, p.309.

Gillett 1988, p.50.

‘Dists saved “name” reps’, p.150.

‘Skidding band B.O. puzzles agencies and leaders’ in *Variety*, January 3, 1945, p.133.

‘BMI may face plug hurdles; disking starts’ in *The Billboard*, November 19 1944, p.13. One of the first band leaders to sign with BMI was Glenn Miller, who formed the Mutual Music Society publishing company in 1941. Miller had been barred from playing his signature tune ‘In the Mood’ on his NBC radio show during the ASCAP radio ban as it was published by Shapiro-Bernstein, an ASCAP publisher (‘Glenn Miller back on air in deal’ in *Variety*, Wednesday, January 15, 1941, p.21).

Secon 1944, p.64. The royalty was less than half-a-cent per disc, but within three years the combined label contribution was earning the AFM $2,000,000 annually (‘The Pied Piper of Chi’ in *Time*, January 26, 1948).

‘Chronological chart of events in the A.F.M record ban’ in *The Billboard*, November 18, 1944, p.13.


Bodec 1943, p.188.

‘First disk jockey platter tab’ in *The Billboard*, January 27, 1945, p.12. The inaugural chart was dominated by Decca, not surprisingly the first major to adopt the promotional innovations of Capitol and the independent sector.

‘Disks, not airtime, biggest hypo for new band’ in *Variety*, January 3, 1945, p.133.

Fong-Torres 2001, p.19.

In one of the odder outcomes of cross-media synergy, the National Association of Disc Jockeys was originally the brainchild of a Universal Pictures press agent. Disc Jockeys were invited to Chicago to attend the first national convention of DJs, only to find the event was a publicity stunt for the film *Something in the Wind*.
(in which Deanna Durbin starred as a disc jockey), and that the convention was in fact a press junket for the movie. Though many were incensed by the ruse, 50 DJs did attend the ‘convention’ and took the opportunity to formally establish the NADJ (‘U-I applies pressure but jocks give cold shoulder to “national convention”’ in The Billboard, August 16, 1947, p.19/Disk jocks set up nat’l assn.’ in The Billboard, August 23, 1947, p.20).

‘1945 expected to see start of record boom’ in Variety, January 3, 1945, p.135.


As the title suggest, an A&R or ‘artists and repertoire’ man (and, apart from RCA’s Ethel Gabriel, they were always men) matched a recording artist with appropriate song material, and then supervised recording sessions. Although there remains some amount of common ground between A&R responsibilities and production work, by the late 1950s the person in charge of supervising and arranging recording sessions became known as the record’s ‘producer’ (Doyle 2005, p.164).

Dawson 2005, p.68.

According to popular music historian Jim Dawson (2005, pp.21-22), ‘New Rubbing on That Darned Old Thing’ by Oscar’s Chicago Swingers is ‘as close to (what would later be termed ) rhythm and blues as anything recorded in the thirties’.


Green 1946, p.245.

For Variety a sure sign of ASCAP’s fear was their attempt to woo back Ralph Peer (‘ASCAP’s BMI jitters on the upbeat’ in Variety, January 3, 1945, p.133).


‘1945 expected to see start of record boom’ in Variety, January 3, 1945, p.135. Although record retail income did double from $109,000,000 in 1945 to $218,000,000 in 1946, the industry would have to wait until 1959 to reach $600,000,000 (Gronow 1983, p.63/ Gronow & Saunio 1998, p.94).

Green 1946, p.245.


Variety, January 2, 1946, p.34.

Tosches 1999, pp.4-5.


Sanjek, R. 1996, p.240. Although the earliest advertisements for King promised that the label would only ever manufacture ‘hill-billy’discs (The Billboard 1944 Music Year Book, p.207).

Szatmary 1996, p.15.

McCourt 1989, p.46.


Shaw 1986, pp.xvi.


On June 25, 1949, Billboard dropped the word ‘race’ (an industry term since Mamie Smith’s 1920 hit ‘Crazy Blues’ on Okeh) from its ‘Top 15 Best Selling Race Records’ list, substituting what was felt to be the more progressive term ‘Rhythm & Blues’ (The Billboard, June 25, 1949, p.30/Shaw 1986, p.xv).

Jones 1963, p.171.


Shaw 1986, pp.xviii.

Schneider 1954, p.16.

Dawson 2005, p.77.


Shaw 1986, p.xvii.

‘Most played juke box folk records’ in The Billboard, August 26, 1944, p.18. Capitol managed the same feat with the King Cole Trio.


As illustrated by the ¾ page ad taken out in Billboard by BMI celebrating Capitol’s 10th anniversary which listed dozens of their biggest mutual successes since 1942 (The Billboard, August 2, 1952, p.63).
141 ‘Capitol puts out first disk release’ in The Billboard, July 4, 1942, p.25.
142 Becker 1952, p.63.
143 Secon 1944, pp.64-65.
144 ‘Ban background and effects’ in The Billboard 1944 Music Year Book, p.147/‘The hits and the artists who made them’ in The Billboard, August 2, 1952, p.68.
145 Hoskyns 1996, p.29.
148 ‘Cap Records nabs over 10 million to double ’45 period’ in Variety, January 1, 1947, p.31.
149 Csida 1952, p.50.
150 A 1944 Capitol advertisement lists only two black artists, Cole and jazz performer Benny Carter.
151 Whitcomb 1994, p.199.
152 Marvin 1944, p.148.
153 ‘1945 expected to see...’, p.135.
154 Garofalo & Chapple 1989, p.66.
157 McCourt 1989, p.48.
160 McCourt 1989, p.58.
162 Gillette 1952, p.64.
163 ‘Stanley steamin’’ in The Billboard, April 18, 1953, p.15.
164 Gillette 1952, p.64.
Chapter Five—

Scoring for a New Industry: Film Music in the Early Post-Studio Era

Musically there tended to be a sameness.
- Henry Mancini

Throughout the immediate post-war era, Hollywood appeared to struggle with, or ignore, key changes in entertainment industry consumption patterns. Some of these transformations, as we have seen, were a direct result of interventions the studios themselves made into the music business. They would also be paralleled by fundamental adjustments to Hollywood’s internal structure, as the Paramount Decree of 1948 prompted the dismantling of the studio system. As the studio era came to a close, Hollywood would gradually be forced to reorganize its understanding of who it was that watched their movies and why, a process in which popular music would play a central role. But that realisation was the end product of a decade-long process during which the major studios at first resisted, and then struggled to adapt to, the altered sphere of the music business.

Bad Investments: Studio ‘Disk Company Affiliations’

In July 1945 Warner Bros. sold the entirety of its 43,759 shares in Decca Records stock back to the label for $1,800,000, ending what had seemed to some in the company a ‘foolish era’ in its history.\(^2\) For a while it had looked as if the record label might be swallowed whole by the film studio, which had incrementally increased its stake in Decca throughout the late 1930s. Instead, according to unnamed sources at Warner Bros., the disassociation marked the welcome end to the studio’s continued run of ‘bad investments’ in the record business, which had begun with the doomed purchase of Brunswick Records in 1930.
Some believed that Harry Warner abandoned Decca because Jack Kapp had thwarted his plans to commercially exploit the link between the companies, just as Warner Bros. had cross-promoted movies and songs through their music publishing interests. Jack Kapp, for his part, saw danger in direct links between a record label and a movie studio, believing, according to *Variety*, that Decca ‘should not compromise its standards…in the interests of any Warner Bros film enterprise which might choose to utilize the wax works for exploitation purposes’. Despite the presence of Herman Starr on the Decca board, by 1945 Harry Warner was forced to acknowledge that his studio was unable to exercise any influence over the label. Others suspected that Harry Warner had not given up on the record business at all, noting that, by selling its 25 percent interest in Decca, Warner Bros. was free to establish its own label, just as their fellow music publishing powerhouses MGM and Twentieth Century-Fox were rumoured to be doing.

Rumours concerning an imminent invasion of the record business by Hollywood were largely seen at the time as an indication that the market for movie soundtrack albums would be one of the key areas of growth for the disc industry in the post-war era. But movie soundtracks were only part of the story. Just as the late-1920s raid on music publishing was designed not to capitalise on Tin Pan Alley’s success but to manage music licensing expenses, Hollywood’s sudden interest in the recording industry was grounded in the realisation that the balance of power in the music business was shifting. Thanks to radio and BMI, records had become crucial to the promotion of music copyrights, and industry commentators warned the studios that they must reassert their power with a ‘disk company affiliation’ and produce their own material, or be left to battle over ‘the leftovers from the Big Three diskers’. With this in mind *Billboard* concluded that, ‘Whatever Decca does, (the) trade feels certain WB won’t stay out of the disk biz very long.’
The trade was wrong, though, and most of these rumours proved unfounded. ‘WB’ did not heed their warnings, and declined to re-enter the disc business, as did Fox. Perhaps wary of the volatile nature of a business still recovering from Petrillo’s two year recording ban, most studios remained seemingly content to manage their music catalogues via the traditional practice of song-plugging. Only one film studio established a record label during the 1940s: in the same month that Warner Bros. opted out of the recording business, MGM head Nicholas Schenck hired RCA Victor Vice President Frank Walker to form a recording division within the studio. Mindful of the success of Decca and Capitol, Walker—who had been contemplating retirement—agreed to take the job if MGM allocated funds to establish manufacturing facilities and distribution networks for the new label.6

When launched in 1947, MGM Records was ostensibly designed to capitalise on the name movie talent featured in hit MGM musicals. Tie-in record releases were already appearing on the market, but always on ‘somebody else’s record label’,7 while Decca had sold over one million copies of the first ‘original cast’ soundtrack album, from the 1943 Broadway production of Oklahoma!.8 Schenck hired Walker largely due to the fact that he had been instrumental in the release of the first soundtrack album in the 1930s, RCA Victor’s three disc set of songs from Disney’s Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. MGM’s first release (like Oklahoma! a ten-inch 78rpm set)9 was the soundtrack to Till the Clouds Roll By (1947), starring Robert Walker, June Allyson, and Judy Garland.

Till the Clouds Roll By: The Hollywood Musical Sustains Tin Pan Alley

Till the Clouds Roll By was a fictionalised account of composer Jerome Kern’s life, a biopic presented in the form of a Hollywood musical. As such it neatly illustrates the early post-studio era adherence to the standardised formal roles established for popular music during the classical Hollywood period. Musicals alone provided space for non-orchestral
music within the film text—although, as with *Till the Clouds Roll By*, this remained largely the popular music of previous generations. As their standard copyrights became devalued due to the rise of the record industry, the studios looked for other ways to stimulate their publishing catalogues and, as they had done in the mid-1930s, turned to the musical. By the early 1950s the Hollywood musical was experiencing a commercial and aesthetic rebirth, largely as it was a genre perfectly suited to the ‘roadshow’ extravaganza. Roadshow films fulfilled Hollywood’s mission to turn the cinema-going experience into an event, reassuring the public that ‘movies were greater and grander than television’.\(^{10}\) The musical was also seen as the ideal vehicle with which to rekindle interest in ASCAP copyrights, and as such the Hollywood musicals of the late 1940s and early 1950s were stocked with standards reprised from decades before.\(^{11}\)

Hollywood’s cycle of musical biopics, many designed to mythologise Tin Pan Alley itself, began with a series of films produced by Warner Bros. during the war. The first, *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1942), starred James Cagney as George M. Cohan, and was prompted in part by a growing tide of patriotism. Cohan’s songs, such as ‘It’s A Grand Old Flag’ and ‘Over There’, had become anthems of hope during the First World War,\(^ {12}\) and had re-entered the public imagination as war escalated throughout 1941 and 1942. *Yankee Doodle Dandy* was instilled with suitable amounts of patriotic fervour, but during production Warner Bros. were surprised to find that they did not own the rights to all the Cohan copyrights featured in the film. Cohan had assigned the rights to ‘Over There’ to struggling songwriter, Billy Jerome, who in turn had signed them over to Feist, an MGM-Robbins publishing firm.\(^ {13}\)

*Yankee Doodle Dandy* was a box office hit, and the revived interest in Cohan’s music encouraged Warner Bros. to produce more musical biopics, including *Rhapsody in Blue* (1945), with Robert Alda as George Gershwin, and *Night and Day* (1946), starring Cary Grant as Cole Porter. MGM copied the format for *Till the Clouds Roll By*, based, according to
the opening credits, ‘on the life and music of Jerome Kern’. *Night and Day* and *Till the Clouds Roll By* exploited Hollywood’s growing dependence on spectacle through the use of Technicolor, but both films also drew heavily on Hollywood’s own musical past: the tunes in *Night and Day* had previously been heard in Warner Bros. musicals such as *Paris* (1929), *Grand Slam* (1933) and *The Singing Marine* (1937), as well as several produced in the 1930s by RKO, Paramount and MGM. The Kern songs on display in *Till the Clouds Roll By* were well known to fans of popular music, and had likewise been featured in dozens of Hollywood musicals since the introduction of the talkie. The film is in effect a compilation of Kern’s greatest hits, as performed by MGM contract stars such as Allyson, Garland, Frank Sinatra and Kathryn Grayson, as well as several other established musical performers of the era on loan from other studios.

*Till the Clouds Roll By* begins with the opening night of *Show Boat* on Broadway in 1927. Film versions of *Show Boat* had already been produced, twice, by Universal, in 1929 and 1936, and here a condensed version of the musical forms a show within a show, accounting for the first 15 minutes of screen time (and in some ways serving as a demonstration reel for MGM producer Arthur Freed’s own 1951 feature production). Thanks to the collapsed format, the audience is immediately presented with excerpts from *Show Boat* (including some of the best known songs by Kern and partner Oscar Hammerstein II: ‘Cotton Blossom’, ‘Where’s The Mate For Me?’, ‘Make Believe’, ‘Life Upon The Wicked Stage’, ‘Can’t Help Lovin’ Dat Man’ and Ol’ Man River’), without the film having to first establish any semblance of conventional narrative.14

The subsequent narrative of *Till the Clouds Roll By* is designed not only to promote ASCAP standard copyrights by stimulating the collective musical memory of the audience, but also to reassure them as to the cultural and patriotic import of well-crafted popular music. On his way home from the *Show Boat* premiere, Kern (Robert Walker) reminisces about his
formative days on Tin Pan Alley. Kern drifts into a nostalgic reverie, triggering a flashback in which the young songwriter is sent by Max Dreyfus—of the publishing firm Harms—to the home of (apparently fictional) arranger James Hessler (Van Heflin). Hessler is portrayed as a figure jaded by turn-of-the-century Tin Pan Alley, and assumes Kern is, like his contemporaries, interested only in making easy money by churning out ‘sugary little tunes and...mushy little melodies...fancied up for public consumption’.

Despite unfavourably comparing modern popular music with the work of Beethoven and Mozart, Hessler is immediately drawn to one of Kern’s tunes (‘It’s a good song, too. Very good’), thus cueing the audience to the fact that Kern is no run-of-the-mill Tin Pan Alley hack, and perhaps should himself be counted among the Masters. This scene grants the film license to humorously toy with the diegetic/nondiegetic aural divide: as Kern previews his tune on a piano, the audience hears the contrasting arrangements Hessler and Kern begin to imagine for it. First, we hear the accompanying strings of Kern’s mind’s ear, only for them to be immediately interrupted by the flutes Hessler insists are more appropriate. Hessler’s enthusiasm for this process indicates that Kern’s music is worthy of the same care and attention he affords his own symphonic works.

*Till the Clouds Roll By* also attempts to draw parallels between the rise of Tin Pan Alley and America’s own growing sense of national identity in the early 20th century. Kern arrives on a Broadway still in thrall to the melodies of the English music hall. In order to learn to write ‘English music’, he relocates to London. ‘How’d You Like to Spoon With Me?’ proves that Kern can indeed write in this style when it is accepted for a London revue. The ‘English charm’ of the song, as performed by Angela Lansbury in cockney ‘Pearly Queen’ regalia, convinces American producer Charles Frohman (Harry Hayden) that its composer must himself be British. Frohman proves to be Kern’s ticket back to Broadway, and there the songwriter receives the blessing of ASCAP founding father Victor Herbert.
(Paul Maxey), who passes the torch to Kern as the next ‘Dean of American music’, instructing him to write ‘lullabies, love songs, hymns, anthems’ for all Americans.

Kern’s path is made clear: he will bring authentic American music to Broadway, leaving behind English operetta and light musical comedies. On his death bed, Hessler summarises the dominant theme of *Till the Clouds Roll By*, echoed many times over in subsequent Hollywood musical biopics: ‘I used to go around hollering about being a genius. And you, with your wheezy little tunes, you were writing the real music—the folk music of America’. Kern travels to Memphis and hears, swirling within the current of the Mississippi River, music containing (according to Kern’s voice-over narration) ‘the laughter, the tears, the joys, the sorrows and the hopes’ of all America.

And thus the fragmented episodic narrative comes full circle, as Kern debuts the founding musical of the Broadway canon, *Show Boat*. As the songwriter composes them throughout the course of the film, each of Kern’s new tunes is presented in a stand-alone musical sequence, with the likes of Allyson (‘Cleopatterer’), Garland (‘Look for the Silver Lining’) and Dinah Shore (‘The Last Time I Saw Paris’) recreating moments from Kern’s stage musicals. This ‘compilation’ format would be repeated by MGM, and replicated by the other music publishing studios, many times throughout the late 1940s and into the 1950s, thus breathing life into their ASCAP catalogues of standards at a time when traditional Tin Pan Alley fare was under threat from BMI’s dissemination of alternate forms of ‘real American music’.

**The Proper Setting: Industrial Self-referentiality in *Singin’ in the Rain***

MGM continued their musical biopic series with films about staff writers Rodgers and Hart (*Words and Music*, 1948), Kalmar and Ruby (*Three Little Words*, 1950), and Sigmund Romberg (*Deep in My Heart*, 1954). But other types of musical were also found to be readily
suited to the compilation format. MGM explored its own recent past, the early talkie period, while simultaneously exploiting the moribund back catalogues of its publishing divisions by stocking *Singin’ in the Rain* (1952) with old copyrights from the 1920s and 1930s, almost all of which were written by the film’s producer Arthur Freed (with partner Nacio Herb Brown) during his days as an MGM staff songwriter. These songs included not only the title track, but also ‘You Were Meant for Me’ (published 1929), ‘You Are My Lucky Star’ (1935), ‘Good Morning’ (1939), and others, and the methods by which these copyrights were interpolated into the film reveal much about the relationship between Hollywood and music in the early 1950s.

As a musical comedy, *Singin’ in the Rain*’s overarching veneer of cartoonishness can in some ways be read as an act of contrition on the part of co-directors Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, a self-mocking acknowledgment that the film was designed in part to promote stagnant MGM song copyrights. This playful quality is most apparent in the opening red carpet sequence, which almost takes the form of a live action recreation of a Tex Avery cartoon. Slapstick pacing and extreme close-ups of absurdly comic rubbery-faced bit-players and extras combine with Kelly’s hammy disingenuousness to reveal the first of several layers of ironic distance employed to perhaps reassure the audience that this obvious commercial gambit is not to be taken all that seriously.

Later, in one particularly telling sequence, the film almost seems to go out of its way to let the audience in on the joke. With *The Jazz Singer* having turned Hollywood upside-down, silent star Don Lockwood (Kelly) is convinced by his friends Cosmo Brown (Donald O’Connor) and Kathy Selden (Debbie Reynolds) that the now-redundant silent film he has just shot, *The Duelling Cavalier*, can still be rescued, despite the studio’s disastrous last-minute attempt to incorporate sound. Don can, they urge, reconstitute it as a musical, *The Dancing Cavalier*, simply by adding ‘some songs and dances’. On cue, under the flimsy
premise that Cosmo realises it has just turned midnight, all three burst into another recycled Freed-Brown tune, ‘Good Morning’, originally featured in Babes in Arms (1939), an MGM musical directed by Busby Berkeley and starring Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland.

Later, of course, the ‘Singin’ in the Rain’ dance sequence clearly illustrates how even such obvious synergistic ploys can still generate sublime Hollywood entertainment. Don escorts Kathy to her front door in the rain, providing the excuse for the introduction of the Freed-Brown title song—originally featured in The Hollywood Revue of 1929—which accompanies Kelly’s now iconic dance routine. Elsewhere, a montage illustrating the plethora of musicals that followed in the wake of the talkie handily allows Freed to include another half-dozen or so old tunes, within the space of a few minutes (there is but one new copyright in the picture, ‘Moses’, written by Betty Comden, Adolph Green and Roger Edens—the film’s associate producer—presumably included because Freed and Brown had not written any songs about providing silent era actors with lessons in diction).

Yet embedded among ironic references to the industrial processes at work in film production is a concomitant vein of conventional Hollywood musical self-referentiality and self-reverence, a more typical boosterism that speaks to the wider role of that genre in Hollywood’s array of pleasures, and the necessity of cinema itself. In a media age dominated by the rise—the threat—of television, the feature film’s superior entertainment values are not only on show in Singin’ in the Rain in glorious Technicolor, but bluntly presented to the audience by the characters themselves as evidence of the medium’s worth.

The parallels between silent film suffering at the hands of the talkie and Hollywood coming under fire from television are obvious, and the film argues—very convincingly—that the major studios can not only weather the storm, but will ultimately triumph due to the superior resources already at their disposal: the audience just needs to be reminded of the true worth of production values, stars and songs.
And reminded they are in the ‘You Were Meant for Me’ dance sequence. This Freed
and Brown song—one of several originally featured in MGM’s *The Broadway Melody*
(1929)—here functions both in the traditional sense of furthering the love story narrative, and
as backdrop to a brief instructional film outlining Hollywood’s technological might. With
Don and Kathy seeking a secluded spot—the ‘proper setting’ for romance—they sneak into a
darkened, cavernous soundstage. Don shows Kathy how the perfect romantic environment—
and thus the perfect life—can be easily, and instantly, obtained with the aid of towering
painted backdrops, powerful smoke and wind machines, and a huge array of lighting gels.
Quite why a studio in 1927, several years before the introduction of three-strip Technicolor,
had need of banks of coloured lighting and painted backdrops is never explained, but Kathy
for one is convinced: Don has used the hardware of movie making to woo her, and to
consummate their love they dance among the lighting stands and cables.

The seemingly effortless cinematic elegance of this sequence—which, as we have just
been made aware, is in fact the product of no small amount of industrial effort—is contrasted
elsewhere in the film with the comic ineptitude on display in scenes dealing with the early
talkie era, a medium still in its formative years and frantically trying to work out the bugs.
The flat looking black and white daily rushes, with their irritatingly scratchy dialogue tracks
presented as evidence of *The Duelling Cavalier*’s unsuitability as entertainment, would in
1952 perhaps have looked eerily familiar to that half of cinema patrons who also owned a
television set. Modern Hollywood, in stark contrast, provided the dazzling spectacle of big
name stars, captured in Technicolor singing well-loved tunes.

The synergistic music publishing strategies apparent in *Till the Clouds Roll By* and
*Singin’ in the Rain* also shaped musicals such as *An American in Paris* (1951), with its of
assortment of George and Ira Gershwin tunes, *Lovely to Look At* (1952), another collection of
Jerome Kern compositions, and *The Band Wagon* (1953), which revisited numbers written by
Arthur Schwartz and Howard Dietz in the early 1930s. Warner Bros. delved far back into its catalogues by producing a string of period musicals starring Doris Day: *Tea for Two* (1950), *Lullaby of Broadway* (1951), and *By the Light of the Silvery Moon* (1953) revived material composed between the turn of the century and the 1920s. *On Moonlight Bay* (1951) included hits from the 1930s heyday of Music Publishers Holding Corp by the likes of Dubin and Warren, Cole Porter, and George Gershwin. Twentieth Century-Fox in turn resuscitated standards by Rodgers and Hart and Irving Berlin in films such as *With a Song in My Heart* (1952) and *There’s No Business Like Show Business* (1954).

It was of course not surprising that the studios employed the musical at the service their other subsidiaries, as the key function of the classical Hollywood musical had always been to ‘glorify American entertainment’ itself. The recourse to nostalgia, via a judicious sprinkling of the audience’s favourite old songs, played a key role in this process. In many cases this nostalgia took the form of a tribute to Hollywood’s own history of musical feature production: as noted, several of the songs featured in *Singin’ in the Rain*, for example, had originally been heard in both of the early MGM talkies *The Hollywood Revue of 1929* and *Broadway Melody*.

These strategies helped sustain ASCAP just as BMI seemed to be gaining the upper-hand. In 1952—the year that, for the first time, recorded music earned more revenue for the music industry than sheet music—the older licensing body finally bowed to pressure from its younger composers and newer publisher-members by modifying its system of royalty allocation. The new classifications, while not replicating BMI’s methods, did improve the standing of current performances in relation to member seniority. The younger hit songwriters were mollified, but the new system also provided unexpected benefits for senior composers: with their old copyrights now recirculating in hit Hollywood musicals, the new ASCAP ‘current performance’ system actually increased royalty earnings for the likes of
Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, Richard Rodgers, and Harry Warren, as well as the estates of
George Gershwin, Gus Kahn, Lorenz Hart.

The Classical Hollywood Score in the 1940s and 1950s

Outside the musical genre, however, the studios continued to view the movie soundtrack not as a potential stream of music publishing revenue, but more as a vital contribution to the cultural fabric of society in general. Aesthetic standards designed to elicit prestige in the 1930s had in effect denied a place for ‘low’ popular music within the nondiegetic film score, and would continue to do so until as late as the 1960s and the dawn of New Hollywood. As we saw in Chapter Two, issues of labour and economy encouraged the Big Five studios to employ large orchestras, hiring practices that in turn promulgated the signature bombastic sound of the Hollywood film score. Thus by the 1950s the film score had remained fundamentally as it had since the mid-1930s—under the influence of Richard Wagner.

Demands by the AFM, and a corresponding discourse as to the aesthetic value of the orchestral score, saw the major studios enlarge their music staffs by up to two-thirds during the late 1930s. Hollywood’s dependence on the lush Romantic score had increased accordingly, with the use of the full orchestra becoming more and more prominent in the second half of the decade, ‘almost without the awareness of audiences or exhibitors’.20 There had been a more than one hundred percent increase in orchestral film scoring during 1936, with a further 50 percent increase in 1937. That year Variety outlined the ‘enormous amount of experiment, research, technical and artistic groping’ that ensured that even the ‘most carefully produced and richly dialogued feature now would seem cold, barren and...one-dimensional...without an ample score’.21 As evidence, the trade magazine noted the recent
sneak preview of one (unnamed) drama which elicited unintentional mirth from three
different test audiences, a problem corrected by the last-minute addition of a dramatic score.

Throughout its ‘Golden Era’ in the late 1930s and 1940s, Hollywood released 500 to
600 fully-scored feature films per year.\textsuperscript{22} The standardised nature of the composition and
orchestration that formed these scores conditioned audience conceptions as to what film
music was.\textsuperscript{23} As we have seen, the entrenchment of the standardised Hollywood score during
the 1930s and 1940s was grounded the dominant artistic ideology of a previous age, the late-
Romantic era of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. However, our recognition of the narrative codes common to
film music stems not from our familiarity with, or the innate logic of, Wagnerian principles,
but from our constant exposure to their repetition throughout Hollywood’s history.

In fact, Hollywood itself was the major disseminator of music and musical knowledge
for over sixty years, in particular symphonic music.\textsuperscript{24} Tony Thomas goes further, arguing that
Hollywood has been the ‘most powerful educational force’ music has ever known.\textsuperscript{25} As
studio film composer George Antheil (\textit{The Plainsman}, 1936; \textit{In A Lonely Place}, 1950), stated
in his 1945 biography,

\begin{quote}
Hollywood music is very nearly a public communication. If you
are a movies fan (and who isn’t?) you may sit in a movie theatre
three times a week listening to the symphonic background
scores….Your musical tastes become moulded by these scores,
heard without knowing it. You see love and you hear it.
Simultaneously. It makes sense. Music suddenly becomes a
language for you without you knowing it.\textsuperscript{26}
\end{quote}

For these writers and others our very competence in musical practice and appreciation has
been moulded by the fixed repetition of musical styles dictated by the Hollywood studio
system.

With this constant reiteration in mind, Karlin identifies the five basic musical codes
which became inflexible during the Hollywood studio era: emotional, historical,
geographical, ethnic, and those codes associated with different genres.\textsuperscript{27} Such conventions are
often employed as a kind of instant exposition or generic signpost of visual action. For example, Claudia Gorbman insists that the music that plays during the credits often activates ‘cultural codes, and can reveal beforehand a great deal about the style and subject of the narrative to come’. The ‘cultural codes’ Gorbman refers to are of course products of industrial standardisation, musical shorthand that Hollywood created and dispersed, just as the demands of the continuity script system had shaped classical Hollywood film style. In the realm of historical and ethnic representations in mainstream film, for example, classical scoring has most often resorted to musical stereotyping that it itself has codified and popularised, in much the same way that Hollywood relied on stereotyped characters. Film composer Jerry Goldsmith (*Planet of the Apes*, 1968; *Poltergeist*, 1982) once claimed that if he were to present authentic ethnic music to a producer or director, ‘they would throw it out in a second’.

In other words, as Goldsmith notes, ‘What is ethnic is what Hollywood has made ethnic’. Classical Hollywood composer Miklós Rózsa (*Double Indemnity*, 1944; *Ben-Hur*, 1959) was often called upon to provide ethnic or historical music for producers, as he was for MGM’s *Quo Vadis* (1951). As Rozsa himself conceded, no one in the 1950s really knew what Ancient Roman music would have sounded like, so the composer created his own ‘Roman music’ by combining known Ancient Greek styles with conventional Hollywood Romantic structures, performed, of course, on Western instruments invented in the 18th and 19th centuries by the full MGM orchestra. This style quickly became established as the ‘Roman sound’, resonating throughout subsequent gladiator ‘sword and sandal’ epics. In this way, it can be seen that Hollywood’s historical musicological research most often went no further than the studios’ own score archives.
Jazz, Pop and Hollywood Scoring Convention

Thus the natural association of the classical score with classical narrative is as much an industrial product as is our acceptance of, and virtual obliviousness to, the processes of continuity editing. Both were directed toward the similar goal of audience engagement combined with a masking of industrial processes, and both have had significant effect on film narrative due to their presumed invisibility and naturalness. But these processes of engagement and masking continued to be the exclusive province of symphonic music. While the classical Hollywood score became naturalised during the late 1930s, contemporary popular music and jazz were denied equivalent narrative roles within the realm of nondiegetic film music. Neither style had yet attained any level of critical respect that might aid the studios in enhancing the cachet of their product; indeed, both forms were either critically dismissed within serious music circles or, worse, tainted by negative associations and prejudices pertaining to crime and race.

Studio music department heads thus discouraged their composers and orchestrators from departing from the Wagnerian model. For Warner Bros. Musical Director Leo Forbstein, this was a strategy designed to not only maintain the high aesthetic standards of the feature film, but to help preserve American culture as a whole: ‘Hollywood is building screen music of its own, music which is important to our product and which is helping boost motion pictures to the status of an art’. As a result—and just as their publishing companies were doing—Hollywood’s music departments remained largely impervious to changes taking place in popular music throughout the 1940s, and well into the 1950s.

In addition, Hollywood remained immune not only to ‘low’ musical forms such as jazz and pop, but also to contemporary developments within serious composition. As noted in Chapter Two, in the late 1940s Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, from the Frankfurt School of Marxist social critics, called for an end to imitative Wagnerian film scores. In their book
Composing for the Films they argued in favour of a more integral, structural role for music that could only be achieved via modernist composition. They felt this more cerebral twentieth century form had been passed over by film producers in favour of the familiar Romantic style, as modernism rejected the ideological underpinnings of preceding nineteenth-century musical styles. Adorno and Eisler believed that the jarring dissonance of serialist compositions—for example, those by modernists such as Arnold Schoenberg and Alban Berg—would help awaken the audience from their Hollywood-induced stupor.

Adorno and Eisler seem not to have realised that dissonant music had, in fact, already infiltrated the classical Hollywood soundtrack, but not in any manner calculated to awaken audiences from a capitalist torpor. Rather, it had quickly been adapted and codified as the aural representation of the ‘Other’, most frequently in horror films or films dealing with mental illness, despite the fact that Schoenberg and his peers attached no such connotations of disorder or abnormality to their music. The essence of serialism was in fact order itself, a tightly-structured mathematical organization that signified not horror, but rather cerebral musical progress. As Royal S. Brown notes, twelve-tone serialism accords ‘equal attention to all twelve notes, through such devices as nonreturn to a given note until the other eleven notes are used up’. The composer also avoids the more strongly tonal intervals of the third, fourth, and fifth. Thus, ‘the resultant music is difficult for the average listener [as it denies] catching up the emotions in patterns of tension and resolution’, a factor obviously not lost on horror film producers, or directors working in the realms of thrillers and psychological drama, such as Alfred Hitchcock.

The composer most closely associated with Hitchcock is of course Bernard Herrmann. The first of a new breed of film composer to arrive in Hollywood during the 1940s, Herrmann’s work more than any other displayed traces of modernist influence. Orson Welles, who had worked with Herrmann on radio in New York, brought the composer to Hollywood
in 1939 to work on *Citizen Kane* (1941). Herrmann’s score for *Citizen Kane* was, as the composer later admitted, much more closely aligned with the scoring he had done for radio, particularly the reliance on shorter-than-usual musical transitions between scenes. These shorter ‘radio’ passages were balanced by several extended musical sequences. As Herrmann himself noted in 1941,

> The film was so unusual technically that it afforded me many opportunities for music experiment. It abounded in montages, which were long enough to permit me to compose complete musical numbers, rather than mere cues to fit them. Mr. Welles...in many cases cut his film to suit these complete numbers, rather than doing what is ordinarily done—cut the music to suit the film.

Herrmann, however, was working under conditions unlike any experienced by previous film composers in Hollywood: his director, Welles, had been granted an unprecedented amount of creative control over the project, which in turn gave Herrmann the freedom to orchestrate his own score. Still, despite the reputation Herrmann enjoys among fans of Hitchcock and Welles, his ‘more adventurous orchestrations’ had little impact on the conventional Hollywood score in the 1940s, other than to introduce touches of minimalist modernism into the horror and thriller score. It would take the erosion of the industrial structures underpinning the music departments to grant even the slightest notion of creative freedom to these younger composers.

Newer arrivals like Herrmann, Henry Mancini and Elmer Bernstein came to Hollywood from radio or big band backgrounds, milieus that had encouraged a more sympathetic relationship with non-Romantic musical styles and more flexible methods of orchestration. One other such newcomer was Alex North, the composer credited with creating the first major jazz-oriented score, for *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951). North felt jazz to be ‘a far more authentic ingredient of American music’ than Romantic music, and thus, by extension, of American cinema. Like Herrmann, North had honed his technique outside the
studio system (in this case writing charts for big bands), and thus was more easily inclined to break with Hollywood’s orchestration conventions. As a neophyte in the studio system, ‘it didn’t occur to him to consider using the entire staff (thus) he surprised the recording musicians and executives by orchestrating for smaller, more personal instrumental combinations’. ⁴⁴

Similarly, Mancini’s working methods elicited much disquiet among Hollywood studio recording personnel. Studio recording engineers had been trained exclusively to accommodate the bombastic sonorities of the classical score, to the point where they sometimes appeared unaware of contemporary advances in recording techniques and technology. According to Mancini, as late as the end of the 1950s,

> There was a lethargy in the studio music departments. . . . At Universal...when I told the engineers I wanted a microphone put on the drums...they looked at me as if I was crazy. This was 1958 and they still thought in terms of a single mike hung over the orchestra. ⁴⁵

The younger generation of film composers brought non-Romantic musical forms to the film score, but the extent of the impact of those styles was still dictated by music department heads. Thus in the post-war period contemporary music genres such as jazz gradually infiltrated the film score, but always their formal influence was tightly reined within the studio production system. Such was the case with the delayed introduction of jazz elements: North’s score for *A Streetcar Named Desire* was of course not performed by jazz musicians, but by classically-trained Hollywood session players.

Despite their attempts to incorporate non-orchestral styles, the work of these composers did not in reality represent a radical departure from standard scoring practice. Their ‘jazz scores’ were not jazz as such, but rather incorporated jazz and blues elements into the standard ‘classical Hollywood approach’. ⁴⁶ A musical form that relies largely on improvisation, jazz had developed around the same time as modernist composition, in the
first two decades of the twentieth-century. By the early 1950s instrumentalists such as Charlie Parker and Miles Davis were leading jazz into the more experimental avant-garde domains of bebop and cool jazz.\textsuperscript{47} The big band sound that North drew on for \textit{A Streetcar Named Desire}—set in New Orleans—had little connection to modern jazz in the early 1950s, having a closer affinity to the 1930s sound of Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and North’s former employer Benny Goodman.\textsuperscript{48} Also, as with modernist music, even this ‘Hollywood jazz’ became quickly marginalised within Hollywood musical coding, possessing as it did for film producers connotations pertaining to the sleazier aspects of life, such as crime, juvenile delinquency and drug addiction.\textsuperscript{49}

The new guard of film composers who began to infiltrate the Hollywood scoring stages by the 1950s quickly found that any attempts to modify the sound of film music faced strong opposition. Within the music departments, Mancini, North, and other newer arrivals were seen as interlopers who were ‘taking jobs away from more talented composers’.\textsuperscript{50} Upon his arrival in Hollywood in the late 1940s, Henry Mancini found a creatively stagnant and homogenized industry mired in entrenched industrial practices:

\begin{quote}
In my years at Universal, the studio was packaging around fifty films a year, mostly for the same people. Musically there tended to be a sameness. Your thoughts became moulded into thinking that the thirty-five piece studio orchestra was the only means of scoring. The general musical concept was one of bigness, lushness. It (was) a super-rich industry (with) a mentality geared to abundance.\textsuperscript{51}
\end{quote}

This drive for lushness reached its apogee in the early 1950s, as Hollywood sought ways to differentiate its product from television and reclaim the audience that had gradually been disappearing since the box office high-water mark of 1946.\textsuperscript{52}

As we have seen, musicals were an ideal genre to display richness and abundance. Epic widescreen adventure movies, such MGM’s first Cinemascope production \textit{Knights of the Round Table} (1954), were another. \textit{Knights of the Round Table} was also one of the first
films to feature stereophonic sound. Larger movie theatres were now able to more fully reproduce the rich—and marketable—high-class sonorities of a symphony orchestra. Despite the efforts of Herrmann, North, Mancini, and their contemporaries, the introduction of stereo sound in the early 1950s only served to reemphasise Hollywood’s dependence on Wagnerian bombastic.

Preserving the Composer

Hollywood’s high-culture aspirations were also at work in another film music discourse, that of the composer-as-auteur. Just as Hollywood had courted celebrated authors to write scripts, so too did the studios engage the services of critically-renowned composers. In the 1930s, Paramount’s Irving Thalberg attempted to commission scores from Igor Stravinsky and Arnold Schoenberg, but negotiations broke down when it became apparent that both composers assumed movies would be custom-made to suit their music. In 1949 Paramount augmented their adaptation of Henry James’ The Heiress with an Aaron Copland score, as did Republic with The Red Pony, which boasted a script adapted by John Steinbeck from his own novel. Perhaps the most overt example of Hollywood’s faith in the box office esteem afforded by symphonic music was Fantasia (1940), which married Disney animation with the works of Bach, Schubert, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Mussorgsky and Stravinsky, performed by the Philadelphia Orchestra under the baton of Leopold Stokowski.

By and large, however, Hollywood preferred to trumpet the pedigrees of their own in-house talent (and, of course, bestow upon them industry accolades such as Academy Awards). For example, the studios that Dimitri Tiomkin composed for—he was one of the few freelance film composers of the studio era—made sure the public were aware that the Ukraine-born composer of scores for High Noon (1952) and Dial M for Murder (1954) was a former concert pianist who had grown up alongside Sergei Prokofiev and studied under
Alexander Glazunov, Shostakovich’s teacher. By hiring composers such as Tiomkin and Erich Korngold, and widely publicising their credentials, Hollywood created their own ‘Masters’, sometimes even featuring their names on the theatre marquee alongside that of the film’s star.

In this way, ‘discourses about “art” and “quality” enhanced the public’s perception of the social and aesthetic value of Hollywood’s products’. These discourses persisted despite the fact that within the studios music was quite openly dismissed as an irritating postscript in the production process. Often a low priority, the score was seen as a poor cousin to the narrative; the music, no matter its high-class connotations, was merely there to support ‘the development of the film’s story line…and should not draw attention to itself’. Such was the awkward position that Hollywood studio composers found themselves in: to raise the cultural tone of a film with unwanted music that should largely remain unnoticed.

If the music itself was often considered a low priority, even a pedigreed composer might not fair much better. In 1934, European-trained concert violinist Victor Schertzinger’s score for One Night of Love won the first Academy Award for music, but the statue credited the Columbia Studio Music Department, whose head Louis Silvers accepted the award. Even after their names began to be engraved on Oscars, composers remained the only employees in the music department not unionised, and thus were not guaranteed the same job security or benefits afforded the musicians and technicians. Nor were composers duly compensated with lucrative royalty cheques for the scores they composed. Having learnt their lesson during the silent era in regard to music licensing, the studios contractually reserved the copyright on all scores, thus the composer held no rights of ownership over his film work.

In addition, the Hollywood composers had to deal with suspicions as to the originality of their work, both from within and without the film business. Some accused film composers of borrowing their ‘impressive sounds’ from the public domain works of the Masters. Upon
receiving an Oscar in 1955 for his work on *The High and the Mighty*, Dimitri Tiomkin began his acceptance speech by saying, ‘I would like to thank Beethoven, Brahms, Wagner, Strauss, Rimsky-Korsakov...’. The audience’s eruption of laughter drowned the remainder of his speech, and Tiomkin left the stage confused; he had genuinely attempted to pay tribute to his prime influences. However, many in Hollywood had already seen fit to make ‘snide remarks about movie composers filching from the classics, and here was one of the most famous of them apparently admitting it’. Subsequently, Tiomkin was castigated by many of his peers for ‘casting ridicule on the profession’.  

This atmosphere fuelled a Romantic artist-against-the-system rhetoric among film composers, who saw themselves pitched in continuous struggle against the tastes and base commercial demands of the studio and music department heads, as well as the indifference of the public. Despite film music being considered ‘a generally mediocre and unvalued medium’,  

it is still rare to locate an interview with a film composer in which the name of a former great—Wagner, Beethoven, Strauss etc.—is not evoked in an effort to draw comparison between the toils of serious film composition and those of the Masters. The discourse of self-preservation only intensified as the new breed of composer infiltrated the Hollywood music hegemony in the post-war era, gradually creating space for rock-influenced scores and compilation soundtracks.  

To traditional composers the rock scores that emerged in the 1960s were created by ‘unwashed ruffians whom…could neither write, arrange, nor even read music’. But it took more than an influx of younger composers and their ‘inferior’ musical styles to render the older generation of film composers obsolete. Until the 1950s their positions within the music departments had been secured structurally, by both the vertical integration system and the job security afforded the studio musicians for whom they composed. However, with the demise
of the perfect system—the end of the studio era—the days of the classical Hollywood film score were numbered.

The Post-Studio Score: Packaged Movies, Packaged Music

In 1948, the US Supreme Court’s Paramount anti-trust decision ordered that the Big Five studios divest themselves of one of their arms of vertical integration. The studios chose to maintain control of distribution, and by the early 1950s had disposed of their highly profitable theatrical chains. This meant, among other things, the end of a system by which for almost thirty years movies had been ‘mass produced by a cartel of studios for a virtually guaranteed market’. In regard to the evolution of the Hollywood score in the post-classical period, three ramifications of the Paramount Decree were crucial. These concerned, specifically, the shift from studio to independent package production, the dismantling of specialised studio departments, and the infiltration of non-Hollywood product into the formerly tightly-controlled exhibition circuit. The first two outcomes will be discussed here; the third will be outlined in Chapter Nine.

Firstly, the rise of independent, or package, production meant that creative decisions were no longer managed according to the established methods of the Fordist production-line system. Rather than being the bureaucratic responsibility of a music department head, from the beginning of the 1950s independent producers and, gradually, directors began to select their own film music. For example, it was Stanley Kramer, one of the more prominent of the post-studio independent producers, who brought Alex North (then working in television) to Hollywood to score Death of a Salesman in 1951. Secondly, without their own cinemas, the studios could no longer regulate the demand for their features, B-pictures and shorts. As this meant an end to the guaranteed revenue that funded specialised in-house services, studio departments began to be dismantled and contract personnel were fired en masse. Those
professionals formerly employed, for example, in studio costume and production design departments, began to turn freelance.

The studios also wished to dismantle their expensive orchestras but, thanks to the powerful influence of Petrillo’s American Federation of Musicians, the music departments remained. The lush movie score, recorded in stereophonic sound and pumped through giant theatre speakers that made a mockery of the tiny, tinny speakers fitted to television sets (and most home stereos), continued to be a key element used to help differentiate cinema from domestic entertainments, but the studios assumed (erroneously, as it later turned out) that they could maintain their high standards of orchestral quality via a much less expensive freelance system. The studios complained that they were losing millions of dollars paying musicians for almost twice as many hours per week than they actually worked, but the AFM held strong. The entrenchment of the orchestras ensured that symphonic music remained the Hollywood signature sound for the greater part of the 1950s.

It was television, though, that eventually inadvertently killed off the studio orchestras. Just as labour disputes begat the studio orchestras at the end of the 1920s, a strike also hastened their demise. In February 1958—almost thirty years after the industrial action over the introduction of pre-recorded film music in theatres—Local 47, the Los Angeles branch of the AFM, went on strike against the Big Five studios. Ostensibly the dispute was triggered by Hollywood’s decision to release their film archives to television. Since the emergence of network television in the 1940s, Petrillo had forbidden the televised broadcast of any film featuring music performed by AFM musicians. As a result, television had become a dumping ground for B-pictures.

By 1956, however, Hollywood was releasing up to 3000 features into television syndication annually, prompting Petrillo to argue that AFM members were entitled to residuals for the commercial reactivation of pre-1948 product. Local 47 members also
demanded a 12 percent wage increase, a 20 percent increase in the size of studio orchestras,
and that sessions be limited to four minutes of recorded music per hour.\textsuperscript{76} Industrial action
continued until September 3\textsuperscript{rd}, but Local 47 were dismayed to find that the studios simply
began recording their scores overseas with European orchestras.\textsuperscript{77} When the strike ended—
unsatisfactorily for the musicians—the studio orchestras had been effectively disbanded, and
after 1958 all recording in Hollywood was completed on a freelance basis.\textsuperscript{78}

With the dismantling of the music departments, the shift to freelance musical
production, and the attendant rise in costs, for the first time since the 1920s film music had to
be considered in financial terms, on a film-by-film basis. In other words, the score was now
an added expense that would ultimately affect profit margins on individual films. Thus, not
only were the industrial criteria for the selection of film music suddenly opened up, but the
choice of musical style for a score began to play an increasingly important role in aiding the
box office success of each production. With the industrial strictures loosened, the Hollywood
soundtrack increasingly began to play host to ‘less prestigious’ non-orchestral forms of
music. Mostly these took the form of the more intimate ‘incidental’ jazz and pop
orchestra tions of a type associated with the younger composers, such as Mancini and North.
But space also began to be found for African American styles, including scores by respected
jazz artists such as Duke Ellington, avant garde composition and, eventually, rock and roll.

Conclusion

For the most part, Hollywood appeared to ignore developments in the popular music
industry in the late 1940s and early 1950s, perhaps distracted by the outcomes of the
Paramount Decree and the spectre of rapidly dwindling box office attendance. The revival of
the big budget musical created space for popular music within the film text, but this was the
pop of previous generations, and was used primarily to bolster ASCAP, whose dominance within the music business was being undermined by the rise of BMI.

Meanwhile, the classical Hollywood score, as it had been since its inception in the mid-1930s, remained the preserve of Romantic era-style orchestration and reflected none of the developments in modernist composition, jazz, or race music. A small group of younger composers such as Henry Mancini, Alex North, Elmer Bernstein and Johnny Mandel found work in Hollywood during the early 1950s, but their attempts to break away from neo-Romanticism’s hold on the film score were tempered by the strict regulations at play within the studio music departments. The Paramount Decree both loosened those industrial strictures and, as we’ll see in subsequent chapters, began to reveal the changing make-up of the audience for film.

Endnotes

2 ‘WB Decca-stock sale seen as end of “foolish” era by some, disk op by others’ in The Billboard, July 21 1945, p.26. Variety reported that Warner Bros. in fact held 98,000 shares, for which Decca paid $4,200,000 or $44 per share (‘Decca Records buys out Warner Bros.’ 25% interest in co.; over $400,000,000’ in Variety, July 11, 1945, p.1).
4 ‘20th-Fox mulling records subsid’ in Variety, August 29, 1945, p.39.
6 Grevatt 1959, p.16.
7 ‘Soundtracks are big business’ in Billboard (MGM Records 20th Anniversary Supplement), January 21, 1967, p.44.
9 Catalogue number MGM-1.
10 Maltby 2003, p.165.
11 Fehr & Vogel, 1993, p.223.
12 Scodari 1994, p.4.
14 The episodic structure of the film may also have been a result of difficulties experienced during production. Kern himself took part in the film’s pre-production stage, but died one month into filming, in November 1945. Producer Arthur Freed hired five different directors throughout the film’s troubled six month shoot.
15 Till the Clouds Roll By shows Kern writing his own lyrics, which was never the case.
16 Block 1993, p.535.
17 As Jane Feuer (1993, p.76) writes, ‘MGM musicals of the 1940s and 1950s don’t dare to question their own logic. To do so would be to deny the promise of entertainment itself’.
18 Feuer 1993, p.90.
20 Jungmeyer 1937, p.52.
The advent of stock music goes some way toward illustrating the standardised nature of the classical Hollywood film score. B-pictures (and later television) relied greatly on pre-existing scores—music supposedly custom-written for a different film—to fill their soundtracks.

In 1919, Samuel Goldwyn announced a plan to hire ‘the greatest American novelists of today’, and not release the resulting films without author approval. Paramount contracted W. Somerset Maugham and Joseph Conrad. Sinclair Lewis, William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald and John Steinbeck were all eventually employed by Hollywood (Thomas 1970, p.36).

An exception to this rule was Erich Korngold, whose contract with Warner Bros. in the 1940s gave him ownership of copyright, limited his work to two films per year, gave him right of refusal, ensured him a separate title card in the credits, and guaranteed that his name be mentioned in any publicity material that cited the name of the film’s director (Karlin 1994, p.182).

See, for example, Faulkner (1983)/Schelles (1999). Acknowledging the stigma associated with corporate (i.e., studio) sponsorship, Elmer Bernstein (The Ten Commandments, 1956; The Magnificent Seven, 1960) once cited parallels with Hayden’s attachment to the Royal Court of Prince Esterhazy (Thomas 1997, p.253).
Karlin 1994, p.16.
Schatz 1993, p.11.
Schatz 1993, p.12.
Chapter Six—

‘Infamous! Barbaric!’: Hollywood and the Problem of Rock and Roll

It isn’t boogie, it isn’t jive, and it isn’t swing. It’s kinda all of ‘em.
Steve Hollis (Johnny Johnston)
in *Rock Around the Clock* (1956)

Hollywood’s wilful neglect of contemporary music was not only detectable on the film soundtrack. Via ASCAP, the music publishing studios also largely ignored the growth of the rhythm and blues and country and western markets, instead seeing the expansion of the disc industry as a hindrance to their established methods of copyright promotion. Due to the post-war generation’s seemingly insatiable appetite for recorded popular music, the recording industry continued to expand towards unprecedented levels throughout the 1950s, particularly after the advent of rock and roll, which would become the most commercially successful style in the history of the disc business. While most of Hollywood and Tin Pan Alley looked on helplessly as rock and roll destroyed their established systems of music promotion, by the mid-1950s small pockets of the film industry would begin to produce films that, on the surface at least, were designed to appeal to teenagers by tapping into burgeoning rock and roll culture.

MGM’s *Blackboard Jungle* (1955) is often credited—or perhaps damned—as being the first rock and roll movie, although in truth rock plays no part in its narrative. The film does deserve its place in the annals of pop history, however, due to its pivotal role in transforming Bill Haley’s ‘Rock Around the Clock’ into the biggest selling record since Bing Crosby’s ‘White Christmas’. Its success launched the rock and roll craze and alerted the record business to the potential size of the teenage audience. Such would be the impact of this discovery that sectors within Hollywood, an industry that had thus far refused to
acknowledge the presence of niche markets within the monolithic mainstream film audience, 
would also begin to cater specifically to younger filmgoers.

‘Rock Around the Clock’ and the Rise of the Youth Audience

Bill Haley was a direct product of the musical ‘miscegenation’ that BMI had fuelled 
throughout the 1940s. Having played Western Swing music since the 1940s, Haley began 
recording R&B covers for small Philadelphia record labels in the early 1950s, his first 
attempt being a cover of Jackie Brenston’s ‘Rocket 88’. That disc failed to chart, but with 
the R&B sound proving popular in his nightclub act, Haley emphasised the dance rhythms of 
Louis Jordan and Big Joe Turner as the bedrock of his style. The Comets, featuring guitar, 
upright bass, saxophone, pedal steel and accordion, already performed an eclectic mix of 
western swing, hillbilly boogie, and Basie-style big band jazz, but the addition of the solid 
R&B beat served to create a musical blend that ‘defied categorization’.

‘Crazy Man, Crazy’—for some the ‘first white rock hit’—reached number 12 on the 
pop chart for the Essex label in 1953. The disc provided a stark stylistic contrast to the 
biggest hit of the day, Patti Page’s ‘Doggie in the Window’, and brought Haley to the 
attention of Decca’s Milt Gabler. Gabler had been Louis Jordan’s recording supervisor, and 
for Haley he duplicated the sessions and arrangements that had spawned Jordan’s million-
selling jump blues hits for Decca in the 1940s. Haley’s Decca debut, the post-apocalyptic 
fantasy tale ‘Thirteen Women (And Only One Man in Town)’, sank without a trace, but a top 
ten placing for his cover of Big Joe Turner’s ‘Shake Rattle and Roll’ in October 1954 helped 
convince Gabler that Haley’s rhythm and blues-tinged western swing sound could appeal to a 
wider audience. What differentiated this disc from all of Haley’s previous records was the 
marked emphasis on the backbeat, provided by Cab Calloway/Lucky Millinder drummer 
David ‘Panama’ Francis.
By February 1955 Haley had four records in the *Cash Box* top 40, but none had come close to matching the success of ‘Shake Rattle and Roll’. Twelve months previously, DJs and audiences had preferred the B-side of ‘Thirteen Women, an up-tempo, rim-shot laden twelve-bar boogie called ‘(We’re Gonna) Rock Around the Clock’. The song had been co-written by two white songwriters from Philadelphia, Max C. Freedman and Jimmy DeKnight, and had originally been recorded in early 1954 by Sunny Dae and His Knights. 8 ‘Jimmy DeKnight’ was a pseudonym used by James Myers, Haley’s manager and publisher, and he convinced Haley to record the song during his first Decca session with Gabler. Not content with his copyright’s fate as an obscure B-side, in 1955 Myers sent 200 copies to “every name I could get in Hollywood”: 9

Myers was apparently oblivious to the fact that marginalised forms of music similar to Haley’s, such as R&B and hillbilly boogie, had thus far had no place in film music. Indeed any music with ‘perceived ethnic, ideological and commercial limitations’, for example jazz or country blues, had been denied access to the movie soundtrack. 10 It was thus fortunate that among the names on Myers’ list was that of young writer-director Richard Brooks, who was shooting a film version of Evan Hunter’s juvenile delinquency novel, *Blackboard Jungle*. 11 The record was selected to play over the film’s title and end credits, the main appeal for Brooks apparently being the impact of its ‘sheer volume’, as outlined by James Miller:

…it was customary for Hollywood producers to lower the levels of the bass on the music used on soundtracks, lest the audience in be deafened by the giant loudspeakers. For *Blackboard Jungle*, however, the producers ran... ‘Rock Around the Clock’ wide open, letting the music hit the listeners in the gut...for most people, it was the loudest music they had ever heard. 12

Despite the volume inflicted on audiences, as employed in *Blackboard Jungle*, Haley’s recording still managed to fall safely within the boundaries set by Hollywood scoring convention. Like the use of jazz in previous films, rock and roll appears here as the aural
representation of the Other: it is the sound of the world-turned-upside-down chaos of the opening scenes of the film and their representation of rampant juvenile delinquency.

That said, the use of ‘(We’re Gonna) Rock Around the Clock’ over the titles is in fact the only appearance of rock and roll in the film. Charles Wolcott’s jazz-tinged score soon takes over and establishes a ‘button-down hipster tone’, as opposed to rock and roll danger.¹³ This quieter, refined score reflects more the tastes of the lead character, schoolteacher Richard Dadier (Glenn Ford) and his victimised staff colleague Mr. Edwards (Richard Kiley), and is more akin to the old Bix Beiderbecker and Stan Kenton 78s that these older characters prize. Wolcott’s polite studio orchestra jazz helps lead the narrative towards ‘normalcy’, as Dadier guides troubled delinquent Greg Miller (Sidney Poitier) away from crime—and by extension rock and roll—towards productive citizenship.¹⁴

But audiences seemed to ignore both the jazz score and the movie’s conventional resolution. The US Ambassador to Italy, Claire Booth Luce, lambasted Blackboard Jungle as a base example of Hollywood’s exploitation of teen delinquency and had it withdrawn from the Venice Film Festival.¹⁵ Publicity surrounding the film’s explicit violence tapped into an ‘ongoing public fascination with teen hooliganism’,¹⁶ ensuring it became an international box office hit: made for $360,000, Blackboard Jungle made $4,000,000 in the US and $8,000,000 worldwide.¹⁷ Decca capitalised on the controversy by re-releasing ‘(We’re Gonna) Rock Around the Clock’ in May 1955. Decca had given MGM the option to buy the rights to the recording for $7,500, but instead the studio licensed the song for $5,000, and released an instrumental version by the MGM Studio Orchestra.¹⁸ Myers’ perseverance finally paid off as the film’s notoriety sent Haley’s recording to the top of the US pop charts, where it stayed throughout July and August, quickly selling two million copies in the US and, eventually, 25 million copies worldwide.¹⁹
The success of the ‘(We’re Gonna) Rock Around the Clock’ was a strong indication for the major labels that this musical style, which they had previously dismissed as having marginal appeal, had the potential to find a mass audience. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, they finally realised what the independent sector—and, to a lesser extent, Decca and Capitol—had known since the late 1940s: that this untapped market was not the same mainstream, multi-generational mass audience that Tin Pan Alley had been attempting to cater to. This fundamental rethinking of the audience for popular music would, not surprisingly, change the way music was made and sold.

The Record Business in the Mid-1950s: R&B, Hillbilly, and Rock and Roll

While some popular music historians have agonized over which record stakes the most convincing claim to being—sonically, stylistically, formally, attitudinally—the first rock and roll record, more than any other single release ‘(We’re Gonna) Rock Around the Clock’ crystallized industry conceptions as to what rock and roll was. Crucial to this was its smoothly hybridized constitution, which marks the recording out as being a patchwork of earlier American music, both familiar and unfamiliar to 1955 audiences. By featuring Bill Haley and His Comets’ ‘(We’re Gonna) Rock Around the Clock’ over its credits, *Blackboard Jungle* became the vehicle via which white rock and roll was launched as a commercial musical form.

According to Charlie Gillett, the evolution from hillbilly and R&B to rock and roll in the early 1950s was a fairly simple one: the independent record labels simplified the beat, and promoted R&B as rock and roll. Gillett also notes that, apart from Decca, the major labels at first hoped that rock and roll ‘would go away’. Even Capitol, with its solid grounding in the hillbilly market, ‘seemed baffled by the tastes of the new teenage audience’, indicated
perhaps by the fact that Capitol’s one successful rock and roll signing, Gene Vincent, was acquired via the desperate measure of a talent competition.24

But the biggest major label, RCA Victor, had little time for—or knowledge of—the supposed nuances of the teen rock and roll market. They knew the pop market, and they decided to approach this new fad the same way they had approached all previous fads, by reproducing an approximation of it in line with their own established standards of production. In the wake of Haley’s success, in November 1955 RCA Victor bought the contract and master recordings of Elvis Presley, a young performer who had garnered several regional country and western hits in the south. They paid $40,000 to the Memphis-based independent Sun Records, beating out the New York R&B label Atlantic. As Robertson and Charlesworth note,

Unlike Sun, with its heritage of hillbilly and blues, or Atlantic, with its deep reservoir of R&B talent, RCA was a pop label, pure and simple. A&R man Steve Sholes handed Presley over to producer/guitarist Chet Atkins with one instruction: to make hit record that would extend beyond the specialist regional charts...25

It proved to be the perfect strategy. The singer’s debut RCA single ‘Heartbreak Hotel’ sold two million copies—the biggest record since ‘(We’re Gonna) Rock Around the Clock’—while his first LP, Elvis Presley, sold 300,000 copies, a figure made all the more impressive due to the fact that Presley’s audience, teenagers, had not previously been known to buy albums in large numbers.

Even before Haley and Presley, the disc business had continued to register record levels of growth. The retail disc market had dipped by $50,000,000 after the 1947 high of $224,000,000, but by 1952 it had rebounded to $214,000,000, outstripping sheet music revenues for the first time in industry history, much to ASCAP’s alarm.26 That year, ASCAP income totalled a record $15,000,000, but largely through film and theatre music licensing—
sheet sales had actually plummeted by almost 25 percent. BMI’s revenues reached $5,000,000, mostly from radio and television licensing, but the company generated almost as many hit tunes as ASCAP. ASCAP responded to the changing balance of power by radically restructuring its classification system in line with that of BMI. Traditional Tin Pan Alley methods of evaluation such as seniority and prestige were eliminated in favour of number of performances, a structure deemed more equitable by younger hit songwriters and an acknowledgment of the newfound strength of the disc market.²⁷

As rock and roll took hold in 1955, record sales climbed even higher, to $227,000,000, a figure dwarfed the following year—the year of Elvis Presley—when $377,000,000 worth of discs were sold.²⁸ Not only had Hollywood looked on as the record labels cut a swath through sheet music profits, they also slowly began to consider the possibility that the disc business was eating into their box office takings. In 1946, Hollywood had claimed one dollar out of every five spent on leisure consumption in the United States; by 1957, the studios were receiving only thirty-five cents.²⁹ For years the major studios had assumed the problem was television: a 400 percent increase in television sets sales in 1949° roughly coincided with a marked decrease in box office takings. The subsequent loss of profit triggered ‘one of the most precipitous collapses in the annals of American business’, and Hollywood ‘made the obvious connection’ as television audiences grew and their own shrank.³¹

While the studios eyed television nervously, they seemed to pay little attention to events taking place within the key non-visual entertainment medium, recorded music. By 1956, though, it was becoming obvious just how much disposable income was being spent on rock and roll discs. Hollywood would react, belatedly, to this incursion on the leisure dollar in two key ways: by entering the record business, and by producing rock and roll movies. Part of the reason that television was at first viewed as a threat was that the studios felt powerless
to control its spread: the government’s antitrust suit and the resulting Paramount Decree led to Federal Communication Commission regulations preventing the studios from owning exhibition outlets such as television stations and networks. By the 1950s, however, Hollywood had begun to capitalise on the rise of television by granting screening rights to their back catalogues, and by establishing television production arms that filled the void left after the dismantling of their B-picture units.\textsuperscript{32} In contrast, no FCC restrictions barred entry into the recording industry, so the heads of the major studios began formulating plans to invest in the recording industry.\textsuperscript{33}

Meanwhile, independent producers hoped that teenagers could be tempted back to the cinema if their favourite singers were performing rock and roll songs on the big screen. In some ways the inclusion of ‘(We’re Gonna) Rock Around the Clock’ in \textit{Blackboard Jungle} marked the beginning of a new era in Hollywood’s attitude to the role of popular music in the film text, although its use would continue to be dictated by the standardised industrial rules germane to conventional film narrative and genre. Whatever the thematic connection that Richard Brooks intended to cue by including rock and roll in his film—\textit{Blackboard Jungle} shaped public perceptions as to the correlation between the teen rock and roll consumer and juvenile crime—it was the controversy stirred by \textit{the film}, fuelled in part by exaggerated media reporting on the young audience’s volatile reaction to the theme song,\textsuperscript{34} that claimed a niche for rock and roll on the film soundtrack. But it would remain a limited and strictly monitored niche, as rock and roll would be deemed appropriate as source music only, in order to invest teen movies with a modicum of gritty reality.

\textbf{Rock and Roll and the Diegetic Realm of the Teen}

Throughout the rest of the 1950s and early 1960s, rock and roll would be used as a signpost to differentiate character—i.e. it was the diegetic music that the teenagers in movies
listened to—but it would not be used to address the audience directly. It other words, it was denied permission to speak for the film as a whole, as the conventional film score had been created to do. Two issues were at play here, both holdovers from the studio era. Firstly, the perceived need to address an imagined and undefined mass audience via prestige, quality entertainment served to preclude rock and roll music as appropriate material for nondiegetic scoring. Like jazz before it, rock and roll (that is a classically-trained studio orchestra’s approximation of rock and roll)\(^{35}\) was quickly generically marginalised within the conventions of Hollywood musical language. As its public profile increased, social critics railed against rock and roll’s vulgar ‘leerics’, anti-authority stance, and ‘Negro-influences’.\(^{36}\) Music produced for teenagers was ‘linked with every perceived social ill from juvenile delinquency and miscegenation to atheism and Communism’.\(^{37}\) Thanks in part to *Blackboard Jungle* this new form of dance music became instant shorthand for an undesirable Other: rock and roll was music for juvenile delinquents—and low budget musicals.

Genuine attempts to incorporate rock and roll into the film narrative were thus mostly left to independent film producers, or those working within the studio package production system possessing a more modest brief. One such producer was Sam Katzman, whose low budget teen exploitation fare was distributed by Columbia, one of the ‘Little Three’ studios along with Universal and United Artists.\(^{38}\) But even independent producers felt compelled to marginalise the new sound, both thematically and textually. Despite the opening up of musical possibilities for film by the mid-1950s, rock and roll remained diegetic sound, recorded source music which possessed a tinge of danger or embodied the unfamiliar.

The second holdover from the studio period was the preservation of the formal divide between diegetic and nondiegetic music, as source music and the score remained the responsibility of separate production divisions.\(^{39}\) This division of labour ensured that source music and underscore continued to be treated as unrelated elements within film language,\(^{40}\) a
formal partition that would only begin to give way once the industrial strictures that enforced it loosened in the 1960s. Thus, after the sound of rock and roll debuted in *Blackboard Jungle*, space could thereafter largely only be found for this music within the one genre that had always accommodated popular music, as independent producers responded to *Blackboard Jungle* with a slew of cheap, hastily produced ‘jukebox musicals’.

As the majors continued to attempt to entice the mass audience away from their television sets with family entertainment presented in VistaVision and Technicolor, independent producers sensed the growing fragmentation of the film audience and so tried another tack. Some, such as Stanley Kramer, took advantage of a relaxing of restrictions on content by producing ‘social problem’ films geared specifically towards an adult audience. Others, working outside the slow-to-respond studio system, noted the size of the pop music audience and began to cater to the younger, moneyed, audience that the pop music charts hinted was out there, but that Hollywood was neglecting. The 1956 US census had indicated that thirteen million teens were spending $7,000,000,000 per annum, a 26 percent increase since 1953. In 1957, allowances granted to teenagers by parents were alone estimated to total $9 billion. Then-influential market researcher Eugene Gilbert thus had the ears of record companies and independent film producers when he claimed that the ‘cultural impulses’ of the late-1950s teenager amounted to no more than the constant desire for marketable goods.

The major studios’ one brief concession to a teenaged audience, a spate of swing movies in the 1940s, had failed at the box office, and many in Hollywood were still convinced that teenagers would not pay to see performances of music that they could hear for free on the radio. Several independent producers, however, saw rock and roll as the ideal accompaniment for their juvenile delinquent pictures and cheap jukebox musicals, and thus was born the teen ‘rocksploitation’ film. Cheaply-made and quickly-released to cash in on the tabloid headlines of the day—be they concerned with juvenile delinquents, rock and roll
musicians, or alien invaders—exploitation films broke no box-office records, but could sustain small production units such as Katzman’s Clover Productions, and new companies that targeted the drive-in circuit, like American-International Pictures. Small independent companies like AIP had formed to take advantage of the void left in the market after the Paramount Decree spelled the end of B-picture production by the majors, as the breaking up of the studios’ monopoly on exhibition rendered such production immediately unprofitable for a larger studio.

Rock Around the Clock: Addressing the Unknown Audience

The emergence of the youth cinema audience, and its connection to the rise of rock and roll, was confirmed for many with the unexpected box office success of Sam Katzman’s low-budget, black-and-white exploiter Rock Around the Clock in 1956. Katzman’s low overheads—which, thanks to his Columbia distribution deal, enabled his films to almost always turn a profit—allowed him to gamble on the whims of the fickle teen audience. Many of Katzman’s low-budget films were simply filmed versions of the tabloid headlines of the day, such as Teen-Age Crime Wave, Creature with the Atom Brain, Riot on Pier 6 (all 1955), and Rumble on the Docks (1956), most of which were directed by B-movie veteran Fred F. Sears. Reading a Variety article on the volatile audience reaction to Blackboard Jungle and its theme song, the producer surmised that this same audience would pay to see movies based on the musical hits of the day, and that the controversy surrounding rock and roll would generate publicity for those pictures. Katzman was proved right with the Sears-directed Rock Around the Clock, which, while produced for under $300,000, grossed over $1,000,000 dollars in the US, and $2,400,000 worldwide.

Released in March 1956, Rock Around the Clock displays both the independent film sector’s eagerness to capitalise on a new musical fad as well as its uncertainties as to what
exactly this music was, and who its audience were. That doubt is also shot through with traces of Hollywood’s growing anxieties in regard to how to cater to a younger audience or, indeed, if they should be accommodated at all. As with Blackboard Jungle, the film’s title sequence is heralded by the cracking rim-shots that open Haley’s recording. The dance-beat that energises the credit sequence quickly gives way, however, to the sedate confines of a small town nightclub, as a sparse collection of dancers shuffle wearily to the sounds of a visibly bored twelve-piece lounge combo. Finishing out their set to scattered applause, the band is informed by their manager Steve Hollis (Johnny Johnston) that their residency has been cancelled, and that he is resigning. Hollis reminds the bandleader that he warned him some time ago that record sales indicated big bands were finished, and that the public now wanted small ‘novelty combos’.

On his way back to New York, Hollis stumbles across one of these very combos. In a sequence that metonymically addresses Hollywood’s unease in regard to the teen audience, Hollis, after being confronted by a group of rowdy youths in a jalopy, drives through Strawberry Springs, a town seemingly overrun with teenagers, who noisily crowd the streets. They are, Hollis finds, hurrying to a Saturday night town hall dance headlined by Bill Haley and His Comets. Having assumed dance music was passé, Hollis is amazed to discover a packed dance floor ‘jiving’ to ‘See You Later, Alligator’. Not being able to identify the style of music he’s hearing (‘It isn’t boogie, it isn’t jive, and it isn’t swing. It’s kinda all of ‘em’), Hollis is informed by a frenzied young dancer, ‘It’s rock and roll, brother, and we’re rockin’ tonight’. The film then assumes musical genre convention by interrupting the narrative with an extended dance sequence. As the band launches into ‘Rock a Beatin’ Boogie’, this seemingly free-form massed dance gives way to a choreographed, jazz ballet-cum-jive routine performed by young brother and sister team Lisa and Jimmy Johns. During this dance sequence the supposed stars of the film, the Comets, fade into the background, where there they remain for the rest of the film.
If Haley and his Comets are relegated to supporting roles, then so too are the film’s teenaged characters, and by extension rock and roll itself. Indeed, the central narrative is based not around Haley’s career or the rise of his musical hybrid, but rather a conventional love triangle that forms between Hollis, Lisa (Lisa Gaye), and a female booking agent, Corinne Talbot (Alix Talton). Despite being an independently-produced film ostensibly aimed at the teen market, *Rock Around the Clock*, as with most jukebox movies of the 1950s, still attempts to appeal to a wider audience. The middle-aged Hollis’ position at the centre of the narrative directly addresses older cinemagoers, those mystified and perhaps concerned by press reports dealing with this troubling teen subculture. Like them, Hollis remains uncertain as to the constitution and appeal of rock and roll but, as with his real-world equivalents in the movie and record business, he is nonetheless eager to capitalise on it.

The nondiegetic score bears out the film’s interpolation of a wider audience: far from being rock and roll, it is a conventionally lush score orchestrated for strings, woodwinds and brass.\(^49\) A multi-generational address is apparent also in the variety of source music on offer. The mambo sound of Tony Martinez receives almost as much screen time as that of the Comets, and is presented not in opposition to rock and roll but as a viable dance music alternative that can co-exist with it. Katzman’s inclusion of cha-cha-cha—as well as the smooth, Ink Spots-influenced vocal group The Platters, and the high-energy showbiz pizzazz of Freddie Bell and His Bell Boys\(^50\)—reflects the genuine uncertainty then pervading the music business as to the commercial longevity of faddish rock and roll. Mambo and calypso, for example, were seen by the industry as a more respectable and manageable styles that could be marketed as just as successfully as rhythm and blues.\(^51\)

By extension, one of the key themes of *Rock Around the Clock*—and indeed many 1950s rock and roll movies, including several starring Presley—is that the seemingly alien rock and roll style should not be perceived by the audience as a threat to the status quo. Bill Haley and
His Comets strive to find a place within the established entertainment milieu of nightclubs, major label recording deals, and live coast-to-coast television broadcasts. They come not to bury family entertainment, but to infiltrate it. Every effort is made to acclimatise the audience to rock and roll, to the point where Lisa and Jimmy are considered an integral part of the Comets’ act: their names are included in the band’s contracts so they will be on call to demonstrate to teens how they should dance to this strange new music.

The conformist impulse to tame rock and roll by portraying as just one more element within traditional entertainment has earned for these 1950s ‘rocksploitation’ films the ire of many rock and roll critics. But by being a relatively spontaneous reaction to the rise of rock and roll, Rock Around the Clock also in some ways effectively elucidates the appeal of the music and its place within the music industry. It was indeed primarily a dance music, the pronounced backbeat being a product of many R&B drummers in the early 1950s reverting to an old trick of the trade designed to get jaded jazz audiences dancing again. And for it to survive, it would have to adapt to the conventions of the established entertainment industry, just as Haley’s Comets (portrayed in the film as farm boys and tractor salesmen) do.

‘Rocksploitation’: Negotiating Generational Division through Rock and Roll

Despite Steve’s centrality, Rock Around the Clock briefly introduces what would become a central trope of the ‘rocksploitation’ genre, generational conflict, seen here in the form of the moral indignation that rock and roll stirs in a few of the film’s older characters. In an attempt to sabotage Steve and Lisa’s blossoming romance, Corinne books the Comets into a staid girls’ school dance. The booking has the desired effect and the elderly chaperones are shocked and disgusted by the cacophony (‘Infamous!’, ‘Barbaric!’). But once Lisa and Jimmy demonstrate to the refined schoolgirls and their well-groomed dates that rock and roll is just harmless dance music, they are won over and overrule the protestations of their elders (it should be noted,
however, that these teenagers are later equally as enthused by Tony Martinez’s sedate cha cha cha rhythms).

Such incongruities have most often been seen by critics as examples of Hollywood’s bewilderment as to, and general disdain for, the wants of the teenage market.\(^{53}\) Likewise the older ‘guardian characters’ featured in rocksploitation pictures have often also been interpreted as mere narrative obstruction, included due to the ‘dramatic potential of pitting the generations against each other’.\(^{54}\) In the majority of 1950s rock musicals, the older generation are indeed positioned in opposition to teenagers, who must triumph over the city elders so as to bring their favourite band to town, or hold a rock and roll dance. But this dramatic potential is always tempered by the fact that often the lead characters in rocksploitation are not themselves teens, but cultural mediators in their thirties and forties.

While not dismissing their role as dramatic foils, it should also be recognised that even those characters who seek to obstruct the rise of rock and roll also function as cultural interpreters for a mainstream audience. This interpretation takes place via an obligatory multi-generational ‘conversion scene’, a further indication of Hollywood’s reluctance to produce movies exclusively for a specific niche market. Just as Lisa and Jim show their contemporaries that rock and roll is no more than dance music, older characters like Steve (and to some extent Alan Freed)\(^ {55}\) serve to ease a wider audience into the strange world of youth culture. Tom Miller (Tom Ewell) has an identical function in *The Girl Can’t Help It* (1956), as do the seemingly endless parade of disapproving senior citizens who are miraculously converted into rock and roll fans by the end of *Don’t Knock the Rock* (1956), *Shake, Rattle and Rock* (1956) and *Loving You* (1957).

It has been acknowledged that although these films ‘may traffic in generational conflict’, ultimately they ‘deliver generational reconciliation’ by diffusing the problematic ‘cultural challenge’ introduced at the beginning of the narrative.\(^ {56}\) While true, this has almost exclusively
been interpreted as a concession made to the youth audience alone. The ‘feel-good’ endings inherent to rocksploitation have thus been seen to be designed to capitalise on issues of teenage self-identification and empowerment. Yet these inclusive resolutions can just as easily be seen as concessions made to a mainstream family audience. Despite the objections to rock and roll expressed by the senior characters, the rocksploitation narrative cannot resolve until the older generation have been assured that teen culture is harmless, that it is not a rupture of the status quo, but a teleological continuation of social norms. In this way, then, 1950s rock and roll movies also functioned to remind teens as much as parents that cultural rebellion is a normal phase of growing up; they too, like the town elders who once danced the Charleston, will themselves leave teenage fads behind in order to become productive citizens, arguably the last thing a baby boomer teen wanted to hear in 1956.

The surprise success of *Rock Around the Clock* prompted Katzman to quickly release a very cheaply-produced, and narratively similar, sequel, *Don’t Knock the Rock*. It also encouraged a few majors to produce their own jukebox musicals, most notably Twentieth Century-Fox’s *The Girl Can’t Help It* (1956), and several Elvis Presley films from Fox, Paramount and MGM (which were in fact independently produced by Hal Wallis). Apart from the Presley features, none of the subsequent rocksploitation films came close to matching the success of *Rock Around the Clock*, a result of the public’s waning interest in rock and roll songs other than those recorded by Presley, as well as the deteriorating quality of the films themselves, and the threadbare nature of the rosters of rock and roll artists that appeared in them. Like most of the rocksploitation genre, *Don’t Knock the Rock* is representative of the low-budget interpolation of the teen audience. But whereas entertainment industry anxieties concerning how to best integrate rock and roll into show business were woven into the narrative of *Rock Around the Clock*, the sequel overrode such
apprehension by displaying almost complete indifference to the specifics of mid-1950s teen taste.

While *Rock Around the Clock* benefited from a smash-hit title song, *Don’t Knock the Rock* was somewhat hindered by the fact that Haley’s pop career was already in decline. ‘See You Later, Alligator’, featured in *Rock Around the Clock*, had been Haley’s fourth big hit, reaching number six in early 1956. But this proved to be his final top ten record, and by the release of *Don’t Knock the Rock* at the end of that year, Haley’s recordings were barely registering in the top forty. Despite once again receiving top billing, the appearance by Bill Haley and His Comets in *Don’t Knock the Rock* amounts to little more than a cameo. The real musical attraction on display was Little Richard, performing ‘Tutti Frutti’ and ‘Long Tall Sally’—big hits from the first half of 1956—who would continue to have top ten hits until early 1958. The other music featured, though—including jump blues veterans the Treniers and swing band Dave Appell and the Applejacks—had little to do with contemporary commercial rock and roll.

The title song, performed by the Comets, was not a known Haley recording, nor a cover of a previous R&B hit, but rather a composition by Robert E. Kent and Fred Karger. Karger was a Columbia staff music director, while Kent wrote the film’s screenplay, as he had done for several Columbia B pictures (both had worked on *Rock Around the Clock*). Fans of *Rock Around the Clock* might have been forgiven for assuming that Katzman and director Sears had duplicated the opening of the previous film, as Kent and Karger’s approximation of the Comets’ style gives way to an opening scene set in a Times Square nightclub. Although the clean-cut pop crooner on stage appears out of place in a rock and roll picture, it gradually becomes apparent that, unlike the jazz combo at the beginning of *Rock Around the Clock*, he is not included as binary opposition, a stylistic representation of bygone days. Indeed it is
quickly made evident that this performer, Arnie Haines (31 year-old Alan Dale), is the lead character, and is—according to Katzman and director Sears, at least—a rock and roll singer.

The first hint that Haines is being presented as such comes with a cutaway to rock and roll’s premier cultural gatekeeper, Alan Freed (here a publicist), seen nodding his approval off-stage during Haines’ big band cabaret act. But it is not until ten minutes into the film that dialogue uttered by one of his band members makes it clear that Haines—who sings, dresses and talks more like conventional pop artists Perry Como and Andy Williams than Elvis Presley—is in fact a major rock and roll star. At one stage Haines is referred to as ‘the King’ of rock and roll, but in his performances throughout the film he cultivates the exaggerated persona of a 1950s lounge-act, his awkward, shoulder-twitching movements seemingly designed to compensate for the lack of suitable rhythmic energy in his songs.

Like the Comets of Rock Around the Clock, Haines and his band are portrayed as simple country boys, longing to return to their small hometown to escape the pressures of showbiz. Their return to rustic Mellondale triggers the key rocksploitation trope of inter-generational conflict: they are greeted at the train station by the mayor, who immediately demands that they leave, announcing, ‘Rock and roll is for morons...we the people of Mellondale consider your so-called music outrageous...depraved!’ We the audience, though, are left only to imagine the outrageous depravity of Haines’ music; he himself is more eager to demonstrate his non-threatening versatility to his new love, to whom he croons a Bing Crosby-style ballad by the beach. Despite the film’s apparent confusion as to what type of singer Haines is—or, arguably, its confusion as to what rock and roll is—the bad publicity generated by Haines’ return to Mellondale leads to bans being placed on rock and roll concerts across the country, including those by Haley.

Haines resolves to prove to America that rock and roll ‘is a safe and sane dance for all young people’, and does so with a ‘Pageant of Art and Culture’, presented by the ‘Young
Players of Mellondale’. Here, with the aid of host Alan Freed, Haines attempts to contextualise rock and roll, drawing parallels with the shimmying, close physical contact, exposed female skin, and wild abandon of the Charleston era of the mid-1920s, when the majority of rock and roll’s more vocal opponents were themselves young. Freed assures the audience that they ‘really need not worry so much about our younger generation, for it will grow up to be the same fine sort of people that parents are today’. Don’t Knock the Rock is slightly more dismissive of the older generation than Rock Around the Clock; indeed, they are assessed harshly: several older characters concede that rock and roll is being used as a scapegoat ‘for our own shortcomings in bringing up our children’ because ‘we’re all a bunch of narrow-minded fools’. But Freed’s speech confirms the key theme inherent in all rocksploitation, reassurance: ‘don’t worry, audience, nothing is really changing’. The pageant triggers this film’s teen culture conversion moment, wherein the most vociferous of Haine’s critics, national gossip columnist Arlene MacLaine (Fay Baker), issues a public apology. But this cultural conversion scene has already been rendered dramatically ineffective, as the real villain of the piece has been revealed as Sunny Everett (Jana Lund), a local teenager who turns traitor on rock and roll by informing on Haines after he rejects her sexual advances.

The final say, musically speaking, belongs to the stylistically ambiguous Arnie Haines, who leads the climactic rock and roll dance sequence with a polite swing version of the title song (as arranged and orchestrated by Fred Karger). A more sympathetic reading of Don’t Knock the Rock would perhaps view the character of Haines as an intentional parody of rock and roll stars; in some ways he is a prescient depiction of the mainstream music industry’s conception of the rock and roll star, as evinced in the form of clean teen performers such as Pat Boone and Tab Hunter. However, it is another rocksploitation film from 1956, The Girl Can’t Help It, which has most often been singled out as an overt, almost
cruel, parody of rock and roll and its hapless teen audience. John Mundy, for example, labels the film ‘resolutely anti-youth’ and ‘emphatically anti-rock’n’roll’.

The Girl Can’t Help It: Defending the Teen Audience

The Girl Can’t Help It quickly became a favourite among rock and roll fans. The Beatles interrupted the recording of their 1968 album, The Beatles, in order to watch a screening of the movie on BBC2. The positive standing the film enjoys with fans of early rock and roll music is seen merely to be a product of the fact that, despite its apparent open disdain for the new sound, the array of performers on display—Little Richard, Fats Domino, Gene Vincent, Eddie Cochran—at least showed that the filmmakers ‘got the music right, and that was enough’. These singers were indeed among the most commercially successful and influential rock and roll singers of the era, but far from being an inadvertent and ironic concession to teen taste, their presence is in truth one of several elements undermining the contention that The Girl Can’t Help It seeks to lampoon rock and roll and its audience.

The mistake that writers such as Mundy and Thomas Doherty seem to make is to attempt to analyse The Girl Can’t Help It as primarily a ‘teenpic’. But, as with Katzman’s films, teens play very little part in the film’s narrative (none even appear on screen until one hour and 20 minutes in, a fact that perhaps encourages the belief that the movie is intentionally dismissive of teen culture). Doherty accuses director Frank Tashlin of a lack of ‘sensitivity to, and respect for, and understanding of the teenage subcultural preference’ for rock and roll. Tashlin’s crime seems to be that he dares to suggest that teenagers might be easily swayed by powerful and manipulative cultural institutions such as the record business and television. An alternate reading is made possible by rejecting the assumption that the film directly—and disrespectfully—addresses a teen audience and openly mocks them. As a film from a major Hollywood studio, it dares not alienate any of its audience, but is more than
happy to poke fun at its competition in the entertainment industry. The invective in *The Girl Can’t Help It* is aimed squarely at these targets, not the young music consumer.

The film is indeed a parody, but not of rock and roll, which is in fact treated with a great deal of respect, both narratively and formally. If nothing else, Tashlin’s carefully-constructed shots of barefooted teenaged extras, dancing unselfconsciously and exuberantly to Fats Domino’s ‘Blue Monday’, belie claims of directorial condescension (even Katzman’s low budget pictures employed professional dancers for his cheaply and unimaginatively shot dance sequences, few of whom managed to pass as teen rock and roll fans). *The Girl Can’t Help It* consistently offers a sympathetic view of rock and roll, and its (often maligned) place within the music business. Critics seem to have misidentified the subjective response of a single supporting character, the gangster Marty ‘Fats’ Murdock (Edmond O’Brien), as being representative of a core thematic thread designed to attack rock and roll. But Fats is portrayed as a violent, though comically buffoonish, thug, and speaks for no one in the film but himself (even his henchman sidekick revels in Murdock’s thwarted attempts to get the girl). The lead character, music agent Tom Miller (Tom Ewell), at no time expresses any opinion in regard to pop music; his puzzled facial expression upon encountering a writhing and squirming Eddie Cochran on television is a product of his bewilderment as to why Fats insisted he watch the singer, not his scorn for the song ‘Twenty Flight Rock’; in fact, in an earlier scene, he is seen politely applauding a nightclub performance by the far more raucous Little Richard.

Even Fats reserves his judgement on rock and roll as a musical form: he doesn’t criticise Cochran’s performance in any way, but merely singles out the singer’s ‘untrained’ voice as proof that Miller could make his fiancée Jerri Jordan (Jayne Mansfield) the star he so desperately wants her to be. Rather than a heartless and manipulative crook intent on exploiting gullible teens (that role falls to jukebox distributor Wheeler, his former rival), Fats
is in truth an old school music industry man, a throwback to the long-gone days of Tin Pan Alley. The focus of most critics’ assumptions regarding the film’s hatred for rock and roll appears to centre on the hit song that Fats writes, the hilariously awful ‘Rock Around the Rock Pile’. But Fats has not written the song in order to pull the wool over the teen audience’s eyes; he simply wants in on the action, and this is the best he can come up with. Waving the sheet music around, Fats claims it is one of several songs that he, inspired by the likes of Hammerstein and Berlin, wrote while in languishing in prison.

Finally, the fact that the song’s arrangement and orchestration in no way resembles the authentic hit rock and roll songs featured in the film is a strong indication that Tashlin, unlike Katzman, knew full-well the difference between the music teens liked and the songs that the music industry wanted them to like. In contrast to the sparser, small combo arrangements of Little Richard, Vincent, Cochran and Domino—all of which are heavy on the backbeat, feature electric guitar, and are slightly rough around the edges—‘Rock Around the Rock Pile’ features a slick big band arrangement by the Ray Anthony Orchestra. It recalls the type of records that RCA Victor and Columbia produced during the initial phase of R&B’s pop success, bringing to mind Andy Williams’ ‘Ko Ko Mo’ and Georgia Gibbs’ orchestrated pop covers of R&B hits. ‘Rock Around the Rock Pile’ was written by Bobby Troup. Troup was not only the composer of the rhythm and blues standard ‘Route 66’ but, as the writer of the film’s frenetic title song, like Tashlin seems to have been capable of differentiating rock and roll from big band jazz. It seems puzzling, then, that The Girl Can’t Help It’s employment of rock and roll has been seen as a direct criticism of the music itself, and not of the record business’s exploitation of selected characteristics of rock and roll for their novelty value. Kent and Karger’s ‘Don’t Knock the Rock’ is a misjudgement of teen taste; Troup’s ‘Rock Around the Rock Pile’ openly pokes fun at the music business.
Formally, too, Tashlin serves rock and roll well, displaying as much aesthetic interest in Little Richard’s sweaty routine as he does in the serene performance by torch singer Abbey Lincoln. Doherty claims that the sequence featuring Julie London performing ‘Cry Me a River’—included in its entirety while most rock and roll songs are reduced to excerpts—is further evidence of *The Girl Can’t Help It*’s ‘smugly condescending’ attitude, ignoring the fact that this musical sequence is included so as to shed light on a key aspect of the narrative, Tom Miller’s romantic back-story. Interestingly, Garth Jowett offers quite a different reading to those of Doherty and Mundy. Jowett claims that the film is actually scoffing at the ‘old fogies’ whom the music business had already passed by, and is as such a proto-*Easy Rider*, an early indication of the coming generational divide. This does seem a more accurate assessment, although his conviction that this, the ‘central message’ of *The Girl Can’t Help It*, is ‘stated loud and clear and without contention’ is not adequately supported.

But even those critics, like Doherty, convinced of Tashlin’s ‘misinformed’ dismissal of teen subculture acknowledge that early rock and roll performance was granted no better cinematic depiction than his. Tashlin also included one soundtrack innovation that thus far seems to have passed without comment: the first instance of a rock and roll recording being used as nondiegetic score (other than as title or end-title music). In an early scene, Little Richard’s version of the title song blares from the soundtrack as Jayne Mansfield sashays along a city street and into her apartment, even though no source—radio, record player or Richard himself—is ever established. As Everett points out, outside the genre of the musical popular songs were rarely found in classical Hollywood films, and certainly never functioned nondiegetically. *The Girl Can’t Help It* is of course a musical comedy, but as with all 1950s jukebox musicals, it is one which—outside this sequence—grounds its musical performances in reality by clearly indicating the music’s source.
Director Frank Tashlin’s background was in animation, directing dozens of Bugs Bunny, Porky Pig and Daffy Duck cartoons for Warner Bros. throughout the 1930s and 1940s. The Warner Bros. animation unit had of course been established to exploit the relationship between popular song and film, so perhaps it was only natural that one of its alumni be the first to attempt such a marriage in a live-action feature. Indeed, the sequence itself is very cartoonish, visually echoing the song’s lyrics (‘If she winks an eye, the bread slice turns to toast’): Mansfield’s swaying curves cause ice to melt, milk bottles to boil over, and eyeglasses to shatter. The heightened sense of reality perhaps grants the former cartoon director license to break a cardinal rule of Hollywood sound design and not indicate the source of a recorded pop song. While this sequence represents possibly the first case of any popular recording being used as nondiegetic score in a Hollywood feature film, it is in truth a brief instance, and rock and roll immediately reverts to its proper place as source music—where it will remain until the mid-1960s.

*The Girl Can’t Help It* does not lampoon teen culture. Rather it aims its barbs at the corrupt and exploitative conventions of the mainstream music business, the seedy and exploitative, or merely old-fashioned, institutions that sought to commercialise rock and roll. That said, like the majority of 1950s rock and roll films, *The Girl Can’t Help It* attempts to smoothly integrate all its musical performances into the wider arena of established entertainment. In this way it mirrors the music industry’s attempts to integrate rock and roll into the wider field of popular music, by domesticating Elvis Presley and promoting singers like Pat Boone and Tab Hunter. Wary of addressing a teen audience exclusively, the film finds space for jazz, gospel, rock and roll, R&B, accordion music, and the 1919 hit ‘I Wish I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Kate’. But never does the film dismiss the taste preferences of teens; they are in fact identified as a crucial component of this wider audience (note how much larger and more
engaged the teenaged audience at the climatic Rock ‘n’ Roll Jubilee concert is than the adult nightclub audiences for Little Richard and Eddie Fontaine were in earlier scenes).

In a monologue preceding the title credits, star Tom Ewell extols some of the finer points of culture on display in the film about to commence, including Cinemascope, DeLuxe colour, and the ‘refinement’ and ‘polite grace’ of orchestral music. But the camera is soon drawn away from this urbane lecture, distracted by a nearby ‘Rock-ola’ jukebox that begins to blare Little Richard’s ‘The Girl Can’t Help It’. Doherty posits this as the first sign of the film’s anti-rock and roll bias, and detects sarcasm in Ewell’s delivery. But the middle-aged Ewell (it is unclear if he is addressing us as himself or as Miller) is depicted merely as naive, oblivious to changes that are already afoot; he is a character out of place and time, over-dressed for a sock hop in tie and tails. As such it is he the film dismises, not teenagers, as the camera turns its attention to the strange sound coming from the jukebox. This sequence is simultaneously an effective representation of rock and roll’s sudden intrusion into the prestigious world of cinema, and a primer from major studio explaining why rock music would continue to be excluded from the mainstream film score: it was simply too distracting.

The End of 1950s Rocksploitation

Throughout 1956—the height of recorded rock and roll’s early popularity—most rock and roll features did relatively poorly at the box office. Only Rock Around the Clock and the western Love Me Tender (a rock and roll picture only in that it featured Elvis Presley) grossed over $1,000,000 dollars in North America. The five other rock and roll films released that year—Rockin’ the Blues, Rock Pretty Baby, The Girl Can’t Help It, Rock, Rock, Rock, and Don’t Knock the Rock, earned nowhere near this mark. Considering the cultural and commercial impact of rock and roll in 1956, the fact that only one major, Twentieth Century-Fox addressed the trend (albeit via a satire, The Girl Can’t Help It, and a western, Love Me
Tender), highlights mainstream Hollywood’s continued capricious relationship with the teen audience in the 1950s.

The majority of 1950s rock and roll movies thus had to make do without major studio distribution and promotion or, of course, Elvis Presley. Even Sam Katzman quickly cooled on rock and roll, turning his attention to other potentially lucrative musical fads (Cha-Cha-Cha Boom!, 1956; Calypso Heat Wave, 1957). He would produce one final rocksploitation picture, Juke Box Rhythm (1959), but was unable to sign any big name rock and roll stars. Only the smaller independent studios were flexible enough, and thus quick enough, to churn out enough rock and roll movies for the faddish drive-in set. These marginalised films, produced within structures not predicated on catering to a family audience, developed narrative tropes that increasingly emphasised the primacy of younger characters. Ironically it would take until the much-maligned AIP beach movies of the early 1960s for teen audiences to be addressed directly, as parental figures and moral guardians became increasingly peripheral to teen narratives, often appearing as little more than comic relief, and ultimately disappearing altogether.

Like the major studios, record labels showed scant interest in rocksploitation. Apart from the Presley films, few rocksploitation films were released with accompanying soundtrack albums to help promote their cause. The single exception was Vanguard Productions’ Rock, Rock, Rock (1956), which starred Alan Freed and Chuck Berry. The resulting soundtrack LP was released on the Chicago independent Chess (to which Berry was signed and Freed had ties to). The Rock, Rock, Rock LP stakes a claim as not only the first rock and roll soundtrack album, but the first rock and roll compilation LP. It is perhaps not surprising that this innovation was attempted by two independent companies somewhat attuned to the vagaries of the teen market.
But this was a very rare example of film and rock and roll synergy in the 1950s. As teens tended not to buy albums, few were the independent labels prepared to, or equipped to, market soundtrack albums for the already dwindling rocksploitation audience. Despite having released hit singles over the previous 18 months, Chess had not dared release a Chuck Berry LP (thus the *Rock, Rock, Rock* soundtrack is prized by fans as the first Berry album). The major labels—as well the new record companies then being launched by the major film studios—knew very well how to market soundtrack albums, but did so for adults and thus had little interest in the rock and roll LP market. Only one major, Decca—which by 1956 owned its own film studio, Universal—dared release a soundtrack for a ‘rock’ film, although the resulting LP, for *Rock, Pretty Baby*, mostly featured Henry Mancini’s score, which in truth was more akin to big band jazz.

As Denisof and Romanowski note, throughout the 1950s and the rise of rock and roll, the full potential of film and pop music synergy seemed to escape both the film studios and the record labels: ‘They had an inherent coincidence of interest, but...few executives were aware of it.’ As with most aspects of 1950s entertainment, the exception to these rules was Elvis Presley, whose soundtrack albums sold in great numbers; but, as shall be outlined in the following chapter, the relationship between Presley’s film and recording careers was far from harmonious. The story of the relationship between film and music in the 1960s would in large part be the story of these two once antagonistic industries finding common ground. This discovery would help rescue Hollywood from the brink of financial ruin, and alter the formal qualities of the film text itself.

**Conclusion**

During the brief ‘rocksploitation’ phase of the mid-to-late 1950s, despite notable exceptions such as *The Girl Can’t Help It* and Elvis Presley’s movies, the major studios
chose not to accommodate ‘authentic’ rock or R&B within the film text. This was partly due to the ingrained studio orchestra system, even though that crumbling structure was granting space to the smaller ‘incidental’ jazz and pop orchestrations of Henry Mancini and Alex North. More importantly, rock and roll was not music fit for mass consumption; it didn’t cater to the whole family in the same way that conventional Hollywood scores were seen to do. With the majors still hesitant after the failure of swing movies in the 1940s, it was left to smaller studios such as Columbia and independent producers such as Sam Katzman and AIP to attempt to identify and cater to a specific youth audience for cinema via a new subgenre of the musical, the rock and roll exploitation picture. Unlike the major studios, which would take another decade to adopt similar practices, these producers had begun to specifically target smaller segments of the film audience, in particular teenagers. The strategy worked, but only briefly, and even then quite modestly.

But even independently produced jukebox musicals still attempted to please as wide an audience as possible with multi-generational characters and variety-style musical performances, rather than address a teen audience specifically. Despite the fact that older characters were invariably positioned in opposition to teenaged characters, these films still sought to place youth culture within a context more easily understood by those outside the baby boomer generation. In this way their strategy mirrored almost exactly the methodology employed in the recording industry by major labels such as Columbia and RCA, as well as the soon-to-be-established Hollywood record labels.

The following chapter will depart slightly from the historical narrative constructed thus far in order to present two ‘case studies’ outlining specific, and exemplary, instances which illustrate the impact of the relationship between the Hollywood star system and the popular music industry. These studies do, however, also serve to help bridge the 1950s and 1960s, two decades in which Hollywood displayed distinctive attitudes to the role of pop
music in film. The rocksploitation films of the 1950s were largely concerned with assimilating rock and roll into accepted standards of entertainment. This permitted the limited integration of the music into the film text, as the incorporation of rock and roll was tempered by industrialised notions concerning the function of the film score.

By the mid-1960s, the market for rock and roll was expanding to the point that it began to dominate the entertainment industry. This ascendancy would force Hollywood to find more space for the style within the film text, enabling rock music to assume many of the functions previously reserved for orchestral music. With this in mind, the following case studies are offered by way of demonstrating the accelerating influence that the institutions of film and music were beginning to have on the other’s modes of cultural production between the late 1950s and early 1960s. It concerns the two most successful acts of the rock and roll era, Elvis Presley and the Beatles.

Endnotes

1 Marmorstein 1997, p.388.
2 ‘Rocket 88’ was an R&B hit for Jackie Brenston in 1951. Recorded in a ‘Memphis Jump Blues style’ at Sun Studios in Memphis, it was released by Chicago independent label Chess (Gillett 1996, p.137).
3 Garofalo 2008, p. 121.
4 Garofalo 2008, p.120.
5 Dawson 2005, p.41.
6 Sanjek 1996, p.250. Questions remain over the authorship of ‘(We’re Gonna) Rock Around the Clock’. Most likely the song was written by Freedman (a songwriter since the 1910s who by 1954 was working as postal clerk), and as was standard practice by publishers in the 1950s, Myers claimed co-credit (see Dawson 2005).
7 Quoted in Dawson & Propes 1992, p.146.
8 MGM was perhaps also comforted by the fact that, unlike most black or country music which was published by BMI, the song was an ASCAP copyright. As with the details regarding the song’s origins, there are several conflicting stories regarding how the record came to the attention of these filmmakers. These include both Brooks and Berman hearing their daughters play the record, Brooks hearing the song on his car radio, and the R&B aficionado son of star Glenn Ford bringing the song to Brooks’ attention (Dawson 2005, pp.114-116).
9 Myers received a credit as Blackboard Jungle’s ‘technical advisor’.
10 Miller 1999, p.92.
12 This use of jazz indicates an apparent reversal in Hollywood’s previous conception of the style as the music most suited to narratives dealing with crime, sleaze, and drug addiction.
This figure is mostly likely accumulated sales over a 50 year period. The song was re-released numerous times, though not always the original recording, as Haley re-recorded it 'for at least half-a-dozen companies' (Dawson 2005, p.183). In 1974 'Rock Around the Clock' re-entered the top 40 thanks to its appearance as the theme for the hit sit-com *Happy Days*.


This aspect will be discussed at length in Chapter Eight.
Steve a favour. Freed also appeared in Don’t Knock the Rock (1956), Rock, Rock, Rock (1956), Mister Rock and Roll (1957) and Go, Johnny, Go! (1959).


57 The commercial impact of the initial wave of rock and roll appears to have been somewhat overstated. Other than Presley, there is very little sign of rock and roll among the top ten best-sellers for each year from 1955 to 1959. Haley was on his own in 1955 with ‘Rock Around the Clock’. Presley achieved four entries in 1956’s top ten, but unless one generously includes the Platters’ ‘My Prayer’ at number 10 as a rock and roll record, he is alone. He had another three entries in 1957, but was joined only by the Everly Bros.’ ‘Wake Up Little Susie’ and Sam Cooke’s ‘You Send Me’. The biggest record of 1958 was ‘At the Hop’ by Danny & the Juniors, which makes it the most successful rock and roll single of the era outside ‘Rock Around the Clock’ and Presley’s hits, but the only other rock and roll record in that year’s top ten was the Everly Bros.’ country ballad ‘All I Have to Do Is Dream’. In 1959, the closest the annual top ten came to rock and roll was Frankie Avalon, Paul Anka and the Platters. Out of the top 50 songs of 1955 to 1959, rock and roll is vastly outnumbered by mainstream pop from the likes of the Four Aces, Mitch Miller, Gogi Grant, Les Baxter, Pat Boone, Debbie Reynolds, the McGuire Sisters and Johnny Horton.

58 See Whitburn 1997.
60 Mundy 1999, p.109.
61 Miles 2001, p.310.
64 Seventeen year-old Cochran was signed by Liberty Records soon after appearing in the film (Denisof & Romanowski 1990, p.51).
65 The songs both Richard and Domino perform in the film were recorded at J&M studios in New Orleans, far from the Hollywood soundstages in more ways than one. Domino had recorded ‘Blue Monday’ in March 1955, and his label, Imperial, re-released it to coincide with the film. It became a top 5 hit in January 1957 (Hannusch & Block 1991, p.45).
66 Gibbs had several hits with pop covers of Atlantic R&B recordings.
67 Doherty 2002, p.76.
68 Jowett 2001, p.165-166.
69 Everett 2000, p.104.
71 The main musical attraction was Johnny Otis, who had one top ten hit, ‘Willie and the Hand Jive’, the previous summer.
72 RCA too at first displayed some amount of trepidation in regard to releasing soundtrack LPs for Presley’s film, their preferred medium being the EP, an extended play 45rpm seven inch that could accommodate up to four songs. Love Me Tender and Jailhouse Rock both had tie-in EP releases, while RCA released two each for Loving You and King Creole. Five of these releases topped the US charts.
73 Chess gave Freed songwriting credit on Chuck Berry’s records in exchange for airplay (Cowen 2001, p.239)
74 The following year Vanguard released Jamboree (1957), featuring performances by Fats Domino, Charlie Gracie, Carl Perkins, Buddy Knox and Jerry Lee Lewis. The film was distributed by Warner Bros., and a soundtrack LP did appear on Warner Bros. Records, but it was a promotional LP only, and all of the artists featured were contracted to other labels.
75 See Chapter Eight.
76 ‘Jazzter’s sotto voce soundtrack’ in Variety, December 19, 1956, p.56.
77 Denisof and Romanowski 1991, p.87.
Chapter Seven——

‘An early clue to the new direction’: Narratives of Cross-media Synergy

Reporter: What do you think of the comment that you’re nothing but a bunch of British Elvis Presleys?

Ringo (swiveling his pelvis): It’s not true! It’s not true!

For many popular music critics and historians Elvis Presley and the Beatles represent the ‘two poles of pop music superstardom’. As such, the point at which the musical careers of these iconic and influential performers intersect with the interests of Hollywood is of paramount interest to this study. In addition, the commercial and cultural influence of two of the key pillars of the twentieth century entertainment industry intertwines in numerous ways. The impact that Elvis Presley had on Britain in 1957 looms large in Beatles origin mythology; for the four teenaged future Beatles, Elvis ‘turned the key’, with John Lennon once proclaiming, ‘If there hadn’t been an Elvis, there wouldn’t have been the Beatles’. As for Presley, the ‘King’ himself appears to have had an ambivalent relationship with the ‘Fab Four’: their awkward first meeting has become the stuff of rock legend, as have Presley’s imprecations to President Richard Nixon that he be given official sanction to monitor the influence on American youth by the drug-taking, subversive, anti-American Beatles. Presley did, however, acknowledge the Beatles’ contribution to music by performing several of their songs.

Despite their shared impact on entertainment industry practice, there appears to be no comparative analysis of any aspect of their work, other than, of course, incessant debate in the press and on the internet regarding who sold more records and who had more number ones. This lack of relative evaluation is perhaps not that surprising, seeing as there has been little sustained serious analytical work examining either act’s engagements with the music industries. The Beatles’ film career has been much better served than their music in this regard, thanks particularly to Neaverson’s (1997) study of the Beatles’ films, as well as several published
analyses of *A Hard Day’s Night*, including those by Rolston & Murray (2001) and Glynn (2005). Presley has been astonishingly neglected in regard to any type of industrial analysis, although detailed biographies by Jorgenson (1998) and Guralnick (1994 and 1998) and an emerging interest in his film career (Brode 2006, for example) do go some way towards correcting this.

This chapter, then, in part attempts to redress this critical oversight to some degree by placing the music and film careers of Presley and the Beatles into a comparative industrial context in line with what has come before in this study. In doing so, it seeks also to describe the industrial and cultural systems that shaped those careers, while noting that unlike any others, these two cases appear in turn to have shaped those very systems to some degree. As we shall see, Hollywood had a profound impact on Presley’s musical career, while the Beatles’ film *A Hard Day’s Night* was to alter the relationship between film and music, thus altering film form. With these issues in mind, this chapter proposes two models of synergistic film and popular recorded music production—the ‘Elvis model’ and the ‘Beatles model’—and in the process examines facets of the interchange between two key cultural industries. This exchange, it will be argued, formed the basis for Hollywood’s revised attitude towards its audience, becoming a key structural element in the emergence of the post-classical Hollywood period known as New Hollywood.

The Elvis model of film and music synergy centres on an all-round entertainer whose recordings ultimately serve a film career to the extent that his musical output takes a backseat to the requirements of the Hollywood film narrative. The Beatles model is by contrast a more typical ‘rocksploitation’ archetype, *a la* the Sam Katzman teen films of the 1950s, but with a 1960s refinement: the group’s film career was launched when a film studio subsidiary, United Artists Records, realised that the rights to a Beatles LP—in the form of a soundtrack album—
were there for the taking. Within this latter model, film narrative ostensibly takes a backseat to the primacy of the artist’s recorded music.

The Elvis model established the ground-rules for film and popular music synergy in the late 1950s and early 1960s, instructing both Hollywood and the major records labels in the art of rock and roll movie cross-promotion. In the mid-1960s, the Beatles model established a template for film and recorded music synergy more suited to the demands of an entertainment industry increasingly invested in the desires of the youth market, and on the verge of conglomeratisation. This latter model would have the supplementary outcome of claiming for rock music a central formal role in film narrative, transforming conventional film form during the New Hollywood period.

The Elvis Oeuvre: ‘Twelve songs and lots of girls’

The confidence shown in (Elvis) by the motion picture industry undoubtedly will rub off to the benefit of all of us.

- Colonel Tom Parker, letter to RCA vice president Bill Bullock

On the 3rd of December, 1968, NBC-TV broadcast Singer Presents Elvis, Elvis Presley’s first television special. Singer televisions, stereos, vacuum cleaners and sewing machines were promoted during the commercial breaks, perhaps indicating that the company saw hip young homemaking mothers—women who were teenagers during Presley’s heyday—as the program’s key audience, a demographic that might find a trip to the cinema to see the latest Elvis movie inconvenient. A new LP available only at Singer stores, Singer Presents Elvis Singing Flaming Star and Others, was also promoted (‘just one to a customer at $1.95’). The track listing drew on older songs from Presley’s films rather than those featured in the broadcast, although the advertisement also stressed that ‘a great selection of Elvis Presley’s hits’ were available in the Singer record department.
Within Presley mythology this program has become known as the ‘‘68 Comeback Special’. A comeback usually of course implies that a performer has been ‘out of work’—without a record or film deal, for example—but in 1968 alone, Presley had starred in three feature films, \textit{Live a Little, Love a Little}, \textit{Speedway} and \textit{Stay Away, Joe}. The television special—which claimed 42 percent of the audience in its timeslot—can in some ways indeed be seen as a resurgence in the singer’s popularity: after over ten years in Hollywood, Presley’s movies were suffering dwindling box office returns. As for his music career, by the end of 1968, Presley had not had a top-twenty hit record in over two years. However, his cheaply-made movies still largely covered their costs, and Elvis’s lucrative RCA Victor recording contract had several years left to run. Within rock criticism, however, Elvis’s ‘comeback’ has always weighed heavy with connotation, carrying the implication that the King, having abandoned his rock and roll kingdom for Hollywood several years before, had returned triumphantly at the end of the 1960s to reclaim his throne.

Upon completing his military service in 1960 Elvis ‘went Hollywood’, which for many rock critics signalled the end of his importance as a musical artist, and the beginnings of ‘the black hole of Elvis’s career’. At the end of the 1960s Nik Cohn wrote of the once ‘great original’:

Most of his time is spent in churning out an endless series of safe and boring musicals—\textit{Kissin’ Cousins}, \textit{Clambake}, \textit{Frankie and Johnny}, \textit{Harem Scarum}, \textit{Girl Happy}—and each one seems worse than the one before. His songs are drab, his scripts are formulaic and his sets look as if they’ve been knocked together with two nails and a hammer. He still makes a fortune but his singles sell patchily and his films break no box office records.

While Greil Marcus labels Presley’s films simply ‘shoddy’, James Miller presents a harsher assessment of Presley’s movie career, lambasting the ‘mind-boggling mediocrity of almost all of his highly profitable films’. For Miller, Presley not only ‘squandered the best years of his
creative life on drivel and kitsch’, but can also take credit for the ‘juvenilization’ of cinema, from the 1950s to ‘Star Wars and beyond’.  

Even allowing for the narrow perspective of much rock criticism, the complaints aired by these writers are accurate in one respect: they highlight the thoroughness of the transformation of Presley’s musical career from initial innovation to acquiescent commerciality. Upon the release of the Presley film catalogue on video in the mid-1980s, film critic Peter Travers complained that Presley’s 1960s movies were ‘no more than excuses for the sound track albums’. In fact, quite the opposite is true: when he signed his first film contract in 1956, Presley’s recorded output largely became a commercial by-product of his movie career. The promise of the young Memphis singer’s early recordings—justly lauded as an innovative marriage of hillbilly and R&B—was largely subsumed to the dictates of studio musical directors and orchestrators, the narrative requirements of pallid romantic comedies, and the financial demands of his lucrative publishing arrangements.

Hal Wallis had signed Presley to a three-picture deal in the wake of the publicity generated by the performer’s television appearances in February 1956. As head of production at Warner Bros., Wallis had produced The Maltese Falcon (1941), Casablanca and Now, Voyager (both 1942), among many others. In the mid-forties, Wallis negotiated a production deal at Paramount, which, as he later proclaimed in his autobiography, was ‘the first truly independent set-up in the business’. This arrangement meant creative autonomy for the producer (‘All we had to do was deliver the finished negative’), plus the benefits afforded by Paramount’s production, marketing, and distribution strength. Wallis’s unit set out to develop their own roster of stars, achieving great success with Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis.

After Presley’s appearance on the Dorsey Brothers’ Stage Show on CBS, Wallis contacted the singer’s manager, ‘Colonel’ Tom Parker, and arranged a screen test. According to Guralnick, the producer saw ‘clear potential to tap into the new youth market, which was
crying for a successor to the late [James] Dean,’ an impression confirmed after William Morris Agency head Abe Lastfogel urged Wallis to sign the singer. Such opportunities had, of course, not been left to chance: Parker had chosen William Morris to represent Presley specifically in light of that agency’s access to, and influence in, the film and television industries.19

Presley’s screen test in March 1956 was comprised of two parts: first Elvis mimed to ‘Blue Suede Shoes’, his recently-recorded cover of the Carl Perkins song, in order for Wallis to ascertain if ‘the “indefinable energy” that had showed up on television would translate into film’.20 Next the singer performed two scenes from the Wallis property, The Rainmaker. Wallis’s description of the screen test highlights how the Hollywood veteran saw potential to mould the Memphis ‘hillbilly cat’ into a movie star:

When I ran the test I felt the same thrill I experienced when I first saw Errol Flynn on the screen. Elvis, in a very different, modern way, had exactly the same power, virility, and sexual drive. The camera caressed him.21

Wallis then entered into what he described as the toughest negotiations of his career: Parker extracted a three picture deal, with Presley receiving $100,000 for the first picture, rising in $50,000 increments to $200,000 by the third.22 These figures, impressive for 1956, undermine assumptions that his films were merely excuses for soundtrack albums. As Jorgensen points out, during his movie heyday, when Presley averaged three pictures a year, the star made more money from each film than from all his annual royalty cheques combined.23

Presley’s film contract enabled Tom Parker to design for Presley a marketing strategy, modelled on the Hollywood/Tin Pan Alley system, through which each feature release would stimulate Presley’s burgeoning publishing interests. Aware of the faddish nature of the teen market, Parker looked for ways to ensure long-term security. He achieved this by moulding the singer into a more conventional all-round entertainer, while also grounding Presley’s business interests in publishing, traditionally the more stable component of the music business. This
synergistic formula would ensure a significant stream of revenue, but it would also severely limit the range and quality of material available to the performer for recording.

Presley’s deal with music publishers Hill & Range guaranteed that he received a co-credit—plus one third of the royalties—on any new songs he recorded, an arrangement that apparently embarrassed the singer. Parker’s insistence on a substantial share of the publishing for every song recorded by Presley would mean that an increasingly limited pool of songwriters would be prepared to submit material. By the mid-1960s, Presley’s film release schedule called for up to forty songs a year, ‘tailored for a movie script, on which the writers would accept substandard royalties’. Under these circumstances, the gradual deterioration in song quality, as identified by critics such as Cohn, was perhaps inevitable.

Initially, however, the quality of the soundtracks was not problematic. Jailhouse Rock (1957) and King Creole (1958) are often cited as Presley’s best films, in no small part due to the songs supplied by R&B producers Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller. The two songwriters initially had little respect for Presley, believing his hit version of their ‘Hound Dog’ to be more parody of Big Mama Thornton’s original R&B 1952 recording than homage. When asked by Presley’s publisher Jean Aberbach to contribute new material, they had facetiously supplied the singer with the hillbilly ballad pastiche ‘Love Me’, which Presley duly recorded. Approached to write songs for Jailhouse Rock, Leiber and Stoller were eventually won over by the young singer’s ‘encyclopedic’ knowledge of obscure R&B recordings, including many of their own songs. After King Creole, however, Leiber and Stoller became frustrated with having to work within the musical formula established by Hal Wallis. According to Leiber, ‘you had three ballads, one medium tempo, one up-tempo, and one break blues boogie, usually for a production number. It was too fucking boring…those assholes only wanted to make another nickel the same way’.

Leiber and Stoller bowed out of future Presley film projects, leaving the singer frequently at the mercy of Hollywood music supervisors unfamiliar with—or openly hostile to—
the particularities of rock and roll production. For Wallis and Parker at least, the songs were largely inconsequential. They knew it was Presley’s star power that drew audiences to the cinema, whether he was singing tunes by recognised R&B composers like Leiber and Stoller and Doc Pomus and Mort Shuman, or Tin Pan Alley fluff concocted specifically to suit flimsy film narratives, such as ‘The Bullfighter was a Lady,’ ‘Do the Clam,’ and ‘Queenie Wahine’s Papaya’. Such was the conviction, on Parker’s part at least, that the music was only there to serve the movies, that Presley’s record label RCA Victor was effectively removed from the creative process. As RCA publicity officer Anne Fulchino put it, the Wallis deal marked the moment ‘when we really lost control’.  

Elvis and the Remnants of the Studio System

I want to become a good actor, because you can't build a whole career on just singing.
- Elvis Presley

They don’t need titles. They could be numbered.
- MGM employee

Presley’s film contract changed the course of the singer’s musical career. By the time he finished shooting his first film, Presley had sold over ten million singles (representing over 60 percent of RCA Victor’s revenue), with five records reaching number one on the pop charts. His first two RCA LPs, *Elvis Presley* and *Elvis*, also topped the charts, at a time when industry lore had it that teenagers did not buy albums. According to Guralnick, Presley’s success was ‘virtually unprecedented in the record business, rivalling anything that had ever been seen in the larger world of show business’. This triumph led to Presley quickly replacing Bill Haley as the figurehead of the new teen music craze, the ‘King of Rock and Roll’.

But, as we have seen, for many popular music critics, the majority of Presley’s films did little to enhance his reputation as the leader of a musical movement. Denisoff and Romanowski,
authors of *Risky Business: Rock on Film*, avoid classifying Presley’s films as rock and roll movies. Whereas the authors analyse all of the key 1950s ‘jukebox musicals’ and juvenile delinquent dramas featuring rock and roll, Presley’s films garner no such attention. In fact, for the most part *Risky Business* avoids any mention of Presley’s film career (despite the fact that the 1991 edition of the book prominently features Presley on the cover), which the authors classify as consisting of conventional ‘personality pics’ rather than examples of the rocksploitation subgenre.\(^{34}\) Certainly, unlike Haley’s—or, later, that of the Beatles—Presley’s film career was conceived more in the conventional ‘star crossover’ tradition, with Parker taking inspiration from the popularity-sustaining cross-media precedents set by singers Al Jolson, Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra.\(^ {35}\) Presley’s film debut, *Love Me Tender* (1956), certainly features no rock and roll: the lilting title song was adapted from the Civil War ballad ‘Aura Lee,’ while ‘Let Me’, ‘Poor Boy’ and ‘We’re Gonna Move’ were written by Twentieth Century-Fox music director Ken Darby, and recorded in the classical studio orchestra style by Fox veteran Lionel Newman.\(^ {36}\)

The Hollywood style of scoring would prove somewhat problematic for Presley. *Love Me Tender* was a B western, originally titled *The Reno Brothers*. Elvis—who had been eager to tackle a straight acting (i.e., non-singing) role—found that that the studio had included three songs for him to perform. Parker had unsuccessfully argued for the inclusion of even more Presley music; instead, he convinced Twentieth Century-Fox to re-title the picture in order to enhance its cross-promotional scope, and insisted that the title song—published by and co-credited to Presley—should ‘run all the way through the picture’.\(^ {37}\) The recording session took place on Fox’s cavernous Stage One on August 21\(^{st}\), 1956. Up to this point, Presley’s recording sessions had either been held in the tiny Sun studio in Memphis, RCA’s slightly-less modest McGavock Street studio in Nashville, or that label’s state-of-the-art New York facility, all in the company of his band, guitarist Scotty Moore, bassist Bill Black, and, later, drummer D.J.
For these sessions—which produced the recordings that established Presley as a popular music phenomenon—Elvis had worked with the largely sympathetic ears of A&R men Sam Phillips, Steve Sholes and Chet Atkins, whose production methods often consisted of simply letting Presley run the session himself.

The *Love Me Tender* session, however, was for Presley an unfamiliar environment. Already uncomfortable on the huge sound stage, the singer was further troubled by the fact that, this being a Hollywood session, the Los Angeles branch of the American Federation of Musicians had refused permission for Moore and Black to participate, insisting that Fox’s own studio musicians be used instead; Presley himself was not even permitted to play guitar. Also, despite the fact that the resulting recordings were scheduled to be released by RCA, no one associated with the label appears to have been present, and the Fox technicians were not trained to capture recording-quality sound. Although Presley was enthusiastic about the title cut, the other two Ken Darby songs—including the ‘silly up-tempo hillbilly number’ ‘Let Me’—were more obviously the work of the composer who had scored the likes of *There’s No Business Like Show Business* (1954), *Daddy Long Legs* (1955), *Carousel* and *The King and I* (both 1956) than someone familiar with Presley’s style.

The commercial wisdom of these new working methods, however, was soon confirmed (for Parker at least) with the success of the ‘Love Me Tender’ single. The song was publicly debuted on CBS’s *The Ed Sullivan Show* on the 9th of September, with Elvis making sure to plug ‘our brand-new Twentieth Century Fox movie’ (which was still shooting, set for a late November release). According to Guralnick, this appearance ‘boosted Presley’s stock with an adult audience for the first time’, and RCA received almost one million pre-orders for ‘Love Me Tender’ despite the fact that the label had not planned to release it as a single.
The success of the ballad ensured that Presley’s non-film recordings also began to reflect the tastes of a broader audience, as RCA took Hollywood’s lead and professionalised the style and sound that made the hillbilly cat famous. Under Chet Atkins,

...Presley’s clear tenor, the stripped-down energy of early rockabilly, and the simplicity and straightforwardness of the Sun sound were overshadowed by vocal swoops from the higher to lower register, bloated productions, and syrupy background choruses provided by the Jordanaires.  

For Parker, the success of ‘Love Me Tender’ illuminated Presley’s future: the singer’s first ballad—courtesy of the Hollywood studio system—quickly sold three million copies, one million more than his previous biggest hit, ‘Heartbreak Hotel’. In the process, ‘Love Me Tender’ handily promoted Presley’s first movie, and broadened its star’s appeal within the mainstream audience, many of whom had thus far been wary of the controversy surrounding his divisive television appearances. By the end of 1956, film was quickly becoming the key medium for Parker’s charge, circumventing any reliance on what Parker perceived as a dead-end niche market, the fickle and faddish teen record buyer, while helping to transform Presley into an all-round—and potentially enduring—family entertainer.

Elvis and the ‘Juvenile Audience Sector’

Parker and Wallis were not alone in their view of the limitations of the youth market. On the eve of Love Me Tender’s release, Variety expressed doubts that an Elvis movie could make money outside the relatively small teenage audience, wondering whether ‘strictly juve appeal—as contrasted with ‘family’ appeal—can really pay off’. The film was released at Thanksgiving with a saturation booking campaign consisting of 575 prints sent to 551 theatres, the widest release in Twentieth Century-Fox’s history thus far. Such a campaign can either be seen as a sign of the studio’s faith in the drawing power of a new star, or of a major studio attempting to
cash in as quickly as possible on what might have turned out to be only the latest in a string of pop music fads. This latter theory is supported by the fact that, long before the success of *Jaws* (1975) established saturation booking as the cornerstone of blockbuster promotion, youth and rockexploitation films were commonly released in this manner,\(^{48}\) in order to strike quickly before today’s rock and roll fad was left high and dry by tomorrow’s calypso craze.

Whatever Fox’s motivation, the plan worked, and by the following week *Variety* conceded that the film had received ‘sock grosses’, citing one ecstatic studio executive’s boast that the picture had done ‘two weeks business in one’.\(^ {49}\) The report was entitled ‘Presley’s pointer for films: get the teen trade’ and was in effect a complete turnaround from the week before: *Variety* now proclaimed that the success of *Love Me Tender* had ‘underscored the need for the industry to develop players and subject matter to bring out the juvenile audience sector’, a growing audience that, perhaps most importantly, bought enough popcorn and Coke to keep exhibitors happy.\(^ {50}\) The article goes on to note that *Giant* (1956) was at the same time proving to be a ‘double draw’ for both adults and teenaged fans of the late James Dean.

*Variety* thus highlighted a dilemma that would vex Hollywood until *Bonnie and Clyde* and *The Graduate* ‘discovered’ the lucrative niche youth audience in 1967. Seemingly in denial in regard to the changing audience, the Hollywood of the 1950s and early 1960s still saw itself as being all things to everybody, releasing largely the same type of family entertainment it had in the 1930s and 1940s, before television and rock and roll began to carve the leisure industry into segments.\(^ {51}\) The result was that the major Hollywood studios maintained their commitment to bland, big budget family pictures aimed at a fast disappearing audience until the late 1960s.\(^ {52}\) In trying to please everyone, Hollywood ultimately did not please enough of anyone, and thus the late 1950s marks the beginnings of an era of uncertainty and financial peril from which a new youth-oriented Hollywood would emerge in the late 1960s. Although no one realised it at the time, the early success of Presley in film and on record showed the way.
The parallels between Hollywood’s desire to cater to a mass audience in the 1950s and 1960s and Parker’s crowd-pleasing plans for Elvis Presley are clear. The singer’s metamorphosis as a family-friendly movie star would, however, not take place until after the completion of Presley’s two-year stint in the US Army, which began in March 1958. His induction was seen at the time as a major career setback; in truth, it gave Parker and Wallis the necessary breathing space to properly formulate their plan to transform the ‘hillbilly cat’ into an all-round family entertainer. The new Elvis would be a versatile song and dance man who, by then having performed his patriotic duty, would have accumulated social cachet and respectability. For Presley’s first post-army public appearance in 1960, Parker organised an explicit public display of his ‘clean-teen’ transformation on The Frank Sinatra Timex Show: *Welcome Home Elvis*, taped in March and aired in May on ABC. Sinatra symbolically passed the variety entertainer baton to ‘a new Elvis, a modified Elvis’ during a tongue-in-cheek—but nonetheless blatantly un-rock and roll—swing medley of ‘Witchcraft’ and ‘Love Me Tender’.

The contrast with the pre-army Elvis was stark and deliberate. Before Presley’s enlistment, Wallis had signed Presley to three more pictures, *Loving You, Jailhouse Rock* (both 1957) and *King Creole* (1958). Together, these films—despite the hesitation exhibited by Denisoff and Romanowski—form a triumvirate of what are perhaps Presley’s only true rocksploitation movies. All three films deal in some way with the machinations of the popular music—that is, rock and roll—industry, while including extra-textual references to Presley’s own rise to stardom. They also incorporate elements of the conventional backstage musical, as we have seen a common trope in many 1950s rock and roll movies. Of course, Presley portrayed performers in several of his other films, but these characters were invariably small-time nightclub singers, or pilots/soldiers/race car drivers who indulged in a spot of amateur—and diegetically incongruous—singing. After the army, pseudo-biographical narratives dealing with
aspirations of a successful career in rock and roll would completely vanish from Presley’s films.\textsuperscript{55}

The first of these rock and roll pictures, \textit{Loving You}, was based on the only script ever constructed specifically around Presley himself. Originally titled \textit{Lonesome Cowboy}, it was written by director Hal Kanter who, after having spent some time with the singer in his home town of Memphis, loosely based it on Elvis’ own experiences.\textsuperscript{56} Such methods—the exploitation of real life rock and roll success stories—were of course common within the world of rocksploitation, as in Sam Katzman’s Bill Haley films and those associated with Alan Freed, who, as well as appearing in the Haley films, starred in \textit{Mister Rock and Roll} (1957) and \textit{Go, Johnny, Go!} (1959). United Artists would duplicate this process in late 1963, when Liverpool-based writer Alun Owen was commissioned to write a script for the film debut of the Beatles. Owen, chosen by the band members themselves, accompanied them on a sort of ethnographic field trip during a brief tour of Ireland and England that November.\textsuperscript{57} With these rocksploitation similarities in mind, a comparison of the production histories, narratives, soundtracks, and critical receptions of \textit{Loving You} and the later Beatles film, \textit{A Hard Day’s Night} (1964), should demonstrate several areas of confluence and divergence between the emblematic rock film careers of Elvis Presley and the Beatles. More broadly, it will elucidate key aspects of the growing relationship between film and popular music, but first some background on the Beatles’ film career is necessary.

‘Their first full length, hilarious action-packed film’: \textit{A Hard Day’s Night}

…you went to see these movies with Elvis or somebody in it, when we were still in Liverpool. And they’d all scream when he came on the screen, right. So we thought, ‘That’s a good job’.

- John Lennon\textsuperscript{58}

In 1964, to the surprise of many, \textit{Village Voice} film critic (and populariser of the auteur theory in the US) Andrew Sarris praised \textit{A Hard Day’s Night} as ‘the “Citizen Kane” of jukebox
musicals, the brilliant crystallisation of such diverse cultural particles as the pop movie, rock ‘n’ roll, cinéma vérité, (and) the nouvelle vague’. He also later placed it in his top ten for the year, alongside films by Godard, Renoir and Bresson. Despite the critical reputation it enjoys, the production origin of *A Hard Day’s Night*—and thus the film career of the Beatles—is somewhat less salubrious than Hollywood’s courting of Presley by Hollywood eight years before. Whereas Hal Wallis had sought to tap into emerging star-power—hoping to find the next Bing Crosby or Frank Sinatra—United Artists were simply looking for a hit record.

For UA, the Beatles—by late 1963 the most successful musical act Britain had ever produced—represented a chance to rescue their floundering recording division, established in 1957; the fact that a film would actually be produced was largely an irrelevance. United Artists Records’ British representative Noel Rodgers noted that EMI had been unable to convince its US subsidiary Capitol to release any Beatle product in America, and realised UA was in a good position to capitalise on an oversight in the group’s June 1962 contract with their record company Parlophone (an EMI label), which neglected soundtrack rights. Rodgers thus signed the band to a three picture deal. EMI’s oversight may have had its origins in the lacklustre history of rock and roll movies in Britain: several had been produced in the preceding seven or so years, but none had achieved significant box office success.

In offering the Beatles a film contract as a means to secure a soundtrack LP and its publishing rights, UA initiated a business strategy that had not successfully been attempted before: in-house corporate film and record synergy. As we have seen, while the Hollywood studios developed strategies tied to music publishing, the doomed association between Warner Bros. and Brunswick Records in the 1930s seemed to have stalled the possibilities of corporate film and record synergy. MGM had made inroads with the career of Connie Francis, but no studio had directly linked the film and recording careers of their stars, despite the fact that by the early 1960s all were in some way involved in the record business. For example, none of the
studios involved in Presley’s films—MGM, Fox, Paramount and UA—had a direct financial interest in his tie-in RCA soundtrack albums—indeed, by now these studios were competing with RCA via their own recording subsidiaries—or the associated publishing revenues. Nor did RCA have any direct stake in the films; only Elvis and Parker profited simultaneously from both mediums.

In the year preceding the Beatles’ deal, Presley’s had made two films for United Artists, *Follow That Dream* and *Kid Galahad* (both 1962). With their record division struggling to survive, UA could only look on enviously as both films helped push RCA’s soundtrack EPs into the US top thirty. The concept of producing a movie as a means by which to procure an LP was new indeed. In fact, UA had very low expectations for the film itself, and provided only a modest £200,000 budget—one-tenth of the average UK production—obviously expecting a Sam Katzman-style cash-in quickie. By the end of 1963, the Beatles’ record sales accounted for almost half of the entire British record market, so UA was confident that the film’s budget would be covered by sales of the soundtrack album alone.

The studio was right, although recent events revealed that their projections had in fact been modest. The band’s success in the US in early 1964, before filming began, was an unforeseen bonus for UA. After battling for almost two years to get their US subsidiary Capitol interested in the Beatles, EMI finally convinced the label to release ‘I Want to Hold Your Hand’ at the end of 1963. The single sold 250,000 copies in three days—10,000 an hour in New York City alone—and by mid-January it was number one across the country. Their appearance on CBS’s *The Ed Sullivan Show* on February 9th 1964 was watched by seventy-three million people, the largest television audience to that time. Nine days after returning to England the band reported to the *A Hard Day’s Night* set, and by the third week of filming they held the top five spots on *Billboard*’s US ‘Hot 100’ chart (as well as 31, 41, 58, 65, 68, and 79). Jukebox operators throughout the US were being forced to re-order up to 50 pressings of Beatle discs so
as to cope with the wear and tear of constant play. The Beatles also held down the number one and number two spots on the LP chart with *Meet the Beatles* (Capitol) and *Introducing the Beatles* (Vee-Jay), despite the fact that the album chart was still otherwise dominated by adult fare such as LPs by Barbra Streisand and the *Hello Dolly!* Broadway cast soundtrack.

Once filming was completed, UA initiated a saturation booking campaign for *A Hard Day’s Night* similar to those designed for Presley’s early films, announcing that they would release 700 prints to North American cinemas alone in August, more than for any other film in history. While in the UK the film, single and LP were released almost simultaneously, in the US the records served as promotion a month in advance of the film. There the album sold 1.5 million copies within two weeks, reaping a $2,000,000 profit for the studio, and recouping the negative cost many times over before the film was even released. This strategy, combined with the Beatles’ popularity, enabled the film to gross $1,300,000 in its first week; after six weeks, it had made $5,800,000, and by 1965, $10,000,000, a windfall for a studio that had only wished to gain a foothold in the record business.

**A Day in the Life: Comparing *Loving You* and *A Hard Day’s Night***

...I got out there and just tried to...act as naturally as I could.

- Elvis Presley

Well, it’s as good as anybody that makes a film who can’t act...

- John Lennon

When rock and roll arrived in the UK in the 1950s, largely on the back of the success of *Blackboard Jungle*, local record companies began to cast around for their own rock and roll stars. Each successful new British ‘Elvis’—Cliff Richard, Tommy Steele, Billy Fury et al.—was also quickly signed to star in a cash-in movie. The Richard vehicle *Expresso Bongo* (1960) is ranked by Andy Medhurst as perhaps the only pre-Beatle British pop movie of any merit.
while few British rock and roll films of the 1950s rate any mention in British cinema histories. According to Kevin Donnelly this is because they ‘belong overwhelmingly to a form lacking critical status or repute’, partly due to the low production values on display, but also the result of ‘a widespread distaste for pop music in established cultural and academic circles’.75

This revulsion meant that, even though such films featured popular British rock and roll stars, they tended to be critical of the music style itself, treating it at best as a passing fad out of which the better performers would graduate into ‘proper’ all-round entertainers; at worst, rock and roll was seen as the appropriate soundtrack to a sleazy world of teenage exploitation. As we saw in the previous chapter, such distaste was also present in US rocksploitation, but narratively this aversion was usually painted as the easily mollified anxieties of an older generation. Presley’s early rock and roll narratives also implicated rock and roll in both social discord and unsavoury business practices: in Loving You Presley plays Deke Rivers, a country singer who runs afoul of a town committee attempting to block his ‘lascivious’ performance; in Jailhouse Rock stardom corrupts ex-con Vince Everett; in King Creole, music brings Danny Fisher into contact with the New Orleans underworld. In all three films, Presley’s characters manage to reconcile the rock and roll lifestyle with domestic stability; Deke, Vince and Danny prove that they (and thus rock and roll) can function harmoniously within mainstream society. In this way, these narratives fit comfortably within the tropes of 1950s rocksploitation.

In stark contrast to 1950s rock film narratives, which attempt to negotiate compromise between generations, in A Hard Day’s Night the Beatles make little-to-no attempt to appease mainstream society; indeed the film sets out to parody that very rock musical trope. Throughout the film—which portrays a fictional day-and-a-half-in-the-life of the group—the four Beatles divide their time between travelling, socialising, attending official functions, and rehearsing and performing rock and roll, and finding ways to circumvent the demands placed on them by the entertainment industry and conservative society at large. Unlike previous rocksploitation, the
narrative implicates their music in little more than youthful exuberance and the pursuit of fun; indeed—for perhaps the first time in film—it implies that expression through pop music is the key to personal freedom. The only downside of a life in rock appears to be the band members’ loss of anonymity and the odd annoying press conference; even the (hardly sinister) attempts by Paul’s grandfather (Wilfred Brambell) to exploit the Beatles’ popularity are thwarted at every turn. But at no time does the band attempt to compromise and broker any accord between what they want and what is expected of them.

Another departure from previous UK and Hollywood rock and roll films was the representation of generational conflict. As we have seen, earlier rock and roll movies set the generations against each other: the kids want to rock but the town elders disapprove, so the kids put on a show and convince the grown-ups that rock and roll is just good clean fun. The reversal of this trope in *A Hard Day’s Night* was more than merely a product of the fact that the mainstream had become inured to rock and roll in the eight years that had lapsed since the initial shock wrought by Presley, Bill Haley and Little Richard. Generational conflict continued to factor in later rock movies such as *Privilege* (1967) and *Wild in the Streets* (1968). Sam Katzman had last mined this narrative field only two years before with *Don’t Knock the Twist* (1962), the same year that *A Hard Day’s Night* director Richard Lester helmed the almost identical *It’s Trad, Dad!* (1962), although in the latter the disquiet was triggered not by rock and roll or lascivious dancing, but Dixieland jazz.

This is indeed the plot mechanism that brings *Loving You* to its climax. In a scene that could have been lifted directly from a Katzman film, Deke Rivers’ press agent, Glenda Markle (Lizabeth Scott), pleads her client’s case to the town elders of Freegate, Texas, after pressure from the local ‘Mothers’ Committee’ leads to the cancellation of his concert. Glenda vehemently defends rock and roll by citing precedent:

You cannot blame the behaviour of young people—or old
people—on music. Why, you’re the same people who were doing the ‘Charleston’ and the ‘Black Bottom’ twenty years ago. Thirty years ago people were alarmed at what they thought jazz was doing to the country. Why, some of our leading magazines were printing articles like, ‘Is jazz the plot of disaster?’, ‘Unspeakable jazz must go’, ‘Does jazz put the “sin” in “syncopation”?’ Now you’re adopting the same attitude toward rock and roll, because your kids use it to let off steam.

Citing every US citizen’s right to a fair hearing, Glenda proposes that they let the public decide, via a live coast-to-coast television performance by Rivers. Despite the fact that Deke Rivers is still an unrecorded, purely regional success, Glenda announces that a national network has committed to telecasting this proto-American Idol cultural experiment live from the Freegate Civic Hall that very evening. Won over by Glenda’s charm, the elders agree to let the concert proceed.

The broadcast commences with a presenter intoning solemnly, ‘America, judge for yourself,’ before Rivers appears, dressed from head-to-toe in denim. In explicit reference to Presley’s family-mollifying performance of ‘Love Me Tender’ for Ed Sullivan the previous September, Rivers opens with ‘Loving You’ a string-laden ballad seemingly designed (by Leiber and Stoller) to transgress generational borders. With the old folks in the audience visibly won over by this display of sincere, non-threatening traditional entertainment values, Rivers takes his cue and introduces them to his brand of rock and roll, with a full pelvis-swinging, lip-curling performance of ‘Lotta Livin’’. Not only does rock and roll gain immediate social acceptance, but the feel-good classical Hollywood musical resolution provided by the concert’s climax segues into conventional ‘formation of the nuclear family’ closure: the orphan Deke asks both Glenda and his musical mentor Tex Warner (Wendell Corey) to be his co-managers (they themselves have only that moment reconciled as a couple after tensions caused by Deke’s success had led to estrangement). The mise en scène thus takes the form of a family portrait, with Deke and his newly adopted ‘parents’ bonded together in the foreground; in the
background, eager to infiltrate this domestic harmony, is the singer’s promising future, in the form of his girl Susan (Dolores Hart)—who has Deke’s heart—and a television producer (Vernon Rich)—who has Deke’s lucrative contract.

But the Beatles’ first film takes the opposite approach to discourses surrounding generational conflict over rock and roll. Whereas in *Loving You* such intergenerational strife is resolved by bringing together family and the entertainment industry, *A Hard Day’s Night* emphasises the casualness—the distance—of the Beatles’ relationship with older citizens, family, and the entertainment business. During the train compartment sequence at the beginning of the film, for example, the four Beatles are seen making little attempt to win over an older, more conservative generation; in fact, they are openly dismissive of their elders. This hint of animus—directed at a bowler-hatted, middle-aged city commuter (Richard Vernon) who objects to their presence in ‘his’ compartment—is, however, not the same type of generational friction depicted in previous youth cinema.

John, Paul, George and Ringo are seen here refusing staid tradition, not negotiating with it. Rather than conforming to social norms—as with Gregory (Sidney Poitier) in *Blackboard Jungle*—or striving to win societal approval via a demonstrable work ethic—like Deke Rivers—the Beatles, after a brief attempt at conciliation, become contemptuous of the commuter’s arrogant propriety. Tensions escalate when the older gentleman reaches over and turns off Ringo’s transistor radio—in effect *A Hard Day’s Night*’s version of a City Hall ban on rock and roll. Lennon taunts the pompous, upper middle-class war veteran by attempting to undermine his masculinity (‘Give us a kiss’), before simply giving up and resorting to sarcasm, (‘You can’t win with his sort, after all it’s his train—isn’t it, mister?’). They leave the compartment, but not before McCartney lands one last jibe (‘Come on, let’s go and have some coffee and leave the kennel to Lassie’).
The difference between this scene and previous portrayals of generational conflict, such as that seen in *Loving You*, is not simply a matter of altered content and tone: it speaks to the contrasting manner of each film’s production. If *Loving You* suffers through critical comparisons to *A Hard Day’s Night* in any department, it must surely be acting. Despite the script being tailored to him, the film’s concessions to Hollywood narrative convention do not serve the singer well: Presley is not convincing in dramatic scenes, struggling to maintain consistency in performance when called upon to register anger or remorse. He does, however, command the screen when the script allows him to display his (apparently) natural charm, whether within a musical routine, or during casual interaction with other characters.

Despite also being made with Hollywood money, *A Hard Day’s Night*’s modest budget—and the fact that shooting took place far away from the close attention of studio heads—emboldened all involved to evade cinematic convention wherever possible. The script was tailored around Alun Owen’s perception of the protagonists’ affable natures, and so, unlike Presley, all four are required to do not much more than display their natural charm. Thus, the confrontation noted above comes across as light-hearted cheek rather than adolescent churlishness. For Robert Murphy, Richard Lester’s directorial style both relied on and amplified this charm, and in matching his ‘detached, quizzical surrealism’ to the Beatles’ ‘stoical Liverpool humour’, he thus portrayed ‘the four good-natured Beatles trying to live out their lives in a world restricted by idiotic and outdated prohibitions’.

‘An Odd, Metatextual Creature’: European Influence in *A Hard Day’s Night*

In this way, film form works to encourage and aid the Beatles in their mission to undermine convention and tweak the establishment. The train altercation is presented in a series of disorienting hand-held cinéma vérité-style close-ups and whip-pans. Lester also toys with verisimilitude: jump-cut edits allow the four Beatles to appear in ‘impossible’ positions, as when
they run and cycle alongside the train, taunting their foe. Operating within an apparently altered milieu of perception, the Beatles of *A Hard Day’s Night* will apparently never—can never—see the error of their youthful ways; the older generation—if they appear in the band’s sights at all—are there to be tolerated, or mocked until the Beatles become bored and move on to something else. With its marriage of grainy, black and white British drabness and aesthetically ‘other’ surrealist jump-cuts, *A Hard Day’s Night*’s irreverent representation of generational difference positions it as the first film made by young people—Lester, at 32, was very youthful by Hollywood standards—for young people. Lester’s fusing of rocksploitation and art cinema thus stands as a key moment not only in the evolution of popular music films, but in the relationship between Hollywood and the growing youth audience.

Film critics have noted that Lester created an ‘odd, metatextual creature’ by combining ‘British kitchen-sink naturalism, cinéma vérité-style probing, Godardian structural playfulness, and a surrealist interest in the plasticity of the image’. An expatriate American, the director already possessed an eclectic resume, having directed television comedy and variety programs, as well as the Goons’ surrealist *The Running, Jumping, and Standing-still Film* (1959), the latter being the main reason the Beatles approved his hiring. By filtering his previous experience through a personal enthusiasm for European art cinema, Lester ensured that *A Hard Day’s Night* helped remove ‘the filter of condescension and contempt’ associated with the teen film market.

Music, of course, plays a crucial role in forging this connection between art cinema and the teen audience. Jeff Smith singles out the film’s ‘Can’t Buy Me Love’ sequence—in which all four Beatles burst forth from the confines of a television studio and cavort uninhibitedly in a field—as a defining moment in the history of the previously restrictive relationship between rock and film, a relationship that had thus far shackled pop music to a purely commercial, diegetic novelty function:

Mixing fast and slow motion with a series of unusual camera angles, director Richard Lester created a rapid
montage sequence that was a unified aural and visual whole. [A Hard Day’s Night] proved that rock music could be used as an underscore for filmed action; a director simply had to use the music in a proper context or treat it as an element equal to the image.\textsuperscript{82}

The footage of the band frolicking to their most recent single—released in England on March 3, 1964—was given the full, fragmentary Godardian jump-cut treatment.\textsuperscript{83} While most of the film featured the Beatles lip-syncing to their hits in classic jukebox musical fashion, the song in this sequence can claim no diegetic justification. But it proves crucial in regard to film form. The camera work itself consists of remarkably shaky and disorienting aerial and hand-held shots. Acknowledging the camera, the Beatles grab at it; at one point, one of them appears to be in control, tilting down to shoot his own boots.\textsuperscript{84} Anarchistic narrative non sequitur though this sequence may be, the steady two-step country-rock beat of ‘Can’t Buy Me Love’ compensates for the lack of textual unity. This formal liberation of pop music from the diegesis would serve film well over the next decade, and beyond. As the final chapters of this dissertation will show, later in the 1960s a generation of emerging directors, similarly enamoured of Godard, would come to rely on rock music’s ability to act as a textual binding agent.

The stylistic innovation of the ‘Can’t Be Me Love’ sequence can be further emphasised by comparing it to musical sequences in previous rock and roll movies. Presley too, for example, has an eye-catching musical set-piece in Loving You, albeit one that draws on notably different cinematic influences. Midway through the film, Deke Rivers is set to headline the Grand Theatre in Amarillo, Texas. It is a crucial juncture in the narrative: not only is it considered a prestigious booking for a country singer on the rise (‘A city!’ crows Tex. ‘They have sidewalks, cops who wear shoes’), but it will be the first time Deke receives equal billing with his mentor.
Before the concert, however, Deke must weather some dramatic tension: he is involved in a fight—provoked by a jealous Amarillo hood—that could ruin his reputation. Instead, it enhances it. Deke’s triumphant performance of ‘Teddy Bear’—to a full house, thanks to the publicity generated by the fight—is, appropriately for this conventional Hollywood trope, afforded a glossy and stylised widescreen mise en scene by debutante director Hal Kanter. Presley, shot from below (as if from the audience), is presented as a commanding presence possessed of a broad, confident stance. Unlike the energetic impromptu performance designed to appease the bully the night before—and the one designed to win over the older generation at the end of the film—here Deke tosses off a seemingly effortless, loose-limbed display of his talents, an un-strummed acoustic guitar slung casually over his shoulder. Across the rear of the stage, in shadow, Tex and the Rough Ridin’ Ramblers (Moore, Black and Fontana) form a straight ‘chorus line’, bobbing rhythmically before a large, sparkling purple backdrop. Above them the crisscrossed shadows of two guitars loom majestically. The effect is that of an intensely-colourful and stylised hillbilly concert, as translated through the visual imagination of the post-Busby Berkeley Hollywood musical.

At first glance, the opening musical sequence of *A Hard Day’s Night* appears also to hold to musical convention. Crammed into a ‘depressing’ train luggage compartment with Paul’s grandfather and a dog, the band begins a game of cards. The introductory harmonica riff of ‘I Should Have Known Better’ fades in non-diegetically and, despite the fact that musical convention would have it that the band are about to burst into song, the card game continues. The slight rhythmic nodding of George and Ringo’s heads, and a shot of Paul ‘singing along’ to half a line, are the only acknowledgment that they are aware music is playing.

Suddenly, at the beginning of the second verse, there is a jump-cut and the diegesis shifts: in a close-up profile shot, John is now playing the harmonica riff. He then begins to sing (itself a
technical impossibility, as the riff and vocal overlap) and a further cut reveals that the rest of the band now also have their instruments. We have thus reverted to quite another musical convention, one that the fade-in of the track originally hinted at: the mimed diegetic performance (as opposed to the mimed non-diegetic performance wherein a performer ‘sings’ to an invisible, pre-recorded orchestra). At the coda, we cut back to the card game; the instruments have disappeared, and the song fades out. With this early musical number Lester establishes a narrative model for what is to follow: French New Wave-styled vérité realism (working class Northerners playing cards in a dingy space, shot in grainy, hand-held black and white) meets (almost) conventional musical fantasy.

The concept of a Godardian/cinéma vérité/rocksploitation hybrid is the key to fully appreciating A Hard Day’s Night’s influence, modifying and popularising as it did styles of filmmaking that previously had only been seen by a relatively small art house audience. Associate producer Dennis O’Dell has confirmed on several occasions that their brief was to capture a Godard-inflected style of cinéma vérité realism, a mode that UA had neither requested nor subsequently appreciated. Studio executives apparently believed Lester’s art cinema touches—during the performance of ‘And I Love Her’, for example, the camera tracks around McCartney, and a klieg light shines directly into the camera, briefly ‘whiting out’ the screen—to be the errors of an amateur. But these vérité touches are the key to its style. Note also the train scenes, which, rather than being shot conventionally in a studio with the aid of back-projection, actually necessitated 2500 miles of rail travel. They also bear striking stylistic similarities to What’s Happening (1964), the Maysles Brothers’ vérité documentary study of the Beatles’ first US visit, screened on UK television mere weeks before A Hard Day’s Night began shooting. It is these touches that impressed critics in 1964: the sequence featuring Ringo ‘parading’ along the Thames towpath was especially hailed, for both Starr’s engaging performance and Lester’s realist sensibility.
In contrast to *A Hard Day’s Night*’s vérité realism, the aesthetics on show in *Loving You* hold to Hollywood convention. In addition to the traditional musical set pieces, the dramatic chase scene in the Presley film underlines the film’s conservatism via both its technical execution (it indeed employs the standard, ill-matched back-projection) and the narrative’s dependence on its drama. In this way *Loving You* ties Presley to a safer, more traditional past, even as its narrative purports to focus on the resolution of contemporary generational difference; *A Hard Day’s Night*’s documentary style, location shooting and *nouvelle vague* leanings, however, signal that this is a rock and roll movie unafraid to locate the Fab Four in a realistic, mutable present.

These formal differences are most apparent in those aspects of *Loving You* and *A Hard Day’s Night* that deal with similar backstage musical tropes. Both employ variations of ‘will the show go on?’ climactic tension, but the imbalance in the dramatic investment in each is telling. Both narrative climaxes are governed by pressing temporal forces: a live television broadcast is imminent, but the star(s) has/have gone missing. Deke, emotionally tormented by the love triangle he has become entangled in, roars off in his jalopy—with Glenda in pursuit—minutes before his telecast, visibly testing the nerves of the program’s producer. Similarly Ringo, feeling unappreciated after Paul’s grandfather ‘fills his head with notions,’ absconds from the studio, only to be arrested for ‘malicious intent’, while the program’s director (Victor Spinetti) also grows suitably apoplectic (Lennon: ‘Control yourself. You’ll spurt’). With less than half an hour until the telecast, the rest of the band—in a fragmented slapstick chase sequence which is once again anchored by ‘Can’t Buy Me Love’—attempt to liberate Ringo.

The stylistic differences of these two chase sequences go beyond the obvious generic demands of *Loving You*’s drama and *A Hard Day’s Night*’s comedy. In its way, the *Loving You* chase scene is also played for laughs: Glenda, finding Deke prostrate under his crashed jalopy, assumes he is dead—he is merely repairing the damage—while Deke’s anxious, sweating
producer is also intended to elicit laughs. Lester’s chase sequence, on the other hand, is yet another excuse for formal stylistic display—in this case, a playful adaptation of the techniques of silent film comedy.

Ultimately, the contrasting approaches to the narrative conventions of the musical at play within the two films—Touches of self-commentary in *A Hard Day’s Night* such as Lennon’s ironic ‘Let’s do the show right here, kids!’ leave us in no doubt that the film is fully aware of such conventions—are summed up by their diametrically opposed resolutions of the standard ‘will the show go on?’ device. Whereas Deke is located and triumphantly returns to the television studio in time to transform the taste preferences of an entire nation, *A Hard Day’s Night* refuses drama by opting for anti-climax. Although there is likewise a reunion of group and ‘family’, Lester does not emphasise this resolution with the same gravity attempted in *Loving You*. After the comically pointless chase scene (the police simply disappear) the band members casually stroll into the studio from the street. The mise en scene places so little emphasis on their just-in-time reappearance that the audience must strain to locate them amid the foreground clutter of film equipment, costumes, dancing girls and crew members. Seemingly oblivious to all the fuss, George asks their roadie Shake (John Junkin), ‘…where’s me boot? And will you get us some tea while you’re there?’

The ‘Elvis model’, the ‘Beatles model’, and the 1960s LP Market

With four, you can associate with one of us and still like the rest of us. If you didn’t like Elvis, that was that.
- Ringo Star

The uneventful meeting between Presley and the Beatles in 1965 was the result of a compromise between Colonel Tom Parker and Brian Epstein. If Parker had had his wish, these entertainment colossi would have met on a Paramount soundstage, with the Beatles performing as Elvis’ backing band in *Paradise, Hawaiian Style*. What could have been Parker’s greatest
publicity coup was ultimately prohibited by the group’s United Artists deal, so a casual meeting was organised instead. According to Peter Guralnick, at this time Elvis Presley both admired and felt threatened by the Beatles,

… he was envious of the freedom that they evidently seemed to feel and to flaunt. He, too, had once enjoyed that freedom, he, too, had once been in the vanguard of the revolution, and now he was embarrassed to listen to his own music, to watch his own films.90

The Beatles’ career differed from Elvis’s in two important ways. Firstly, film always remained a secondary concern for the Beatles, and after *A Hard Day’s Night* the band increasingly came to see their (hardly demanding) contractual commitment to appear in films as an irritant. Presley, too, came to see movies as a distraction, as during the 1960s he churned out twenty-one features. The Beatles made just five—one of which was a cartoon in which they only appeared briefly, and the other a documentary—but Presley’s manager bound the singer to a film-and-publishing model that altered the direction his career. This led directly to the other significant distinction between the working methods of the Beatles and Elvis: Presley’s recordings became little more than the means to assemble film soundtracks—not even Presley’s record company, RCA, had a say in the material recorded. A roster of professional (but less than first-rate) Tin Pan Alley songwriters hired by the film studios kept the King of rock and roll supplied with songs custom-made for his musical comedies. Presley hated these songs, but was obligated—both contractually and through his loyalty to Parker—to record them.

Elvis’s film career thoroughly dominated his post-army recorded output. Between 1960 and 1970, of the twenty-eight Elvis Presley LPs released, sixteen were soundtrack albums. After *Pot Luck with Elvis* in 1962, Presley did not record another recognisable rock and roll album until the post-comeback *From Elvis in Memphis* in 1969. In an era in which the Beatles, the Beach Boys and others were establishing the long-playing rock album as both the aesthetic and commercial flagship of the record industry91 (pushing revenues over the one
billion dollar mark for the first time), Colonel Tom Parker had ensured that Presley’s musical career remained at the mercy of his increasingly shoddy films. With Presley singing songs about harem holidays, papayas and clams, record sales slumped accordingly.\footnote{In a further irony, as we’ll see in the next chapter, it was during this period that rock LPs first began to outsell the previous mainstay of the album market—the film soundtrack.}

The Beatles had a career in film because United Artists was one of the first record companies—and film studios—to recognise the value of the teen LP market. UA’s unconventional tactic to boost its ailing record division meant that by the summer of 1964 the company found itself with both one of the biggest-selling records in the history of the industry, and the first film to ever make back its budget before its release.\footnote{Just as the discovery by Warner Bros. of the full potential of the merchandising relationship between movies and musical copyrights altered film practice, so too would UA’s business innovation. The fact that a film studio subsidiary identified the emergence of the teen-oriented record album market is telling, and will form the basis of the next chapter. This recognition was largely located in the early 1960s success of the soundtracks for the Presley films \textit{G.I. Blues} and \textit{Blue Hawaii}, which were immensely successful despite—or because of, according to Tom Parker—the fact that the Tin Pan Alley tunes they featured bore little relationship to the music with which the singer had established his career.}

By \textit{A Hard Day’s Night}, however, the Beatles, were increasingly only recording material that met a particular professional standard—their own. The UK release of the soundtrack LP was their first album to contain exclusively self-penned material. While the \textit{A Hard Day’s Night} LP did have a specific utility, and was thus—like the majority of Presley’s LPs in the 1960s—a record tailored to the demands of a film contract, the actual recording sessions appear to have been conducted no differently than their previous two albums. Indeed, the LP was a clear progression from their 1963 albums \textit{Please Please Me} and \textit{With...
the Beatles, both of which relied on cover versions to pad out the track listings. All the songs in A Hard Day’s Night—and all of their subsequent films—were written by the Beatles; never before had the stars of a musical composed all the songs in the film. Even the incidental score—arranged by George Martin—was based on Lennon and McCartney originals.

The United Artists’ soundtrack LP for the US market—the film’s raison d'être —showcased the film’s original Beatle recordings on the first side, and George Martin’s score on the second. Other songs used in the film—‘She Loves You’, for example—were not on the album, as UA only had claim on record and publishing royalties for original songs used in the film (original pressings of the UA LP even featured ‘You Can’t Do That,’ which had appeared in an early cut). Capitol, who attempted to counter the impact of the UA soundtrack by simultaneously releasing most of the film’s songs on singles, made sure to secure the bands’ soundtrack rights before their next film, Help!, went into production. But for the Beatles, films remained no more than an adjunct to the practice of creating music; for most of Elvis Presley’s career, though, Hollywood called the tune.

**Capitalising on Cross-media Success**

Stylistically different though the two films are, both Loving You and A Hard Day’s Night demonstrate their debt to the backstage musical and use its tropes in order to examine the role that another medium, television, played in the rise of rock and roll. Loving You (and Jailhouse Rock) and A Hard Day’s Night drew inspiration from crucial events in the early histories of Elvis Presley and the Beatles. Through the conventional rockexploitation climax of the live television performance, these movies interpolated the mainstream audience’s familiarity with each act’s career-defining variety television performances, which for Forman rank among the ‘monumental televised musical performances’. Several of Presley’s controversial television appearances have been discussed above; in October 1963, the Beatles’ appearance on Sunday
Night at the London Palladium garnered an audience of fifteen million, and the pandemonium caused by fans outside the theatre prompted Fleet Street to coin the term ‘Beatlemania’.  

Each film thus memorialises and capitalises on the trajectory of its stars’ respective careers. In the case of Loving You that representation is rich with cozy, family-friendly associations. For Presley, these domestic associations were deemed necessary—note that, while the Beatles appeared on teen pop music programs, Presley was restricted to family variety shows—as Parker was concerned about deflecting the bad publicity resulting from ‘violent’ rock and roll concerts. At the climactic performance in A Hard Day’s Night, unlike in Loving You no stentorian-voiced announcer heralds the arrival of the Beatles, and certainly no one invites the audience to pass judgment. Appropriate to the youth-orientation of the film, the focus in the dénouement rests only on the group and its music. Suddenly they are onstage, belting out ‘Tell Me Why’ to an almost grotesquely enthusiastic crowd. This mini-concert forms the most conventional sequence of the film, consisting of ten minutes of standard lip-synced rock and roll performance, with only the odd vérité touch—a rapid zoom into a screaming face here, an unconventionally extreme low-angle shot of Lennon there—to remind the audience that they had just seen a very unconventional teen film, an unlikely site of formal innovation.

Conclusion

The Beatles had indeed initially feared they would be forced to appear in a standard Katzman-style quickie exploitation movie. They had seen the types of movies Bill Haley had made, and they had also watched in horror as Hollywood had turned their idol Elvis Presley into, they felt, a poor man’s Dean Martin. Instead, just as unprecedented commercial success had encouraged them to assert their power in the recording studio, so too did they take a critical interest in the film deals on offer; choice in recording and film selection were, as we have seen, the two areas in which Presley had quickly lost control.
Lester and the Beatles had creative leeway to incorporate cinéma vérité and nouvelle vague touches because United Artists saw little reason to be concerned about the qualities—narrative, formal, production value or otherwise—of the finished film. The fact that they left the film untouched despite their concerns over its amateurishness confirms their ambivalence in regard to the production standards expected of a Beatles movie. Thus, in contrast to standard rocksploitation fare, *A Hard Day’s Night* was able to draw on a range of film styles that previous examples of the genre had neither the time nor the inclination to be concerned with, and it used these playfully but unapologetically to frame the pleasures of Beatle music in a film produced only for the youth audience. *A Hard Day’s Night* was, as a line of dialogue had it, ‘an early clue to the new direction’. On one hand, it served as instruction for young directors, showing how the rock soundtrack opened up space for formal experimentation in popular cinema; on the other, it proved instructional for film studio executives, revealing to them the size of the youth audience for film, and explaining how to lure this audience into the cinema with pop music.

Endnotes

1 Quoted during the Beatles’ first US press conference, February 7th, 1964. ‘An early clue to the new direction’ is a line of dialogue featured in *A Hard Day’s Night*.
2 Webb 2002.
3 MacDonald 1994, p.7.
4 Wayne 2005, p.386.
5 The meeting took place at Presley’s Bel Air mansion on August 27, 1965, with all four Beatles apparently dumbstruck at the sight of their idol, Presley, in Hollywood to film *Paradise, Hawaiian Style* (1966).
8 Quoted in Guralnick 1998, p.92.
9 These commercials can be viewed at http://www.elvis.com/elvisdvds/gallery/default.asp.
11 Feeney 2001, p.54.
12 Cohn 1996, p.22.
13 Marcus 1989, p.245.
14 Miller 2000, p.156.
16 Mundy 1999, p.114.
19 Rose 1995, p.204.
By the mid-1960s, Presley would be making upwards of $1,000,000 per film, not including his fifty percent profit share.

These three songs were featured in *Fun in Acapulco* (1963), *Girl Happy* (1965), and *Paradise, Hawaiian Style* (1966) respectively, and were written by Tin Pan Alley veterans such as Sid Tepper and Sid Wayne.

The songs featured in *Love Me Tender*—for which Presley was loaned out to Twentieth Century-Fox—were co-credited to Presley (as per his publishing agreement) and Vera Matson, but in fact were composed by Darby, who used his wife’s name as a pseudonym (Guralnick 1995, pp.329-330/Jorgensen 1998, p.58).

The trade magazine’s assessment of Presley’s film performance was less encouraging: “…as an actor, he ain’t” (‘Love me tender,’ in *Variety*, November 21, 1956, p.6).

In *Double Trouble* (1967) Elvis plays a touring rock singer, but the plot itself is preoccupied with spies and jewel thieves. In this way, perhaps it can be seen as more akin to the earlier Beatles film *Help!* (1965), which itself was part James Bond parody.


Mundy 1999, p.173.


Keith Richard, guitarist with the Rolling Stones, credits *Blackboard Jungle* with introducing rock and roll to England; until that film’s release, such music had been notably absent from the BBC-controlled airwaves. Richard also implies that it was the artists whose films received a sufficient UK release, such as Presley, Fats Domino, and Little Richard, who sold the most records there. In contrast, Chuck Berry’s few film appearances received scant exposure in England, and his popularity suffered as a result (Greenfield 1971, p.25).


Donnelly 2001a, p.3.

These ‘old folk’ included Presley’s own parents, Gladys and Vernon, later visible to the right of the screen as Deke dances up the aisle.

Murphy 1992, p.112.

With the Beatles’ second movie, *Help!* (1965), Lester would expand these touches of surrealist humour into an entire film.


Medhurst 1995, p.68.

Thompson 1995, p.34.

Smith 1996, pp.159-60.

See Chapter Nine for a fuller discussion of the relationship between European cinema and the role of music in film.

Apparently this was Lester himself, standing in for John Lennon, who had excused himself in order to attend a literary luncheon.

Parker might have admired the fact that Hal Wallis had gone to the trouble of plastering posters for *The Sad Sack* (1957)—the producer’s forthcoming Jerry Lewis vehicle—all over the theatre.

See, for example, the extra features on the Miramax DVD release of *A Hard Day’s Night*.

Lewisohn 1992, p.150.

Rolston & Murray 2001, pp.12, 40.

Interview filmed for BBC2’s *Late night line-up*, 1st December, 1969 (see http://www.geocities.com/~beatleboy1/dbrs69.int.html).

Guralnick 1999, p.207.

In the *Times*, theatre critic Kenneth Tynan proclaimed that *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* was ‘a decisive moment in the history of western civilization’ (quoted in Negus, 1996). See Chapter Eight for more on the growth of the LP market.

By September 1967, *Sgt. Pepper* had sold three and a half million copies in the US; the *Double Trouble* soundtrack, also released in June, sold 185,000 copies.


The UK and US versions of the soundtrack differ. The UK Parlophone LP features the film songs on side one, and new non-film material on side two.


Lewisohn 1992, pp.84, 180. When the Beatles first started recording at Abbey Road studios in 1962, EMI deemed it unnecessary for performers to attend their own mixing sessions.
Chapter Eight—

Hollywood Gets the Blues: the Studios Enter the Record Business

More than ever it’s the recording that continues to wag the music biz.

- Variety, January 8th, 1958

As we saw in the preceding chapter, between the late 1950s and the mid-1960s, the global film and recording industries, despite decades-long frictions surrounding the pre-eminence of music publishing, were moving increasingly towards détente, developing methods with which to mutually capitalise on a changing marketplace. The examples of Elvis Presley and the Beatles illustrate a clear convergence of commercial interest, centred on the expansion of the market for popular recorded music; in addition Hollywood was gradually realising that they too could tap into the youth market’s infatuation with rock and roll, via both corporate expansion and the film text. The preceding two chapters have been largely concerned with Hollywood’s cinematic relationship with popular music—in particular rock and roll. This chapter begins by picking up the historical narrative thread left unresolved—though touched on since—at the end of Chapter Six, which concerns the film studios’ burgeoning industrial relationship with the recording industry.

In many ways the 1950s saw Hollywood begin to reconcile itself to the fact that the audience for entertainment was becoming younger and more particular in its tastes. This reconciliation became apparent not so much though Hollywood’s core business, movies, but through their chief sideline interest, music. While the major studios continued to largely ignore the teen film audience and focus on broad family entertainment, through their investment in music publishing they became acutely aware of the growth of the record business. Annual disc sales continued to reach unprecedented levels, much to the chagrin of the ASCAP publishing houses, who still viewed the rise of the record business as a disruption to the natural order of
things. As *Variety* put it, the tail was now wagging the dog, and the once-powerful publishing business had become a mere ‘appendage to the disk’.²

The Hollywood/Tin Pan Alley nexus responded in two ways: ASCAP members stepped up their $150,000,000 anti-trust suit against BMI, accusing them of colluding with the radio networks and major labels,³ which would culminate in the radio payola hearings of the late 1950s (and, by the mid-1960s, force the networks to divest of their BMI stock).⁴ As, in truth, ASCAP was collecting more revenue than ever before—$22,000,000 to BMI’s $8,000,000—in the form of mechanical performance royalties (despite the two cents-per disc rate having not been raised in 50 years),⁵ many suspected these protests to be more the product of anti-rock and roll bias from senior ASCAP members. Secondly, and more importantly, the major studios began to buy into the record business itself. Having lost control of the music industry, in the 1950s Hollywood attempted an intervention arguably even more dramatic than its investment in publishing in the 1920s, and by 1958 all of the major studios had staked a claim in the recording industry.

As rock and roll continued to dominate the singles charts throughout 1956 and 1957, the movie studio labels—and several smaller companies closely affiliated with television pop music programs—reacted by attempting to tailor the phenomenon to the model they understood best, the Hollywood star system. While that strategy reaped only negligible dividends, by the mid-1960s the film studios would hold a major stake in the record industry, made newly powerful by the unparalleled popularity of the Beatles. The corporate links between the studios and the labels would in effect teach Hollywood how to address the largest pool of disposable income the world had ever known, the teenage baby boomers.
As we have seen, the rise of BMI encouraged an exponential growth of the audience for rhythm and blues and country and western music in the late 1940s and early 1950s. With R&B appealing especially to teens, these markets combined to push the post-war boom in recorded music towards record-breaking levels of prosperity, unseating sheet music as the music business’s chief source of revenue. As if to emphasise the disc business’s growing power, in 1953 the entertainment industry appeared to shift on its axis when it was announced that Decca, only the third most successful record label in the United States, had gained a 67 percent controlling interest in a major Hollywood studio, Universal Pictures.  

The few histories dealing with the bonds between Hollywood and the record business tend to view the key post-war events in this relationship—the establishment of MGM Records in 1948, Decca’s purchase of Universal, and the gold rush-style investment in the recording business by the rest of the majors that commenced in 1957—as being all part of a single process, specifically Hollywood’s interest in the growing market for soundtrack albums. But while that market did play an important role in this series of mergers, acquisitions and the establishment of new subdivisions, several dissimilarities suggest other processes may also have been at work. While MGM initially seemed concerned with controlling a share of the soundtrack market, the appointment of Frank Walker as label head ensured that their record label invested heavily in the new developments in post-war popular music.

Walker knew well which markets Decca and Capitol had targeted in order to establish themselves as major labels. During the 1920s Walker had been head of Columbia’s race music division, where he signed, among others, blues singer Bessie Smith. Like Ralph Peer, throughout the 1920s and 1930s Walker scouted the South for blues and hillbilly talent, and during the Depression attempted to resuscitate the specialised divisions of both Columbia
(Okeh) and RCA (Bluebird). Later, as head of the army’s V-Disc program, it was Walker who exposed thousands of soldiers to country and western and blues for the first time.\(^7\)

Having developed a genuine enthusiasm for his ‘first loves’, rhythm and blues and hillbilly music,\(^8\) Walker was thus wholly cognisant of contemporary changes in popular music taste in the 1940s, and positioned MGM to capitalise on the musical environment BMI had nurtured. As he later told *Billboard*,

> No record company is complete without country and western or rhythm and blues or what we used to call race records. That music is our only hold on originality in the business today. That’s exactly why this music has been so widely absorbed into the popular field.\(^9\)

While MGM Records ultimately made few inroads into the R&B market, they quickly established themselves in the country and western field via several of Walker’s early signings, including popular western swing performer Bob Wills, and a young singer-songwriter, Hank Williams. Williams came to MGM thanks to an A&R agreement Walker organised with Fred Rose, head of the Nashville-based, BMI-affiliated publishing firm, Acuff-Rose.\(^10\)

Within Hollywood, though, MGM’s response to the turning of the tide was atypical. Over the next decade Warner Bros. and the other music publishing studios came to regret their decision not to enter the recording industry, as by the 1950s disc sales would begin to dwarf the record highs experienced in the mid-1940s.\(^11\) But the reluctance by the majority of these companies to enter the disc business after the war was far more representative of Hollywood’s seeming lack of concern in regard to the myriad changes taking place within popular music marketing, an indifference mirrored by their reluctance to accommodate changing film audience patterns. Thus it was left to a record label, Decca, to forge a crucial and influential link between the film industry and the recording industry.
Like MGM, Decca may also initially have had an eye on the marketing of movie soundtracks, but their purchase of Universal was grounded in much broader ambitions in regard to entertainment conglomeration. As we saw in Chapter Five, Decca boss Jack Kapp, the man who had brokered the Al Jolson deal between Brunswick and Warner Bros. back in 1928, had seen danger in direct links between labels and studios, a fear that prompted Harry Warner to terminate the association between his studio and the record company at the end of the war. But after Kapp’s death in 1949, his successor Milton R. Rackmil revealed new objectives, and much greater ambitions. In 1951 Decca bought a 26 percent share in Universal-International, increasing that to a 42.2 percent stake the following year with the purchase of shares owned by British firm J. Arthur Rank. After gaining majority control in 1953, by 1954 the label had amassed a 72.5 percent share in the studio, and Rackmil was named president of Decca-Universal.

Not only was this a shock to both Hollywood and the music business, it represented a complete about-face from Kapp’s original mission statement, to forge for recorded music a singular and primary place within the entertainment industry. Decca had grown enormously thanks to the disc boom of the 1940s and Rackmil, eyeing enviously the media empires to which RCA Victor and Columbia belonged, sought expansion beyond the record business. Billboard noted that whereas ‘other record enterprises were the children of show business empires, Decca was able with its own resources to build its own empire’. What neither Decca nor Billboard could have realised was that, while Hollywood would continue the slow financial decline it had been suffering since 1947, the record industry had only just begun a decades-long era of expansion and prosperity. In the short term, though, Decca would have little to complain about. Like Warner Bros. twenty years previously, it quickly found ways to spread financial risk across its in-house film and music subsidiaries: the soundtrack album for 1954’s The Glenn Miller Story, for example, released in advance of the feature, was a huge
hit, selling over 250,000 copies. The success of the album—available in the new long-playing 33⅓rpm twelve-inch vinyl record format—also of course functioned as promotion for the movie, helping to make it the biggest grossing picture in Universal’s history up to that time.\(^{16}\)

Although Jeff Smith infers that Decca’s landmark purchase of Universal spurred the other major studios into entering the record business,\(^{17}\) the three year gap between the completion of Decca’s takeover and Paramount’s purchase of Dot Records in 1957 suggests otherwise.\(^{18}\) Smith does, however, note two other more credible ‘causal mechanisms’: the shrinking market for sheet music, and the concurrent boom in record sales. By 1957, even Hollywood could not fail to notice the rise of the teenaged consumer, as reflected in the phenomenal growth of the record industry. As Philip Ennis notes, in 1956 the Record Industry association of America (RIAA), formed in 1952 in response to the disc market’s expansion, reported that total record sales revenues had increased by $100,000,000, to a total of $331,000,000.\(^{19}\) Of this, 42 percent was sold by independent labels, representing a doubling of their market share in the post-war period.\(^{20}\) The following year the figure reached $460,000,000, and by 1958 it was $511,000,000.\(^{21}\)

Yet, rather than perceiving the record business’s success in the teen market as an indication that cinema, too, might profit from this demographic, the major film studios continued to largely ignore the teenaged filmgoer, still viewed by many theatre owners as a ‘peculiar’ and ‘undesirable’ audience which disturbed the ‘normal patronage’; the majors thus left that market to the ‘grab the money and run’ independent studios.\(^{22}\) Instead Hollywood simply bought into the recording sector, or launched competing record labels, in order to revitalise their position in the booming music economy. By mid-1958, all of the major studios would be in the disc business. Billboard noted that the ‘prime lures’ for a studio buying out or forming a record label included ‘dollar volume’, ‘tax advantages’,
‘promotion bonanzas via tie-ups’, and the ‘acquisition of promising disk talent as film box office draws’.

After having their offer for the New York label Cadence rejected, in January 1957 Paramount purchased the independent Dot Records, formed in Tennessee in 1951, for a reported $3,000,000. This was deemed a relatively safe investment in that the label registered estimated sales of $6,000,000 in 1956, largely through the success of Pat Boone, who was second only to Elvis Presley in teen popularity. There was no indication from Paramount that Dot would enter the soundtrack market, a field the label certainly had no experience in. Boone himself had only just signed a seven year contract with Twentieth Century-Fox the previous November, so there could be no opportunity for a direct synergistic link between his two careers, although agencies MCA and William Morris were increasingly insisting on non-exclusivity clauses for artists who appeared on both film and disc.

With Variety reporting that ‘the music biz is shaping up in the Hollywood mind as the new hub of show biz’, United Artists, after failing in their attempts to buy both Imperial and Liberty, also forced their way into the record business at the end of 1957. The United Artists Record Corporation was launched with plans for the label to adopt the studio’s distribution and promotion model, in that artists could keep their master recordings and lease them through the label. In the spirit of post-Paramount Decree Hollywood, UA saw ‘its job as selling an entertainment package’, and planned to take full advantage of the studio’s experienced promotions staff to plug its records. The label’s first release that December—Joe Valino’s rendition of the title song from the UA film Legend of the Lost—indeed indicated that the company intended to capitalise on its cross-media interests, although its decision to distribute its discs via 33 independent distributors also hinted that it was aware of the rock and roll market’s reliance on regional specialisation.
In a November story entitled ‘Pic industry in wholesale climb on indie bandwagon’, 
*Billboard* reported that Columbia, Twentieth Century-Fox and Warner Bros. were all 
currently also shopping around for their own indie label, with Roulette, Imperial, Gee, Rama, 
Tico, Liberty and even Mercury among the companies in their collective sights.\(^{31}\) 

Negotiations between Fox and Roulette broke down in early 1958 after the studio accused the 
label of botching the promotion of Jimmie Rodgers’ title track from *The Long Hot Summer* 
(the label instead promoted the flipside, for which they owned the publishing).\(^{32}\) As an 
alternative, the studio launched 20\(^{th}\) Century Records in April. Although new president Henry 
Onorati claimed that a studio label was ‘the only way to get around the increasingly serious 
problem of every star in a musical being under contract to a different recording firm’, the fact 
that 20\(^{th}\) Century’s first signings were teen acts Eddie Moore, the Royal Jacks and the Locos, 
and that the label would be handled (like United Artists Records) by independent distributors, 
indicates that the studio had one eye firmly on the youth market.\(^{33}\)

Meanwhile, though Music Publishers’ Holding Corp president Hermann Starr had 
claimed publicly that Warner Bros. were ‘definitely not interested in getting into the record 
business’,\(^{34}\) Jack Warner had been particularly impressed by a recent article in *Variety* 
reporting that the disc business had doubled in size in three years. After a failed attempt to 
purchase Imperial—home of Fats Domino and Ricky Nelson—Warner approached former 
Columbia head James B. Conkling and asked him how much it would cost to start a record 
label. With Conkling estimating a price of $2,000,000, Jack launched Warner Bros. Records, 
Inc. on March 10\(^{th}\), 1958, naming Conkling president.\(^{35}\) In effect, this was Jack’s first major 
business move since the 1956 coup during which he wrested control of the studio from his 
surviving brothers Harry and Albert. Conkling stressed that the firm was not entering the 
business ‘simply to record motion picture sound tracks’ (sic), as Warner Bros. had ‘made a 
very heavy investment to insure a prominent position in the disk business’.\(^{36}\)
Finally, in April 1958, Columbia Pictures, after being the latest Hollywood suitor spurned by Imperial, announced the formation of their own label, with plans to cover the jazz, pop and rock and roll markets (scouts had already been dispatched to Nashville to hunt for rockabilly talent). With the name Columbia Records of course already taken, the studio settled upon Colpix Records, and launched the label in July. More so than the other studio labels, Warner Bros. and Columbia quickly set about finding ways to capitalize on cross-media potentialities. Warner Bros. Records released its first discs at the end of August, in the process harkening back to the era during which it revolutionised motion pictures with the introduction of Vitaphone: ‘Warner Bros., which pioneered the use of sound in motion pictures, is determined to continue this tradition in the recording field (through) Vitaphonic High Fidelity and Vitaphonic Stereo’. But the studio misjudged the market: among this initial batch of releases were, strangely enough, a re-recording of the score from the 1943 Paramount film *For Whom the Bell Tolls* by the Warner Bros. Studio Orchestra (credited as the Ray Heindorf Orchestra), and a spoken word LP, *You’re My Girl: Romantic Reflections by Jack Webb*, by the star of television’s *Dragnet*. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these discs—as well as all the other early releases by Warner Bros. Records—failed to sell in any significant way.

Columbia, which formed Colpix as a studio division rather than a separate company, planned to take ‘full advantage of its major studio parent and its TV film production sister, Screen Gems’, and allow their contract stars to display ‘facets of their talents heretofore unknown to the record buying public’. Examples included Kim Novak’s debut as a singer, and releases by the young stars Billy Gray, from Screen Gems’ *Father Knows Best*, and James Darren, soon to star in the Columbia western *Gunman’s Walk*. Darren’s co-star in that film was Tab Hunter, loaned to Columbia by Warner Bros., who himself had already launched a very successful career in pop. Hunter released one of the biggest hits of 1957,
‘Young Love’, a cover of an obscure regional country and western hit by Ric Cartey which both Hunter and Sonny James (on Capitol) took to number one.

**Clean Sounds for Clean Teens: Hollywood Rock and Roll**

To Jack Warner’s apparent chagrin, however, Hunter, who had been a Warner Bros. contract player since 1953, was signed to Dot Records. Warner managed to extract Hunter from his Dot contract—possibly by loaning him to Paramount for *That Kind of Woman* (1959)—but the actor’s first Warner Bros. Records release at the end of 1958, ‘Jealous Heart’, flopped and reached no higher than number 63 on the *Billboard* chart. The label had much more success packaging in-house product the following year with *77 Sunset Strip*, which proved a ratings bonanza on ABC-TV for Warner Bros. Television, and spawned a spin-off hit LP and single that helped sustain the label. The soundtrack album spent six months on the LP chart, peaking at number three, while the single, ‘Kookie, Kookie (Lend Me Your Comb)’, by two of the show’s stars, Edd Byrnes and Connie Stevens, became a sizeable pop hit, peaking at number four. The single gave Warner Bros. a foothold in pop, and they attempted to buttress that position with the signings of doo wop groups the Chateaus and the Marquees, and rockabilly performers Troyce Key, Johnny Carroll, Bob Luman, and even, in 1960, Bill Haley. But again, none of these artists sold well.

Despite their corporate ties, there continued to be very little understanding by either the music or film industries as to how to profit from both markets simultaneously. A form of negotiation was, however, located within what Hill & Range Publishing head Jean Aberbach once referred to as ‘the process known as Elvis Presley’. The Presley phenomenon, plus the relative success of Hunter and Byrnes, clued not only Warner Bros. but several of the other majors and studio labels as to how best to capitalise on rock and roll. The solution might as well have been lifted from a Sam Katzman movie: towards the end of *Rock Around the
Clock, as the new musical style begins to achieve broad commercial success, music business manager Steve Hollis reveals to agent Corinne Talbot his plans to exploit the fad: ‘For weeks I’ve had other bands and vocal groups making up rock and roll arrangements’. It is a telling line, as it accurately predicts the mainstream music industry’s reaction to the rise of the teen market.

In 1957, the majority of rock and roll artists were still emerging on independent labels such as Imperial, Sun, Chess and Specialty. After having little success locating more unpolished regional talents like Presley, Fats Domino, Little Richard, Chuck Berry and Jerry Lee Lewis, the major labels, and the more savvy East Coast independents, attempted to invent their own rock and roll performers, based on the modified Elvis package created by Hal Wallis and Tom Parker. In this venture they would be aided by three powerful institutions: Tin Pan Alley, television, and, of course, Hollywood. Charlie Gillett shows that by 1957 record labels had discovered they could employ traditional production techniques to recreate rock and roll, as written scores performed by skilled session musicians began to replace spontaneous ‘head’ arrangements. In addition, the self-composed hits of the R&B and early rock and roll era—and thus much regional variation—began to disappear from the charts, replaced by Tin Pan Alley fare. The ‘Elvis Presley sound’ simulacrum created by Twentieth Century-Fox, Paramount, and MGM studio orchestra musicians for the soundtracks of his films in 1956 and 1957 had been a key factor in this standardisation of rock and roll.

The smoother musical aesthetic Hollywood and RCA developed for Presley allowed the entertainment industry to copy it, and thus promote conventional teen idols—film and television stars such as Hunter, Byrnes and Darren—as rock and roll performers. In turn the Elvis model aided burgeoning recording stars such as Paul Anka, Tommy Sands, Fabian and Frankie Avalon to also move more freely between mediums. Thomas Doherty is one of the
few scholars to place this aspect of the rock and roll era into a context that acknowledges the emergence of a meta-entertainment industry. Rather than a ‘spendidly-isolated’ music business that somehow conducted its business oblivious to patterns emerging elsewhere in competing leisure industries, the ‘creation and exploitation of the “clean teen idols” offer the best evidence of the entertainment industry’s newly acquired sophistication in handling the teen marketplace’.47

The term ‘rock and roll’ had, by 1957, been adapted by the record business to include virtually any record that featured a shuffle or triplets rhythm pattern with a steady backbeat, played in a twelve bar or I, VI, IV, V structure, and featuring some amount of electric guitar or saxophone. For example, Dot Records arranger Billy Vaughn applied all he had learned adapting several Fats Domino R&B hits for Pat Boone on Boone’s recording of the 1931 standard ‘Love Letters in the Sand’, the second biggest record of 1957. In March 1958, *Billboard* reported that ‘less than half’ of the top 50 best selling records were ‘what would be called out-and-out rock and roll’, their places having been taken by a slew of pop ballads.48 Not surprisingly, a poll taken in July 1957, as ‘Love Letters in the Sand’ continued its six week stay at number one, indicated an audience trend towards ‘ballads and sweet music’.49

This system of recording standards in a rock and roll ballad style—which was aided by similar recordings of Tin Pan Alley standards by black performers such as Domino and the Platters50—also enabled the studios’ own ASCAP publishing houses to regain some ground. By streamlining rock and roll production standards and tapping into the Hollywood star system, by the late 1950s the Hollywood/Tin Pan Alley nexus would begin to reclaim power over popular music.

Post-Presley ‘clean teen’ pop performers such as Hunter, Darren, Avalon, Fabian, Anka, and Sands—all of whom were regularly appearing on film by 1960—have traditionally served as the *bête noir* of rock critics, being seen as evidence of the ‘creative doldrums in
rock ‘n’ roll, a “treacle period” marking an audible decline in the music’s originality, vitality, and volume’. Guralnick writes that in the late 1950s ‘rock ‘n’ roll died (and) in its place came a new all-synthetic product….the Philadelphia era of rock’. Doc Pomus, a Hill & Range songwriter who wrote for Ray Charles, the Drifters and Presley, as well Anka, Fabian, Bobby Darin, Bobby Rydell, Bobby Vinton and Connie Francis, labelled the clean teen singers ‘Philadelphia’s beautiful singing and non-singing men’. Both Guralnick and Pomus highlight the fact that many of these stars were photogenic amateurs who emerged from the East Coast multimedia hub assembled by Dick Clark.

On ABC-TV Clark hosted the nationally-broadcast and hugely influential dance music program *American Bandstand*, the first television show to prove to Madison Avenue that teens, with on average $500 in annual disposable income, could be a boon to more than just the record industry. A canny entrepreneur, Clark also had stakes in the music business, specifically the Jamie and Swan record labels and Sea-Lark Publishing. He co-owned Jamie with Harold Lipsius and Harry Finfer, who ran Universal Distributors, ‘a giant distributing depot powerful enough to own its own record labels, and closely linked to *American Bandstand*’. Such was Clark’s perceived influence on the teen market that the entertainment industry looked to him not only to recommend talent, but to serve as the trustworthy adult face of the rock and roll business; he also, like Alan Freed before him, performed this function metaphorically on film, starring in Columbia’s *Because They’re Young* (1960) as a school teacher determined to help troubled teens. Unlike Presley, Clark’s (and Hollywood’s) clean teen singers were not rock and rollers tamed by the pop machinery, but rather white romantic idols (Chancellor promoted Fabian as ‘America’s boyfriend’) whose recorded output evinced just enough of the stylistic elements of contemporary rock and roll songwriting and production styles for it to be marketed as such by their labels.
As Clark scoured ‘the South Philly neighbourhoods near the Bandstand studios in search of young Italian crooners’, television functioned as a proving ground for the record labels, especially those with links to other media. This enabled the entertainment industries to adapt the star system to rock and roll, thus spawning the non-threatening ‘pretty boy’ phase of pop that so irks rock critics. In regard to chart success, it proved to be a successful system: for example, while simultaneously appearing in features, American Bandstand regulars Avalon and Fabian had several top ten hits (for Chancellor, a Philadelphia label distributed by ABC-Paramount), as did Hunter, Darren, Sands, and Anka. This success also enabled ASCAP to reclaim power: labels needed song material to sustain the careers of the teen idols, and the Hollywood version of rock and roll proved much easier for Tin Pan Alley to replicate than the original hybrid R&B-meets-C&W style. As a result, Philadelphia became the new hub of the music trade, with an influx of publishers flocking to the Bandstand studio, prompting Billboard to refer to the local train station as ‘an annex to the Brill Building’.

Younger members of the ‘old line publishing houses’ thus helped ensure that these ‘youngsters from the pop stream’s factories put an average of five singles a year on the pop charts during their brief heyday, which lasted from the late fifties to the early sixties’. However, despite this pop music success, attempts to cultivate film and TV-friendly pop stars reaped relatively limited cross-media dividends: while the labels and the film studios acted in concert, few of these artists signed film and recording contracts with the same company. An early exception was one of few female clean teens, Connie Francis, whose career serves in many ways as the original exemplar of corporate pop synergy, pointing the way to Hollywood’s future.
Francis was signed to MGM both as a singer and an actress, and managed to sustain careers in both fields until the mid-1960s. She did particularly well for the label in that she was the first female act to accrue two consecutive number ones, and in 1960 ranked second only to Presley as a singles artist. During the early 1960s she also featured in, and appeared on the soundtracks of, a string of MGM teen musicals, including *Where the Boys Are* (1960).

In addition Francis was at the heart of another key aspect of the late-1950s shift from independent rock and roll to corporate pop. BMI publishers, keen to ensure that ASCAP did not steal the youth market from them with the aid of the clean teens, also began to adapt traditional Tin Pan Alley methods to rock and roll composition. Francis’s success on record helped establish one such BMI publisher, the newly-formed Aldon Music, the firm which supplied much of her material.

After achieving a top five hit in 1958 with yet another rock ballad arrangement of a standard (‘Who’s Sorry Now’, written in 1923), Francis began casting around for a follow-up. She found the young songwriting team Neil Sedaka and Howard Greenfield, and had a hit with their ‘Stupid Cupid’. Sedaka and Greenfield were signed to Aldon, a firm which also supplied Dick Clark’s stable with material. Aldon had been formed in 1958 by Al Nevins (guitarist in the RCA Victor easy listening combo the Three Suns) and 21 year-old Don Kirshner. According to Mark Ribowsky,

Kirshner was pathologically ambitious; a failure as a songwriter in the fifties, he drew vicarious satisfaction from owning outright the best young songwriters.... More than anyone else Kirshner...made rock and roll a profession rather than just a vehicle of rebellion.

To do so, Kirshner assembled a ‘cadre of young writers and composers’, including Sedaka, Paul Anka, and Gerry Goffin and Carol King, who ‘recast the teen fantasies and preoccupations pioneered by Chuck Berry into smartly-styled—if sometimes overtly slick—
Kirshner had little interest in publishing ‘authentic’ rock and roll, believing rather
that his mission was to create stars. Likewise, although the songwriters who worked for him
were mostly teenage rock and roll fans themselves, they were also ‘eager to update the Great
American Songbook by adapting it to changing times. [...] The music they would write owed
less to Big Joe Turner than to Irving Berlin’. Thanks to Francis and the teen idols, Aldon
quickly became the chief competition for the dominant teen publisher, Hill & Range.

Aldon has become closely associated with the ‘Brill Building era’ of 1960s teenage
pop (although their offices were actually across the street, at 1650 Broadway). Music
publishers had been located in the Brill Building since the 1930s (Irving Berlin and Cole
Porter had offices there), and by the early 1960s over 150 music companies were based in the
building. Despite its longer history, the name the Brill Building readily evokes a specific
period, the teen idol and girl group phases of the early 1960s. For Emerson,

The music publishers and songwriters who worked there routinized the creation and production of rock ‘n’ roll.
They smoothed the rough edges of black R&B performers to help them appeal to a white audience, and they roughed
up white performers just enough to create a tousled titillation. Reining in the unruliness of rock ‘n’ roll made it
safe for teenage America and profitable in the mass marketplace.

Aldon and other BMI and ASCAP firms have thus been seen as key to the domestication of
rock and roll at the end of the 1950s, in that they permitted the Hollywood/Tin Pan Alley
structure to reclaim power from ‘semiliterate hillbillies and black ex-dishwashers on upstart
record labels’ and once again reaping the rewards due them from their heavy investment in
traditional pop. By April 1958 Billboard could report that the major labels were slowly
reclaiming the disc market from the indies. They noted, however, that the majors had
achieved this turnaround by adopting ‘indie tactics’, that is by either signing the most
successful of the independent acts or by buying the labels they recorded for.
Among the biggest selling hits of 1958 were pop ballads by Anka (‘Put Your Head on My Shoulder’ and ‘Puppy Love’) and Avalon (‘Venus’). Only three regional rock and roll acts managed to survive the clean teens’ chart onslaught, Presley, Fats Domino, and the Everly Brothers. Along with the mainstream music industry, Hollywood and television appropriated the term ‘rock and roll’ in order to effectively ‘rebrand’ traditional pop music, and by the end of the 1950s the only aspect of the rock and roll style that survived on the charts was the doo wop-influenced ballad, played in slow triplets. Thus the only rock and roll artists still registering hits by 1959 were those who could comfortably record in the pop ballad style.

The doo-wop influenced ballad survived the industry clean-up of rock and roll because it was non-threatening, and retained enough traditional formal pop elements that it was easily reproduced by Tin Pan Alley; unlike the faster and louder styles of rock and roll, ballads didn’t require special skills or regional nuance, and there were no awkward associations with ‘authenticity’. The style suited Presley, Domino (who arguably originated it), and the Everly Brothers, a Nashville-based country vocal duo, and all three acts remained on the charts until the early 1960s. Others like Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis and Carl Perkins recorded ballads also, but found it difficult to fashion them into smooth pop: they couldn’t hide their ‘regionality’ and their ballads were too ‘bluesy’, too ‘country’, or too raw.76 Thus the ‘schlock rock’ and ‘commercially viable ersatz rock ‘n’ roll’ of Paul Anka, Fabian, Bobby Darin, Neil Sedaka and Frankie Avalon edged out the likes of Berry, Perkins and Lewis between 1958 and 1963.77

Warner Bros. and the LP Market

One act in particular, the Everly Brothers, did manage to bridge the gap between regional authenticity and the demands of the pop ballad. Signed to the small New York label
Cadence, the Everly Brothers were among the most successful acts of the early rock and roll era, with seven top ten singles and three number ones, the latter feat only bested (although quite substantially) by Presley’s eleven number one hits. Among these number one hits was the country-tinged ballad ‘All I Have to Do Is Dream’, one of the biggest selling discs of 1958. All told, between 1956 and 1959, the Everly Brothers were the third most successful rock and roll act of regional origin, after Presley (with 19 top ten hits) and Fats Domino (with ten).

By early 1960 the brothers were embroiled in a royalty dispute with Cadence, with whom their contract was due to expire that February. Billboard reported that RCA Victor, United Artists and Warner Bros. were all considering the ten year, $1,000,000 deal proffered by the duo’s manager Wesley Rose (part of the Acuff-Rose country and western publishing empire). While Don and Phil Everly were keen to work with RCA’s Chet Atkins, Rose was swayed by the feature film possibilities opened up by the other two firms. Warner Bros. at first baulked at the $1,000,000 price tag. Not only had their track record with rock and roll been unimpressive, but Jack Warner was already weighing up whether or not to ‘cut his losses and shut down this whole damned Vitaphonic failure’. The floundering enterprise had lost $2,000,000 for the studio since its inception, but James Conkling convinced Warner to reconsider and a compromise was reached: the label would close its expensive distribution arm (based in five key cities) and instead switch to a network of 34 independent distributors. This not only freed up enough money to allow Conkling to sign the Everly Brothers to a $750,000 ten year contract, but the access to independent distribution channels enabled Warner Bros. Records to more effectively target the pop market at the ground level, and not rely on their own, musically inexperienced, staff.

Conkling announced that the signing of the Everly Brothers heralded a ‘new development phase’ for the label, in which they would concentrate on producing ‘current hot
sellers’ rather than continue attempting to build a catalogue—the industry term for discs that sold over lengthy periods of time—with 12 to 16 LP releases per month.\textsuperscript{84} By the end of 1960, the Everly Brothers had not only registered a huge pop hit with ‘Cathy’s Clown’, which remained at number one for five weeks, but, ironically, the duo had given Warner Bros. Records their first hit LPs in the teen pop market with \textit{It’s Everly Time} and \textit{A Date with the Everly Brothers}. These latter successes were somewhat of a bonus, as industry lore still maintained that teens did not buy rock and roll albums other than those by Elvis Presley.

This shift to a focus on the teen market was in part a response to the label’s failure to establish itself in the adult LP market with a catalogue of easy listening albums. In addition, Warner Bros. Records had hardly proven an outstanding success in the soundtrack market. One of the ironies of the rush by studios to enter the soundtrack market with their own labels in 1957 was the fact that at the same time the audience for Hollywood musicals was slowly vanishing. With musicals costing upwards of $3,000,000 to produce—a figure which necessitated that each film gross $6,000,000 to break even—and the issue of soundtrack rights becoming increasingly complicated, few were the film producers prepared to take the risk.\textsuperscript{85} By the end of 1963, Warner Bros. Records had released just one significant original soundtrack LP, for its parent studio’s \textit{The Music Man} (1962), the only soundtrack to gross over $1,000,000 for the label. Warner Bros. was not alone among studio labels in its relative failure to commercially synergise film and music; indeed it was actually the most successful of its peers in the soundtrack market, with no other studio record company managing to reach the $1,000,000 mark until MGM hit with the \textit{Doctor Zhivago} LP in 1966.\textsuperscript{86}

Part of the problem was that the recording rights to hit musicals were usually tied up early—often before the work had even debuted on Broadway—by RCA Victor, Columbia and Capitol, who contributed to production budgets in order to secure an LP release.\textsuperscript{87} In addition, often the lure of a huge cash advance was hard for a studio to turn down: Twentieth
Century-Fox, whose label was alone in choosing to concentrate on soundtracks rather than pop, was seen to be taking a risk by turning down bids from the majors of up to $500,000 for the rights to *Cleopatra* so as to release the tie-in LP itself.\textsuperscript{88} Warner Bros. Records managed to beat the majors to the rights for *The Music Man*, but the soundtrack for one of Warner Bros. most successful musicals, *My Fair Lady* (1964), was a huge hit for Columbia Records.\textsuperscript{89} While the studio could take solace in the fact that a hit soundtrack LP provided an extra $1,000,000 in promotion for a movie no matter which label released it,\textsuperscript{90} sustained success in the soundtrack market proved elusive for their record division.

Fortunately, the popularity of the Everly Brothers in the pop market throughout 1960 and 1961 helped establish the label, as did success an unexpected—and hitherto largely unrecognised—field, comedy albums. Comedians Bob Newhart and Alan Sherman brought Warner Bros. four number one albums between them in the early 1960s, and ‘kept the label afloat’.\textsuperscript{91} Newhart was especially successful, with *The Button-Down Mind of Bob Newhart* becoming the top-selling LP for three months in 1960, and remaining in the chart for two years, an achievement which the follow up LP, *The Button-Down Mind Strikes Back!*, came close to matching.\textsuperscript{92} But, with comedy records still largely an unknown entity within the industry, and with the Everly Brothers chart career already stalled by mid-1962 thanks to a legal dispute with Acuff-Rose,\textsuperscript{93} the still-fledgling Warner Bros. Records needed to find consistency in the pop music market.

That stability came as the label found itself at the forefront of an emerging change in teenage music consumption patterns—the growth of the folk album market. The major labels had been hoping for years that the teenaged audience for rock and roll singles would eventually mature into more serious album collectors, once the independent labels had effectively conditioned them into being habitual music consumers. In 1958 *Variety* had claimed that major record labels maintained the assumption that,
...the r’n’r platters are serving as an incubation for future packaged goods customers. The passion for r’n’r, they say, will diminish as the teeners grow older but it will have conditioned them to music and record-buying which will rub off on their pop albums, jazz and classical product. So it’s the left-field labels, they contend, with their quick-buck clicks that are building an audience for the major’s long-buck album catalog.\(^9^4\)

Presley and the Everly Brothers had indicated that such a transition was possible, but a new folk trio, Peter, Paul and Mary, who signed to Warner Bros. in 1962, soon began to reveal the true potential of the youth LP market. According to Gillett,

> As albums became an increasingly important factor...folk was clearly an attractive proposition...folk performers played an important role in enabling the major companies to recover their position in the pop market, and some of them became the cornerstones of their companies.\(^9^5\)

By the early 1960s, all of the major labels had at least one folk performer in their rosters. The commercial crossover success of Peter, Paul and Mary would have a profound effect on the music business in the 1960s: perhaps most importantly, the folk trio would become a successful album act, and help bridge the divide between the adult LP audience and the teen singles audience, in the process instructing their record label on how to market to both audiences simultaneously.

Their debut album, *Peter, Paul and Mary*, knocked Columbia’s *West Side Story* soundtrack off the number one spot on the *Billboard* chart in October 1962, remaining there for a month (before being replaced by another Warner Bros. comedy album, ironically Alan Sherman’s *My Son, the Folk Singer*). After the single ‘Puff the Magic Dragon’ reached number two in early 1963, in July that year Peter, Paul and Mary released ‘Blowin’ in the Wind’ (‘a sailor’s lament’, according to *Billboard*\(^9^6\), which sold an unprecedented—for a folk music single at least—300,000 copies in its first week of release, on its way to over one million copies.\(^9^7\) This proved an added boost for Warner Bros. in that the song’s composer,
Bob Dylan, was signed to Witmark publishing. While Sherman continued to match the folk group’s success with his single ‘Hello Muddah, Hello Faddah’, their third LP, *In the Wind* (which included two further Dylan songs, including ‘Don’t Think Twice, It’s All Right’, a top ten hit) sold over one million copies. Together, the Everlys, Newhart, Sherman, Peter, Paul and Mary and *The Music Man* rescued the label from insolvency.\(^98\)

At the 1963 Warner Bros. Records sales convention, new president Mike Maitland (James Conkling had retired in 1961)\(^99\) stressed the importance of independent distribution in their new-found success, which enabled the label to ‘control’ their market.\(^100\) At the same conference Maitland confirmed trade rumours that his parent studio was negotiating to purchase Essex Productions, the film company owned by Frank Sinatra.\(^101\) Sinatra’s company had a struggling music subsidiary, Reprise Records—both Sinatra and Dean Martin were signed to it—which the studio also bought for $1,500,000. On September 3 1963, the two labels were merged as Warner Bros.-Reprise Records, immediately making the concern the fourth largest record company in the US (leapfrogging Decca, MGM, Mercury, ABC-Paramount, Liberty, Roulette and Dot),\(^102\) with Sinatra being given a one-third interest.\(^103\)

Although Jack Warner had in truth only offered to buy the singer’s ailing record label as added incentive in wooing Sinatra into a four picture deal, Reprise and its head Mo Ostin would soon go on to transform Warner Bros. Records into the biggest record label in the world. Along the way this would prove the salvation of the film studio and, in many ways, Hollywood itself.
‘I just want to say what an honour it is to be able to introduce the Grateful Dead and its music to the world’.
- Joe Smith, Warner-Reprise

‘I just want to say what an honour it is for The Grateful Dead to introduce Warner Brothers Records to the world’.
- Jerry Garcia

In November 1966, Jack Warner sold his controlling interest in the family business. In a deal that would invoke memories within the industry of Decca’s takeover of Universal over a decade before, Jack sold his 1.6 million shares to little-known Canadian syndication company Seven Arts Productions, for $32,000,000 (although he himself would remain at the studio in some capacity until the end of the 1960s). The new company, Warner-Seven Arts, would give the new Warner Bros.-Reprise-Loma regime of Joe Smith and Mo Ostin the leeway to shift the record company’s focus away from the middle-of-the-road pop market, and direct its attentions toward the unfamiliar world of the emerging post-Beatles rock underground. Reprise had initiated this switch in 1964, in the wake of the Beatles-sparked surge in US disc sales, following a relatively quiet fiscal year for the industry (only two singles had managed to sell over one million copies in 1963). A crucial outcome of the Beatles’ commercial success in the US was that they restimulated the entire music economy. As a result of the British Invasion, ‘more people started buying more records, effectively expanding the basic pop music market to reclaim an audience which thought it had “grown out of” pop music’. As George R. Marek, general manager of RCA Victor—a label with no connection to the British group—noted, ‘A phenomenon like the Beatles helps bring people into record stores’.

But who those people were was now more important than ever before. Reprise merchandising director Joel Friedman announced that the days of a record company attempting to maintain broad representation across markets with releases in the ‘piano, polka
and Latin fields’ were over, revealing that Reprise intended to become a more ‘realistically nimble’ and ‘contemporary’ record label, more aggressively targeting the teen market at the expense of adult LP catalogue items. Noting that over 50 percent of LPs on the charts were now teen-oriented albums, Friedman stressed that ‘companies like ours can’t afford the luxury of indulging in products of this type. We will attempt to get even more contemporary in the future’.  

Reprise’s first move in this direction was to negotiate a local deal with their UK distributor Pye Records. This gave Warner-Reprise access to British pop acts such as Petula Clark, Sandi Shaw and Donovan, as well one of the most successful of the new British rock groups, the Kinks, whose UK number one ‘You Really Got Me’ became a US top five hit for Reprise in December 1964. Although raucous, long-haired rock performers such as the Kinks were far removed from the ‘Ratpack cool’ of Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin (or the suit-and-tie folk of Peter Paul and Mary and the wholesome pop of the Everly Brothers), Warner Bros.-Reprise, by being among the first US labels to respond to Capitol’s unprecedented success with the Beatles, cannily established itself as an emerging rock label at a crucial juncture in record industry history. 

As the rise of electric rock music began to dominate the trade papers (Bob Dylan later wrote, ‘Tin Pan Alley is gone. I put an end to it’)\textsuperscript{111}, the Warner Bros.-Reprise A&R men delved further into the musical underground. By 1967 the catalogues of both labels were stocked with rock acts such as the Electric Prunes, the Grateful Dead, Arlo Guthrie, Van Morrison, Randy Newman, the Fugs, Van Dyke Parks and, via another UK distribution deal, the Jimi Hendrix Experience. According to Fred Goodman, label boss Mo Ostin made a conscious decision in this era of the Beatles and Dylan to re-fashion the record company as a ‘safe-haven’ for the emerging self-styled auteurs of white rock. Ostin’s plan—modelled on Irving Thalberg’s film production system at MGM in the 1930s—was to empower a team of
young in-house rock producers who would also act as A&R representatives, keeping the major label in touch with rapidly changing trends in rock music.\textsuperscript{112}

These ‘house hippies’ were culled from within and around the ‘art rock’ scenes springing up in the Haight-Ashbury district in San Francisco and the Laurel Canyon section of Hollywood. As Goodman notes, the signing of the resolutely uncommercial San Francisco band the Grateful Dead in late 1966 lent an air of credibility to Warner-Reprise, sending a message to the underground announcing that the home of Tab Hunter and the Ratpack was now also receptive to ‘freaks’. In addition, it was the fact that leading underground bands such as the Grateful Dead and the Jefferson Airplane were willing to sign directly to major and Hollywood labels that enabled these record companies to ‘reinforce their hold on the American record industry’.\textsuperscript{113}

Of course industry figures such as Ostin and Smith were not wholly concerned with the aesthetic worth of underground music or issues surrounding ‘rock authenticity’. Their chief interest was commerce, and in the mid-1960s the youth market had evolved into a cash cow as never before. In 1963, despite a slight slump in the pop market, US retail disc sales had reached a record $698,000,000, representing an increase of almost half a billion dollars over the preceding decade. That year’s revenue was earned largely through hit soundtrack LPs sold in the adult market, but in 1964 the Beatles almost single-handedly increased US retail sales by a further $60,000,000,\textsuperscript{114} which continued to grow by an average of $100,000,000 per year throughout 1965 and 1966.\textsuperscript{115} This was done mostly via the expansion of the teen singles market by the likes of the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Herman’s Hermits and other British Invasion groups, while the album market continued to be dominated by original cast LPs culled from Hollywood and Broadway fare, such as \textit{My Fair Lady}, \textit{Hello Dolly!}, \textit{Funny Girl}, and \textit{Fiddler on the Roof}. However, by 1967, as teens began buying albums in the same numbers they once bought singles, and with the LP being a far more
profitable format than the 45, returns became exponentially more impressive: that year, with an additional $214,000,000 in sales, the US record industry became a billion dollar per-year business.

‘Monkee Business is Big Business’: Lessons in Corporate Synergy

As with many aspects of the teen market, the Beatles had helped alter record buying habits considered immutable by the US record business since the early 1950s. In 1964, as we saw in the previous chapter, they dominated the singles charts as no performer had before. While their impact on the LP charts was at first far less comprehensive, it did provide hints that the record industry was on the verge of a sea change. Prior to the mid-1960s, rock and roll had experienced an uneasy relationship with the long-playing 33⅓ record. Of *Billboard*’s top 10 best-selling albums of 1955 to 1959—the peak years of the original rock and roll era—there appears only one rock and roll LP, *Elvis Presley*, which sits at number nine. By way of contrast, there were seven soundtrack albums featured in the top ten.

The top-selling LPs of 1964 were—once again—mostly soundtrack albums and easy listening records, the most successful being the original cast recording of *Hello, Dolly!* (RCA Victor), although Peter, Paul and Mary’s *In the Wind* was the second highest seller of the year. In 1965 the Beatles claimed the second top-selling LP of the year with *Beatles ’65*, a lone—but unprecedented—rock LP in a top five still dominated by soundtrack albums: *Mary Poppins* (at number one, on Disney’s in-house label Vista), *The Sound of Music* (RCA Victor), *My Fair Lady* (Columbia) and *Fiddler on the Roof* (RCA Victor). The pattern continued the following year, with the Beatles’ *Rubber Soul* the only rock LP in the year’s top five sellers (at number four), but in 1967 the teen-oriented pop floodgates appeared to open, with the Monkees (on Colgems) claiming the two biggest selling albums of the year.
This proved to be a turning point for the rock LP. Maturing rock and roll fans, whose interest in popular music was reactivated by the Beatles, could now afford to buy albums, while completist teen and pre-teen fans also began to buy LPs by their favourite pop groups. The Beatles encouraged this change in consumption habits by seeing their albums as repositories for original material, rather than as ‘filler’ laden stop-gaps designed to cash in on the success of their singles.\(^\text{118}\) According to Gillett, the industry had previously assumed that ‘when pop fans grew up, they would settle down to listen to cabaret crooners, but here were adults buying the same albums as teenagers’.\(^\text{119}\)

With the Beatles’ domination of the pop charts showing no signs of abating,\(^\text{120}\) US media outlets had set about devising methods by which to capitalise on the expansion of the youth market. As we have seen with Reprise, one method was to license proven hit-makers from UK labels; another method was to attempt to locate an ‘American Beatles’ by scouting for similar talent (as with Columbia’s the Byrds). The third model saw the industry, as it had done at the height of the rock and roll era, adapting traditional Tin Pan Alley methods for the post-Beatles milieu. The Monkees were not only a harbinger of change in the LP market, but represented the consolidation of the key aspects of commercial synergy that the entertainment industry had been experimenting with since the emergence of Elvis Presley: the fictional rock group were a product of a concerted attempt by the Hollywood/Tin Pan Alley nexus to capitalise on the success of the Beatles, an endeavour in which Aldon’s Don Kirshner played a decisive role.

In April 1963, after grossing $2,500,000 in the previous year from their record label Dimension and their numerous publishing firms spread across ASCAP and BMI, Kirshner and partner Al Nevins sold the entirety of their enterprise to Columbia Pictures. The deal was worth $2,000,000 in cash and Columbia stock, but more importantly Kirshner was named executive vice-president in charge of all Columbia Pictures-Screen Gems publishing and
recording activities, including the Colpix label (Nevins was named a consultant, but soon retired). Kirshner brought with him around 20 contracted composers, including the hit-making teams of Goffin and King and Mann and Weill, and announced plans to ‘groom his writers for Broadway musical scores, Hollywood picture scores and music for TV shows’.

As Columbia Pictures began to show signs of the financial decline that would plague the major studios throughout the 1960s—by 1962 US box office figures had fallen to ‘barely a quarter’ of their 1946 peak—Kirshner’s management of the studio’s music interests gleaned 60 top ten hits, including 10 number ones, while his composers provided theme tunes for hit Screen Gems television programs such as Bewitched, Gidget and I Dream of Jeannie. As reward, in 1964 Kirshner was promoted to president of the Columbia-Screen Gems music division, which in recognition of its new-found importance was moved out from under the shadow of the television department. In June 1966 Kirshner shut down Colpix and launched the Colgems label as a joint venture with RCA Victor (a first for that label) in order to launch the Monkees. As the new label’s creative director, Kirshner manoeuvred himself into the centre of one of the most ground-breaking examples of commercial synergy in entertainment industry history.

In 1965, after the success of A Hard Day’s Night and Help!, independent filmmakers Bob Rafelson and Bert Schneider (son of Columbia Pictures president Abe Schneider) pitched a ‘new-wave style’ situation comedy based around a ‘Beatles-type’ rock group to Screen Gems Television. As he had done previously with teen television stars Paul Petersen and Shelly Fabares, Kirshner ‘grabbed the chance to mastermind the cross-promotional possibilities of TV and Top Forty radio’. After a series of auditions, Rafelson and Schneider (as Raybert Productions) assembled their ‘band’, consisting of four young actors and semi-professional musicians, including Columbia-Screen Gems actor and Colpix recording artist Davy Jones. Despite the fact that the television networks, like the studios, had
previously shown little interest in catering to a teen audience, Screen Gems managed to sell the pilot of *The Monkees* to NBC.

Kirshner scheduled the release of the band’s first single, ‘Last Train to Clarksville’, written by Screen Gems songwriters Tommy Boyce and Bobby Hart, for mid-August, one month in advance of the show’s debut on September 19, 1966. Promising that *The Monkees* would feature two new songs per episode, Kirshner, in conjunction with RCA and NBC, orchestrated an impressive for the time $100,000 publicity and merchandising campaign based around the slogan ‘Monkee business is big business’, targeting radio, television, teen magazines and record retailers, at the heart of which was a ten day national promotional tour by the group members.129 ‘Last Train to Clarksville’ debuted at number 43 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 one week before both the show’s debut and the release of the LP, *The Monkees*. By mid-November both the single and album were the number one records in the US, and were awarded gold discs by the RIAA.130

The Monkees package paid off handsomely for the RCA corporation, through RCA Victor, which earned record-breaking profits in 1966,131 and NBC television; although several NBC affiliates refused to air a program featuring men with long hair, it became a top 20 show with an audience of ten million per week.132 *The Monkees* LP remained high on the charts throughout 1967, and was outsold only by the group’s follow-up album, *More of the Monkees*, which became the biggest selling album of the year, a first for a rock LP. Columbia also did very well through Colgems, Screen Gems publishing and television, and later (albeit to a lesser degree) with the 1968 release of *Head*, a feature film starring the group. In total, the Monkees sold over six million records in the US within 12 months.

Such was the meteoric rise of the group that in early 1967 the band members felt emboldened enough to demand from Kirsher—who exercised full control over the selection and production of songs, and claimed one-third of all the musical profits in return133—the
right to compose and record their own material, after it was revealed publicly that they did not play their own instruments.\textsuperscript{134} A threatened walk-out by the band led to Kirshner’s dismissal from Colgems by Columbia-Screen Gems in February 1967, prompting a $35,500,000 unfair dismissal suit.\textsuperscript{135} Oddly, Kirshner, who was only one year into a ten year contract, remained president of Columbia-Screen Gems Music until July, when he left to form the Kirshner Entertainment Corp.,\textsuperscript{136} finding substantial success in the late 1960s with a similar cross-marketing project, *The Archies*, a cartoon series and recording group.

**Hollywood Labels and the Rock Revolution**

At the same time that the Monkees were debuting on television and on the charts, MGM launched a similar Beatles-style multimedia assault on entertainment with the British group Herman’s Hermits, placing them in the 1966 Sam Katzman-produced film *Hold On* and releasing accompanying singles and a soundtrack album. The film was no box office smash—as we shall see in the next chapter, the youth audience had moved on from cheap rocksploration pictures—but by 1967 Herman’s Hermits had released 13 top ten singles and were the second biggest UK export after the Beatles. MGM also attempted to manoeuvre its way through pop and rock by developing production and distribution deals with independent producers such as Stan Kesler (Sam the Sham & the Pharaohs) and the UK’s Mickie Most (Herman’s Hermits and the Animals), and labels such as Kama Sutra (the Lovin’ Spoonful).\textsuperscript{137}

After the industry ‘feeding frenzy’ that followed the first major rock festival, 1967’s Monterey Pop Festival,\textsuperscript{138} MGM attempted to mimic the success several labels were having with San Francisco bands. They signed a slew of Boston groups (Kangaroo, Beacon Street Union, Eden’s Children, Orpheus and Ultimate Spinach) and unsuccessfully promoted them as the Bosstown Sound, ‘the sound of the now generation’.\textsuperscript{139} Elsewhere MGM did better
with the soundtrack to the 1966 Michelangelo Antonioni MGM film *Blow-Up*, which featured Herbie Hancock as well as UK groups the Yardbirds and the Birds.

MGM also attempted to tap into Columbia’s emerging post-Monterey A&R expertise by headhunting Bob Dylan and Simon and Garfunkel producer, Tom Wilson—and briefly Dylan himself—in 1966. Having purchased jazz label Verve in 1960, MGM also found itself marketing the fruits of that label’s adventurousness in the form of Frank Zappa, the Blues Project, Tim Hardin, Laura Nyro, Janis Ian and Richie Havens. According to Charlie Gillett, one discernable sign of the changing attitudes of the major record labels—or perhaps an indication of their confusion as to what exactly it was that this new youth market desired—was MGM’s release of the overtly non-commercial Tom Wilson-produced debut album by New York’s the Velvet Underground in 1967, which featured songs such as ‘Heroin’, considered untouchable by commercial radio.\(^{140}\)

By this time Warner Bros., Colgems and MGM were not the only studio labels embracing the rock market: as we saw in the previous chapter, United Artists made inroads into the youth audience with *A Hard Day’s Night*, and followed that up by signing the Spencer Davis Group and Australian band the Easybeats. Still, Warner Bros.-Reprise Records remained at the forefront of the studio labels, boosting their earnings by 50 percent in 1966, which represented an 80 percent increase since 1964. All told, music interests earned Warner Bros. over $30,000,000 in 1966, much needed revenue for a film studio heading towards financial crisis.\(^{141}\) Indeed, with similar stories emerging at MGM, United Artists and Columbia Pictures, it would not be long before such figures drew the attention of predatory corporations keen to diversify into an ever-expanding entertainment industry.
**Conclusion**

Rock and roll represented both a symbolic and substantive annexation of the Tin Pan Alley popular music system, and Hollywood spent much of the late 1950s and early 1960s attempting to reconsolidate its power in the music business. Control had shifted to the recording industry and, as one entertainment reporter noted, ‘film companies want in to the record business for more than just pic tie-in reasons. They realise it’s a booming business and they want a share’. By 1958 all of the major studios were associated in some way with a record label. As Jeff Smith notes, film distributors may have known little about marketing records, but they had assumed their well established national and international channels would go a long way toward overcoming what for most small new record companies seemed a formidable barrier to entry. When United Artists established their label in late 1957, they had initially planned to use ‘all the resources at their command’ and draft their field promotion men to act as record pluggers.

But gaining a foothold in the expanding pop market at first proved difficult for the studio labels. Elvis Presley inadvertently provided Hollywood with the means to help them reclaim supremacy within the music industry, power that had gradually eroded after the ASCAP/BMI split and the devaluation of Tin Pan Alley standards. The establishment of in-house record labels enabled film studios to adapt their established marketing models to rock and roll, thus spawning the non-threatening ‘pretty boy’ phase of Tab Hunter, Pat Boone and Fabian that so irks rock critics. By the early 1960s, with RCA Victor, Columbia and Capitol dominating the soundtrack LP market, the now independently-distributed record divisions of United Artists and Warner Bros. began to turn to the pop market. Once the Beatles confirmed that the old systems of musical promotion were unrecoverable, Hollywood, through its music divisions, set about adapting themselves to change. Success in the folk LP market placed
several of the studio labels in a prime position to capitalise on the mid-to-late 1960s explosion of album sales to teens, just as their parent studios faced financial crisis.

Endnotes

1 Schoenfeld 1958, p.213.
2 Ibid, p.213.
3 ASCAP songwriters went as far as to demand that RCA divest themselves of either NBC or RCA Victor, and Columbia do the same with either their network or label (Ibid, p.218).
4 NBC and CBS had fully divested by 1961 (Hall 1961, p.3). ABC retained a 4.5 percent stake until BMI was forced by the Justice Department to sign a consent decree in November 1966 (Schultz 1979, p.531).
5 Also, with the majority of publishing revenue now coming from mechanical and performance royalties, Congress waived the 90 percent personal holding tax rate usually placed on companies that made over 50 percent of their earnings from royalties (Schoenfeld 1958, p.218).
6 If Warner Brothers had held on to their Decca shares it would have complicated, if not prevented, Decca’s purchase of Universal-International.
7 Ackerman 1967a, p.24.
8 Grevatt 1959, p.32.
9 Quoted in Grevatt 1959, p.32.
13 ‘A 20-year history of Decca...’; p.15.
14 ‘A 20-year history of Decca...’; p.15.
16 ‘Decca firsts...’; p.50.
18 Although this gap does include the little-noticed 1956 purchase of the obscure Unique label by a struggling RKO Teleradio (‘RKO-Unique new tag for Unique Disks’ in *The Billboard*, April 28, 1956, p.22).
23 ‘Pic industry in wholesale climb...’; p.28.
24 ‘Agreement on Para’s acquisition of Dot’ *The Billboard*, January 12, 1957, p.13. Another label, ABC-Paramount, was formed in 1955, but it was a product of the 1953 merger between the ABC radio and television network and Paramount’s divested chain of theatres, and thus was not affiliated with the studio itself. ABC-Paramount immediately set about capitalising on ABC’s relationship with Disney (‘Am-Par alters label name to ABC-Param’s’ in *The Billboard*, September 22, 1955, p.11).
25 ‘20th-Fox pact to Boone’ in *The Billboard*, November 24, 1956, p.15.
26 ‘The “non-exclusive” set’ in *Variety*, November 21, 1956, p.43.
28 ‘UA sets up own diskery label’ in *The Billboard*, October 14, 1957, p.20.
31 ‘Pic industry in wholesale climb on indie bandwagon’ in *The Billboard*, November 25, 1957, p.28. *Billboard* would also later suggest that the fact that the new studio labels needed AFM licenses to be able to record musicians served to speed up the peace process during the 1958 strike over television residuals for studio musicians (‘AFM license grants may presage peace’ in *The Billboard*, May 19, 1958, p.40).
32 ‘Roulette gets summer chill’ in *The Billboard*, March 3, 1958, p.3.
34 ‘Pic industry in wholesale climb...’; p.28.
Warner later joked that Conkling must have been looking at the figure upside-down, as the cost was closer to $4,000,000 (‘Trade honours Jim Conkling’ in The Billboard, October 30, 1961, p.4).

Friedman 1958b, p.4. Interestingly, on the same page as Joel Friedman’s Warner Brothers’ report in Billboard was an announcement that he was leaving the publication to become director of merchandising at Warner Brothers Records.

‘H’wood in discs 100% as Col sets July bow’ in Variety, April 9, 1958, p.1.

New label, but no name yet’ in The Billboard, April 28, 1958, p.4.


Some sources suggest that Jack Warner formed the record label primarily in order to claim Hunter back from Dot (see Edwards et al 2004).

Stevens also had a hit in 1960 with ‘Sixteen Reasons’, but her Warner Bros. LPs, such as Connie Stevens Sings the Hank Williams Songbook, did not find an audience.


Smith, J. 1998, pp.33-36. In contrast, in 1958 Loews Inc.’s most profitable arms were its music and broadcast divisions, with MGM Records, The Big Three Music Company and the New York Radio Station WMGM bringing in $5,500,000.‘WB quits own distribution’ in The Billboard, February 8, 1960, p.4.


Zhito 1960, pp.4, 11.

‘Movie diskeries scramble for first call on sound tracks’ in The Billboard, June 9, 1958, pp.4, 10.


Sanjek 1996, p.239.


Other similar examples from among the biggest selling soundtracks LPs of the late 1950s and early 1960s include Oklahoma! (1958, 20th Century-Fox release/Capitol LP), South Pacific (1958, 20th Century-Fox release/RCA LP), as well as, of course, all of Elvis Presley’s soundtracks.


Southall 2003, p.297. Although here again another studio handed Warner Bros. a lesson in cross-promotion: Newhart was cast in Paramount’s Hell is for Heroes (1962) as a soldier who incongruously performs one of the comedian’s well-known telephone monologues.


Escott 2002, p.29.


‘Late single spotlights’ in Billboard, June 22, 1963, p.6.


Rolontz 1963, pp. 1, 6.

‘Trade honours Jim Conkling’, p.4

‘WB distribs view label’s Fall plans’ in Billboard, August 3, 1963, p.3.


‘WB-Reprise potent hit team’ in Billboard, August 24, 1963, p.3.


Quoted in Goodman 1997, p.43.


Loma was a short-lived soul music imprint launched by Warner-Reprise in 1964 which featured Ike and Tina Turner, the Olympics and the Soul Shakers. It was closed in 1969, not long after Warner Bros.-Seven Arts purchased Atlantic Records (Ribowsky 2000, p.219).


‘Disk biz flips after ’63 flop’ in Variety, February 19, 1964, p.49.


‘Reprise gets more disks from Pye’ in Billboard, Oct 24, 1964, p.3.

Quoted in Dylan’s liner notes for his 1997 compilation LP Biograph.


Schoenfeld 1964, p.37.

Gronow 1983, p.66.

There are only four rock and roll LPs in the entire Billboard top 25 best-sellers, all of which are by Presley: Elvis Presley (#9), Loving You (#11), Elvis (#19), and Elvis’ Christmas Album (#24) (Whitburn 1996, p.1037).

The Monkees outsold both Dr. Zhivago (MGM) and The Sound of Music, and the top five was rounded out by The Temptations’ Greatest Hits, on soul-pop label Tamla-Motown.

Indeed, the Beatles camp maintained a policy of not including previously-released material on their albums, of which they averaged two releases per year until 1966. This was not necessarily the case in the US, however, where they appear to have had less control.


Of all the statistics that highlight how the Beatles and the attendant British Invasion altered the landscape of American popular music, it is the singles charts themselves that are the most illuminating. In 1963 only one UK-produced record managed to register on the US charts, compared to 113 US-produced records. By the end of
1964, after ‘I Want to Hold Your Hand’ had lead the charge at the beginning of the year, the total of UK records had risen to 32 records, while the US total had been reduced to 68 (Gillett 1996, p.283).

125 ‘Col-SG ups Don Kirshner’ in *Billboard*, September 12, 1964, pp.1, 16.
126 ‘RCA KO’s tradition—bows outside label’ in *Billboard*, June 25, 1966, p.3.
128 Emerson 2005, p.249.
130 ‘Monkees score a gold parlay’ in *Billboard*, November 5, 1966, p.4. The Record Industry Association of America awarded gold discs for singles which had sold one million copies, and LPs which had achieved $1,000,000 in retail sales.
131 ‘RCA statement points out division’s success’ in *Billboard*, January 7, 1967, p.3. Perhaps one of RCA Victor’s odder attempts to capitalise on the Monkees was the release of a version of the show’s theme song by jazz trumpeter Al Hirt.
132 Baker 1986, p.34.
135 ‘Kirshner & Col.-SG collide—he sues’ in *Billboard*, March 25, 1967, p.3. The case was later settled in Kirshner’s favour with a ‘huge out-of-court settlement’ (Segal 2004, p.C1).
141 ‘WB-Reprise sales up 50% over 1965’ in *Billboard*, January 7, 1967, p.3.
143 Smith, J. 1998, p.34.
144 Schoenfeld 1957, p.62.
Chapter Nine—

‘Hard Lessons’: the Rock Audience, Conglomerate Art Cinema and New Hollywood

What am I going to do with the movie rights of a rock and roll concert?
- Atlantic Records head Ahmet Ertegun on Woodstock

As with all of the major studios Warner Bros. Pictures limped into the mid-1960s, alternating crowd-pleasing hit musicals such as My Fair Lady (1964), and The Great Race (1965) with colossal disasters such as Camelot (1967). However, one surprise ‘adult’ hit, Who’s Afraid of Virginia Wolf? (1966) by first-time director Mike Nichols, would prove to be a harbinger of themes to come. The following year the studio released another pivotal film which signalled a shift in mainstream film form and helped identify an emerging and crucial cinema audience segment. With the help of the growing youth market, Bonnie and Clyde (1967) would become Warner’s second all-time highest grosser after My Fair Lady.

Despite its increasing stake in the record industry, as a producer of films Hollywood was relatively slow to realise the marketing advantages they had gained via direct access to the youth market. While the major studios were able to capitalise on growth in the record industry, as movie producers they seemed oblivious to—or uncomprehending of—the emergence of a younger, and apparently far more particular, audience for film. But Hollywood had a long history of misjudging—if not ignoring—the wants of teens. Until the 1960s Hollywood disregarded statistics indicating the growing spending power of the American teen; the studios had little time for demographic studies and so continued to disregard this all-important consumer group. However, facing financial ruin by the end of that decade, Hollywood finally began to realise it could no longer afford to overlook the baby boom generation of cinemagoers.
At the same time the market for rock and roll had expanded to the point that it began
to dominate the entertainment industry. The move by Hollywood into the record business in
the mid-to-late 1950s had initially been greeted with derision in the music industry, but by the
mid-1960s most of the studio labels had gained ‘solid respect’. In particular, Warner Bros.
was the ‘glamour story of the...movie-owned labels’. After several shaky years, Warner
Bros. Records not only survived but, by tapping into the emerging rock market, grew to a
point that it was essentially keeping its ailing parent studio afloat. And in that it was not
alone: since the 1950s MGM, Columbia, United Artists and Paramount had come to rely on
their music divisions as the movie business continued to slide into a ‘deep recession’ which
resulted in the majors posting collective losses of $600,000,000 by 1970.

Some in Hollywood realised there might be a correlation between the audience for
hits like *Bonnie and Clyde* and *The Graduate* and the growing rock audience. With the
struggling film industry seemingly being sustained by its record divisions, it might seem only
natural that Hollywood would also begin to gear its films toward a younger audience. But the
studios themselves appeared to overlook the connection. It fell to a new breed of filmmakers
who, suddenly empowered in a period of industry uncertainty, began experimenting with,
among other filmic elements, methods by which contemporary sounds could function in place
of the traditional film score.

In doing so, a formal place was carved out for popular music within the film text of
the late 1960s and early 1970s, an aesthetic function above and beyond the oft-acknowledged
commercial operation of the rock music score. Still, with a growing need to cater to an
increasingly segmented audience, the movie soundtrack became one of the vital avenues via
which Hollywood would attempt for the first time to court specific pockets of its once
monolithic audience. This chapter will examine popular music’s impact on film form
throughout the 1960s, but first the industrial milieu that permitted these changes must be addressed.

The Rise of Entertainment Conglomerates in the 1960s

By the end of the 1950s the Decca-Universal combine had not quite lived up to the expectations that arose immediately after its establishment. Under the management of Milton R. Rackmil, the studio posted a modest profit of $2,800,000 in 1957; Decca, which despite its early success with Bill Haley had largely missed the rock and roll boat and had faded as a pop label, fared little better. In February 1959, the powerful talent agency and television production company Music Corporation of America, after having bought the Universal City studio, initiated a takeover of Decca-Universal. An exchange of stock was finally completed in June 1962, and Rackmil was named vice chairman of MCA, under Jules Stein and Lew Wasserman.

The US Justice Department objected to the takeover and launched a civil suit accusing MCA of ‘monopoly practices and restraint of trade’, ordering the agency to immediately divest itself of the record label and film studio. MCA opted instead to sign a consent decree in October 1962 agreeing to cease all talent agency and booking operations. With ownership of Universal, Decca and Revue Television Productions, MCA succeeded where Decca-Universal had failed, becoming ‘the first modern US media conglomerate...a template for the media conglomerates that would rule the New Hollywood, with MCA itself as the dominant industry force for the next half century’.

The processes of entertainment industry consolidation escalated further with the creation of Warner Bros.-Seven Arts in 1966, as larger firms—many not previously involved in entertainment—began accumulating film studios and record labels. That same year 20th Century Records merged with ABC-Paramount, Gulf + Western (up to that time involved in
mining and real estate) purchased Paramount Pictures, and in 1967 insurance and financing conglomerate Transamerica Corp took over United Artists. Conglomerates like Gulf + Western and Transamerica initially appeared to be interested in the prestige of owning a Hollywood studio (despite the fact that it was their financial instability that had made them vulnerable to takeovers in the first place), but soon came to realise that the real value might lie in each studio’s music interests. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the takeover of Warner Bros.-Seven Arts by Kinney National Service Inc in June 1969.

In 1967 and 1968, while the film studio faded, Warner Bros.-Seven Arts had continued to devise methods with which to expand into the growing youth market. One innovation came from Stan Cornyn, Warner Bros. Records’ director of creative services, who addressed the new ‘hippy’ audience directly via a series of highly influential print campaigns. Cornyn turned advertisements for Warner-Reprise releases, in youth publications such as *Rolling Stone* and *Creem*, into ‘chattily hip newsletters to the record buyer which laid out in almost unheard-of honesty the trouble Warners was having in trying to put across its more artistic products, from Van Dyke Parks to Randy Newman’. A 1970 Warner-Reprise advertisement referred to the labels as the ‘Gold Dust Twins’, and featured ‘before’ and ‘after’ shots of president Mike Maitland, illustrating his transformation from a clean-cut ‘establishment’ business executive to a hip record company man, replete with moustache, sideburns, collar-length hair and an open-necked shirt. The ad proclaimed, ‘We all change’ and assured the audience that Warner-Reprise would sign talent ‘no matter what it looks like’. Warner Brothers also led the industry in targeting FM radio, a growing medium whose album-friendly programming—San Francisco’s KMPX-FM had been the first station to play entire LPs in 1967—had become increasingly popular with older teens and college audiences.
The rise of the youth-oriented LP thus progressed unabated, as evinced in the RIAA’s annual awards for gold discs, which had been steadily increasing since 1963 (67 albums registered sales of $1,000,000 or more in 1967). These figures also went some way toward assuaging the last vestiges of ASCAP’s long-standing problems with rock and roll, with the society earning a record high of $30,000,000 in mechanical royalties that year. One label in particular, Atlantic, had capitalised on the rise of the album, leapfrogging most of the competition to market more hit LPs than any other labels except CBS and Capitol. It was thus inevitable in this era of a ‘trend toward bigness, mergers and corporate manoeuvres for diversification’ that ‘non-show business’ corporations would begin to pay closer attention to the success of independent labels like Atlantic in the youth market.

As discussed previously, when the disc market exploded in the mid-1950s, several of the film studio labels attempted to buy directly into the record business by purchasing an independent label. This strategy was revived in 1967 when Warner Bros.-Seven Arts purchased Atlantic. Thanks to its haul of gold records, Atlantic had just managed to double its annual sales figures for the second year in a row. Throughout the 1950s the New York label had mostly concentrated on the R&B market, and by the mid-1960s it was mostly known for its roster of soul performers, including Aretha Franklin, Sam and Dave, Wilson Picket and, courtesy of a distribution deal with Memphis label Stax-Volt, Otis Redding, Carla Thomas and the multi-racial instrumental group Booker T. and the MGs. But Atlantic had also moved into the post-Beatles world of white rock. After making unprecedented inroads into the white audience in the 1950s with R&B releases by Ray Charles, the Drifters and others, the label had established a subsidiary, Atco. Atco became the home of cross-over doo-wop group the Coasters, but label heads Ahmet Ertegun and Jerry Wexler also took advantage of the new imprint to sign their first white acts.
One such performer, the clean teen idol Bobby Darin, also had an eye on a career in the movies, and relocated to Hollywood in the late 1950s. Darin’s recording dates necessitated that Atlantic establish contacts within the Los Angeles industry, and by the 1960s these new contacts included a group of young producers, arrangers and session musicians who worked on many of the ‘girl group’ records produced by Phil Spector and published by Aldon music. One of Spector’s arrangers, Sonny Bono, was half of the folk-rock duo Sonny and Cher, who signed to Atco. The success of Sonny and Cher—‘I Got You Babe’ was a massive success in 1965—established Atlantic-Atco in the rock field, expanding its reach globally. Part of that expansion included tapping into the British music scene, perceived as a chrysalis for the progressively more experimental—yet increasingly commercially successful—side of rock. Knowing that German label Polydor was attempting to establish a distribution company in the UK with their relatively sparse talent roster, Ertegun offered Atlantic’s catalogue in exchange for first option on the US rights for all British-based Polydor acts. The deal would both increase Atlantic’s UK distribution capabilities, and result in the label signing acts such as the Bee Gees and Cream for the US.

In an era of conglomeration, such growth inevitably drew attention. In 1966, ABC-Paramount had unsuccessfully attempted a $4,000,000 takeover of Atlantic. The following year, in October 1967, Wexler and Ertegun’s co-owner brother Nesuhi, having observed the demise of most of their contemporary post-war independent labels, pressured their senior partner into accepting a $17,000,000 offer from Warner-Seven Arts, which included a three-year employment contract for the Atlantic principals. By the time of the sale the Atlantic roster included the likes of Buffalo Springfield, Vanilla Fudge, Young Rascals, and Neil Diamond. Together with the British acts, these artists provided Atlantic-Atco with 40 charting LPs throughout 1967.
Atlantic’s contract permitted the label to keep its own management and distribution structure, while at the same time allowing Warner Bros. Records to further cash in on ‘the commercial boom of the rock underground’. By the late 1960s, rock music was ‘the major cultural diversion’ and, as noted in the previous chapter, in 1968 revenues from record sales exceeded one billion dollars for the first time. Ahmet Ertegun was given ‘an unlimited checkbook’ as Warner-Seven Arts encouraged its labels to attempt to outbid CBS on new unsigned talent. A ‘new breed [of] avant-gardish’ A&R men at Warner-Reprise-Loma embarked on a talent-scouting spree towards the end of 1967, signing 21 artists in a matter of weeks. One such ‘house hippie’ was English A&R man Andy Wickham, who was seen as an ‘ambassador to the counterculture’, having worked for Rolling Stones manager Andrew Loog Oldham at Immediate Records in London. According to Barney Hoskyns, Wickham’s principal duty for Warner ‘was to hang out with musicians in Laurel Canyon and keep his finger firmly on the pulse of the times’. This ‘artist-friendly approach to the music business’ brought the likes of Joni Mitchell, James Taylor, Arlo Guthrie, Gordon Lightfoot, Neil Young and Van Morrison to the label.

Five months after Atlantic was sold, Transamerica bought Liberty Records for $24,000,000. An independent established in Los Angeles in 1955, Liberty had achieved sales of $20,800,000 in 1967, after having purchased Imperial in 1963 and jazz label Blue Note in 1966. It was mostly known for middle-of-the-road artists, but had recently signed the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, the Idle Race and Canned Heat. Liberty was added to United Artists Pictures, while in turn United Artists Records became a division of Liberty. For *Billboard* the sales of Atlantic and Liberty marked the end of the ‘great era’ of the indies which had begun in late 1940s, the culmination of a trend toward independent labels being ‘tied with an umbilical cord to a film company, a broadcaster, or even a non-show business corporation looking for new money-making outlets’.
Warner’s investment in the expanding youth LP market reached fruition in 1968, as the Jimi Hendrix Experience’s *Are You Experienced* (on Reprise) became the first rock LP to be the biggest seller of the year, finally breaking the domination of the soundtrack album. Atlantic came close to matching that success with Cream’s *Disraeli Gears* (on Atco), that year’s third best seller. Indeed, 1968 was the first year that rock dominated *Billboard*’s annual top five albums list, with two of those LPs, ironically, being film soundtracks, with Simon and Garfunkel’s *The Graduate* (Columbia) at number two, and the Beatles’ *Magical Mystery Tour* (Capitol) at number four. Rock’s annexation of the LP charts was fully complete by 1969, with the top five biggest sellers of the year being Iron Butterfly’s *In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida* (Atco), the soundtrack LP to the first ‘rock musical’, *Hair* (RCA), the eponymous debut album by Blood, Sweat And Tears (Columbia), Creedence Clearwater Revival’s *Bayou Country* (Fantasy), and Led Zeppelin’s eponymous debut on Atlantic. The British blues-rock band, who had signed to Atlantic due to an existing relationship with music attorney Steven Weiss (who worked for Led Zeppelin’s manager Peter Grant as well as Atlantic act the Young Rascals) would go on to become Atlantic’s most successful act.

The massive success of LPs by Hendrix, Cream, Iron Butterfly and Led Zeppelin meant that by the end of the 1960s, at the height of ‘market concentration and corporate conglomeration’, Warner Bros. Records joined MGM among the ranks of the Big Five record labels, along with CBS, Capitol, and RCA. Such was Warner-Reprise-Atlantic’s growth during the rock era that together they quadrupled the value of their parent company: in June 1969, less than three years after the Seven Arts deal, Kinney National Services Incorporated bought Warner-Seven Arts for an estimated $400,000,000 (despite the fact that the studio was about to post an after-tax loss of $27,000,000). Kinney National had been formed in 1966 with the merger of the Kinney Parking Company and the National
Cleaning Company, both established in 1932, and by the time it decided to enter the entertainment business the conglomerate also dealt in funeral homes and rental cars.\textsuperscript{41}

Even with the inroads into the rock market made by its record divisions in the late 1960s, Warner-Seven Arts had never adopted a marketing strategy that would enable both the film and music arms of the corporation to synergise popular music and film, and thus fully capitalise on the growth of youth culture. It would take a shift in management focus by Kinney CEO Steven J. Ross for the marketing and distribution innovations being developed by Warner’s labels to filter over to film production. Steve Ross took over with an eye to allowing the various heads of each entertainment division no small amount of leeway in regard to decision making, and the gains made by Kinney’s autonomous labels provided the burgeoning entertainment conglomerate with new direction at the dawn of the 1970s.

**Let it Be: Steve Ross and Label Federation**

The takeover of Warner-Seven Arts by Kinney, approved at a joint shareholder’s meeting in June 1969, involved a byzantine exchange of debentures designed to fend off competing offers from film and television producer Commonwealth United Corp and film distributor National General.\textsuperscript{42} It also included the purchase of Frank Sinatra’s shares in the record division, for which he was paid $22,500,000 and awarded a 20 year consultancy position worth $25,000 annually.\textsuperscript{43} Initially Ross had solely been interested in adding a prestigious film studio to Kinney’s expanding holdings, but during negotiations he came to realise that the movie company was ‘the weak sister in the deal’.\textsuperscript{44} He was informed by securities analysts that “this is a record company. Essentially, all the earnings come from the record business.”\textsuperscript{45} According to Warner-Reprise general manager Joe Smith, “All they were buying that was profitable was the music division because the picture company was a disaster by this point”.\textsuperscript{46} It thus came as no surprise that, had its bid been successful, National
General had intended to immediately sell of the ailing studio and keep the music division. Kinney decided instead to keep the studio and write off its $60,000,000 in losses for tax purposes.

Ross announced that he and his fellow executives would ‘not become directly involved’ in Warner Bros., which would continue to concentrate on ‘medium budget, non-blockbuster pix’. He named Ted Ashley, whose Ashley Famous talent agency Kinney had acquired in 1967, as the new chairman of Warner Bros., who would oversee a ‘new system of autonomous divisions’. According to Joe Smith, Ross remained true to his word:

His philosophy was to let us be.... He would always tell us, “...if you’ve got a problem, you’ll let me know. You don’t have a problem and the company is doing good, just keep going.” That was a great way to run a record company.

For Ahmet Ertegun, the infusion of cash from Kinney ‘raised the ante’ by supplying the necessary funds and peripherals in order for Warner Bros. to undertake unprecedented expansion within the popular music industry and effectively stake a greater claim in the exploding rock music economy. Ertegun stepped up his signings, and by the early 1970s, the Atlantic catalogue included Blind Faith, Emerson, Lake and Palmer, King Crimson, the Allman Brothers, Derek and the Dominos (featuring Eric Clapton), and, arguably the greatest rock prizes of all, Led Zeppelin and the Rolling Stones.

With Ross’s ‘label federation’ concept, Warner became ‘the first record company with a multidivisional organizational structure’. Ross expanded his company’s music interests the following year when, at the suggestion of his various record company heads, Kinney paid $10,000,000 for folk-rock label Elektra Records (which had a pre-existing relationship with Atlantic). Ross stressed that Elektra boss Jac Holzman would retain independence (‘Our philosophy stresses autonomy’), and said there were no plans for Kinney to combine all their labels into one record company, although such a decision was up to the
label heads themselves. By 1970 Kinney controlled over 20 percent of the disc retail market.

While Steve Ross’s label federation concept did indeed allow individual labels to operate in a relatively autonomous manner, in June 1971 Kinney consolidated the international distribution of all their disc interests with the establishment of a new subsidiary, Warner-Elektra-Atlantic Distributing Corp (WEA). By this time the Kinney labels—Warner Bros. Records, Reprise, Atlantic, Atco, Loma, Cotillion, Bang, Dakar, SGC, Stone Flower, Nonesuch and Elektra—had collectively overtaken CBS to dominate the US market. In 1971, Kinney controlled 16.6 percent of *Billboard*’s Hot 100 singles charts (to CBS’s 8.6 percent), and 20.6 percent of the Top 100 LPs (to CBS’s 15.4 percent). In total, record companies associated with film studios—the Kinney labels, MCA, Bell (owned by Columbia Pictures), and MGM—accounted for 30 percent of the overall disc market.

Citing the ‘classic label turnaround’ successes of Kinney’s Warner stable, *Billboard* noted the ‘massive changes [record companies] must put themselves through’ in order to compete in the ever-expanding rock market. That market was by now broad enough to include the soft acoustic sounds of Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, Joni Mitchell and James Taylor as well as the harder rock and heavy guitar riffs of the Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath, all of whom by the early 1970s recorded for Warner Bros. labels. Warner ‘became a role model and others replicated its radically new organizational approach’. Studio labels such as United Artists and MGM hired new—younger—label presidents in order to help modify their staid ‘middle-of-the-road’ (MOR) reputations and compete more effectively in the ‘aggressive rock market’ by signing ‘progressive’ rock acts. *Billboard* argued that, by overthrowing ‘in a very short span of time...many of the established rules of what an entertainment business was supposed to be’, the record industry was showing other mediums the way:
It is certainly no secret now that the recording industry is at the forefront of dealing with these new conditions of the entertainment market. Slowly and painfully, the movies, television, even book publishing, are moving towards the changes necessary to run a big business that sells to a hip mass audience....the recording industry has already learned its hard lessons.  

In early 1972, in recognition of the corporation’s change in direction over the previous two years, Kinney Services, Inc. officially became Warner Communications, Inc., while Kinney Music International was renamed WEA International. During the 1970s Warner Communications, by now also featuring acts such as the Doobie Brothers, Fleetwood Mac and the Eagles (signed to Asylum, which was bought by Warner in November 1972), continued to dominate the record industry. All the time, according to Ahmet Ertegun, ‘Steve Ross never got involved in anything we did. He was just happy to see the results’.  

But Ross’s corporation did give ‘record men like Ertegun the financial resources to compete for expensive established acts like the Rolling Stones’, as ‘cash generated by monster hits’ in one operation paid for those in another and allowed each division to ‘be able to survive the stiffs, thanks to their corporate backing’. For Paul Lopes, the success of Warner Communications’ ‘open system of development and production’ can clearly be seen in the US charts, where Warner labels averaged 24 percent of charting albums in the 1970s (which increased to 30 percent in the 1980s), and 20 percent of singles in the 1970s, reaching 29 percent in the 1980s.  

Rock Festival Crowd/Cinema Audience: Atlantic Records and Woodstock  

Yet, even as Warner Bros. Records began to overshadow CBS in 1970, Warner Bros. Pictures continued to struggle. Ted Ashley’s first task as a movie mogul had been to release a slew of features produced by the previous regime—Sophie’s Place (1969), There Was a Crooked Man, Rabbit, Run, The Ballad of Cable Hogue, Flap, Which Way to the Front and
Start the Revolution Without Me (all 1970)—none of which met with more than mild box office interest. If all of these films had one thing in common, it was that they made few concessions to the youth audience. Only one pre-Kinney property, Performance (1970), addressed this emerging section of the marketplace, via its star, Rolling Stones singer Mick Jagger, who also sang on the soundtrack. After having sat on the shelf at Warner-Seven Arts for two years ‘after an executive’s wife freaked out during an advance screening’, it became a success in art cinemas, but could not find a wider audience.66

Upon appointment Ted Ashley had immediately fired 18 executives from the old management and, borrowing a strategy from the record division, replaced them with a younger team. Among them was his new head of production, 39 year-old John Calley, known in Hollywood as a ‘director friendly’ producer (Calley had just produced Catch-22, Mike Nichols’ follow-up to The Graduate). The new regime was far different from the old, eschewing suits, ties and martinis for jeans, work shirts, long hair and marijuana; in other words, according to one new executive, story editor Jeff Sanford, ‘hippies’.67 Noting the youth audience’s affinity for art cinema, Calley organised lunchtime screenings of films by the likes of Godard, Truffaut, Fellini and Kurosawa for his executives, while one of his first deals involved securing Stanley Kubrick’s A Clockwork Orange (1971). Ashley also brought in Fred Weintraub, a pony-tailed former folk music promoter, as Vice President of Creative Services. Weintraub informed Calley of a film property to which another Kinney subsidiary, Atlantic Records, owned the rights.

In 1969, Paul Marshall, a New York attorney acting on behalf of the Woodstock Music and Arts Festival scheduled for August, approached his friend Ahmet Ertegun offering Atlantic the soundtrack rights to a planned feature film. Assuming that at least three or four of his acts would be involved and would supply a substantial number of the tracks, the Atlantic head agreed to a figure of $75,000. Marshall also offered Ertegun the film rights,
despite the fact that Atlantic had no prior experience in the movie business. Ertegun declined, but Marshall—having had no luck shopping the rights in Hollywood—offered to combine both the film and soundtrack rights for $100,000. Ertegun reluctantly agreed, swayed by the list of talent expected to perform at the event, which the promoters, Woodstock Ventures, had promised was going to include a ‘remarkably high proportion’ of the world’s major rock acts.

Rumours began to circulate that both the Beatles and Bob Dylan would return to public performance during the three day event, while names such as the Doors, and the Rolling Stones were also being bandied about. Ertegun tried to convince Led Zeppelin to appear, but their manager Peter Grant refused. Ultimately, only one Atlantic act, Crosby, Stills, and Nash, would play the festival, in what was only their second public appearance. Jimi Hendrix was on sister label Reprise, but Ertegun had to negotiate with a host of other reluctant labels to gain permission for the likes of the Who (Decca), Joe Cocker (A&M), Canned Heat (Liberty), Jefferson Airplane (RCA), Sly and the Family Stone, and Santana (both Columbia) to appear and on the soundtrack, planned for release on Atlantic’s Cotillion subsidiary. With the film rights in his possession, Ertegun was simultaneously negotiating to have these artists appear in a feature film documentary of the event, to be directed by Michael Wadleigh, a cinematographer who had shot several cinema verite documentaries, as well as the debut feature by Martin Scorsese, *Who’s That Knocking at My Door* (1967). The resulting film, *Woodstock* (1970), combined rock, verite realism, and art cinema touches, such as the ‘technological innovations’ of ‘split-screen mirror imagery and superimposed cinematography’.

Of course, the Woodstock Music and Arts Festival became the defining event of the rock era, attracting an estimated 400,000 rock fans and alerting the world—marketers especially—to the rise of the ‘Woodstock Nation’ counterculture. As it required very little
financial outlay from Warner Bros., John Calley agreed to release the film in March 1970.\textsuperscript{76} *Woodstock* was received rapturously by the youth audience; as one counterculture publication review concluded, there was finally a movie “‘about us’”.\textsuperscript{77} Collecting $14,000,000 in domestic rentals in the 12 months after its release,\textsuperscript{78} the unexpected success of *Woodstock* ultimately helped save Warner Bros. from oblivion. Adding to the coffers was the soundtrack LP, which was awarded a gold disc on advance sales prior to its release in May 1970, despite being the most expensive rock LP ever released, a three-disc package retailing at $14.95. It debuted on the *Billboard* chart at number three, and became the first soundtrack album since *The Graduate* to reach number one, selling one million copies (or three million discs, cassettes and eight-track cartridges) by the end of August, on its way to an eventual two million units.\textsuperscript{79}

**The Youth Audience and the Rise of Art Cinema**

The *Woodstock* soundtrack helped Atlantic increase disc sales by 30 percent throughout 1970, ensuring its most successful year thus far.\textsuperscript{80} But more broadly, in the words of Steve Ross, the entire *Woodstock* package saved Warner Bros. from ruin.\textsuperscript{81} The documentary—the rights to which had cost the company $25,000—made a significant contribution to Warner’s posting of a $28,000,000 profit in 1970, a 98% increase from the previous year’s $300,000. As Ahmet Ertegun later noted, Warner Bros. made much more money from the film and soundtrack than they paid for Atlantic Records itself.\textsuperscript{82} In effect, despite the haphazard nature of its preproduction, *Woodstock* in many ways represented the culmination of Warner’s attempts to nurture a youth market for film by drawing on methodologies developed within the rock music market.

The success of *Woodstock*, particularly on the emerging ‘midnight movie’ circuit, represented the coming together of the rock market and the art cinema audience, which had
been tentatively merging since the success of *The Graduate*. *Variety* conceded that the box office was now being ruled by a youth ‘dictatorship’. Moreover they marvelled at the fact that ‘kids’ now functioned both as consumers and ‘talent’, a fact which the industry itself was becoming increasingly aware.\(^8^3\) The Motion Picture Association of America reported that 65 percent of moviegoers were now less than 25 years of age, while only 15 percent of those over forty still attended the cinema.\(^8^4\) In January 1970 Eugene Picker, head of the National Association of Theatre Owners, proposed a joint meeting between the NATO and the MPAA to discuss how to best accommodate the industry’s ‘most dynamic customer segment’. Picker highlighted the recent success of films such as *The Graduate, Easy Rider, Midnight Cowboy, Goodbye, Columbus* and director Arthur Penn’s follow up to *Bonnie and Clyde, Alice’s Restaurant*. The NATO chief commented that ‘youngsters seem to have grown up with an unparalleled infatuation for the world of movies’, noting the rise of a generation of educated cinephiles, found both in the audience and in the nation’s recently established film courses.\(^8^5\)

All of the films Picker mentioned were accompanied by rock and pop soundtrack albums: *Goodbye, Columbus*, the ninth most successful film of 1969 (grossing over $10,000,000 in North America), featured music by Warner Bros. group the Association. *Alice’s Restaurant* grossed $3,500,000, and was based on the hit song ‘Alice’s Restaurant Massacree’ by Reprise artist (and Woodstock performer) Arlo Guthrie. *Variety* posited explicit links between the rise of the rock audience and the expansion of the youth movie market, drawing parallels between ASCAP’s acquiescence to the youth market in response to the unremitting growth of the by now more successful BMI, by building ‘new catalogues geared to the new-beat generations’.\(^8^6\)

Just as the US ‘rags trade’ had succumbed to the influence of Carnaby Street, *Variety* continued, Hollywood’s traditional methodologies had given way to a host of ‘upstart, short-bankrolled “now” pictures’ that were ‘mopping up’. The biggest grossing film of 1969 was
Fox’s *Hello, Dolly!* (1969), but its exorbitant budget meant that its box office earnings did not cover its production costs.\(^{87}\) Several studios still pressed ahead with ‘costly items’, but the high-profile failures of expensive flops such as Universal’s *The Loves of Isadora* (1968) and *Sweet Charity* (1969) brought sweeping changes to the studios. As with the record business, the shifting marketplace triggered a wave of ‘revolving door’ studio firings and hirings, as Hollywood, groping ‘for the key to the new filmmaking’, recruited more youthful executives, such as the Warner team, United Artists’ new head David Picker (38) and 20th Century Fox’s 35 year-old head of production, Richard D. Zanuck.\(^{88}\)

Accounts of the emergence of the New Hollywood of the late 1960s make clear that these attendant industrial modifications were closely linked to social and cultural changes, changes in audiences, and in audience demand. The post-war audience for film had become, in short, better educated, suburbanised, somewhat more affluent, and, perhaps most importantly, younger.\(^{89}\) At the same time, however, as noted in previous chapters, the cinema audience had contracted by forty-three percent since the 1940s.\(^{90}\) In 1969, 75 percent of all releases failed at the box office, dragging five of the seven major studios into to the red as they suffered collective losses of over $100,000,000.\(^{91}\) Such figures would demand that Hollywood ultimately reassess its sense of the ‘mass’ audience, as well as its dependence on the industrial standardisation associated with classical Hollywood filmmaking. Films like *The Graduate*, *Easy Rider* and *Woodstock* seemed to show the way.

All of these developments would in due course allow new influences such as international art cinema and popular music to increasingly infiltrate the Hollywood film text. Because this transition period is central to the development of the pop film score—most crucially in the destruction of the conventions surrounding the formal separation of the score and source music—and thus the relationship between Hollywood and the record business, it is here necessary to outline some of the central features of this shift, in regard to aesthetics,
economics, and the main players involved. As we have already covered one of these developments—the B-grade rocksploitation film—in some detail, it is time to turn our attention to the youth audience’s relationship with art cinema and, more specifically, art cinema’s influence on the film soundtrack.

‘New Wave Music’: Jean-Luc Godard and the Subversion of Film Music Convention

The new generation of American filmmakers would tap into the youth audience’s burgeoning interest in art cinema in the late 1960s and early 1970s—Francis Ford Coppola, George Lucas, William Friedkin, Martin Scorsese—often cited the influence of the French New Wave, and in particular director Jean-Luc Godard. Michael Temple notes Godard’s ‘central and symbolic role in the philosophy and pedagogy of the moving image’. According to Godard himself, the main contribution made to cinema by the nouvelle vague was its summary deconstruction of the relationship between film image and film sound, as manufactured by Hollywood. The nouvelle vague’s re-configuration of the classical film text was to have a lasting formal impact on Hollywood cinema and, in addition, alter irrevocably most of the conventions associated with the traditional film score.

This study has previously discussed several changes that followed in the wake of the Paramount Decree, including the dismantling of studio departments and the move toward package production. Another crucial outcome was of course the effect on exhibition itself. With the majors’ oligopoly over, space opened up in the 1950s for alternative ‘arthouse’ theatres which catered to ‘an apparent audience desire to view film as akin, under certain circumstances, to the high arts of literature, music, and drama’. Foremost among these new styles of cinema were Italian neo-realist films, and later, the work of the French New Wave, which for the US market were both lumped together under the broad umbrella term ‘art cinema’. European art cinema was defined by formal techniques sometimes far removed from
classical models of industrial Hollywood. The neo-realists, for example, shot on real
locations, used non-professional actors, and reverted to a primitive type of ‘non-style’
consisting of single shots, deep focus and minimal camera movement.

Soon after, a group of self-styled auteurs, including Francois Truffaut, Eric Rohmer
and Godard (all of whom were associated with French film journal Cahiers du Cinema),
began to make their own, highly individualized films in which they toyed with the
conventions of film form. Godard especially was waging a ‘great battle…to free himself from
the traditional narrative forms of cinema that have their source in the unity and continuity of
action of the nineteenth-century novel’. In Pierrot le fou (1965), for example, Godard
intermittently allows certain technical elements to dominate the film—editing one moment,
music the next—undermining conventional narrative to creating a complex, disjointed text
with the potential to alienate an audience that is not prepared to ‘read’ a film.

Just as the jarring jump cuts of A bout de soufflé (1959) alerted the audience to the use
of montage, Godard’s Une femme est une femme (1960) cuts-and-pastes the score in a way
seemingly designed to draw attention to film music practice. Godard subverts the rules of
film scoring to the point of parody: dramatic orchestra stabs punctuate Angela’s (Anna
Karina) request that Alfred (Jean-Paul Belmondo) sweep the floor; lush Romantic strings pop
in and out, seemingly at random; various other styles of music fade up and down, sometimes
obliterating dialogue. Thus the artifice of the score is playfully exposed, just as other
elements of film artifice are here made strange, such as the marionette-like blocking of the
actors and the stilted dialogue.

The introduction of the lightweight Nagra 3 recorder in 1962 encouraged those
filmmakers troubled by the artifice of the film score to experiment with location sound,
ushering in another revolution in French filmmaking. Godard’s first sync-sound film was
Vivre sa vie (1963), which represented the ‘first significant break with the conventional
approach to sound on film’. For Godard, sync-sound proved to be a revelation: cinematic realism was no longer restricted to the realm of the visual and, as ‘Godard’s cinema was the cinema of the researcher…from this point on sound…was as important, if not more important than the image’. Godard seized upon the increased ambiguity allowed by the improved technology, the ability to force the audience to ponder (just as the producers of the early talkie era had worried they might), ‘where is that music coming from?’ Music was thus to become a crucial element in art cinema’s commitment to awakening the ears of the passive audience.

By toying with the partition between synchronised sound and overdubbed sound, Godard deconstructed the previously dialectical relationship between diegetic and nondiegetic music, a defining moment in the history of the film score. As noted previously, classical Hollywood narrative had demarcated the score and source music as separate entities, subject to their own individual rules and conventions: nondiegetic music supported narrative and emotional content, while diegetic music was exclusively grounded in the recreation of reality. So binding were these rules that the studio system allocated the responsibility for source music and the score each to separate production divisions. In Vivre sa vie, direct sound recording permitted Godard to virtually ‘do away with nondiegetic music altogether’, but he continued to treat source music as a raw material to be ‘tampered with [and] carefully integrated into both the film’s aesthetic and narrative structures’. Of Godard’s many celebrated ‘stylistic breakthroughs’, his deconstruction of the diegetic/nondiegetic soundtrack and his exploitation of the expressionistic potential of ‘live’ sound remains largely unacknowledged.

Liberated by sync-sound, Godard began to play with live recording in much the same way as he had experimented with framing, editing and nondiegetic sound. According to Wheeler Winston Dixon, Godard was ‘fascinated by pop music and the concomitant
merchandising of pop music stars’, and so cast French pop singer (or ‘yé-yé girl’)
Chantal Goya as would-be pop star Madeleine in *Masculine-feminine* (1966). Here Godard’s long
takes, jump cuts, and ‘illogical’ camera movement are now accompanied by pop music
recordings that seem to arbitrarily stop and start for no apparent reason other than to draw
attention to their presence and cloud their status within the diegesis. The music is both
narratively justified—the songs are mostly Madeleine’s recordings—and diegetically
accounted for, usually emitting from jukeboxes; yet Godard never grants the audience any
assurance as to the music’s true origin and function. In one café scene, for example, one of
Madeleine’s songs begins to play, then stops abruptly, only to pick up again where it left off.
The initial assumption that the song was emitting from a jukebox has thus completely been
undermined.

Godard’s removal of the formal partition separating source music and the score
subsequently entered the paradigm of possible film technique. This would prove a defining
influence on New Hollywood filmmaking, and beyond. Just as jump-cuts and unsteady
camera movement became standard techniques for action films by the 1990s, so too did
diegetic/nondiegetic musical slippage evolve into film convention. Godard and his
contemporaries inspired a future generation of American auteur filmmakers, themselves
temporarily liberated from the shackles of the production-line studio system, to look for ways
to aesthetically and formally incorporate sound design and music into the film text. With the
need to diegetically justify the presence of music—even a commercial rock song—now
removed, the film soundtrack was suddenly opened up to new aesthetic possibilities.

**The ‘Movie Brats’**

America’s exposure to European art cinema bred not only a ‘cine-literate’ audience
more open to experimentation and narrative ambiguity, but also inspired a new generation
of filmmakers from within that audience. Art cinemas, and the establishment of film schools in the 1960s, created a circle of young American cinephiles with auteur aspirations, such as Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, Peter Bogdanovich, George Lucas and others. These ‘movie brats’ ‘presented themselves as the heirs to the French New Wave’ in the late 1960s and early 1970s.\textsuperscript{105}

In addition to exposing young filmmakers to new formal templates for filmmaking, changes in exhibition also allowed them entrée into the film industry itself. In the 1950s and 1960s, independents such as American International Pictures had moved to fill a market gap and accommodate the teen audience that the major studios were neglecting. Like Sam Katzman’s productions, AIP’s low-budget exploitation films, distributed to independent urban cinemas and drive-ins, consisted of either raw tabloid subject matter married ‘to a rock ‘n’ roll beat’\textsuperscript{106} or, as in their beach film series, ‘the comic and romantic escapades of white suburban teenagers having good clean fun at the beach’ to a pop soundtrack.\textsuperscript{107} Both were teen-friendly formulas that the majors themselves largely avoided.\textsuperscript{108} Producer Sam Arkoff and director Roger Corman, eager to use young talent—that is cheap, non-union talent—turned AIP into a ‘shoot-today-edit-tomorrow low-budget motion picture academy’.\textsuperscript{109}

The most affordable talent could be found in the new film schools of Los Angeles and New York. Arkoff and Corman would eventually give directorial opportunities to the likes of Coppola and Scorsese, and with access to funding and distribution, several of these film buff filmmakers began to break down the borders ‘between the stylised realism of classical Hollywood cinema and the more reflexive concerns of European cinema’.\textsuperscript{110} By the end of the 1960s, the success of other young directors such as Mike Nichols, and producers such as Warren Beatty, led the major studios to also begin recruiting youthful filmmakers. In 1970, Warner’s John Calley approved a development deal for American Zoetrope, a production company established by Coppola, and formed around ‘a bunch of talented former USC and
UCLA students’. Among them was George Lucas, whose Coppola-produced directorial debut, *THX 1138* (1971) Warner subsequently distributed.\(^{111}\)

**Conclusion**

After the emergence of the Beatles, the LP would become the primary cultural and commercial artefact of the rock era, as well as the source of the majority of the recording industry’s revenues. Warner-Reprise, due to their understanding of the album market thanks to years of marketing soundtrack LPs and, most crucially, folk albums, found itself in prime position to take advantage of the youth market’s sudden interest in the long-playing record. The forays into the world of recorded popular music by studios such as Warner Bros., Paramount, MCA, MGM, UA, and Columbia Pictures would ultimately act in concert with changes in the make-up of the audience for film as these companies became components of larger entertainment conglomerates.

At the height of the parallel explosion of the rock music market, producers, writers and directors the same age as the new target audience for cinema began to be enlisted from the ranks of the USC, UCLA, and NYU film schools, where ‘the auteur theory had become institutionalised as part of the curriculum’.\(^{112}\) *The Graduate* and *Easy Rider*, non-musicals that relied heavily on their rock and pop soundtracks to attract an audience, had sent ‘tremors through the industry’.\(^{113}\) With *Woodstock*, Warner Bros. showed that, like United Artists had briefly achieved with the Beatles, cross-marketing success could be achieved under a single corporate umbrella. For a newly-formed entertainment conglomerate such as Warner Communications, still in the throes of mapping out its future, this would prove a revelation. The aesthetic and industrial merging of two distinct aspects of cultural production—commercial cinema and popular music—would infiltrate and alter the conventional
methodologies of entertainment industry practice, giving birth to the era now known as New Hollywood.

Endnotes

1 Atlantic Records: The House That Ahmet Built 2007, written and directed by Susan Steinberg, Atlantic/PBS/Rhino DVD.
2 Jack Warner’s final production.
3 Doherty 2002, p.49.
4 Rolontz 1963, pp.1, 6.
5 Cook 2000, p.3.
6 In May 1967 Billboard reported that, with surveys indicating that ‘a large percentage of the movie-going public is now made up of teenagers’, the ‘motion picture studios are stepping up their raids of the record business’. The article highlighted the rush by film producers to attach pop and rock theme tunes by the likes of the Supremes, the Turtles and the Byrds to their pictures, or hire rock performers such as the Lovin’ Spoonful and Paul McCartney to compose rock-influenced scores (Gross 1967, p.1).
7 Dick 1997, p.159.
8 ‘MCA completes stock deal, acquires Decca’ in Billboard, June 30, 1962, p.6.
10 ‘MCA tells how it’ll work its 3 show business arms’ in Billboard, October 27, 1962, p.4.
12 Smith 2003, p.75.
13 Maltby 2003, p.173.
14 ‘Top quality rock helps labels turn around their profit picture’ in Billboard ‘Rock Now’ Supplement, November 6, 1971, p.RN34. One such print ad for Van Dyke Park’s 1968 LP Song Cycle featured the headline ‘How We Lost $35,509.50 on “The Album of the Year” (Dammit)’ (Tosches 2002, p.238).
17 Ackerman 1967b, p.1.
18 ‘Col. Captures gold disk crown’ in Billboard, January 13, 1968, p.1. CBS had renamed its record division CBS Records in the early 1950s, within which Columbia remained a label.
19 Ackerman & Gross 1967, pp.1, 8.
20 ‘Atl. sales doubled in 1967—8 singles hit gold; albums spurt’ in Billboard, January 6, 1968, p.3.
23 After first releasing a failed single on Reprise (Hoskyns 1996, p.83).
25 Ackerman & Gross 1967, pp.1, 8. The deal involved the two companies exchanging stocks.
26 Through subsidiary Bang.
27 ‘Atl. sales doubled in 1967...’, p.3. There was one immediate setback after the sale to Warner-Seven Arts, when the highly successful Stax label took advantage of a clause in their contract to terminate its distribution deal with Atlantic (weeks later Stax was sold to Gulf + Western, where it languished for several years alongside Dot at Paramount). The blow was lessened somewhat when it was revealed that Stax had inadvertently signed its entire back catalogue over to Atlantic (Bowman 1997, pp.139, 142, 170).
32 Hoskyns 2006, pp.36-37, 48-49.
34 Ackerman & Gross 1967, pp.1, 8.
35 As opposed to the Monkees’ pop LPs. Initially, though, Reprise promoted Hendrix as a soul performer (see advertisement in Billboard, May 6, 1967, p.27).
36 Diana Ross And The Supremes’ Greatest Hits (Motown) was the fifth biggest-seller of 1968.
41 Southall 2003, p.300.
42 Byron 1969a, p.3.
44 Bruck 1994, p.64.
45 Quoted in Goodman 1997, p.139.
47 Byron 1969b, p.3.
49 Grainge 2004, p.351.
51 These ‘peripherals’ included access to a private plane. Later, as incentive to renew their contracts, the
Erteguns were presented with their own soccer team, the New York Cosmos (White 1998, p.A60). Warner
Communications money enticed the likes of Pele (for a reported $7,000,000) and Franz Beckenbauer to play for
the Erteguns in the new North American Soccer League.
53 Ackerman 1970, p.72.
54 ‘Joel Friedman prez of Kinney’s distrib subsid’ in Variety, June 30 1971, p.49.
56 Singles: Kinney (16.6%); MCA (5.1%); Bell (5%), MGM (4.2%). LPs: Kinney (20.6%); MCA (6.2%); Bell
(3.3%). Together the Big Five controlled 27 percent of the singles market and 34.2 percent of the album market.
57 ‘Top quality rock...’, p.RN34.
59 Ibid, p.RN34.
60 Ibid, p.RN34.
61 ‘New co. name change at Kinney’ in Billboard, March 11, 1972, p.78.
63 Seabrook 2003, p.47.
64 Lopes 1992, p.62.
65 Hoskyns 2006, p.50.
66 Verrill 1971, p.27. See Chapter Ten for an analysis of Performance.
68 Ertegun 2001, p.236. Fred Weintraub disputes this version of the story, claiming he secured the rights directly
from the festival’s promoters (Evans & Kingsbury 2009, p.244).
71 Schowalter 2000, p.89.
72 Atlantic Records: The House That Ahmet Built 2007, written and directed by Susan Steinberg,
Atlantic/PBS/Rhino DVD. Only three major artists, Janis Joplin, Creedence Clearwater Revival and the Band,
did not appear in the film or on the record.
73 Scorsese in turn supervised the editing on Woodstock (Wootton 1988, p.355).
74 Schowalter 2000, pp.89-89.
75 Garofalo 2008, pp.211-212.
76 Biskind 1999, p.85.
77 Quoted in Schowalter 2000, p.92.
78 Verrill 1971, p.5.
80 ‘Atl in banner year—sales up 30 percent’, in Billboard, January 9, 1971, p.3.
Kenneth Bowser, Shout! Factory DVD. See also http://fredweintraub.com/Freds_Woodstock.html
83 Green 1970, p.3.
84 Valenti 1970, p.5.
85 Picker 1970, p.5.
Green 1970, p.38. Contemporary ASCAP advertisements featured cartoon drawings of bearded hippies, and boasted that Janis Joplin had recently joined because the society paid their members more ‘dough re mi’ than their competitor (see *Variety*, January 7, 1970, p.147).


Ibid, p.194.


Although the term yé-yé was derived from exuberant shouts of ‘yeah yeah’ by French rock and roll performers (Stewart 2003, p.154), it was actually ‘a lushly orchestrated, bouncy, saccharine style of French pop music which ruled the airwaves in the mid-sixties’ (Dixon 1997, p.67).

Schatz 2002, p.188.


Pye & Myles 1979, p.33.


Biskind 1999, p.31.

Grimes 1986, p.66.

Biskind 1999, pp.92, 101. Although its failure at the box office quickly led to the termination of the Zoetrope deal.


Biskind 1999, p.15.
Chapter Ten—

Sounds of New Hollywood: Consolidating the Compilation Film Score

Contemporary music doesn’t merely tell a story or set a mood; it is the story. It is the mood.
- Zabriskie Point soundtrack liner notes

Two of the biggest stars of “The Graduate” aren’t even seen.
- Columbia Records advertisement, 1968

As this, the final chapter of this study, will show, the textual marriage of film and popular music in the late 1960s came as much, of not more, from aesthetic choices made by a new generation of filmmakers than the machinations of the emerging entertainment conglomerates. Indeed, the subsequent formula for commercial film and music synergy was largely an accidental by-product of the ‘Hollywood Renaissance’, the period of film production during which a financially unsound film industry briefly turned to young, inexperienced directors and producers. The movie brats showed Hollywood that their two greatest assets, movies and music, might serve cinema in a formal capacity beyond the simple marketing equation of ‘youth film plus rock music equals hit’ (although this did prove to be a reasonably successful blueprint). Rather, by drawing on their European art cinema influences, directors such as Lucas and Scorsese showed that rock and pop could find a formal place within film as seemingly unobtrusive and ‘natural’ as the classical orchestral score had been since its inception in the 1930s.

Of course, it did not take the new entertainment conglomerates long to capitalise on the formal innovations wrought by these rock fan directors. From these developments emerged a ‘New Hollywood’, a term which describes the industrial and formal coming together of film and popular music within a culture of entertainment conglomeration. The art
cinema film sound design and scoring techniques that the movie brats borrowed from European directors and modified for Hollywood merged with the commercial environment created by the establishment of huge entertainment conglomerates such as Warner Communications and MCA. This meshing of the aesthetic and the marketable redefined the film score and shaped the sound of New Hollywood.

With the relationship between the burgeoning multimedia conglomerates of the mid-to-late 1960s and the rock/cinema audience now established as the central tenet of New Hollywood, it is time to look more closely at the outcomes for the films of the period. The success of *The Graduate, Easy Rider* and *Woodstock* uncovered the existence of an exploitable niche market, while instilling in Hollywood a faith in the merchandising and promotional capacity of the rock soundtrack.\(^2\) This chapter will examine some of the key methods with which rock and pop songs were used in film during the New Hollywood period, while highlighting connections to contemporary developments within entertainment conglomeration. Finally, we will look at how these aesthetic innovations fed into emerging high concept blockbuster marketing strategies to shape commercial cinema into the 1980s and beyond.

**Internal Song and *The Graduate***

Along with *Bonnie and Clyde*, *The Graduate* proved that New Wave-influenced, youth-oriented films could find a substantial audience. Both were ‘visually arresting, thematically challenging, and stylistically individualised’; more importantly, unlike the contemporary string of big-budget flops that had been produced ‘for the old audience’,\(^3\) both were among the highest-grossing films of the period. Hollywood had expected both of these films to fail,\(^4\) but their unprecedented popularity meant that Hollywood could no longer afford to ignore the youth market. Whereas *Bonnie and Clyde* was a period film,
incorporating 1930s-style bluegrass on the soundtrack, *The Graduate* was firmly rooted in a late-1960s ethos of uncertainty, for which certain types of rock music seemed ideal accompaniment.

Mike Nichols’ film was the first non-musical to feature a score compiled largely from pre-existing rock hits, but it became so in a roundabout way. Nichols had been using four songs by Columbia folk-rock act Simon and Garfunkel as a ‘temp track’ during the editing stage, with an eye to hiring the duo to pen an original score. Simon and Garfunkel could only find time to contribute one brief acoustic piece, ‘Mrs. Robinson’, so Nichols instead licensed from Columbia Records the songs he had been using, and commissioned television composer Dave Grusin to write an incidental score based around Paul Simons’ music. Later Columbia compiled the Simon and Garfunkel tracks and Grusin’s score together on the one record, in the process creating the first hybrid compilation soundtrack album featuring both score and pop songs.5

Nichols’ use of the Simon and Garfunkel songs was unprecedented for a non-musical, and displayed an unmistakeable European influence. For film music purists the late 1960s and early 1970s were a period in which film producers and directors indulged in the ‘folly’ of non-orchestral musical accompaniment.6 Aided by Hollywood’s almost complete abandonment of the orchestral score by the mid-1960s (with composers such as Henry Mancini, Jerry Goldsmith and Ennio Morricone increasingly incorporating ‘non-traditional’ instrumentation such as rock-influenced guitar, bass and drums), film scores of the late 1960s were largely unrecognisable from the classical model that had dominated cinema for three decades.7

As Todd Berliner and Philip Furia show in a detailed analysis, by using pop songs as musical soliloquies *The Graduate* helped establish new techniques for incorporating song into film. During the film’s opening credits, as a forlorn Benjamin Braddock (Dustin
Hoffman) is carried along an airport’s moving walkway, the soundtrack plays Simon and Garfunkel’s ‘The Sounds of Silence’:

> The song does not merely set a tone for the movie. The melancholy mood and lyrics (‘Hello darkness, my old friend’, ‘I turned my collar to the cold and damp’) indicate Benjamin’s loneliness, sadness, and fear, in effect telling us what Benjamin’s expressionless face does not. Indeed, the film invites us to understand that the song, while not sung by Hoffman, expresses his character’s feelings much in the way “spontaneous songs” had in the classical Hollywood musical. ⁸

Berliner and Furia argue that, as with the songs of the classical musical, the use of Simon and Garfunkel’s recordings help establish a connection between character and spectator, ‘giving them privileged access to the character’s thoughts by means of song’. ⁹

But it must also be acknowledged that these songs achieve this function in an unprecedented manner. While the parallels the authors draw between Nichols’ use of rock music and the film musical convention of ‘internal song’ are valid, the appearance of songs such as ‘The Sounds of Silence’, ‘Scarborough Fair’, ‘April Come She Will’ and ‘Mrs Robinson’ are as much a product experimentation with diegetic/non-diegetic slippage resulting from the director’s art cinema influences. In addition to the work of the *nouvelle vague*, Kenneth Anger’s *Scorpio Rising* (1963), the ‘most widely seen film in the history of the American avant-garde’, had a ‘ripple effect’ on the films of the late 1960s. ¹⁰ Anger’s juxtaposition of thirteen sugary pop hits over gritty footage of real-life bikers ‘used rock as a kind of referential intertext capable of commenting on or satirising the image track’. ¹¹ *The Graduate* extended such techniques beyond the art house, and thus brought new possibilities for the film score to mainstream cinema. For example, no musical—indeed, no Hollywood film—had ever allowed two pre-recorded pop songs to play in succession, in their entirety, over a four minute montage sequence.
This section of the film—which elliptically condenses several weeks of Ben’s first post-college summer, drawing parallels between his debilitating ennui and his dispassionate affair with Mrs. Robinson—is bravura art cinema filmmaking which asked much of a 1967 audience. Outside of the rock and roll film, pre-recorded pop music had never simply faded in during a commercial film without any diegetic clarification, and here two songs are permitted to play from beginning to end without any narrative justification, as if the audience is listening to an LP accompanied by pictures. Yet the unconventionality of this technique works in concert with the spatially and temporally ambiguous montage (with the final chord of ‘April Come She Will’ Ben leaps, spent, from his parents’ backyard pool on to Mrs. Robinson, who is lying on a hotel room bed) to distract from each other’s strangeness; together, they make sense.

Nichols’ unconventional use of the soundtrack resonates with the other formal influences on display in this ‘European-influenced, youth-oriented vehicle’. Like Richard Lester before him, and aided by a witty script by Buck Henry and Calder Willingham, Nichols laced Truffaut- and Godard-inspired sequences—featuring zooms, extreme close-ups and disorienting jump-cuts offering brief glimpses of nudity—with a comic sensibility that rendered their avant-garde origins more palatable for a mainstream audience. Contemporary audiences certainly did not seem perturbed by Nichols’ art cinema touches or his odd use of the soundtrack. Produced independently by Embassy Pictures and distributed by United Artists, by the end of the 1960s The Graduate had become the second biggest grossing film of the decade—and the third-highest grossing film of all time—earning $43,000,000 in rentals.

In addition, the Columbia Records soundtrack was the second biggest-selling LP of 1968, spending nine weeks at number one on the Billboard charts in the spring of 1968, only to be replaced by another Simon and Garfunkel album, Bookends. Both LPs featured the
number one hit single ‘Mrs. Robinson’, which The Graduate’s producer Lawrence Turman had convinced the duo to expand into a full song and re-record as a single to promote the film. Like ‘The Sounds of Silence’, ‘Mrs. Robinson’ sold over one million copies, and went on to win Record of the Year at the 1968 Grammy Awards.

Drug Narratives and Easy Rider

Two years later, Easy Rider would become ‘the yardstick by which all future “pop compilation” soundtracks would be judged’. For Jeff Smith, Easy Rider spliced the AIP-style teenpic, European cinema, and the avant-garde film into a commercially successful whole. Originally intended as an AIP youth exploitation picture in the mould of Corman’s The Wild Angels (1966) and The Trip (1967), AIP’s Sam Arkoff balked at the idea of a film featuring two cocaine dealing anti-heroes. Writers Dennis Hopper and Peter Fonda instead turned to the company responsible for the Monkees, Raybert (soon to be renamed BBS), which producer Bert Schneider had transformed into a haven for counterculture filmmakers. BBS combined AIP marketing strategies with major studio distribution (thanks in part to Schneider’s familial connection to Columbia) and turned the $375,000 budgeted Easy Rider into a $50,000,000 blockbuster. Here the producers were aided by the promotional boost of a top ten soundtrack album, which featured several of the biggest acts of the era.

As with The Graduate, the filmmakers were forced to use their temp track as a score when a plan for Crosby, Stills and Nash to record music for the film failed to materialise. The temp track consisted of songs director Hopper had heard on the radio while editing, and thus necessitated the procurement of release rights from artists such as the Byrds, the Electric Prunes, the Band, the Jimi Hendrix Experience and Steppenwolf. The LP rights were sold to Dunhill, who in turn had to seek permission from Warner-Reprise, Elektra, Columbia, and ABC for a ‘cooperative-release’, and coordinated an extensive national promotion campaign
with the film’s launch. The massive success of the compilation LP verified the commercial advantages of a rock soundtrack. With The Graduate and Easy Rider, popular music was discovered to have both commercial and formal value: marketable, familiar rock music could also ease a potentially baffled audience through sections of European-style ambiguity ‘without further need for explication’.

Dennis Hopper has since acknowledged that he indeed set out to make the first American art film, a modern-day John Ford western with European-style editing designed to be entered at the Cannes film festival. But the jarring edits, flash-forwards, constant focus-pulling and seemingly endless, repetitive montages of desert landscapes are made more cohesive thanks to the overlaying of rock songs by artists such as the Band and Hendrix. In addition, the music sometimes adds subtle narrative commentary—or, indeed, compensates for a lack of narrative progression—as when the Byrds sing sweetly of mountains and forests in the Goffin-King song ‘Wasn’t Born to Follow’ while Wyatt (Hopper) and Captain America (Fonda) amble their way through the countryside on their customised Harley-Davidsons.

Rock music proved crucial at this stage in Hollywood history. The negotiation between art and commerce that sparked the so-called ‘American film renaissance’, was still, finally, a product of Hollywood’s commercial hegemony. As Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson have noted, New Hollywood’s forays into art cinema experimentation were still largely governed by classical narrative convention, unlike the more abstract work of European directors who were not in any way beholden to a major film studio. European filmmakers often had access to state subsidies, and thus were largely removed from the concerns of the marketplace, but during this period of experimentation and modernist aspiration, the movies of the Hollywood Renaissance were still shaped by market forces.
American directors—and those European directors such as Michelangelo Antonioni who suddenly found themselves with Hollywood studio backing—looked to ways to incorporate formal experimentation within films that went at least some way towards fulfilling mainstream expectation. Much structural ambiguity is to be found in films of the period dealing with murkier aspects of the counterculture or drug culture, such as Zabriskie Point (1970) and Performance, for which rock music serves as a binding agent. Antonioni’s Zabriskie Point features a score by Pink Floyd, as well as songs by the Grateful Dead and the Rolling Stones. Yet for this MGM production the Italian continued to use the film score in a relatively conventional way, holding to the established score-versus-source soundtrack divide. In Zabriskie Point, Pink Floyd’s ambient, pulsating instrumental rock tends to appear over comparatively enigmatic sections of the film, such as the infamous daydream-like desert orgy sequence, while in contrast more conventional rock songs containing lyrics emit from acknowledged sources, usually car radios.

Rock music’s unifying structural strength was most successfully brought into play in overtly drug-related narratives. In Donald Cammell and Nicolas Roeg’s Performance, (distributed by Warner Bros.), the pounding beat of diegetic blues-rock helps to unify large portions of fragmented text. For example, as London gangster Chas Devlin (James Fox) has his first psychedelic drug experience at the home of reclusive rock star Turner (Mick Jagger), his host plays some driving rock music on a reel-to-reel tape recorder. Jump cuts, zooms, rapid editing and freeze frames are employed as an intentionally disorienting subjective representation of Devlin’s hallucinations. Yet the tightly-structured rock song manages to marshal the imagery into a dramatically unified whole. These jarring techniques—which by the 1980s would be the stuff of music video convention—culminate in Turner’s dream-like transformation into Chas’s boss, a slick-haired cockney gangster. Turner then performs the raucous ‘Memo From Turner’, featuring lyrics referring directly to Chas, which the other
criminals in the room verbally interact with in a hallucinatory nod to Hollywood musical convention. Eventually, Turner exhorts the gang to disrobe and dance naked. As the song finishes, so does Chas’s trip, and we return to a (relatively) coherent narrative.

The pressures of attracting a paying audience essentially grounded the art cinema of the period within familiar classical Hollywood convention. In this way, ambiguous, European-influenced movies such as *Easy Rider, Alice’s Restaurant, Zabriskie Point, Performance, Getting Straight* (1970), *The Strawberry Statement* (1970), *Billy Jack* (1971) and *Harold and Maude* (1971) were the product of an attempt to straddle the divide between auteurist impulses and market demands. The success of *Easy Rider* ‘convinced producers that inexpensive films could be made specifically for the youth market and that they could become blockbusters overnight’. This prospect permitted a brief artistic flowering based on European models, but on the whole proved to be an illusion. As the early 1970s progressed, industry recession continued as the Hollywood Renaissance proved to be a false dawn in terms of box office returns. As David Cook writes of this brief period of American auteurism,

> The idea that American directors, working within the world’s most capital-intensive production context, could somehow approach the European ideal of authorship as incarnated in the French New Wave was probably doomed from the start. 

But while the Renaissance faded, popular music remained, becoming increasingly structurally anchored to notions of convention and verisimilitude as the more expressionist aspects of art cinema influence declined.

*Mean Streets* and the Consolidation of the Diegetic/Nondiegetic Rock Score

Thus was a formal place carved out for popular music within the film text by the early 1970s, an aesthetic function above and beyond the more often acknowledged commercial
operation of the rock music score that resulted from the rise of the entertainment conglomerates. In 1973 Martin Scorsese’s *Mean Streets* consolidated many of these formal and aesthetic possibilities. Scorsese successfully integrated ‘the background music of the characters lives’ into the film’s narrative structure, simultaneously experimenting with an increased flexibility in diegetic/non-diegetic musical slippage.

With a soundtrack compiled of doo-wop, Phil Spector girl group pop, opera, and late-sixties rock, *Mean Streets* comprehensively traverses the source/score divide. There are many examples in the film, but one seven-minute sequence in particular encapsulates Scorsese’s manipulation of the plasticity of his soundtrack. A voice-over narration from Charlie (Harvey Keitel) acts as a sound-bridge between a scene set in a church and a night club sequence. We cut to slow motion footage of the nightclub as a song by the Rolling Stones, ‘Tell Me (You’re Coming Back)’, replaces the voice-over as the dominant nondiegetic sound. But its volume and fidelity gradually alter (the song becomes ‘smaller’) in sync with a barely perceptible speeding up of the film, as Charlie appears to float towards the dance floor. These alterations in tone indicate that the song has crossed over to the diegetic realm—it is the music playing in the club, and Charlie begins to snap his fingers in time to its beat. As it plays, ‘Tell Me (You’re Coming Back)’ repeatedly fades then increases in volume to allow dialogue to be heard, as does its replacement, ‘I Looked Away’ by Derek and the Dominos. Both records ostensibly emanate from the night club PA, but, as Godard had done in *Masculine-feminine*, the constantly shifting volume renders their diegetic status ambiguous.

Scorsese then immediately repeats the process. Johnny Boy (Robert De Niro) enters the club, with a female companion on each arm. Once again the footage slows as Charlie narrates, and once again the Rolling Stones cut him off, this time with ‘Jumpin’ Jack Flash’. The driving, apparently nondiegetic, rock song laid over slow-motion footage produces an almost hypnotic kinetic tension (an outcome that would not be lost on future music video
directors). While the slowed-down footage affects other parts if the soundtrack—the general sounds of the bar, including human voices, are stretched to the point that they resemble animal sounds—‘Jumpin’ Jack Flash’ continues unaffected, indicating its nondiegetic status; but when ‘real time’ is suddenly re-established, the song is once more revealed to be source music.

Far from being merely a compilation of hit recordings designed to entice a rock audience—although, in this Warner-distributed film, they did indeed also serve that function 40—Scorsese moulds the soundtrack to suit his narrative and formal ends. Repeatedly songs serve as sound-bridges, binding otherwise disparate sequences through the alteration of their diegetic status. Betty Everett’s ‘Shoop Shoop Song (It’s in His Kiss)’ acts at first as a nondiegetic sound-bridge between two scenes; in the second scene, however, an off screen radio is gradually revealed as its true source, indicated by an altered, ‘tinny’ aural fidelity and subsequent DJ banter. Scorsese also used this ambiguity to enhance, or even comment on, action. During a chaotic fight scene in a pool hall, the Marvelettes ‘Please Mr. Postman’, apparently emitting from a jukebox, suddenly increases in volume; the sweet girl group pop song thus transforms into ironically dramatic nondiegetic accompaniment, as Johnny Boy wildly flails a pool cue.

Scorsese seems to revel in the disorientation allowed by the slippage between source and score, as well as the attendant auteurist implications of authorial expressivity and psychic analysis. 41 As Wendy Everett has argued,

Songs can…increase the multiple textualities of a film…by emphasizing the lack of distinct boundaries between past and present, fiction and reality, screen and audience. The insecurity of temporal and narrative status mirrors the slippage and doubling we recognise as essential features of…turning one’s attention inward. 42
Thus, while the soundtrack of *Mean Streets* appears on the surface to both interpolate a youth audience with rock music and provide a veneer of documentary realism for Scorsese’s ‘anthropological study’ of New York street life,\(^43\) it is also subject to various art house-inspired aesthetic and formal choices. These choices are now commonly accepted as part of mainstream film language, as popular music slips constantly from score to source, and back again.\(^44\)

Within popular film criticism, *Mean Streets* is itself ‘an astonishingly influential film…one of the source points of modern movies’.\(^45\) This influence can be readily identified in the work of more recent filmmakers also indebted to the compilation score, such as Doug Liman, director of *Swingers* (1996) and *Go* (1999), and Paul Thomas Anderson, who relied heavily on compilation scores for *Boogie Nights* (1997) and *Magnolia* (1999). And, of course, Quentin Tarantino has tested the limits pop music’s referentiality in films such as *Reservoir Dogs* (1991), *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Jackie Brown* (1998), and *Kill Bill* (2003). In *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), a film set during the Second World War, Tarantino offers a postmodern hodgepodge of ‘found’ nondiegetic music. Tarantino culls music, both orchestral and rock, from previous film soundtracks, including excerpts from Dimitri Tiomkin’s *The Alamo* (1960), Lalo Schifrin’s score for *Kelly’s Heroes* (1970), several pieces from Ennio Morricone, and David Bowie’s rock title song from *Cat People* (1982).

**Post-Renaissance Period: the Regression of the Brats**

The era of commercial American art cinema did not last beyond the period when Hollywood discovered ways to reconnect with a mass audience. In an early-1970s *Variety* interview, William Friedkin, director of *The Exorcist* (1973), lamented how his generation ‘all went out and copied Godard…forgetting where our roots were’.\(^46\) The roots he spoke of were in classical Hollywood; as well as receiving their educations in film schools and art
cinemas, the brats had come of age during the 1950s, just as Hollywood began to distribute its extensive back catalogues of classical-era movies to television. The same commercial impulses that persuaded the American auteurs to smooth over the cracks of their narratively ambiguous films with a varnish of rock music eventually lead these same young filmmakers towards more populist styles of filmmaking. The likes of Friedkin, Coppola, Lucas and a younger colleague, Steven Spielberg, quickly decamped to the safety of ‘genre films’, and by 1977 had completely transformed the Hollywood landscape once again.

At a time of industry recession the blockbuster success of Coppola’s *The Godfather* (1972)—which made three times as much money at the US box office than 1972’s next most successful film, *Fiddler on the Roof* (1971)\(^{47}\)—set Hollywood on a path that led directly to the unprecedented box office returns for *Jaws* (1975) and *Star Wars* (1977). These two films in particular presented Hollywood with a new formula for success: an annual, limited assortment of wide-release summer action-adventure movies.\(^{48}\) Ironically, the marketing strategies for these blockbusters were based on the old teen exploitation saturation booking model, designed by independent studios to lure as many young audience members into the cinema as quickly as possible with the aid of television commercials. The success of the Warner-distributed counterculture/action exploitation film *Billy Jack* (1971), which was re-released in 1973 accompanied by a television campaign, was the first indication of this ‘major marketing revision’.\(^{49}\)

When old-fashioned adventure films such as *Jaws* and *Star Wars* returned, so too did the types of lushly dramatic Wagnerian scores associated with conventional genres. As noted previously, the symphonic score had been all but abandoned during the late 1960s and early 1970s, a period in which, according to Elmer Bernstein, composer for *The Magnificent Seven* (1960) and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962), ‘a beautiful melody for strings (was) likely to be scoffed at’.\(^{50}\) The one sanctuary for the traditional score was the unreservedly populist
disaster film genre. Many of these films, such as *The Poseidon Adventure* (1972), *The Towering Inferno* (1974), and *Earthquake* (1974), were supplied with bombastically familiar orchestral scores by composer John Williams.\(^{51}\)

An ex-jazz arranger who worked for Alfred Newman at Fox during the final days of the studio orchestras, Williams went on to write jazz-tinged scores for 1950s television crime shows.\(^{52}\) But it was his rousing, Wagnerian disaster film work that prompted Spielberg to hire him for *Jaws*. In turn Spielberg recommended Williams to Lucas for *Star Wars*, ensuring his centrality in the re-Wagnerisation of Hollywood. For Tony Thomas, this re-Wagnerisation was a simple case of the pop score finally being finally recognised for the ‘folly’ it was.\(^{53}\) However Anahid Kassabian, who has argued in favour of the ‘affiliating’ potential of pop compilation scores, which do not so tightly track viewers into ‘identification with a single subject position that does not challenge dominant ideologies’, laments that ‘hyperclassical’ films such as the *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* series ‘returned to the tightest musical meaning system available’.\(^{54}\)

Yet, at the same time that the movie brats’ nostalgic genre pictures were breaking box office records, with *Jaws* and *Star Wars* reinventing Hollywood via the summer blockbuster film, two other films, *Saturday Night Fever* (1977) and *Grease* (1978), showed that cross-media entertainment packages could prove equally, if not more, lucrative for the entertainment conglomerates. Together these and similar pop music films of the time demonstrated how best to merge the interests of entertainment conglomerates subsidiaries via ‘high concept’ marketing structures based on commercial synergy.
High Concept Cross-pollination: *Saturday Night Fever* and *Grease*

Show biz hits grand slam in 1977.

- *Variety* 55

Together 1977 and 1978 proved to be banner years for all of the US entertainment industries. This period serves as both the culmination of at least 20 years of experimentation with cross-media synergy, and as the model for what Justin Wyatt has labelled the ‘high concept’ era of the 1980s and beyond. 56 In its round-up of 1977—the year which saw the 50th anniversary of talkies as well as the 100th anniversary of the ‘disk business’—*Variety* reported unprecedented grosses ‘in all entertainment sectors’. 57 It was the ‘biggest year in film history’. 58 Film studio profits were up 27 percent over 1976, with Hollywood grossing $2,300,000,000 for the year, largely on the back of the success of *Star Wars*—which by the end of the summer had leap-frogged *Jaws* to top *Variety*’s ‘All time film rental champs’ list with $127,000,000 59—and Steven Spielberg’s *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (a co-production between Columbia Pictures and EMI), which took in $23,000,000 in the last six weeks of the year. 60 The television networks also boosted their profits by 23 percent, to $2,900,000,000. This increase was at least in part due to Hollywood’s growing reliance on television advertising for its blockbuster product, a dependence which had seen marketing costs rise to $175,200,000, an increase of 26 percent in the two years since the release of *Jaws*.

In 1978, the returns were even more impressive. Hollywood posted $2,750,000,000 in picture grosses, up a further 20 percent from the previous year, ‘despite the ravages of inflation’. 61 Again ‘space films’ played a large part, with *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* collecting a further $32,000,000 in rentals, and *Star Wars* adding $38,000,000 to its tally, thanks to a wide re-release. 62 The film studios’ obsession with summer opening weekend box office returns can in large part be traced back to June 16th of this year, when *Jaws 2* and
*Grease* opened on the same day and shared a record opening weekend gross of $18,000,000. The latter film was the biggest success of the year, claiming over $83,000,000 in rentals; not far behind was *Saturday Night Fever*, the third most successful movie of the year, which had earned $71,473,000 by the end of 1978.63

Both *Grease* and *Saturday Night Fever* immediately entered Variety’s ‘All time film rental champs’ list, at numbers four and seven respectively, together ensuring that Paramount ended the year as Hollywood’s most successful studio.64 These films would also prove crucial in the parallel explosion of the music business, as the growth of the record industry managed to overshadow even the extraordinary gains made in Hollywood. In 1977, US record industry income had surpassed Hollywood’s total revenue by $1,200,000,000, with labels selling $3,500,000,000 worth of albums, singles and tapes (which by now accounted for 26 percent of sales).65 The following year retail sales leapt by a further $631,000,000 to over $4,100,000,000, out-grossing the film studios by $1,380,000,000. All told the American market for recorded music had more than doubled in five years, growing an average of over $400,000,000 per year since 1973.66

In 1976 the RIAA had begun awarding platinum discs in recognition of sales of one million LPs and two million singles; by the end of 1977 they were already considering introducing a further award made of a more precious metal (such as titanium), to reflect the sudden increase in multi-million disc sales by the likes of Peter Frampton, the Eagles and Fleetwood Mac.67 The advent of the blockbuster LP was in part a product of the growth in teen sales and the fact that, whereas in the past consumers had stopped buying records after reaching their mid-1920s, the baby boomers in the 25 to 35 age range continued to buy discs in numbers.68 In addition, according to Joe Cohen, executive vice president of the National Association of Record Merchandisers, more and more artists were breaking the two million
disc barrier due to industry maturation, a product of the labels’ increased ability to gain
‘multi-media’ exposure for their ‘superstar talent’:

There has been a sophistication of marketing over the past few years in terms of research, advertising reach...and our ability to take advantage of and tie into other activities in the entertainment world. [W]e as an industry have become more predictable in the eyes of the business community and in the eyes of the advertising...world.69

In this way the rise of the blockbuster album, as the rise of the blockbuster movie had done for Hollywood, provided the record business with unprecedented stability. This stability formed a platform for further expansion towards what would by the end of the 1990s be a $14,000,000,000 per year business in the US, and a $38,500,000,000 global industry.70

In the 1950s, recorded music had overtaken music publishing to dominate the music industry, and by 1977 it had grown to the point that it was far and away the most lucrative component of the entertainment business. Although record industry figures, which did not include the attendant publishing revenues (ASCAP, now home to many rock acts, including the Eagles, earned a record gross of $102,500,000 in 1977),71 dwarfed the film industry’s domestic revenues, there was little gnashing of teeth in Hollywood. By this time those record labels with a film studio affiliation released approximately 36 percent of records on the US charts. Warner Bros. alone accounted for 23 percent of hit recordings, matching the combined totals of Columbia (17 percent) and RCA (six percent).72 In 1978, grosses by the Warner labels increased 31 percent, earning Warner Communications $532,000,000.73

The ‘multi-media exposure’ highlighted by the NARM vice president was clearly visible in the top ten best-selling singles of 1977, almost half of which had direct links to movies. The biggest single of the year was Debby Boone’s ‘You Light Up My Life’, released on the Warner-affiliated Curb label and taken from the Columbia Pictures film of the same name. Next was an ‘unofficial’ disco version of the theme from Star Wars by Meco, released
on Casablanca. Columbia artist Barbra Streisand had the fourth biggest hit of the year with ‘Love Theme from “A Star is Born” (Evergreen)’, from the soundtrack of the Warner Bros. film, in which she co-starred with country music recording artist Kris Kristofferson. Finally, United Artists Records had a substantial hit with Bill Conti’s ‘Theme from Rocky (Gonna Fly Now)’, from their parent studio’s Rocky (1976), one of several competing versions of the film’s theme tune.

Throughout 1978 there was an 18 percent overall rise in disc sales, but the charts were dominated by one label that, while not directly affiliated with a major film studio, had claimed a central position in the coming revolution in marketing synergy between Hollywood and the music business. Far and away the two biggest selling LPs of 1978 were the double disc soundtracks for Saturday Night Fever and Grease. Both were released by RSO Records, a component of the Robert Stigwood Organisation, which also served as the production company for both films. Stigwood had appointed former Capitol vice president Al Coury as head of his company’s record division in 1976, and together they coordinated an integrated promotional campaign for the disco-exploitation package Saturday Night Fever, based in part on what Stigwood had learned while producing the film versions of the rock operas Jesus Christ Superstar (1973) and the Who’s Tommy (1975). By tapping into the disco craze and drawing on the popularity of the Bee Gees, Coury had hoped to sell one million copies of the soundtrack before the film’s release; he missed that target by only 19,000 albums, ensuring that the record was a sizeable hit by Saturday Night Fever’s theatrical debut in December 1977.

Stigwood launched the movie by producing a two-hour television special, Disco Fever, syndicated to 68 stations one week before the film’s release. It featured appearances by the film’s star John Travolta and soundtrack artists the Bee Gees, as well as contemporary television stars Penny Marshall, Cindy Williams, Suzanne Somers and John Ritter. For the
special, taped immediately after *Saturday Night Fever’s* premiere at Grauman’s Theatre, Stigwood convinced Paramount to build a $75,000 disco featuring an 18,000 square-foot dance floor on one of its soundstages. The immediate impact of the movie garnered the soundtrack a further 700,000 sales in the week after its debut; as Coury put it soon after, ‘They fed each other, there was cross-pollination’.

While the movie became the third highest grossing film of the year, the soundtrack sold 15 million discs in the US, as well as 13 million internationally, making it the biggest selling album to that time, and earning RSO a total gross of $156,000,000. Stigwood, Coury and Paramount then repeated the process for *Grease*. That film significantly outperformed its predecessor, while the soundtrack came close to repeating *Saturday Night Fever’s* success, with 12 million albums sold in the US (20 million worldwide) by the end of 1978. In addition, both packages provided RSO with eight number one singles throughout that year, five of which sold two million copies each (half of the songs in the year’s top ten best sellers list were released by RSO, with a further eight reaching the top 50). In 1977 four singles had sold over two million copies each; in 1978 the total was ten, and most were culled from the soundtracks of *Saturday Night Fever* and *Grease*.

Thus by 1978 not only were the key entertainment industries generating revenue as never before, they were frequently doing so in close synchronization with areas once seen to be ostensibly competing for the leisure dollar. At the heart of this revolution in marketing synergy was RSO, but *Saturday Night Fever* and *Grease* were only the most prominent of numerous film and music entertainment packages to rival the dominance of the movie brats’ summer blockbuster genre movies in the late 1970s. Together these movie/single/album packages set the pattern for the type of synergistic cultural production that dominated the 1980s and continues to this day. Almost as much as *Star Wars*, *Saturday Night Fever* forged
the template for Hollywood’s high concept future, a model solidly grounded in the value of music.

**Conclusion**

Richard Maltby notes that ‘financial instability’ provided space for the Hollywood Renaissance to emerge, ‘a period in which a group of new and mainly young directors produced stylistically innovative, thematically challenging, but only occasionally commercially successful movies’. However, as Maltby goes on to argue,

The more enduring change...came from the installation of a new, younger generation of executives who guided the direction of the New Hollywood, devising production and distribution strategies to manage the increased risks of post-Classical Hollywood’s new economics.

As we have seen, this new direction was a direct outcome of the rise of the youth audience, as revealed to Hollywood via their growing investment in popular music. The Hollywood Renaissance, as an aesthetic movement, was for all intents dead by 1974, but New Hollywood, an economic and aesthetic model grounded in the relationship between cinema and popular music, and the partnership between the film and music industries, remained to shape Hollywood for decades to come.

Wyatt sees Robert Stigwood as central to the link between the rock soundtrack and high concept filmmaking that followed the rise of the entertainment conglomerates. Film and music synergy was of course not foolproof, as another RSO package, *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1978), would almost immediately demonstrate. At the time Coury bridled at suggestions that the third big RSO package (based on the Beatles’ 1967 album and starring that band’s 1978 commercial equivalents Peter Frampton and the Bee Gees), was a ‘stiff’, noting that the modest box office returns of $11,000,000 were more than compensated for by $37,000,000 in soundtrack sales. Within a year, however, an estimated two million
record returns would shake the industry’s faith in such strategies and help trigger record industry recession.\textsuperscript{84} Later, in the immediate post-\textit{Top Gun} era, Denisoff and Plasketes further exploded the myth of the rock soundtrack as a watertight formula for synergistic commercial success.\textsuperscript{85} But in the mid-to-late 1970s two parallel entertainment phenomena, the blockbuster film and the blockbuster album, came together to produce what key entertainment conglomerates such as MCA, Warner Communications, Transamerica, Disney—and soon Viacom, Sony, Vivendi, et al.—felt was an almost perfect storm of cross-marketing potential. The prospective rewards of successfully integrated film and music entertainment packages like \textit{Saturday Night Fever} and \textit{Grease} have been enough to convince many influential producers since of their worth.

While the recording industry would suffer a slump after the record highs of 1978 (bottoming out at $3,600,000,000 in sales in 1982), by the mid-1980s and the advent of MTV—with its unprecedented power to promote new product by fully integrating the aural and visual aspects of popular music developed in Hollywood\textsuperscript{86}—the disc business would recover and continue its seemingly unstoppable rise.\textsuperscript{87} In the 1980s, 1990s and beyond film producers such as the teams of Peter Guber and Jon Peters (the latter the producer of the early synergistic package \textit{A Star is Born}) and Don Simpson and Jerry Bruckheimer would adapt the lessons of \textit{Saturday Night Fever} and \textit{Grease} for the MTV era. Blockbuster entertainment packages such as \textit{Flashdance} (1983), \textit{Footloose} (1984), \textit{Beverly Hills Cop} (1984), \textit{Top Gun} (1986), \textit{Batman} (1989), and \textit{Armageddon} (1998) successfully tapped into the expanded possibilities for film and music synergy offered by music video.

Endnotes

4 Carr 2000, p.94.
Ibid, p.25. It is perhaps no coincidence that the appearance of popular music as film score coincides with the emergence of the ambiguous Hollywood ‘art-film anti-hero’, often played by a new breed of emotionally passive, seemingly inarticulate method actors such as Hoffman, Al Pacino and Robert De Niro. Note, for example, how Jackson Browne’s mournful country rock ballad ‘Late for the Sky’ (‘Awake again I can’t pretend and I know I’m alone, and close to the end of the feeling we’ve known. How long have I been sleeping?’) seems to speak for the cripplingly inarticulate Travis Bickle (De Niro) in *Taxi Driver* (1976), as he trains his gun on his television set.

Ibid, p.16.


After *The Sound of Music* at $72,000,000, and *Gone With the Wind* at $71,000,000 (*Variety*, 7th July, 1970, p.25).


Simon and Grusin also shared the award for Best Original Score Written for a Motion Picture.


Biskind 1999, pp.45, 61, 66.


Toop 1995, p.77.


Crisp 1997, p.418.

Hugo 1986, p.70.

Adding to the expanded possibilities of commercial cinema was the emergence in 1968 of a new ratings system—a product itself of the newly segmented movie audience—which allowed entrée to more ‘politically subversive, sexually explicit, and/or graphically violent material’ (Schatz 1993, p.15).


Grimes 1986, p.66.


Maltby 2003, p.571.

Cook 1998, p.34.

Prince 2000, p.198.


Kael quoted in Friedman 1997, p.17.

In many ways Scorsese was expanding on techniques he had first employed in his debut film *Who’s That Knocking at My Door* (1967).

There was, however, no soundtrack LP released, perhaps due to the fact that the opera and Neapolitan pop also featured would not appeal to the rock album market.


Everett 2000, p.112.

Friedman 1997, p.23.

Scorsese further subverts scoring convention by choosing to accompany the closing credits with street sounds rather than music.

Ebert 2003.

Quoted in Biskind 1999, p.204.

Maltby 2003, p.571.


Wyatt 1994, pp.110-111.
Quoted in Thomas 1997, p.258.
Davison 2004, p.49.
Burlingame 1996, pp.34, 38.
Thomas 1997, p.228.
Silverman 1978, p.1
Wyatt 1994.
Silverman 1978, pp.1, 76.
Variety’s rentals chart factored in all the monies returned to distributors from North American theatres. The 1977 top four was rounded out by Jaws ($121,000,000), The Godfather ($86,000,000) and The Exorcist ($82,000,000) (‘All time film rental champs’ in Variety, January 4 1978, p.25).
Frederick 1978, p.21.
Ibid.
Quoted in Meyer 1978, p.141.
Silverman 1979, p.74.
Silverman 1979, p.72.
Formed in the early 1970s by Australian-born music entrepreneur Robert Stigwood, RSO was originally distributed in the US by Atlantic (Stigwood managed Atlantic acts Cream and the Bee Gees), but was by now handled by Polygram (Southall 2003, p.233).
Meyer 1979, p.223.
‘$75G disco for promo’ in Billboard, December 17, 1977, p.69.
Quoted in Meyer 1979, p.223.
Silverman 1979, p.66.
‘U.S. disk biz to top $3.5-bil mark in 1978’ in Variety, January 3 1979, pp.1, 80.
Wyatt 1994, p.22.
Wyatt 1994 pp.142-145.
Meyer 1979, p.223.
Hollie 1980, p.27.
Denisof and Plasketes 1990.
See Mundy 1999, pp.221-45.
Garofalo 2008, pp.323-324, 473. That growth would continue virtually unabated until 1999 when the appearance of the mp3 and peer-to-peer file sharing began to unravel the industry’s marketing strategies.
Conclusion—

‘The Total Entertainment Complex’¹

Without music, radio, records, synchronous cinematic productions, wired and ether broadcasting, television or any other type of amusement is very limited.

- Variety, 1928²

By the beginning of the new millennium, the entertainment business—or, as Peter Bart and Peter Guber label it, the ‘core copyright business [of] film, music, media, advertising etc.’—was worth more than two trillion dollars, almost seven percent of the global economy.³ This represented the culmination of a decades-long expansion in the entertainment industry, which had relied on youth culture’s domination of ‘domestic and public space’.⁴ Although Hollywood had been the dominant force in global entertainment since the 1910s, ‘the branch of the entertainment industry that stood the most to gain from exploiting the teen audience was the one longest in coming around’.⁵

The process of identifying and catering to specific segments of an increasingly younger cinema audience with specialised genres and new styles of film music was not a lesson Hollywood learned on its own. Indeed, until the 1960s the studios had wilfully avoided emerging marketing sciences such as audience research and demographic studies and thus were determinedly unaware of changing audience patterns that had emerged in the post-studio period.⁶ Rather, this was instruction that Hollywood would receive as it began to invest heavily in the recording industry in the 1950s, a venture grounded in the industrial relationship between film and music that had begun thirty years previously; by the 1970s this affiliation had created a ‘New Hollywood’.

While scholars such as R. Serge Denisoff and George Plasketes (1990), Jeff Smith (1998), John Mundy (1999) and Pauline Reay (2004) have examined specific outcomes of
post-1970s youth-centred high concept marketing, future researchers might concern themselves with dramatic changes brought about by digital technology since the 1990s. Developments such as DVD, Blu-ray and broadband internet have extended the reach of multi-media conglomerates, but the increased opportunity for illegal copying that digital technology allows has also interfered with the marketing and distribution structures developed in the late-1970s that generated unprecedented revenues in the 1980s and 1990s. One notable outcome of this interference was highlighted by Time-Warner’s decision to offload the Warner Music Group in December 2003. In addition, these new technologies and formats sometimes reveal how popular culture has continued to fragment, indicating that the global entertainment conglomerates are no more able to anticipate the desires of their key consumers, the youth market, any more than they did in the 1960s.

The industrial relationship between film and music that emerged at the end of the 1960s in response to that lack of understanding was shaped by the advent of the sound motion picture in 1926 and 1927. The introduction of the talkie—itself in great part a product of the affiliation between film and music—meant that the burden of licensing musical copyrights from the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers shifted from theatre owners to the film studios themselves. Facing millions of dollars in annual fees, the major studios decided instead to buy out Tin Pan Alley’s key publishers and absorb the process of musical composition into the established studio system. In doing so, Hollywood gained control of ASCAP itself and with it responsibility for the management of American popular music. The Hollywood musical proved a boon for song promotion—and thus ASCAP—but subsequent conflict between the film and music industries kept US entertainment industries in ferment. In particular, their fractious relationship affected the production and dissemination of popular music for decades to come.
The emergence of the national radio networks CBS and NBC as a force in US entertainment in the early years of the Depression further problematised the connection between Hollywood and ASCAP. Radio relied heavily on music to attract audiences for its advertisers, and the film studios—Warner Bros. in particular—complained of the disparity between the networks’ growing revenues and the amount radio contributed in licensing fees. With ASCAP failing to act, Warner Bros.—the studio with the largest stake in publishing and responsible for almost half of the popular music on radio—withdraw its copyrights from the society in protest. The withdrawal had no effect, and Warner Bros. returned to ASCAP to increase pressure on the board to negotiate more favourable terms with radio.

ASCAP did indeed succumb to this pressure, but neither the licensing body nor Hollywood could foresee the outcome. In 1940 ASCAP demanded that radio pay twice as much in fees, but the newly-formed National Association of Broadcasters had been preparing for such a contingency. The NAB announced that all ASCAP copyrights would be banned from the airwaves, to be replaced by music licensed by their own firm, Broadcast Music, Incorporated. The establishment of BMI proved to be a watershed moment in popular music, partitioning the music business in a way that reshaped the industry as much as the Paramount Decree would soon transform Hollywood. With ASCAP holding the rights to the majority of the American songbook, BMI looked elsewhere for music to publish and broadcast. They found it in neglected corners of American musical culture—particularly in the South—which Tin Pan Alley had wilfully overlooked.

ASCAP quietly gave in to the networks ten months into the radio ban, but by then BMI had established itself, and the rupture that would reshape the music business—the rise of the recording industry at the expense of publishing—widened. BMI provided an infrastructure which allowed regional and urban music styles access to a national audience; the independent sector thrived and the market for rhythm and blues and country music
expanded accordingly. Growth in these markets undermined the established methods of music promotion cultivated by Hollywood and Tin Pan Alley, which had been based on the careful management of standard copyrights over periods spanning decades. By the beginning of the 1950s—with radio now playing records—the recording industry was not only generating more revenue than the sale of sheet music for the first time, but, in ASCAP’s view, had accelerated the processes of publishing and promotion alarmingly.

In order to restimulate its moribund music catalogues, Hollywood recycled their standards in a series of big-budget musicals in the late 1940s and early 1950s. At the same time, the US government’s antitrust ruling ended the studio system and encouraged the rise of independent package production. Independent production permitted the introduction onto the film soundtrack of musical styles that had thus far been deemed inappropriate according to the conventions of classical Hollywood film scoring. These styles included elements of modernist composition and jazz, but Hollywood distanced itself from rock and roll, the incredibly popular R&B- and country-based musical form that had emerged from the industrial milieu created by BMI. Deemed not suitable for the mainstream film score, rock and roll was instead marginalised in independently-produced, low-budget teen exploitation movies in which, as textual analyses presented here have shown, the entertainment industry’s anxieties concerning the youth audience were on show.

While the major studios found little room for rock and roll in their features, they seemed more than happy to capitalise on its success off-screen, investing heavily in the booming record industry in the mid-1950s. By 1958, MGM, Paramount, Universal, United Artists, Columbia, Twentieth Century Fox, RKO and Warner Bros. all owned record labels. With the soundtrack market dominated by established labels such as Columbia, RCA Victor, Decca and Capitol, by the mid-1960s most of these labels had turned instead to the pop and rock markets. The unprecedented success of Elvis Presley and the Beatles not only helped
expand the record business into a billion-dollar industry, it also revealed exploitable confluences between rock music and film.

The rise of the youth market in the late 1960s impacted Hollywood in two key ways: firstly, the explosion in record sales meant that each studio’s recording divisions provided much-needed revenue at a time when the film industry was suffering financial crisis. Secondly, the studios, awakened to the potential of the youth audience by record sales, also began to cater to the rock market via youth films. Hollywood’s financial difficulties were triggered in part by disastrous box office returns suffered by a number of high-profile, big-budget family pictures. Realising for the first time that the mass audience that had been deserting them since the late 1940s had fragmented and was perhaps unrecoverable, the studios sought instruction from their own record labels on how to market to the lucrative youth audience. A group of young directors, producers and studio executives who had been given unprecedented creative freedom due to Hollywood’s precarious financial state, acted as mediators in this process, adapting aesthetic models from European art cinema that subverted film scoring convention.

By the late 1960s, the composed film score thus began to give way to the compilation score, which was stocked with recent rock hits. Those hits were often of course released on record labels owned by the film studios themselves. The entertainment conglomerates that emerged during the 1960s were thus in prime position to capitalise on the coming together of Hollywood and the youth market, as played out in the affiliation between film and popular music. This youth-oriented Hollywood was in effect a ‘New Hollywood’ whose business models, based around corporate synergy and a younger market, function to this day.

New Hollywood, like the contemporary global entertainment conglomerates that underpin it, is a product of the film industry’s investment in popular music. The history of Hollywood is the history of the most successful cultural institution the world had ever known
calling upon its considerable financial resources to ensure dominance in the leisure industry. When it became obvious by the 1970s that leisure was primarily the domain of the young, Hollywood was forced to act accordingly. Whilst history has written of American entertainment in the 20th century primarily as a development based around Hollywood, this thesis shows that popular music was as much a leader as a bit-player.

Endnotes

1 ‘The Total Entertainment Complex’ was a slogan used in the late 1970s by Detroit record label Motown, which by that stage had relocated to Los Angeles and branched out into film production (see Variety, January 4, 1978, p.68).
2 Variety, Wednesday, November 21, 1928, p.57.
4 Elsaesser 1999, p.192.
6 Ibid, p.49.
7 See Garrity 2003, pp.5, 65.
Bibliography

_____________ Ackerman 1970, ‘Kinney buys Elektra; Ross eyes TV cartridge’ in Billboard, August 1, p.3, 72.

Ackerman, Paul & Gross, Mike 1967, ‘Atlantic sold in big $$ grab era’ in Billboard, October 28, pp.1, 8.


Anderson, Tim 1997, ‘Reforming “jackass music”: the problematic aesthetics of early American film music accompaniment’ in Cinema Journal 37, no.1, Fall.


Atlantic Records: The House That Ahmet Built 2007, written and directed by Susan Steinberg, Atlantic/PBS/Rhino DVD.


Bart, Peter and Guber, Peter 2002, Shoot Out: Surviving Fame and (Mis)fortune in Hollywood, G.P. Putnam’s Sons, New York.

Becker, Gene 1952, ‘Key to mass sales is widespread promotion’ in The Billboard, August 2, p.63


Billboard, 1942 -


__________1943, “‘New’ and better ASCAP highlighted music yr.” in Variety, January 6, p.188.


Brown, Royal S. 1994, Overtones and Undertones: Reading Film Music, University of California Press, Berkeley.


Caine, Andrew James 2001, “‘Calculated violence and viciousness”: the British critical reaction to *King Creole,*’ in *The Velvet Light Trap* 48, pp.34-47.


Csida, Joe 1952, ‘The industry’s ten most eventful years’ in The Billboard, August 2, 1952, p.50.


Fickett, Robert 1977, ‘And the beast goes on’ in *American Film: Journal of the Film and Television Arts*, vol.2, no.5, March.


Francis, Warren B. 1943, ‘U.S. radio takes a bow’ in *Variety*, January 6, p.95

Frederick, Robert B. 1978, “‘Star Wars”: what else was news in 1977” in *Variety*, January 4, p.21.


Friedman, Joel 1958b, ‘Warner bares disc plans; full line in quality field’ in *The Billboard*, April 14, p.4.


Frith, Simon 1981, ‘“The magic that can set you free”: the ideology of folk and the myth of the rock community’ in *Popular Music: Folk or Popular? Distinctions, Influences, Continuities*, vol.1, pp. 159-168.


Garrity, Brian 2003, ‘It’s the majors vs. the lesser as Bronfman bags Warner Music’ in *Billboard*, December 6, pp.5, 65.


Gillette, Lee 1952, ‘A&R job is no cinch; coast rep reveals why’ in *The Billboard*, August 2, p.64


Green, Abel 1930a, ‘Year in music’ in *Variety*, January 8, p.119.

__________1930b, ‘Year in radio’ in *Variety*, December 31, p.47.


__________1942a, ‘Selling side of song plugging’ in *Variety*, January 7, p.156


__________1946, ‘This has been the year of years for the music business’ in *Variety*, January 9, p.245.


Grevatt, Ben 1959, ‘Walker recalls M-G-M’s start and growth’ in *The Billboard*, April 20, p.16


Gross, Mike 1958, ‘Indies’ inroads on major diskeries’ pop singles; $400,000,000 record mark’ in *Variety*, January 8, p.215.

__________1961, ‘Pix promotion’s cuffo ride’ in *Variety*, September 6, p.45.


Hall, Claude 1974, ‘MCA seeks to sting new LP buyers with TV spots’ in Billboard, April 20, pp.3, 10.


Hannusch, Jeff & Block, Adam 1991, They Call Me the Fat Man: Antoine ‘Fats’ Domino, the Legendary Imperial Recordings (Liner Notes), Capitol-EMI Music Inc, Hollywood.


Hellman, Jack 1938, ‘New York—never heard of it!’ in Variety, January 5, p.135

Hoberman, J. 1981, ‘Sympathy for the devil’ in American Film: Journal of the Film and Television Arts, vol.6, no.5, March.


Humphrey 1942, ‘Diskers will bide time’ in The Billboard, June 20, 1942, p.62.


Kehr, David 1984, ‘Can't stop “the musicals”’ in *American Film*, May, pp.33-37.


__________1940, ‘A lot of tact and a few fights’ in *Variety*, January 3, p.85.


Lev, Peter 2000, *American Films of the 70s: Conflicting Visions*, University of Texas Press, Austin.


McRobbie, Angela 1991, ‘Dance and social fantasy’ in McRobbie, Angela & Nove, Mico (eds.), 

Medhurst, Andy 1995, ‘It sort of happened here: the strange, brief life of the British pop film’ in 
Romney, Jonathon & Wootton, Adrian (eds), *Celluloid Jukebox: Popular Music and the Movies Since 
the 50s*, BFI Publishing, London.


Press, Philadelphia.


Miller, Toby 2001, ‘Cinema studies doesn’t matter; or, I know what you did last semester’ in Tinkcom, 
Matthew & Villarejo, Amy (eds), *Keyframes: Popular Cinema and Cultural Studies*, Routledge, 
London.

Morley, Paul 2010, ‘Are we witnessing the death throes of pop music? Take a look around you and the 
signs are everywhere’ in *The Observer*, 14 November, p.29.

Manchester University Press, Manchester.


Musser, Charles 1990, *The Emergence of Cinema: the American Screen to 1907*, University of 
California Press, Berkeley.


Neumeyer, David & Flinn, Caryl & Buhler, James 2000, ‘Introduction’ in Buhler, James & Flinn, 

of Record Producers*, Billboard Books, New York.


Pareles, Jon 1990, ‘When the business of music becomes even bigger’ in *The New York Times*, 
Monday, March 19, C17.

Paulin, Scott D. 2000, ‘Richard Wagner and the fantasy of cinematic unity: the idea of the 
Gesamtkunstwerk in the history and theory of film music’ in Buhler, James & Flinn, Caryl & 

Press, Chicago.


Rolontz, Bob 1958, ‘Drive, talent, hits, Clark help make Philly the hottest’ in *The Billboard*, March 10, p.4.


Rutsky, R.L. 1999, ‘Surfing the other: ideology on the beach’ in *Film Quarterly*, vol.52, no.4, Summer, pp.12-23.


Schneider, Leonard W. 1954, ‘You can keep the geniuses! Good team’s Decca answer’ in The Billboard, August 28, p.16.

Schoenfeld 1958, ‘More than ever it’s the recording that continues to wag the music biz’ in Variety, January 8, p.213.

_________1964, ‘Victory through hair power’ in Variety, December 30, p.37.


Secon, Paul 1944, ‘Disking starts, ban’s over’ in The Billboard, November 18, 1944, pp.3, 64-65.


Swigart, Bill 1930, ‘Studio music’ in *Variety*, January 8, p.121.


Temple, Michael 1999, ‘The Nutty Professor: teaching film with Jean-Luc Godard’ in *Screen* 40: 3, Autumn.


*Variety*, 1905 –


White, Timothy 1996, ‘Please don’t wake me: producer Russ Titelman recalls 35 years in the service of a California dream’ in Billboard, June 22, pp.41-54.


