

THE VANISHING HEDGEROWS

Reflections on a Musical Theme

Paul Lewis

In 1966 I was told by a senior official of The Composers' Guild of Great Britain that by composing for television I was prostituting my art. Personally speaking, I have never regarded the creation of music to accompany television programmes as any less noble an occupation than the provision of music to accompany theatre productions. If the great composers of the past had regarded the latter as artistic prostitution we would in all probability have had no suites of incidental theatre music from Purcell, no *Midsummer Night's Dream* from Mendelssohn nor *Peer Gynt* from Grieg. And what of the great collaborations 'twixt movie director and composer: Eisenstein and Prokofiev, Olivier and Walton, Hitchcock and Herrmann? No – as far as I am concerned, to be offered the opportunity to compose for television is both an honour and a very great challenge; one has a direct line into people's homes and lives, and one ignores the duty to provide the best possible music for the largest imaginable audience at one's peril.

As a composer I have had the good fortune to have collaborated with producer-director David Cobham regularly since 1970. David is an avid naturalist as well as a film-maker, and his films are all imbued with a great love for their subject matter, enhanced by a deep understanding of how to use music. And I employ the word 'use' advisedly, for in his very moving Henry Williamson film *The Vanishing Hedgerows*, for which I composed the musical score, we did indeed attempt to use music in a positive way.

The supplying of aural wallpaper to cover the cracks, joins, inconsistencies and actors' and director's misjudgements in a film has never interested me; if the music cannot add a valuable element to the film, or in some way enhance the argument or forward the storyline, then the composer should in my opinion keep quiet. Thus the placing of music within a film is as important as is the nature of the music. David therefore discussed in detail the positioning of the *Vanishing Hedgerows* music cues with the editor, Terry Twigg, taking into account the use of natural sound effects as well as the rhythm of H.W.'s commentary, so that I was presented with a very clear structure on first viewing the loosely-edited film. At this stage David always allows me to offer counter-suggestions: to start or to end a music cue earlier or later perhaps, or to try something completely different if I so wish. It was then that the editor provided me with a shot-list for each music cue. The cues were numbered separately for each reel of film and the exact timings of each shot or voice-over were listed. Nowadays, in the age of the home video machine, composers receive a video copy of the film with a time-code printed onto the picture instead, for the music has to fit precisely. The *Vanishing Hedgerows* score was recorded to stop-watch, though it is more usual to have the film projected onto a monitor screen so that the director can see how the music lays with the pictures, for this is the first time that anyone has actually heard the music, other than perhaps being hammered out on the composer's piano, or in the composer's case, in his own head!

For simplicity and directness I used only two instruments for *The Vanishing Hedgerows*: flute and harp. The musicians had one 3-hour session in which to learn and record the 10 minutes and 47 seconds of music under my supervision. Christopher Taylor was the flautist and Marie Goossens the harpist. Both were fine and well-loved musicians; neither is alive today.

I mentioned earlier the decision to attempt to use music in a positive way. I deliberately chose to compose a simple folk-song-like melody in order to relate directly to the Norfolk countryside seen in the film, for which I felt a great affection, having been a regular visitor to the county for several years. Folk songs grow from the earth and from the everyday occupations and feelings of the people who draw their living therefrom, and I wanted the music to evoke in the viewer a nostalgia for a vanishing way of life in order to underpin H.W.'s plea for a return to traditional farming methods. I could have composed bleak music to emphasize the destruction that was being wrought upon the countryside, but this would have been alienating; I am an optimist, I am passionately attached to our rural past and traditional way of life, and I wanted to let the music play upon the emotions of anyone susceptible to this argument – perhaps even to swing back the balance in the case of anyone erring in the opposite direction.

I did use one ancient melody. H.W. gave me a cue which it would have been criminal to ignore: 'Sumer is icumen in' he said, quoting the title and first line of a famous 13th century song, the melody of which I therefore wove into the texture of the music which accompanies the dazzling montage of spring flowers, hares, hedge birds and cuckoos.

The film and the music lingered in my mind long after completion and transmission, and from 1980 onwards the idea of reworking the score for concert performance nagged at me, until, on being asked in 1992 by the young flute and harp duo Kirsten Spratt and Ruth Holden for a work to programme alongside the Mozart Flute and Harp Concerto, I finally completed my *Norfolk Concerto* for flute, harp and strings.

The *Vanishing Hedgerows* music forms the first movement of that concerto, 'Rhapsody', lasting some 6 minutes. With the added richness of the string orchestra present, I was able to embroider the harp part, adding a filigree texture which would have been distracting on the film soundtrack and which would have been too difficult for the original harpist to master satisfactorily in the course of a single recording session. The mood of the movement is elegiac until the ominous final section which in the film accompanies shots of Old Nog the Heron catching a dragonfly; in the concert hall this has the effect of ending the 'Rhapsody' with a question-mark, which is my way of reminding the listener that the battle is not won – the future of too many hedgerows hangs yet in the balance.

Norfolk Concerto is dedicated to David Cobham, and by a neat and perhaps Fortean coincidence, the first performance took place in Stowe church, just a few yards from the very room in which the young David Cobham had slept whilst at Stowe School, and in which he had cared for a peregrine falcon and a tawny owl which he had rescued. Before that performance I spoke to the audience of the origins of the music, and afterwards one of the listeners told me that the opening notes had brought back clear memories of the film. Thus it is that music, as well as recalling a distant memory, can also recall a distant message: in this case the message so eloquently expressed by H.W. and David Cobham.

And the story continues. I have just adapted the 'Rhapsody' as a separate work for harmonica and harp entitled *Norfolk Rhapsody*, adding a positive ending after the musical question-mark referred to above, and dedicating it 'In Memoriam Henry Williamson'. This will shortly be recorded on a CD of harmonica works of mine for release in the autumn.

As a coda or footnote: on Sunday May 4th, 1997, I listened to 'Legends of Light Music' on BBC Radio 2, only to hear Denis Norden, on playing a recording of my 'Spring and Autumn' TV theme, state that I was more immediately associated with such titles as (amongst others) *Vanishing Hedgerows*; and the following day I saw on my local TV news a group of protesters encamped before a Saxon hedgerow which had just been attacked by the chainsaws of a very famous building firm who ought to have known better.

So Henry Williamson's words are as current today as when he first spoke them 25 years ago, and if the performance and recording of my music can help bring them to mind, then that alone justifies my belief that I have not, in all the busy years of my television composing career, been prostituting my art.

Paul Lewis was born in Brighton, Sussex, in 1943. In 1963 at the age of 20, he became Assistant Musical Adviser to ABC Television and composed music for ITV's celebrated Armchair Theatre series. Since then he has composed almost exclusively for television, regarding as a challenge and an honour the opportunity to write the best possible music for the largest possible audience. His work includes 'Arthur of the Britons', 'Spring and Autumn', 'Lady Killers', 'Kings Royal', 'Swallows and Amazons Forever!', 'The Prisoner of Zenda', 'The Dark Angel' (with Peter O'Toole) and 'Woof!', the Emmy Award-winning children's series which has been running since 1988 (directed and produced by David Cobham). Recently he has turned to the composition of concert works.

212.

"think of the many varieties of birds that use hedges"

0 secs start of bird montage

30 1/2 secs partridges feeding on frosty stubble "I love the partridge"

51 secs end of sequence; go to CU Henry picking up a handful of earth "let us go with Nature"

213

"let us see that many animals live, where two, perhaps one alone, live today"

plough music slower

0 secs start final montage (recap) of animals

1m. A

31 secs ploughman riding horse into the setting sun; start final Voice Over.

solof (1m.)

59 secs End of Voice Over

bar 3

of recap (hypentny)

1m. 9 secs cut to last shot, ploughman riding back to the farm; this is the reverse of the first shot but one in the film.

SUPERIMPOSE END TITLES

1m. 35 secs End of Fade Out, titles and background.

Above: One of editor Terry Twigg's shot-list of music cues for *The Vanishing Hedgerows*, with the composer's notes in the margin.

Opposite: Paul Lewis' original pencil draft for the opening title music for *The Vanishing Hedgerows*.

(M)

5th. again - see

1'09" 12"

(pity)

slow
man looking worse

G⁴

10" horizontal current

RIT.

(pity)

1'35"

c.rit. - 12" 6" 12"

von verge of extinction

1'09"

Bar

