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'A crazy clutter of the mediaeval, medical mind': Ken Russell, Peter Maxwell Davies and Modernist Medievalism in *The Devils*

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Abstract Ken Russell's 1971 film *The Devils* is a shocking historical drama which, eclipsed by its own battle against censorship, has only recently had a critical revival. A landmark musical collaboration central to that film remains unexplored: Peter Maxwell Davies wrote the score, which is heard in tandem with 'period' performances from David Munrow and the Early Music Consort of London. Though ostensibly historical, the film's disruptive atemporal style is elevated through an art of stylized anachronism. This collaboration mirrors Davies's opera *Taverner* (premièred in 1972), not only because that too featured Munrow and his consort but also because Russell was supposed to direct its première. This article posits Davies's film score as a compelling work combining historicist compositional interests and a challenging aesthetic of excess within the popular context of mass cinematic spectacle. Informed by the close study of Davies's own manuscripts, it argues for new ways of understanding the role of a persistent past in the music of a resolutely modernist present.

'A crazy clutter of the mediaeval, medical mind'. Thus reads the film director Ken Russell's script for a scene that occurs roughly halfway through his 1971 cult feature *The Devils.* It goes on: 'horses' hooves, human bones, the foetus of a whale, retorts, jars … and dominating everything, the suspended crocodile under which evidence against GRANDIER is being discussed'.[1] The crocodile did not, regrettably, survive the cut of this scene, but the room's anachronistic mélange of medievalized artefacts, placed incongruously side by side, serves as a metaphor: not simply for *The Devils*, but for a more general and pervasive kind of historical imaginary (and/or historical) presence that is prevalent across film, television, music and other media besides.

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[1] London, Royal Academy of Music, DM/5/3/2. See <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/de49f789-9c6c-4dde-ab92-2d97f2e79857>.

While often engaged with what it means to be 'historically informed', that presence is frequently – if not uniformly – marked by contradiction and anachronism; it is at authenticity's outer reaches that the creative past most effectively speaks to the present.

The Devils has experienced something of a revival in its critical fortunes in recent years, fuelled in part by a renewed interest in Russell himself – a man now recognized as a major player in what the film critic Raymond Durgnat has described as a fantasist or antirealist 'phantasmagorical' British cinema tradition.[2] But while a great deal of the growing literature on Russell has shown considerable interest in this film especially, unpacking the minutiae of its production, release and reception, there has been no critical investigation of the significant musical collaborations which are both heard and felt in the film.[3] Indeed, it was British music's own *enfant terrible* Peter Maxwell Davies who composed the score for *The Devils*, and an interest in reanimating the past in bold ways is one trait that Davies and Russell shared in their respective careers. This was one of only two film scores that Davies composed (the other was for another Russell film, *The Boy Friend*, in the same year), and his music in *The Devils* is routinely juxtaposed with so-called period-appropriate, usually diegetic (though mostly off-screen), performances from the early-music popularizer David Munrow and the Early Music Consort of London. It is one of the aims of this article, then, to explore for the first time aspects of Davies's film work, as well as some of the circumstances and details of his (and Munrow's) little-known and short-lived association with Russell, which ended with an aborted collaboration on the première of Davies's opera *Taverner* in 1972.[4]

In this article, however, it is 'medievalism' – that is to say, the 'semantic site for the fusion of creative and scholarly engagement with the past' as something distinct from a

[2] Raymond Durgnat, 'The Great British Phantasmagoria', *Film Comment*, 13/3 (1977), 48–53 (p. 48); available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43451340?refreqid=excelsior%3A94629f1afdf76823d6eef36c18ed3e3e>. Much of the recent literature on Russell assumes this point and moves forward from there.

[3] See, however, Richard Crouse, *Raising Hell: Ken Russell and the Unmaking of the Devils* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2012), and the documentary *Hell on Earth: The Desecration and Resurrection of The Devils* (2004), fronted by Mark Kermode, both of which, it might be said, take the score and collaboration into some (mostly documentary) consideration. As we shall see, it is in the musicological literature about Davies's *The Devils* that the score is most notably absent.

[4] Revealingly, there is no available or complete authoritative score for the soundtrack of *The Devils*. My research, therefore, has been aided by Davies's fragmentary handwritten notes, sketches and manuscripts held at the British Library, London. The *Suite from The Devils*, incidentally, which includes some of the music from the film score, has been performed a couple of times, including once in a themed BBC Proms performance (Prom 40, 29 August 1974) featuring both the Fires of London and Munrow's Early Music Consort of London. Meirion Bowen (writing for *The Guardian*, 30 August 1974) gave the concert a lukewarm review at the time, but noted that many people came 'eager to hear the two groups combined for the incidental music […] for Ken Russell's film "The Devils"'. Parts of it were also performed in 2014 by the BBC Concert Orchestra conducted by Nicholas Cleobury and released in the same year on CD by Naxos (<https://www.naxos.com/catalogue/item.asp?item_code=8.572408>).

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learned, scientistic or philological form of the study of the Middle Ages – that I want to foreground first and foremost.[5] In particular, I am interested in how we might start to rethink and better understand a strain of *modernist medievalism* in post-war British new music through this unusual (but by no means incongruous, and perhaps even exemplary) case of a little-appreciated score by a composer of significant national standing. Indeed, in the improbable instance of a cult film, Davies's cerebral form of medievalism is newly inflected by the possibility of alternative cinematic reading strategies that celebrate bad taste and excess in chronologically circuitous contexts that connect disparate discursive spaces of art (both 'high' and 'low') on stage, on the screen and in the concert hall.

Modernist medievalism, in so far as it is characteristic of Davies's work, came close to achieving a mass audience through *The Devils*.[6] As well as better accounting for a one-of-a-kind film score, ill-fitted to established narratives of post-war new music, this article proposes to go further. Indeed, it contends that it is in medievalism's playful treatment of such concepts as continuity and authenticity, humour, primitivism, spectacle and co-disciplinarity – spliced together here by an aesthetic of noisy heretical excess – that we may find more effective routes for understanding the role of a persistent past in the music of a resolutely modernist present.[7]

Medievalism in *The Devils*, and in British music

The Devils – based on the Aldous Huxley novel *The Devils of Loudun* (1952) – is set in the seventeenth century, in a France still reeling from its wars of religion. It epitomizes many of the traits of a timely cinematic medievalism, with (as we shall see) garish costumes and castle walls, as well as religious superstition and violence, to say nothing of the shawm-dominated, raspy, diegetic music-making that takes place throughout. It tells, then, the partially true story of the mass possession of an entire convent of Ursuline nuns in the French medieval fortress town of Loudun, triggered (in this version of events) by the sexual obsession of one Sister Jeanne (Vanessa Redgrave) with the rebel Jesuit priest Urbain Grandier (Oliver Reed). This possession becomes the pretext for a cruel exorcism of Jeanne by a team of inquisitors working under orders from Cardinal Richelieu and, ultimately, the politically motivated trial and execution of Grandier.

A product of its time, the film draws heavily upon John Whiting's 1961 play *The Devils*, itself adapted from Huxley's novel. The film retains much that is theatrical in style – this is particularly obvious in the actors' performances, which are so often histrionic,

[5] Richard Utz, 'Coming to Terms with Medievalism: Towards a Conceptual History', *European Journal of English Studies*, 15 (2011), 101–13 (p. 109).

[6] For all the controversy this film received, and its storied history of censorship (some of which will be covered in the present article), the film prospered in British and European cinemas.

[7] All these terms (authenticity, humour, etc.) are invoked as chapter titles in the useful primer for medievalism studies *Medievalism: Key Critical Terms*, ed. Elizabeth Emery and Richard Utz (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2014).

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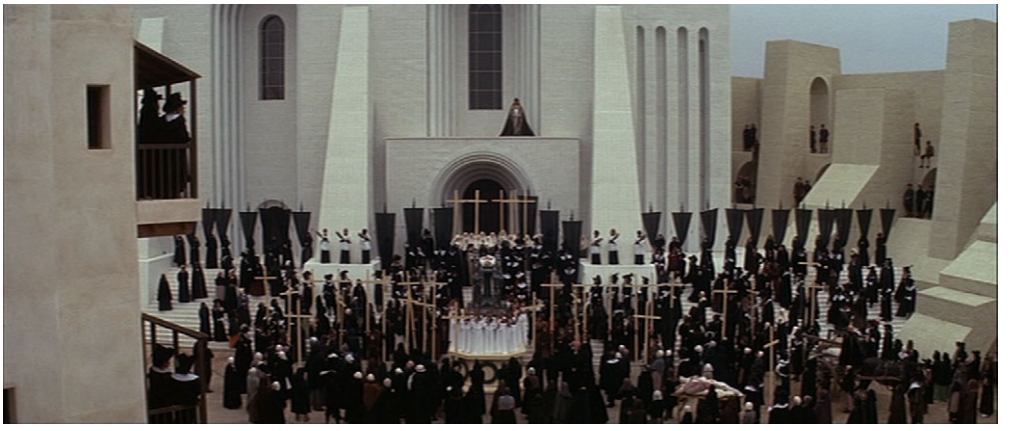

Figure 1 The city of Loudun's modernist-inspired medieval architecture. Sets designed by Derek Jarman.

shrieking and loud. Furthermore, it follows by only a couple of years Krzysztof Penderecki's similarly expressionistic opera on the same story, *Die Teufel von Loudun* (1969).[8] Visually, *The Devils* is dominated by a vast set designed by the young Derek Jarman: this was his first major film work, and the largest set that Pinewood Studios had seen. It depicts Loudun's long-destroyed and medieval-walled city through the lens of an early twentieth-century kind of architectural modernism (the viewer may recall Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*), as can be seen in the imposing white geometries of Loudun's walls (see Figure 1). This architecture, and the kind of deeply embedded structural anachronism it embodies, runs deep in the film's holistic sonic-visual textures.

Of course, *The Devils* is set not in the Middle Ages, but in the early seventeenth century. However, as in other works, such as Davies's opera *Taverner*, it requires no great leap of the imagination to describe the stylized early modern or Renaissance in *The Devils*, as well as the musical-expressionist idiom that these works share (complete with references to 'early music'), as potent instances of sonic medievalism or its ambiguously defined partner, neo-medievalism.[9] Indeed, it is the porousness of the

[8] A comparative study is beyond the scope of this article, but it might be a worthwhile and complementary investigation. Indeed, a television film version by the original cast of the Hamburg State Opera première of Penderecki's opera was made in 1969. I have been unable to ascertain whether Russell or Davies might have seen this version, or whether there may be a line of influence.

[9] There is an ongoing discussion about the distinction between the terms 'medievalism' and 'neo-medievalism'; see *Neomedievalism in the Media: Essays on Film, Television, and Electronic Games*, ed. Carol L. Robinson and Pamela Clements (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2012). Medievalism may variously refer to the imaginative and creative recreation of the Middle Ages, whereas neo-medievalism denotes a speculative form of the medieval as it appears in fantasy or science fiction. Occasionally, however, neo-medievalism is used to describe any medieval imaginary, positioned against a scientific medievalism, that might elsewhere separate medievalism from work that is 'medievalist'. But in order to underscore the artificiality and contingency of the recreation of the distant past in any (and all) media, I characterize medievalism and neo-medievalism as essentially interchangeable.

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medieval period – its historiographical fuzziness – that is the locus of its imaginative power. Medievalism has functioned since its nineteenth-century origins through the evocation and splicing together of a 'non-contiguous' and distant past with the present.[10] Popular and fantasy medievalism in literature, opera or film invariably employs the distant past as a stage on which the tensions of the present are played out and where, often, futures can be imagined – distance and alterity being key. So it is, then, that medievalism trades on an imaginary pre-modernity broadly defined. In short, it is a site of contested meanings, encompassing a range of stylized temporal discontinuities.[11]

That medievalism is a slippery and even contradictory field also forms something of a rallying cry for scholars who believe strongly in the ongoing vitalism of the past and the lived intersection of scholarly and creative practice – with all the challenges this poses to already vexed notions of authenticity. On the basis of a discussion of the seeming strangeness of the architecture of the American university campus, for example (complete with often Disney-level Gothic revivalism), Daniel Lukes has declared evocatively that medievalism (or neo-medievalism) 'looks to the future, unravels time and disrupts teleology, makes new the old, celebrates the impossible, makes mockeries of truth […] feels ashamed for its lack of respect for the historical Middle Ages, and distracts and enchants with improbably absurd assemblages'.[12]

Lukes's colourful exaltation should ring true for anyone familiar with the carnivalesque atmosphere into which *The Devils* descends during its closing tumultuous execution scene, where Grandier is publicly dragged to and burnt at the stake amid grotesque scenes (the walls of the city are destroyed at the end) – even if it does so as an inversion of Lukes's implied utopia. It is a sequence in which time and setting dissolve into something neither strictly here nor there, neither past nor future, but wholly cruel, visceral and *now*. This image is conjured sonically in an ever-escalating musical mess that is entirely isorhythmic (governed by a transforming and cyclical cantus firmus), contrapuntal (or polyphonic) and dissonant. A production list of audio in the film which was compiled at the time (edited in Table 1) recalls the film's circular sonic chronologies: smatterings of 'Dies irae' and 'Sanctus', alongside dovetailing musical sequences both 'authentic' (Munrow's passages here include selections from composers like Michael Praetorius and Claude Gervaise, among others) and new ('P. Maxwell Davies'). If the film's central acts find some semblance of stability, it is at the beginning and the end that the names of Munrow (misspelt 'Monroe') and Davies (old and new, respectively, you might argue) – and thus musical time itself – become enmeshed, dissolute and out of sync.

[10] Utz, 'Coming to Terms with Medievalism', 106. Perhaps the most iconic and parodied form of popular medievalism, after all, is the costumed 'Renaissance fayre'.

[11] I borrow this phrase from Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr, '"Sportful Combat" Gets Medieval: The Representation of Historical Violence at Renaissance Fairs', *The English Renaissance in Popular Culture: An Age for All Time*, ed. Greg Colón Semenza (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 115–26 (p. 116).

[12] Daniel Lukes, 'Comparative Neomedievalisms: A Little Bit Medieval', *Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies*, 5 (2014), 1–9 (pp. 8–9).

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TABLE 1
PRODUCTION LIST OF AUDIO IN *THE DEVILS*

Duration	*Title of composition*	*Composer/author/arranger*
1.03	Introduction to King's Dance	D. Monroe
1.56	King's Dance	D. Monroe
1.08	Titles	P. Maxwell Davies
2.48	Dies irae	D. Monroe
3.39	Dies irae	D. Monroe
0.50	Grandier's House	P. Maxwell Davies
0.26	Plague Death Dance	P. Maxwell Davies
1.24	Interlude – Grandier and Mlle De Brou	P. Maxwell Davies
1.40	Plague Death Dance	P. Maxwell Davies
0.25	Plague Death Dance	P. Maxwell Davies
2.52	Plainsong Sanctus	P. Maxwell Davies
1.30	Jeanne's Second Vision	P. Maxwell Davies
0.18	Street Music	D. Monroe
0.13	Grounds of the King's Palace	D. Monroe
0.05	Grounds of the King's Palace	D. Monroe
0.08	Grounds of the King's Palace	D. Monroe
0.08	Grounds of the King's Palace	D. Monroe
0.26	Grounds of the King's Palace	D. Monroe
0.10	Street Music	D. Monroe
0.20	Street Music	D. Monroe
2.58	Wedding of Père Grandier and Mlle De Brou	P. Maxwell Davies
0.31	Humming Nuns	P. Maxwell Davies
0.48	Mock marriage in convent	P. Maxwell Davies
1.00	Fight – Mlle De Brou and Sister Jeanne	P. Maxwell Davies
0.15	Help me, Father	P. Maxwell Davies
2.14	Cue 28	P. Maxwell Davies
2.27	De Brou – Grandier	P. Maxwell Davies
1.22	Grandier narrates letter	P. Maxwell Davies
0.23	Fanfare no. 1	P. Maxwell Davies
0.08	Exorcism music	P. Maxwell Davies
0.25	Jeanne's supposed liberation	P. Maxwell Davies
0.17	Fanfare no. 2	P. Maxwell Davies
0.40	Organ only	P. Maxwell Davies
0.18	Sign of the Devil	P. Maxwell Davies

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Table 1 (cont.)

Duration	*Title of composition*	*Composer/author/arranger*
1.00	Condemn[n]ing Grandier	P. Maxwell Davies
1.52	Grandier's House smashed	D. Monroe
0.45	Street song 1	D. Monroe
0.55	Street Music	P. Maxwell Davies
0.39	Street song 2	P. Maxwell Davies
0.40	Grandier Dragged to stake	D. Monroe
1.10	Execution of Grandier	P. Maxwell Davies
0.12	Grandier Dragged to stake	D. Monroe
0.12	Grandier Dragged to stake	D. Monroe
0.20	Played simultaneously with Execution of Grandier	P. Maxwell Davies
0.15	Execution of Grandier	P. Maxwell Davies
0.13	Grandier Dragged to stake	D. Monroe
4.49	Execution of Grandier	P. Maxwell Davies
3.55	End Title	P. Maxwell Davies

Source: London, Royal Academy of Music, DM/5/3.

As suggested by the scholar Jonathan Hsy, it is, then, precisely in 'medievalism's conspicuous concurrence of temporalities' that a special space is created for 'co-disciplinarity' in which 'an individual or a group of people [… can] test the very conventions of academic disciplines and […] experiment across diverse modes of artistic production'.[13] Again, this rings true not simply for work in medievalism studies itself (which cuts across any number of academic disciplines: literary criticism, art history, film theory and so on), but for products of medievalism including that which is under investigation here. Indeed, however much medievalism can come to reveal, *The Devils* is a complex constellation blurring much that is ossified in our cultural economy: in the first instance, combining Russell's pop pedigree and transgressive aesthetic with the avant-garde Davies (incorporating, stylistically speaking, elements from his Artaudian music theatre and earlier musical expressionism), alongside Munrow's own 'historically informed' (but heavily stylized) early-music recreations and even the film's set designer Jarman's medievalized homage to early twentieth-century modernist futures.[14] It is through the contradictory lens of the distant past that the film's cross and co-disciplinary innovations might best be recognized, demonstrating what Hsy

[13] Jonathan Hsy, 'Co-disciplinarity', *Medievalism*, ed. Emery and Utz, 43–52 (p. 43).
[14] This was a very early work for Jarman (who was then only 19 years old). Jarman would go on to create a formidable body of work locating the modern in the medieval. See Robert Mills, *Derek Jarman's Medieval Modern* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2018).

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describes as the 'sheer range of venues through which inventive medievalism flows, generating new artistic media in an ever-shifting present'.[15]

The field of medievalism studies has only recently begun to show its influence in musicology. Its capacity to bring into collision divergent musical discourses and to push critical enquiry beyond 'chronological and geographical boundaries' is, however, already evident.[16] In the field of new music, especially, there is much to say. Take, for instance, Emma Dillon's analysis of George Benjamin's hugely successful opera *Written on Skin* (2012).[17] Dillon draws specifically on the works of two leading scholars of medievalism, Caroline Dinshaw and Louise D'Arcens, to call attention to the productive potential of the co-presence of multiple and conflicting temporalities in a work: the 'asynchronous' or 'out of sync' in artefacts of medievalism (also evoked in the Lukes quotation above).[18] She also refers to the making fluid of boundaries between the scholarly (or 'discovered') and the 'made' (fictional or creative) medieval, and the creative intersection that this fosters.[19] The resultant 'new modality' – 'in which studies of the medieval past "discovered" and "made" are juxtaposed, and integrated' – might fruitfully be applied not only to music in the opera house but also to absolute music more generally.

Benjamin's medievalism – overt or disguised in compositional technical dress, 'discovered' or 'made', or a combination or juxtaposition thereof – might be viewed in the context of a post-war lineage beginning with Davies. Indeed, while Davies's 'Manchester School' milieu has often been said to have brought a kind of Continental high modernism to British shores in the 1950s, Jonathan Cross briefly notes in relation to Harrison Birtwistle that 'neo-medievalism' was a 'prominent feature' of that composer's music and an 'interest that was also to be shared at Manchester by Peter Maxwell Davies and Alexander Goehr'.[20] British contemporary music, then, has indeed often been characterized by its playful relationship with a (broadly conceived) medieval history:[21] it is, you might say, one of its defining qualities. What this means in

[15] Hsy, 'Co-disciplinarity', 50.

[16] See, for example, Stephen C. Meyer and Kirsten Yri, 'Introduction', *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Medievalism*, ed. Meyer and Yri (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 1–13 (p. 1).

[17] Emma Dillon, 'Vocal Philologies: *Written on Skin* and the Troubadours', *Opera Quarterly*, 33 (2017), 207–48. *Written on Skin* has had a strongly salutary effect in this respect, inspiring a number of scholars to probe the intersection of an avant-garde present with the medieval past; see, for example, Maria Ryan, 'Angels in the Archive: Animating the Past in *Written on Skin*', *Recomposing the Past: Representations of Early Music on Stage and Screen*, ed. James Cook, Alexander Kolassa and Adam Whittaker (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 174–87, and Anne Stone, 'The Postmodern Troubadour', *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Medievalism*, ed. Meyer and Yri, 397–419.

[18] Dillon, 'Vocal Philologies', 214.

[19] *Ibid.*, 215.

[20] Jonathan Cross, *Harrison Birtwistle: Man, Mind, Music* (London: Faber & Faber, 2000), 11.

[21] Although I concern myself here with the post-war generation of composers, the same could be said of preceding generations of composers too, for example with regard to the folk medievalisms employed by Ralph Vaughan Williams and Gustav Holst, and more generally in the so-called English Musical Renaissance, as well as the Tudor (and other) medievalisms of the likes of Benjamin Britten and Michael Tippett. On Britten and Tippett specifically, see, for example, Heather Wiebe, *Britten's Unquiet Pasts: Sound and Memory in Postwar Reconstruction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

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a music-analytical context has been the subject of some discussion, its presence discerned by close analysis of (say) embedded plainchant quotation as note row (a technique I investigate further below). But its meaning and implications for the situating of ivory-tower composers within broader cultural currents have largely been taken for granted. Indeed, as Anne Stone notes, by the late 1960s British modernism was 'conditioned by the imagined medieval, and the sound of the medieval was inflected with 1960s modernity'.[22] She draws attention, in particular, to some of the interconnections between the contemporary music scene and the early-music revival – interconnections that are discernible across popular music (as in the folk-music revival) and in popular film and television too. Viewed in this way, medievalism is a vector through which to recognize the changing terrain of the popular historical perception conditioned simultaneously by scholarly and imaginative work in the field. 'Serious' music, as evidenced in *The Devils*, has much to contribute to that story, and to its destabilizing presence in post-war modernity.

The Devils: paracinema and its reception

While it was intended as something of a 'serious' and 'historically informed' study of power and corruption, *The Devils* is today mostly remembered for scenes of gruesome torture and dubious medical practice. (Russell was, despite the implied critique in the film, a devout Roman Catholic.) Particularly disturbing for its critics was an extended passage, promptly cut, that has come to be known enigmatically as the 'Rape of Christ'. In this bacchanalian scene, scores of crazed and naked nuns molest religious paraphernalia, watched over by (it is implied) a masturbating priest, and they do so while accompanied by frenetic camerawork and an increasingly cacophonous soundtrack: a noisy and improvisatory mélange dominated by a percussive ensemble including police whistles, a 'knife on plate', a thunder sheet and more besides.[23] If we take this scene as a microcosm of the film as a whole (and to do so would not be unjustified), *The Devils* is clearly a stylistically abrasive work that is hard to classify, a reputation reinforced by its having a contested legacy and reception that has relegated it for much of its history to the rarefied status of 'cult film' and even a kind of 'video nasty'.[24] All the while, it was marketed as something of a prestige 'authentic' historical feature, despite an expressionistic visual and sonic style that foregrounds *excess*, entirely in keeping with Russell's authorial signature. The score is fully imbricated in this contradiction. At once entirely legitimizing, it is the work of someone whom the general public may have seen as a

[22] Stone, 'The Postmodern Troubadour', 416.

[23] This list is based on archival material dating from 1971 at the British Library, London (MS Mus. 1409, fol. 71).

[24] I refer to the cult horror tradition which has historically relied on word of mouth and a certain amount of cult capital associated with bootleg video trading. The term 'video nasty' itself comes from the British controversy and public moral panic in 1981 surrounding the availability of a number of horror-film video cassettes: for more on this, see Julian Petley, *Film and Video Censorship in Modern Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 23–32. *The Devils* has also been cited as an example of the 'nunsploitation' subgenre of often lurid, usually low-budget exploitation films.

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prestige composer well versed in early-music techniques and sources, but simultaneously theatrically avant-garde: equally repugnant, sonically speaking, to a mainstream audience.

In a now highly mythologized account of runaway censorship and near public hysteria, and after a considerable tussle with both the British Board of Film Classification and the film's own studio, *The Devils* would receive a rare X certificate.[25] This was a response that came about, as Julian Petley has demonstrated, by way of a complex and interrelated, even artificial, public outcry conditioned by the seeming convergence of moralizing critics, local councils and socially conservative grassroots organizations (including Mary Whitehouse's Nationwide Festival of Light), many of which even went so far as to lie about the film's content while it was still in production.[26] It would be subjected to further cuts for audiences in the USA (where it was a commercial failure), and that heavily edited version went on to be released for home video in Britain and elsewhere.[27]

The Devils is a complex text that exists in multiple forms – its censored original release is not 'authentic', and the real deal is still being reconstructed. However, its reputation for shock and depravity is far in excess of anything that is really there in the film, despite being also the principal reason why it is sought by cinephiles today. All the same, the conditions of its suppression, its ambitious narrative and visual scope, and the evolving credibility of its director have inspired a counter-narrative arguing for its legitimization by inclusion in the canon.

The Devils, then, has all the ingredients of a cult classic. As a result, it occupies a creative-imaginary space not readily suited to the seemingly inescapable binary of prestige (or 'art') and popular cinema. That it has a score from a renowned 'avant-gardist' also adds to this mystique, though I might argue that that is to *mishear* the score itself. To this extent, then, it has much in common, I suggest, with what has long been referred to in film theory circles as 'paracinema' (and with its cognate aesthetics of 'trash'). Indeed, *The Devils* clearly challenged an ostensibly conservative establishment's ideal of what constitutes 'good taste', a term that is consistently (perhaps even lazily) invoked in the mainstream discussion of Russell's legacy.[28] 'Good taste', however, is also a hegemonic concept long recognized by Pierre Bourdieu as the

[25] See Craig Lapper, 'The Censors, the Studio and "Cutting the Orgy in Two"' in the booklet that accompanies the 2012 BFI DVD release of the film (<https://www2.bfi.org.uk/blu-rays-dvds/devils>), pp. 7–13. Russell is quoted as saying after the *penultimate*(!) bout of cuts: 'I believe that despite the fact I have butchered the film at your bidding far and away beyond anything I dreamed of […] what remains still just about retains my intentions – albeit in a watered-down version' (p. 12).

[26] See Julian Petley, 'Witch Hunt: The Word, The Press and *The Devils*', *Journal of British Television and Film*, 12 (2015), 515–38.

[27] Successive releases have restored some of the edited content (the BFI DVD restores the originally released X-certificate version; see above, n. 25), but the full 'director's cut' remains unavailable, other than having been viewed in select cinema showings. There has been a lively and ongoing campaign, led by the film critic Mark Kermode, to have this version (including the 'Rape of Christ' scene) released commercially.

[28] A quick internet search will show that 'good taste' (and Russell's problematic relationship with it) was consistently invoked in obituaries in (among other publications) the *Financial Times* and *The Guardian* when he died in 2011.

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spurious tool of a taste-making sociocultural elite; and, as Bourdieu states: 'Tastes are perhaps first and foremost distastes, disgust provoked by horror or visceral intolerance of the tastes of others.'[29] In this view, 'good taste' functions not in the affirmative sense (so as to delineate, say, excellence), but instead to maintain something altogether more unequal, and to exclude any challenge to an oligarchic cultural order. No wonder, then, that a newer breed of scholarship concerned with Russell's legacy shies away from the label now – and to this end, mention of Davies as composer for this film is principally employed for his legitimizing status as a serious composer of 'art music' rather than a co-conspirator in cultish trash cinema.

Building from this theoretical foundation, the influential notion of 'good taste' has become the basis for the study of 'paracinema' – an elastic concept intended to describe a huge range of 'seemingly unrelated' and 'bad taste' film subgenres (from exploitation movies of all kinds, obscure documentary, softcore pornography and more).[30] Paracinema is less a subgenre of film than it is a method of reading, though; or, to quote Jeffrey Sconce, a 'counter aesthetic turned subcultural sensibility devoted to all manner of cultural detritus'.[31] Poised at the hinterlands of both 'excess' and 'style', paracinematic readings encourage a non-diegetic, detached appreciation of the 'whole film' where 'unconvincing special effects, *blatant anachronism*, or histrionic acting' bring the profilmic and extratextual into dialogue with traditional narrative verisimilitude so as to encourage distanced, critical and heterogenic readings.[32]

The paracinematic canon also reveals (Joan Hawkins has suggested) something generally overlooked in the cultural analysis of art cinema, namely 'the degree to which high culture trades on the same images, tropes, and themes that characterize low culture'.[33] A paracinematic lens reveals that the apparently impermeable line that preserves social structures' corollary to the high and low divide in art is, in fact, a porous, if not outright moveable, one. Therein, too, lies the discursive power of the 'paracinema' label which is also relevant to this article: as Hawkins has also observed of the mail-order video market catalogues in which esoteric and cult film canons have historically been circulated (such catalogues freely list works of 'art' cinema alongside the 'low end' of body horror and cult trash), paracinema perspectives can do much to destabilize binary or hierarchic assumptions of taste.[34]

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[29] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 57.

[30] Jeffrey Sconce, '"Trashing the Academy": Taste, Excess and an Emerging Politics of Style', *Screen*, 36 (1995), 371–93 (p. 372).

[31] *Ibid.*

[32] *Ibid.*, 387 (emphasis added).

[33] Joan Hawkins, *Cutting Edge: Art-Horror and the Horrific Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 3.

[34] *Ibid.* No doubt the widened availability of the internet and the growing size of platforms such as YouTube have contributed to and accelerated (or even, perhaps, dissolved) this category. Certainly, YouTube facilitates the kinds of cultural juxtapositions implied here on a scale that could only have been imagined in an era of VHS. That increasingly uncensored versions of *The Devils* have begun to circulate in the last 20 years is, arguably, no coincidence. See, for example, Jodi Brooks, 'The State of the Discipline: Film Studies as Bad Object', *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, 24 (2010), 791–7.

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The Devils, suffice it to say, does hold something of a paracinema pedigree on its own, and without my interpretative intervention, it operates (whether intentionally or not) at the productive fissure of art and trash. Indeed, it is mentioned (along with three other Russell features) in *The Psychotronic Encyclopedia of Film* (something of a bible for the subject), and the reference book *Horror Films of the 1970s* describes it as a 'spiky, controversial, even inflammatory film' that 'fits in with the witch-hunt tradition of such gory 1970s films as *Mark of the Devils* (1972)'.[35] The 'witch hunt' obsession and folk horror associations indicate, also, a special place for medievalism within traditions of trash cinema. And while it would not be entirely fitting to throw Russell wholly into this category (such responses to the film run counter to the symbolist or mannerist reading more common today),[36] explicit authorial intent aside, a film as sonically and visually striking as this deserves correspondingly heterogeneous perspectives. Equally deserving of this is Davies's soundtrack, which, as a kind of musical cognate for the visual action on screen, also trades in a similar aesthetics of noisy and flamboyant excess bordering on 'trash', albeit in a language or idiom mostly preserved, critically speaking, for its association with a concert-hall (or, indeed, music-theatre) 'art music' tradition.

Blind alleys and cacophonies: Davies's medieval theologies

Davies's work for *The Devils* has received little attention in the scholarship on his music. Indeed, the politics of a serious composer stepping down from the ivory tower to score for a popular film – one with as chequered a reception history as this one – is tricky, especially where commentators may be inclined to maintain for the composer a position that is in some way privileged. That *The Devils* has gone on to find a renewed profile on that strange but productive cusp between cult horror and underappreciated 'art' film (of national significance) is a further complicating, though no doubt promising, vector. Comparisons should come as no surprise: Davies, too, was an artist who defied expectation.

Consider, then, the brief account of his collaboration with Russell in Mike Seabrook's understandably fawning Davies biography. For a start, any substantive details of the film itself are missed. Seabrook comments on Davies's enthusiastic acceptance following an 'approach' from Russell in 1971 and the direction of travel here is made very clear.[37] And, although Davies would admit to finding it an 'interesting novelty to

[35] Michael Weldon, *The Psychotronic Encyclopedia of Film* (London: Plexus, 1983); John Kenneth Muir, *Horror Films of the 1970s*, 2 vols. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002), i, 109.

[36] One might suggest that much of the current scholarly interest in Russell is concerned with 'rehabilitating' him, accounting for his idiosyncratic career by way of – as in the example of one recent essay collection – comparison with artistic mannerism and national style, such as in *Ken Russell: Re-viewing England's Last Mannerist*, ed. Kevin M. Flanagan (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009). This is fine, although the approach taken in this article recognizes that a rehabilitative route is not necessarily the most desirable or productive way of reading his work (at least in this case).

[37] Russell is, of course, aware of and very impressed with Davies's music here; we have no idea whether the reverse is true and are allowed to presume that this is not the case. Mike Seabrook, *Max: The Life and Music of Peter Maxwell Davies* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1994), 128.

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work with film people', he would, according to Seabrook, 'on the whole' see it as an 'interlude [and] just that […] a bit of a *blind alley*, out of the mainstream of his development as a composer, and having no influence on it'.[38]

There is, though, more to this score (which was exceptional for its time) than such an account would suggest, despite what the composer himself might have said. It is always, in any case, necessary to go far beyond the image- and reputation-sustaining activities of artists – which are, in fact, an extension of their creative activities.[39] As Mervyn Cooke – in an example of retrospective critical recognition that is rare today – has noted of the score, it remains (perhaps owing to a 'steady influx of jazz and pop scoring') a 'notable exception' in which 'extreme nondiegetic modernism' (consisting of 'disturbing expressionism' with 'avant garde twitterings' and 'grotesque parody') proves exceptionally well suited to Russell's 'strong visual imagery'.[40]

In his review of the essay collection *Peter Maxwell Davies Studies* (a significant contribution that makes no mention of *The Devils*),[41] Christopher Fox briefly reads in Davies's Russell encounter a kind of complicated (even liminal) moment for Davies, suggesting that this score was something more than merely the first thing he composed in his Orkney composition retreat:[42]

> It is also clear that it was the crazy parodies and Artaudian display of these works, not transformations of pitch […] which had taken Davies to the fringes of popular consciousness. Frenzied fox-trotting and absurdist theatricality brought Davies to the attention of Ken Russell […] it is perhaps not too far-fetched to suggest that Davies's subsequent move to the Orkney islands was an attempt to put clear blue water between him and a success at odds with his most fundamental concerns.[43]

Referring, of course, to the anarchic and extravagant music-theatre works of the period (1969's *Vesalii icones*, *Eight Songs for a Mad King* and so on), Fox sees in *The Devils* – suffused, as Davies's work then was, with timely 'counter cultural energies' – the culmination of what Philip Rupprecht has described elsewhere as Davies's bursting out (publicly).[44] In relation to this, his Orkney-based retreat to a 'new form of classicism'

[38] *Ibid.* (emphasis added).
[39] To be fair to Seabrook, his account is entirely consistent with Davies's own publicly stated position. Indeed, his published mentions of the film and collaboration tend to refer to it only in biographical contexts relating to his move to Orkney. This can be observed in four short references in the recently published *Peter Maxwell Davies: Selected Writings*, ed. Nicholas Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 127, 137, 220, 266.
[40] Mervyn Cooke, *A History of Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 259.
[41] A quick flick through its index reveals no mention of this film. The same can be said for other collections, such as *Perspectives on Peter Maxwell Davies*, ed. Richard McGregor (Abingdon: Ashgate, 2000). I do not intend this as a criticism, however; neither do I think it all that surprising an omission.
[42] This fact seems to be the principal reason why Davies and scholars of his music mention the score at all.
[43] Christopher Fox, 'Magic Moments', *Musical Times*, 151/1910 (2010), 87–91 (p. 87).
[44] Philip Rupprecht, *British Musical Modernism: The Manchester Group and their Contemporaries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 319.

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seems, symbolically at least, to be a response or rebuttal.[45] This, then, accounts in some way for the disproportionate attention paid to his earliest works, and the score of *The Devils* got lost to criticism precisely because it fell in that moment between phases. It does not, apparently, have an obvious home in the now reified story of the composer: one that sees him at one end of the spectrum as the *enfant terrible* of British new music, and at the other, as the Master of the Queen's Music.

Davies and Russell's relationship *should* (with the help of some wishful thinking) have reached its zenith just less than a year after the release of *The Devils*, with the Russell-directed première of Davies's first opera, *Taverner*, composed between 1956 and 1972, whose resemblance and overlap with *The Devils* – stylistically, chronologically, even biographically – is striking. Their first association had been the Unicorn Records releases of Davies's groundbreaking music-theatre works *Eight Songs for a Mad King* and *Vesalii icones*, both recorded in 1970, which Russell financed and promoted.[46] Davies's music theatre had struck a nerve with Russell (a very public rising 'talent' at that time),[47] and with hindsight this should come as no surprise, given Russell's own growing reputation as a 'British Fellini'.[48] That these recordings also were part of a concerted effort to bring the 'avant-garde' to popular audiences also seems likely, and Davies's potential crossover appeal is detailed in an article in *The Guardian* in 1971.[49]

Davies at the same time wrote the score for *The Devils* (performed, in the end, by his ensemble the Fires of London) as well as Russell's film adaptation of the musical *The Boy Friend*, for which he composed a suite of popular song-style foxtrots (something of an obsession for Davies) as well as song arrangements from the musical on which it was based. Seabrook's biography considers these arrangements in particular as something

[45] Fox, 'Magic Moments', 87.

[46] See <https://www.discogs.com/release/1972838-Peter-Maxwell-DaviesFires-Of-London-Vesalii-Icones> and <https://www.discogs.com/release/4905273-Peter-Maxwell-Davies-Fires-Of-London-Eight-Songs-For-A-Mad-King>. The record sleeve for *Eight Songs for a Mad King* has photographic artwork taken on the set of *The Devils*. The eponymous King can be seen among Jarman's white brick walls on the cover, and on the inside Davies is seen lying on some steps that feature prominently during the film's execution scenes (he is surrounded by members of the Fires of London and singer Julius Eastman, all of whom are superimposed).

[47] In 1970, Russell's D. H. Lawrence adaptation *Women in Love* had been nominated for four Academy Awards. Recognized as he was already for having made a glut of innovative (mostly composer-biography) documentaries for BBC's *Monitor* series in the 1960s, it seems that expectations were high: his work on the forthcoming *The Devils* was documented in a serious way in the BBC *Omnibus* documentary *Russell's Progress*. (The same documentary has lengthy scenes of Davies and the Fires of London recording the soundtrack in the studio.)

[48] This description, often attributed to Fellini himself, comes up nearly everywhere in journalistic and scholarly coverage of Russell. Its persistence is interesting, however, and reflects a desire by his advocates (then and now) to substantiate the film maker amid a great canon of European masters, and to explain his aesthetics of excess as being representative of a kind of Fellini-esque fantasism.

[49] Edward Greenfield, 'Popping up the Avant Garde', *The Guardian*, 15 November 1971. Greenfield somewhat banally articulates how such a crossover might work, and it is perhaps unsurprising that its success was limited: 'What for me distinguishes […] these works from so much avant-garderie is that their focus is clear. Though detailed analysis is not always easy, each work has a clear geographical shape with fast and slow interchanged more readily than is common.'

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'Max thoroughly enjoyed' (even if his 'brief sideline as a composer of film music' was to end because it was 'back-water').[50]

In an interview recorded as part of the documentary *Director of The Devils* (1971), Russell boasted about their relationship and what would have been his forthcoming Royal Opera House directorial début with Davies's opera *Taverner*. He noted the similarities between the two works thus:

> It's on a religious subject very similar to *The Devils*, it is about corruption of religion, the corruption of a human being, and when the forces of religion get to work on him […] so when it came around to finding a composer for this film there was only one possible choice.[51]

Despite his professed confidence in the work and his role in realizing it, Russell did not in the end direct *Taverner*. It was reported shortly afterwards, also in *The Guardian*, that Russell had withdrawn from the production, 'effectively ending […] one of the most provocative and stimulating artistic relationships of its time'.[52] The same article says that Russell had heard a tape recording of *Taverner* played on the piano and declared there and then that it was not enough to work with.[53] Davies is quoted as saying that their partnership had ended amicably (though Russell's lack of a response was noted). He was then still planning to score for a further Russell feature, *The Savage Messiah* (a biopic of the modernist sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska), but this never came to pass either.

We can never know what a Russell-directed *Taverner* might have looked like, and how this unrealized and potentially landmark version of a work mostly recognized as important only for those with an interest in Davies and his compositional milieu might (or might not) have changed the course of both careers in question – and, perhaps fancifully, that of British new music and film more broadly. In lieu of this, it suffices to say that *The Devils* and *Taverner* share much, visually and sonically, as well as dramatically, and comparison here is apt: they stand as comparable manifestations of a challenging form of modern, or avant-garde, medievalism.[54] *Taverner*, too, for

[50] Proving the legitimizing function of modernist medievalism in British music at the time, Seabrook makes a point of mentioning in the next paragraph how Davies was able to work a 'fifteenth-century French folk song' quotation into one of his foxtrot arrangements. Seabrook, *Max*, 129.

[51] *Director of The Devils*, special feature on *The Devils* BFI DVD set (see above, n. 25).

[52] Christopher Ford, 'An End to the Devils and Fox Trots …', *The Guardian*, 18 January 1972.

[53] This is confirmed in the Seabrook biography, where Davies corroborates that Russell had been 'put off the work […] by hearing a reduction of the piece for single voice and piano' (Seabrook, *Max*, 134). I suspect that for all his apparent 'radical' qualities as a director, Russell's musical tastes were quite conservative: indeed, his great love was classical music from the Romantic period, and he was responsible for several groundbreaking BBC docudramas on composer subjects in the 1960s, as well as the films *Mahler* (1974) and *Lisztomania* (1975). Musicological interest in the man has mostly focused on those works, and his approach to biography is famously impressionistic, surreal and theatrical. See, for example, John C. Tibbetts, '"Just an Innocent Bystander": Composer Films of Ken Russell', *Composers in the Movies: Studies in Musical Biography*, ed. Tibbetts (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 155–216, and Rodney Stenning Edgecombe, 'Tracking Tchaikovsky: The Melokinesis of Ken Russell's *The Music Lovers*', *Musical Times*, 155/1928 (2014), 51–69.

[54] See Alexander Kolassa, 'Presentness and the Past in Contemporary British Opera', *Recomposing the Past*, ed. Cook, Kolassa and Whittaker, 155–73 (p. 164).

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example, featured Munrow's Early Music Consort of London, as intended, at its Royal Opera House première, playing on this occasion newly composed, period-pastiche music off stage. Both likewise dramatize similar religious themes (heretical to some) – chiefly forms of religious and authoritarian corruption – and conclude with public executions. Davies's fictional treatment of the historical composer Taverner has him undergoing a negative transformation from Catholic composer (of 'Popish-Ditties') to a ruthless Protestant enforcer; in *The Devils*, however, Grandier stays resolute in the face of his own mistreatment.

And there are visual parallels too: *Taverner* premièred with a set designed by Ralph Koltai (1924–2018), whose giant metallic and wiry seesaw structure and 'wheel of fortune'[55] recalls, if not by way of a direct copy, the aforementioned early twentieth-century modernism of Jarman's own huge set.[56] It is striking in both *The Devils* and *Taverner* that such overtly modernistic and *anachronistic* settings should be juxtaposed against a more typical 'authentic' medievalized wardrobe. The result in both cases resembles a kind of (retrospectively, borderline comic) collision between a strict modernist expressionism and (now, at least) campy BBC period costume drama wholly representative of a shared epoch.

Like *The Devils*, *Taverner* had a mixed reception (the *New York Times* described it as offering a 'pretty forbidding face to the average opera goer'),[57] and it was appreciated principally as a piece of music, if not as a great work of drama (the fact that Davies wrote and compiled his own libretto was cited as a reason for this).[58] This tension was, perhaps, expressed most neatly at the time by Joseph Kerman, who regarded the music very highly but figured that the dramaturgy was all wrong: the character of Taverner, he explained, felt like a 'straw man […] a caricature out of a counter-reformist tract', his transition not properly prepared or earned.[59] There is something in *Taverner*'s coarse and unrelenting style, and in its seemingly nihilistic outlook, which challenged a certain kind of operatic good taste too. While its score was accepted at face value by an audience no doubt anticipating something 'difficult' (it being, after all, an opera from a foremost modern composer), its didactic dramatic logic was ultimately derived from (and perhaps better suited to) a more 'underground' avant-garde music-theatre context (with all the associations with cultural capital that this implies), its post-Brechtian commitment to alienation and anti-narrative being less appealing to opera-house

[55] This is how it is labelled in a design included at the back of the original Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, programme.

[56] Jarman was to design at least the costumes for this production of *Taverner* too. The British Library is currently cataloguing a sketchbook (MS Mus. 1854) belonging to Jarman containing his work-in-progress designs.

[57] Peter Heyworth, '"Taverner": An Obsession', *New York Times*, 30 July 1972, <https://www.nytimes.com/1972/07/30/archives/-taverner-an-obsession-that-became-an-opera-taverner-an-obsession.htmlhttps://www.nytimes.com/1972/07/30/archives/-taverner-an-obsession-that-became-an-opera-taverner-an-obsession.html> (accessed 6 April 2021).

[58] Davies compiled much of the libretto from written historical records: he details this precisely in Peter Maxwell Davies, '"Taverner": Synopsis and Documentation', *Tempo*, 101 (1972), 4–11. That edition of *Tempo* was entirely dedicated to articles about *Taverner*.

[59] Joseph Kerman, 'Popish Ditties', *Tempo*, 102 (1972), 20–4 (p. 23).

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audiences.[60] *Taverner* has retained an important place in post-war British music, if primarily as a kind of metonym for well over a decade's work by the composer (leaving its traces across several *Taverner*-inspired Davies compositions across all of the 1960s). But it is only in recent years that the theatrical achievements of the opera have been better appreciated and even rehabilitated.[61]

In an article discussing the seemingly heretical content of Davies's operatic works, Majel Connery has noted that he, like Russell, could be 'confrontational, boundary-renouncing, provocative, and sometimes bizarre'.[62] Her reading of *Taverner* here, partially framed as a response to Kerman's criticism that the character of Taverner's transition in the opera makes little 'dramatic sense', suggests an idiosyncratic apophatic or negative theological underpinning, more sympathetic to its Christian subject matter than it might at first seem – or than Davies's own avowed atheism might admit. Her reading is a holistic and intertextual (or transtextual) one, which considers *Taverner* as well as the failure of its own internal morality play – in conjunction with *Eight Songs for a Mad King* and the later *Resurrection* – as dramatizing the loss of voice (the excessive object of opera) so as to 'stage (and, in so doing, inflect as theatrical) the terrifying experience of a lack of god where one ought to be'.[63] Being forced to reflect, somewhat ironically though not necessarily insincerely, in an extratextual or intertextual way on the horizon of vocal or bodily excess is a music-theatrical hermeneutic parallel to the kinds of strategies associated with the paracinematic 'aesthetic'. Davies's strange medievalized chronology too – the presence of early-music quotation, transformed and lampooned – reinforces this as another layer, both drawing the listener out of the action and immersing them in its fluid temporalities.

And while the score is absent of voice (although the shouted dialogue in the film itself more than makes up for that), Davies's music for *The Devils*, in its necessary negotiation with Russell's own ear-splitting cinema-auteur vision, proposes something of a companion work to Connery's version of *Taverner* too, coating its own salvation negatively – Connery uses the phrase 'excluded sacred' – at the expense of good taste and in medieval costume. Consider the arch-conservative activist Mary Whitehouse's own withering critique of *The Devils* (a film she probably never saw), pompously delivered in a manner suggestive of a kind of religious authoritarian hysteria (of the sort both the opera and the film set out to satirize):

> That the film critics – some of whom have played a not inconspicuous part over the years in the acceptance of decadence within the cinema – were, this time, unanimous in their critical attack on *The Devils* is a true measure of the corruption of art, the extent of the

[60] For more on this music-theatrical context, see Michael Hall, *Music Theatre in Britain, 1960–1975* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2015), and Robert Adlington, 'Politics and the Popular in British Music Theatre of the Vietnam Era', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 143 (2018), 433–71.

[61] See David Beard, '*Taverner*: An Interpretation', *Peter Maxwell Davies Studies*, ed. Kenneth Gloag and Nicholas Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 79–105, and Majel Connery, 'Peter Maxwell Davies' Worst Nightmare: Staging the Unsacred in the Operas *Taverner* and *Resurrection*', *Opera Quarterly*, 25 (2009), 247–69.

[62] Connery, 'Peter Maxwell Davies' Worst Nightmare', 248–9.

[63] *Ibid.*, 251.

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> blasphemy, the violence and perversion, the *cacophony of sound* which characterized this film.[64]

Notwithstanding her inability to read in a work anything more than a face-value or two-dimensional morality, Whitehouse – ever, nevertheless, a sensitive critic – goes one step further than the average moralizing reviewer, recognizing the corrupting and affective potential of sound and music here and making the direct link between 'cacophony' and 'blasphemy'. Ahead of her time, she foreshadows – negatively, of course – the development of so-called drastic as well as sonic turns in musical scholarship. One cannot help but wonder what, if ever she saw or heard them, she might have thought of such works as *Vesalii icones*, *Revelation and Fall* and *Resurrection*, and of the cacophonic violence that they depict – narratively, dramatically or sonically. Would *The Devils* have escaped the fate that she had partially engineered for it had it been reimagined in a form fitting the concert hall or opera house instead? Or might Davies have found himself on the wrong end of one of her campaigns?

Whatever might have been the case, thinking this through does occasion a number of questions with which I wish (rhetorically, at least) to colour the investigation here. What happens qualitatively to this type of music in its transition from the opera house to the screen, where one critic's (Kerman's) 'marvellous score' (despite being a 'less marvellous […] theatre piece') becomes corrupting, blasphemous and in some way immoral, depending on the media in which it is delivered?[65] And how is this excess – between music and image, blasphemy and violence – understood as it moves between these two ideological spaces? In particular, though, I want to explore the role played by the distant past (or, as I see it, medievalism) in negotiating or destabilizing these distinctions: does historical distance, I ask, strengthen or diminish this spiritual-heretical cacophony and corruption?

What fresh lunacy is this? A crocodile?! Chant and medievalism in *The Devils*

The Devils begins with a disclaimer, presented in a stark red font against a black background, a declaration of historical authenticity of the kind ordinarily disliked by the fantasist Russell:[66] 'This film is based upon historical fact. The principal characters lived and the major events depicted in the film actually took place.' This warning, that the film that follows is 'authentic', is followed immediately by the concurrence of the image of a stage and the unmistakable sound of 1970s-era early music. On this stage, France's King Louis XIII (Graham Armitage) on a giant shell emerges from shifting cardboard waves, recreating Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* and dressed in a costume consisting of three golden shells covering only his genitals and nipples. He is heralded into view here by the characteristically 'shawmy' sound of the Early Music Consort of

[64] Mary Whitehouse, quoted in Petley, 'Witch Hunt', 534 (emphasis added).
[65] Kerman, 'Popish Ditties', 20.
[66] Joseph Lanza, *Phallic Frenzy: Ken Russell and his Films* (Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, 2007), 106.

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London and their version of the courante from Praetorius's *Terpsichore*.[67] After he is crowned by two well-toned dancers, that piece segues into the livelier 'La Bourée' from the same Praetorius collection, and the choreography livens up in kind.[68]

The room is full of chattering and gossiping courtiers, mostly dressed as women, and the highly camp display on stage and off stage is juxtaposed against the impotent masculinity of a chair-bound, visibly uncomfortable Cardinal Richelieu (Christopher Logue) in the middle of it all, flanked by two austere nuns shyly averting their gaze. The presumably diegetic music stops only for the King to receive applause, and as Richelieu addresses him, declaring his desire to help birth a new France 'where church and state are one', we first hear Davies's score (see Example 1), which is unleashed simultaneously with the King's response: 'Amen'. The music, which is loud in the mix, briefly recedes as Richelieu adds: 'And may the Protestant be driven from the land.' This is followed (at bar 4) by an ear-splitting scrape performed on the thunder sheet in the soundtrack that coincides with a jump cut, from a closeup on Richelieu's face to the face of a rotting corpse (with maggots in its eyes and mouth) suspended on a wheel alongside the road leading to Loudun.[69] The opening scene, in its interminably over-the-top way, cogently sets the tone for the film's consistent and routine use of the shocking juxtaposition of exuberant early-music timbral 'authenticity' (however illusory) and a harsh sort of sonic expressionism. The noisy heresy to which it succumbs likewise underlines the concurrence of temporalities and even the (macabre) humour of it all.

The melody, in the upper voice of Davies's title introduction, is taken by the alto flute: an uncanny metallic timbre probably relatively unfamiliar to mainstream audiences. Its austere and lyrical line sketches out something bordering on the dodecaphonic (it plays a set of ten pitches without repetition) before coming to rest on a fragmentary quotation from the plainchant 'Dies irae' (the descending E–D♯–E–C♯–D♯–B–C♯). The accompaniment throughout Example 1 seems to suggest a kind of B minor tonality. However, false relations (such as the recurring E♭ and D♯ simultaneities) encourage a subtly discombobulating microtonal undercurrent. The broadly chordal accompaniment, delivered polyphonically with dovetailing resolutions, has a contrapuntal logic both entirely typical of Davies and evocative of a medieval kind of

[67] Munrow and the Early Music Consort of London recorded some of the *Terpsichore* collection as part of the album *Praetorius: Dances from Terpsichore/Motets* in 1973. The 'raspy' performance is typical of their style of interpretation and the general popular perception of 'early music' at the time.

[68] 'La Bourée' was a more recognizable example of 'early music' then, and a few years earlier in 1967 it had some international success seemingly through its quotation in the hit recording of 'Ding-Dong! The Witch Is Dead' by the American band Fifth Estate.

[69] This passage features in the first movement of the *Suite from The Devils*, which was first performed at the BBC Proms in the 1974 season in a concert, mentioned in n. 4 above, that combined Munrow's Early Music Consort of London with the Fires of London. The suite itself includes a lot of music that did not survive the cut in the film; likewise, some of the more fleshed-out compositions (as I see them) in the soundtrack itself are not in the suite, including scenes explored below, such as the isorhythmic plague scene and the final execution scene. The recording studio performance of the execution scene (with Davies conducting) is included, almost in full, in the documentary *Director of The Devils* (see above, n. 25).

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Example 1 First nine bars of the title sequence of *The Devils*, music by Peter Maxwell Davies (transcribed from London, British Library, Add. MS 71263, fol. 51[r]). Reproduced by kind permission of the Peter Maxwell Davies Estate.

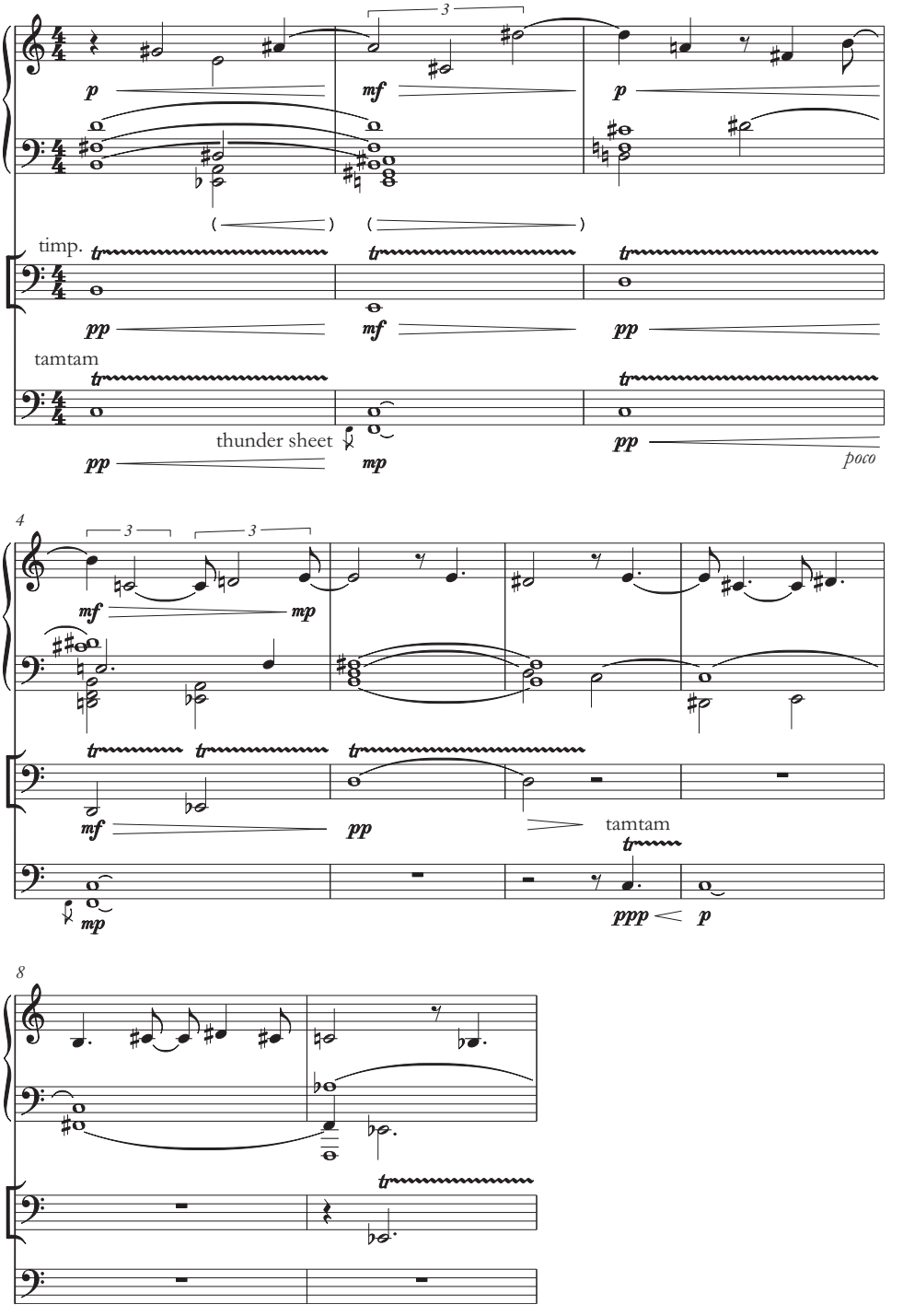

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Figure 2 Historical instruments in Loudun funeral procession in *The Devils*.

horizontal musical thinking. The embedded 'Dies irae' chant here has special status throughout the score, as I discuss further below, but it has also been a recurrent part of Davies's compositional toolbox since as early as 1958.[70] Davies is, knowingly or not, tapping into long-standing traditions here, the 'Dies irae' having completed something of a semiotic transformation by this point, running (as James Deaville sees it) the associative gamut from the principally holy to the wholly satanic.[71]

Within Loudun's not-so-medieval walls, in the next scene, the film's main protagonist Grandier preaches to a packed square of townsfolk, leading the funeral for a recently deceased governor of Loudun. A procession follows (see Figure 2) in which an ensemble of period instruments is heard to play the aforementioned 'Dies irae' chant in unison (accompanied by its sung Latin text), now in its historically appropriate context. The 'Dies irae' heard earlier in expressionistic dress is now retrospectively reimagined as a pre-echo of the diegetic period-appropriate music to come. The presence of historical instruments on screen – the serpent and sackbut, for example – has a powerful *othering* effect, one that is exploited in much cinematic medievalism.[72] That othering effect of alien instruments is often exploited (in both film and early-music practice) to conjure quasi-orientalist associations, but here they carry, I suggest, inauspicious and unnerving significations.[73] In this way, medieval music more generally works, with the

[70] See, for example, his *St Michael* (1958). Rupprecht, *British Musical Modernism*, 144–5.

[71] James Deaville, 'Evil Medieval: Chant and the New Dark Spirituality of Vietnam-Era Film in America', *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Medievalism*, ed. Meyer and Yri, 709–28 (p. 709).

[72] The image recalls what John Haines has identified as the prominence of horn and trumpet in medieval-themed movies, though the chivalric associations are somewhat subverted here through the near manic repetitions and inauspicious funerary occasion. John Haines, *Music in Films on the Middle Ages: Authenticity vs. Fantasy* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 45.

[73] See, for example, John M. Ganim, *Medievalism and Orientalism: Three Essays on Literature, Architecture and Cultural Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), and Adam Whittaker, 'Musical Divisions of the Sacred and Secular in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*', *Recomposing the Past*, ed. Cook, Kolassa and Whittaker, 89–106.

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expressionistic parts of the score too, to evoke an alienating distance both temporal and geographical.

Medieval compositional techniques haunt Davies's manuscripts here, and devices such as 'isorhythm' and 'mensural canon' are regularly referred to in labels by the composer (even when their presence is not entirely apparent to the listener). Indeed, the 'Dies irae' repeats for several minutes in this scene with a sort of trance-inducing and rhythmically rigid insistence (becoming defamiliarized); it is then (after an edit) heard from outside while the Ursuline sisters gossip in the corridors of their cloistered convent. When two women in the street outside are overheard by the abbess Sister Jeanne discussing Grandier's sexual exploits, the passage designated by Davies (in his handwritten score) 'Jeanne's first vision' begins, and for the duration of this 1' 06" 'intro' (see Figure 3) the sound of a muted cello played *sul ponticello* and tremolando (as well as flutter-tongued flute and bass clarinet harmonics) weaves in and out of the procession, which is still repeating the 'Dies irae' in the background.

The chant's excessive presence cannot be contained either by the walls or by the women's conversation, and it is Grandier's own presence (which is what is really being announced here) that is the inciting incident for Sister Jeanne's subsequent obsession and the events of the film that follow. The passage is notably rendered in what Davies called in his own tabular analysis 'free notation', and the musical textures are harsh and metallic. There are further transformations of the same chant source material here too (the first four notes in the cello part, with a C♯ displaced by an octave, for example), with each voice clearly conceived as a polyphonic transformation of it.

A dream sequence that lends itself well to a multipart composition follows, as Sister Jeanne – obsessed with the charismatic Grandier – has a vision of the priest as Christ walking towards her on water. In this scene she falls before his feet to a relatively slow and regular percussive processional accompaniment (cymbals, large tabor, tamtam and so on). At this point, the alto flute plays a melody derived, again, from an inverted 'Dies irae' beginning (B–C–B–D–E). But as Jeanne washes his feet there is another noisy escalation dominated by whistles and flexatone improvisations, as well as flutter-tongued winds, while Jeanne remembers that she has a severe scoliosis and her hump returns. She begins screaming, 'I'm beautiful!' and 'Don't look at me!' as an assembled circle of nuns laugh hysterically at her. The combined cacophony is a musical blasphemy seeming to exceed and destroy her once serene, holy (and, indeed, erotic) vision. By this point we are barely 13 minutes into the film, but the sonic onslaught – its curious combination of parallel and dovetailed temporalities, tonalities and escalating intensities – has bludgeoned any such simple, linear and cinematic, temporal logic. A short scene that follows, without music, in which the post-coital Grandier abandons a lover moments after she reveals that she is pregnant with his child, is somehow deafening by comparison.[74]

[74] The stark juxtaposition of jarring medieval musical anachronisms with silence (and by extension, ambient noise) is itself a notable feature of challenging medieval cinema over the years. See Alexander Kolassa, 'The Past Is a Different Planet: Sounding Medievalism in Aleksei German's *Hard to Be a God*', *Studies in Medievalism XXVII: Authenticity, Medievalism, Music*, ed. Karl Fugelso (Cambridge:

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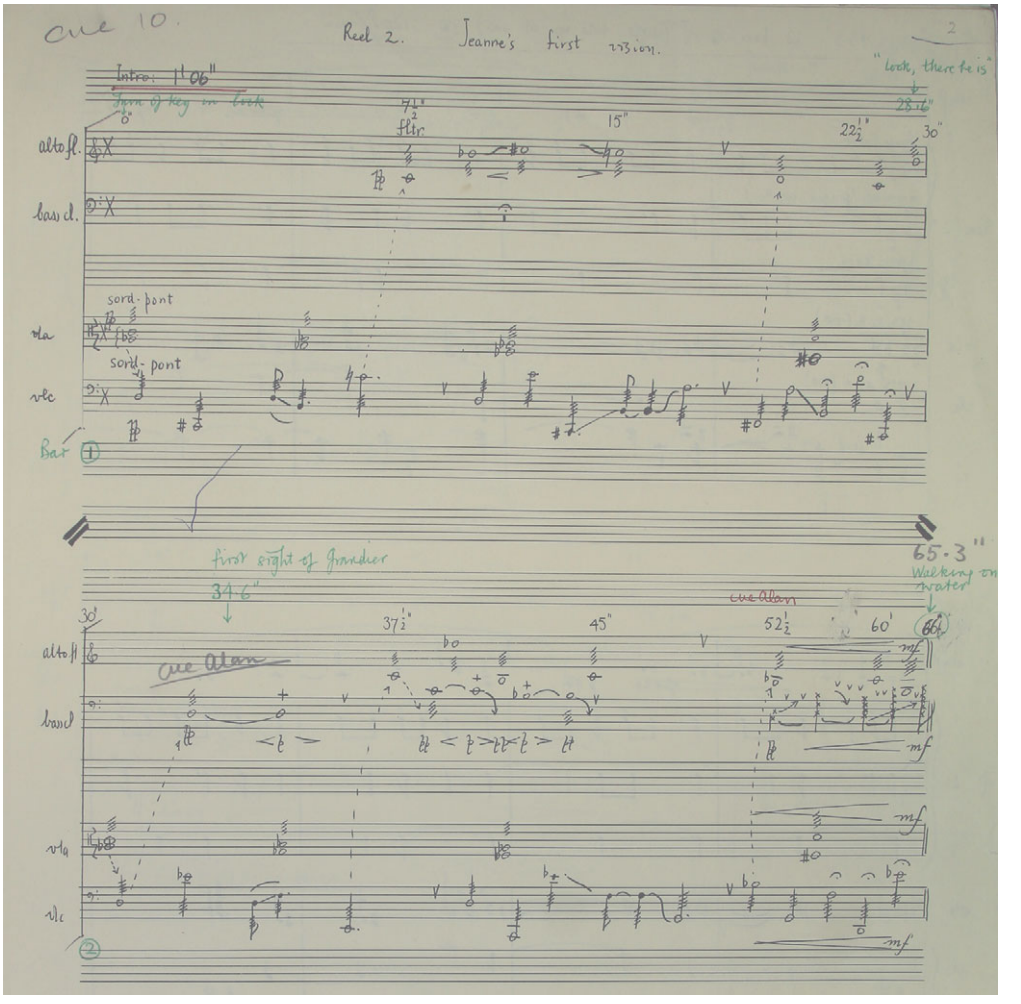

Figure 3 The opening of 'Jeanne's first vision'. London, British Library, Add. MS 71264, fol. 2[r]. Reproduced by kind permission of the Peter Maxwell Davies Estate.

In Rob Young's *Electric Eden*, a panoramic history of twentieth-century British folk and medieval music-making (in spheres both 'high' and 'low'), *The Devils* and its score are featured for their significant place in that story. Highlighted here are its links, culturally speaking, to the contemporaneous folk-music revival and a fashion for BBC medieval costume drama.[75] However, Davies is strangely absent from this discussion,

D. S. Brewer, 2018), 227–50, and Alexis Luko, 'Faith, Fear, Silence, and Music in Ingmar Bergman's Medieval Vision of *The Seventh Seal* and *The Virgin Spring*', *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Medievalism*, ed. Meyer and Yri, 636–57.

75 Rob Young, *Electric Eden* (London: Faber & Faber, 2010), 201.

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and it is Munrow's contributions that are foregrounded.[76] The reader is left, perhaps, with the assumption that the noisy modern score has little to contribute to the subject of the study – in comparison, at least, to the timely early-music interpretations of Munrow and the Early Music Consort of London. It may seem that this is the work of a socially detached composer of the avant-garde unlikely to be part of a uniquely British post-war cultural dialogue with a medieval past. Elsewhere, John Callow has, in a cultural history of witchcraft, drawn attention to the combination of Munrow and Davies in this film, the latter characterized as being at the 'cutting edge of the avant garde', with the resultant soundtrack offering 'another example' in the film of the mix between 'knowing anachronism and scrupulous attention to historical detail'.[77] In another rare example of critical recognition for *The Devils* in a musical textbook, the question of 'anachronism' is posited as posing 'many problems'.[78] The authors' response to this problem lies, however, in the unambiguous contemporaneity of Davies's contribution: a music that is alien to the film's world but that imbues the film-text with modernity's own gaze.

These very perspectives – coming from scholarship on folk music, witchcraft and film music – are, I suggest, making the same error as does the explicitly modernist and musicological discussion, which is likely to see in the musical collaboration at the heart of *The Devils* a kind of happy musical accident, or at least a sort of unremarkable filmic parallel for an isolated modernist music practice. Here, questions of anachronism and authenticity are inevitable, and this juxtaposition of new and old is a problem to be solved. These positions take for granted, in different ways, the same well-trodden narratives of modern, dissonant or 'challenging' music, and its teleological temporality is left as being necessarily a break with the past and in some way always entirely 'contemporaneous'.[79]

Were we to recognize, instead, a form of medievalism (playfully atemporal, and engaged meaningfully with what it means to *be* medieval in the – ever-shifting – present day), the score's position in the film might be said to play an altogether more nuanced and interesting role. Indeed, it is my conjecture that the two temporalities coincide and inflect one another. As the past is made present and the present is made (sonically) past, the score (with its own complexly noisy and granular materiality) becomes physical and 'authentically' present in history too. Where medievalism can demodernize, modernity might reinscribe the artifice of the medieval. In watching *The Devils* it is hard, then, to sustain some of those typical simplistic binaries associated with film and music criticism: the authentically old and the modernist new, mapped here, perhaps, onto the diegetic and the non-diegetic. It is not, perhaps, so simple that Munrow's

[76] Davies's involvement is reduced in Young, *Electric Eden*, to a single parenthetical reference to 'the featured composer' (p. 202).

[77] John Callow, *Embracing the Darkness: A Cultural History of Witchcraft* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014), 126.

[78] Roger Manvell and John Huntley, *The Technique of Film Music*, rev. and enlarged by Richard Arnell and Peter Day (Exeter: Focal Press, 1975), 247. This reference is interesting in that the seven pages dedicated to *The Devils* include four reproductions of pages from Davies's film score (including one wrongly attributed to the 'burning sequence at the end of the film').

[79] *Ibid.*

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'period-appropriate' music sounds on the inside, while Davies's voice provides a present-day 'commentary' (on the outside).

Taking place immediately after the aforementioned deafening silence, a scene depicting a gruesome plague outbreak on the streets of Loudun employs an expressionistic score underpinned by temporally incongruous and 'authentically' medieval techniques of composition. In it, among other things, Oliver Reed's Grandier spars with the father (Louis Trincant) of the pregnant (and now spurned) lover, gleefully defending himself from his sword-wielding opponent with a crocodile. In this absurdist display, the sword eventually shatters against the rigid, though seemingly feather-light, theatre-prop reptile. Grandier had previously thrown it out of the window while interrupting a cruel and arcane attempt by a pair of alchemists to cure a dying woman ('What fresh lunacy is this? A crocodile?!' Grandier shouts at them.) It is an oddly comic and jarring moment, even by the standards of an avowedly odd and jarring film, juxtaposed as it is against piles of bodies being collected for incineration.[80]

Comic forms of medievalism are recurrent, if contradictory, phenomena in the popular imagination according to D'Arcens, disrupting progressivized and periodized models of historical continuity, directing ridicule both at a medieval 'other' and at the present.[81] The crocodile is, presumably, the same one mentioned in the script quoted at the beginning of this article, a scene in which it did not survive the cut. In a nod to traditions of comic medievalism, then, it is, we might say, both present and absent; comically unwelcome, but also in some sense authentic in that its incongruity is meant to imbue the scene with a kind of absurd historicism. (It is there, after all, to be used as medieval-style plague cure.[82])

Isorhythm is a technique for the ordering of musical time, and in the novel context of Davies's medievally inflected attempt to work within the modern cinematic medium, that is its function in the plague scene.[83] Taking place between approximately 16' 00" and 22' 50" in the original British X-certificate version of the film, isorhythm and plainchant has, you might say, a role to play similar to that of the reptile in the seven-minute scene. Indeed, these seven minutes are accompanied by a four-section isorhythmic composition (with a coda and brief introduction) in which the 'Dies irae' chant is both heard and disguised, used and transformed as the basis for both angular polyphony and sombre lyricism, and as a sort of underlying structuring device.

[80] The scene is not unlike that in a favourite film of medievalism studies, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, complete with calls of 'Bring out your dead!' Indeed, Monty Python were interested in Russell as director and he was referenced a couple of times in *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (one episode receiving the title 'Ken Russell's "Gardening Club"'). This particular moment in *The Devils* has been cited as an influence on their own plague scene. See Marcia Landy, *Cinema and Counter History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015), 83.

[81] Louise D'Arcens, *Comic Medievalism: Laughing at the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2014), 12.

[82] A hanging stuffed crocodile or alligator is a common motif in depictions of a medieval alchemist or apothecary from the early modern period to the present day.

[83] In Davies's handwritten score, this is meticulously worked out: the tempo is set at 120 crotchets per minute (60 minims per minute in the slow section), with calculations that demonstrate how two different rhythmic talea (shown in Examples 3 and 4, setting an underlying cantus firmus derived from the 'Dies irae') fill up the four sections of the scene.

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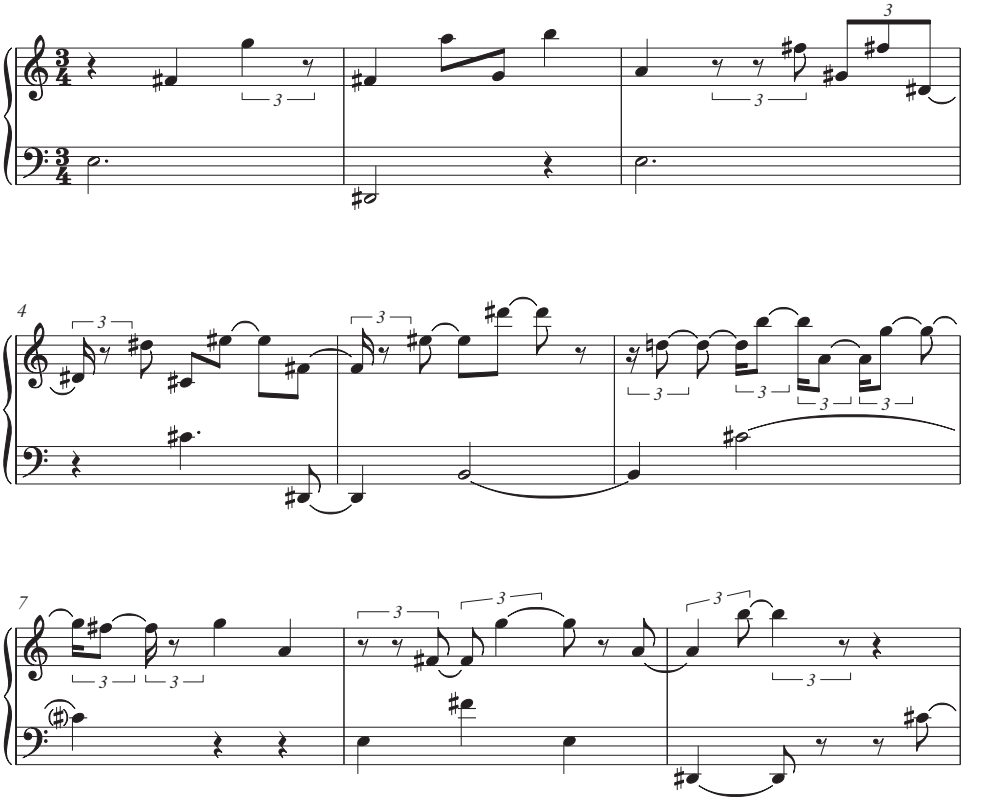
Example 2 Beginning of plague-scene isorhythmic composition (transcribed from London, British Library, Add. MS 71263, fol. 2[r]). Reproduced by kind permission of the Peter Maxwell Davies Estate.



The music of this scene begins with a script cue: Grandier's final line as he leaves his naked and pregnant lover Philippe Trincant in tears: 'Hold my hand. It's like touching the dead, isn't it?' It sounds, you could argue, trashy, and although tightly controlled, it feels unrefined, as if always threatening to fall apart, perhaps as if it were loosely improvised. A sustained chord heard at several key points in the film (simultaneous, and sort of leitmotivic, major-third dyads on D and E heard over a low rumbling D)[84] accompanies an edit as Grandier dons his cape and begins a quick march through the plague-strewn streets of Loudun. Then, a short and improvisatory flute flourish (labelled 'death dance' in Davies's notes) made up of an accelerating 'Dies irae' chant (or, indeed, row) is sounded simultaneously with the beginning of the isorhythmic section labelled by Davies A[1] in his manuscript, of which the opening nine bars are shown in Example 2.

[84] This chord is Davies's 'death chord', a recurrent motif in many of his works from around this time and carrying particular significance in the opera *Taverner*, where it is closely connected to the theme of death through the Jester character. That makes for another interesting connection between that opera and *The Devils*.

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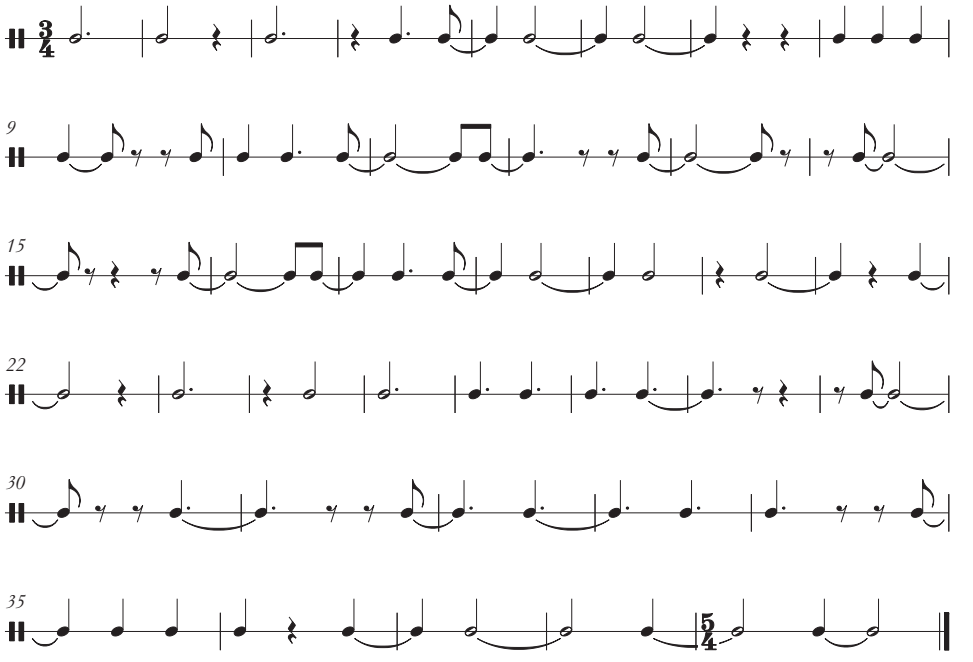
Example 3 Rhythmic pattern for cantus firmus in the plague scene, talea 1 (transcribed from London, British Library, Add. MS 71263, fols. 2[r], 3[v]). Reproduced by kind permission of the Peter Maxwell Davies Estate.



The passage, with trumpet in the upper voice and trombone plus cello in the lower one (in addition to improvisatory and noisy percussive accompaniment of which I can find no notated trace) is strikingly reminiscent of several of Davies's much earlier (and ultra-modernist) experiments with chant and isorhythm. It shares much in particular with his interpretation of the technique of mensuration canon in such works as *Prolation* and *St Michael* (both 1958).[85] Stripped bare like this, the music rendered as just two contrapuntal voices in Davies's only existent notes for the score, his modernist-medievalized treatment of the 'Dies irae' should be abundantly clear: a manipulated version of the chant unfolds in both voices, albeit masked by octave displacement. In the lower voice, and save for a few alterations, the chant is literal (note the first four notes: E, D♯, E, C♯), while in the higher voice it is, mostly at least, inverted and transposed up a tone, beginning on F♯. The two voices proceed according to the logic of an adapted mensuration canon, and the upper voice copies the rhythmic schema of the lower one at approximately three times its speed (a crotchet becoming a triplet quaver, and so on). As with much of the score, the effect is anything but subtle, and while the listener may not hear the chant outright, the 'Dies irae' recurs so loudly and so frequently that the assault is, over time, undeniable. Davies wields his medieval weaponry like Grandier does his crocodile.

[85] See Rupprecht, *British Musical Modernism*, and Davies's own '*St Michael: Sonata for Seventeen Wind Instruments*', '*Prolation*' and 'Realizing the "Aural Vision" of *Prolation*', in *Peter Maxwell Davies: Selected Writings*, ed. Jones, 37–8, 39–42 and 43–5.

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TABLE 2
BREAKDOWN OF ISORHYTHMIC PARTS
IN PLAGUE SCENE ACCOMPANIMENT

Part (and description in score)	*Low stave*	*High stave*	*Notes*
Intro (to reel 3), cue 'like touching the dead, isn't it?'			10 secs. of sustained chord (D and E dyad over a low D) connecting end of previous scene to this one, plus accelerating 'death dance' ('Dies irae')
A^1 (cut to Grandier in plague street)	talea 1 (see Example 3), 'Dies irae' cantus firmus, starting on E	mensuration canon, partly inversion of 'Dies irae', starting on F♯	
B^1 (from G. enters Mme De Brou's room to Mme De B. dies)	talea 1, 'Dies irae' cantus firmus inverted, starting on E	freely composed	mostly cut from actual film
B^2 (from Mme De B. dies to Trincant in street)	talea 2, metre 4/4 but each bar subdivided into 5 equal beats (see Example 4)	two voices playing simultaneous octave-displaced 'Dies irae' chants, starting on E (normal and inverted); additional flute part oscillating slowly between E♭ and B♭	slow and sombre; accompanies death of Mme De Brou
A^2 (from Trincant in street to death pit)	talea 1, 'Dies irae' cantus firmus inverted, starting on E (repeated from B^1)	material partially derived from A^1 (resembles mensuration canon)	
Coda (from cut to death pit to end of reel)			sustained D/E chord; improvisatory melodies derived from 'Dies irae'

Successive subsections of the scene are ordered according to repetitions of a 'Dies irae' cantus firmus, whose rhythmic scheme (or 'talea') is shown in Example 3. Part A^1 proceeds until Grandier arrives in the room of the dying woman and confronts the alchemists, starting what Davies labels part B^1 ('isorhythmic to A^1'), with the same rhythmic scheme and 'Dies irae' cantus firmus, albeit inverted. The slower, sparser, part B^2 (here the counterpoint is carried by strings) begins as the woman dies; and part A^2 as Grandier returns to the street (where the musical racket resumes). Table 2 summarizes the isorhythmic design of these parts. A final section labelled 'coda' accompanies a short sequence in which Grandier is seen later anointing a giant pit of corpses with an assistant clergyman (the latter disapproving of Grandier's sexual exploits). The recurrent D/E major-third dyads (or 'death chords') are heard under their dialogue. As the camera lingers on the pit of plague victims, a cart empties another delivery of bodies into it. A flute and trumpet can be heard then repeating an indeterminate, swung and stilted, manipulation of the 'Dies irae' chant once again. The music fades, and the scene cuts abruptly to outside the convent.

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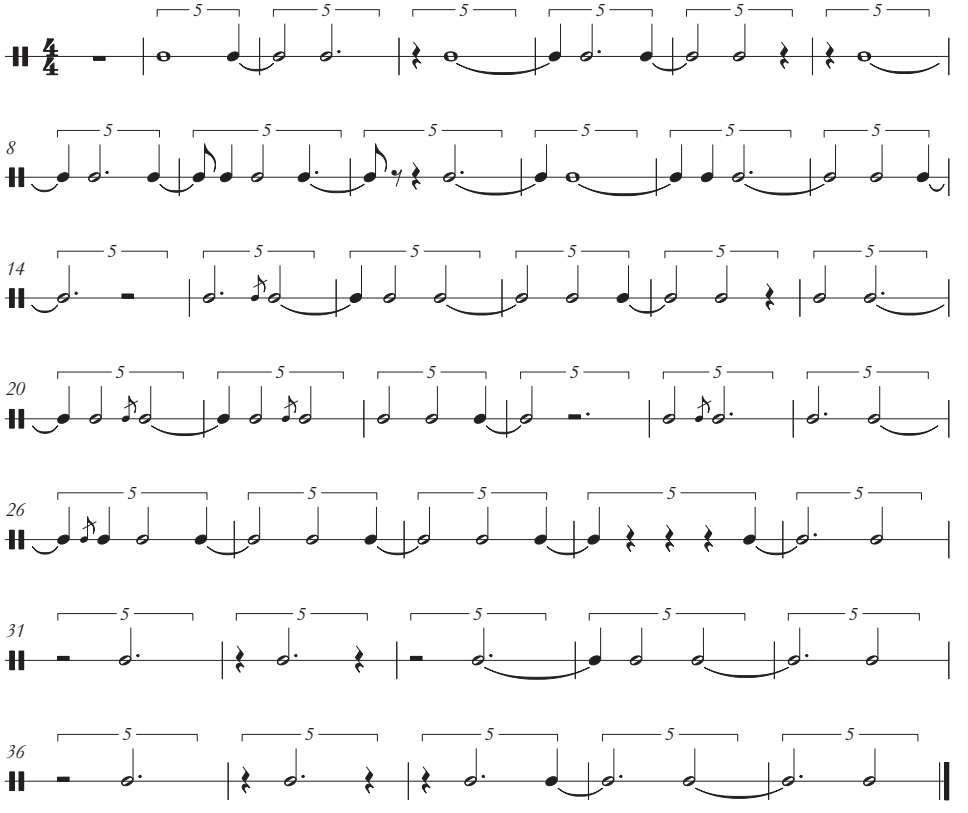
Example 4 Rhythmic pattern for cantus firmus in the plague scene B^2, talea 2 (transcribed from London, British Library, Add. MS 71263, fols. 7^r, 8^v, 9^r). Reproduced by kind permission of the Peter Maxwell Davies Estate.



'The full Hollywood treatment':[86] authenticity and excess in modernist medievalism

A barely audible historic 'authenticity' bristles in *The Devils* under a surface of crass excess, one that is as comic as it is disturbing. Indeed, the complex isorhythmic design of parts of the score described above, whether or not it is aurally perceived, lends those moments some architectonic sonic gravitas, even if the wild percussive accompaniments distract and distort.[87] But were we to see here the appropriation of the 'Dies irae' as yet more avant-gardist esoterica, it would be worth considering the

[86] Quoted from London, British Library, MS Mus. 1409, fol. 74^r.

[87] It is a pivotal moment: in the chaos of this scene, Grandier first meets, and bonds with, Madeleine de Brou, with whom he starts a love affair and whom he eventually marries in secret. Sister Jeanne's jealousy over this is the catalyst for the violence that encompasses much of the rest of the film.

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extensive currency the chant carries in the cultural-imaginative terrain that encompasses orchestral romanticism and popular culture.[88] One of music's most enduring intertexts, the 'Dies irae' is the site for an unlikely convergence of all that is popular and serious in mainstream musical culture. As early as 1953, Robin Gregory wrote of the sacrilegious appropriation of a 'most solemn' church rite 'intended to call to mind awe inspiring events, [having] no association with anything evil'. But, he explains:

> Parodies of Berlioz, Liszt […] regarded by many as in *bad taste* and even approaching profanity, intentionally give the melody a baleful significance. Repeated use in this manner has extended to debase its real character so that now it is almost taken for granted that its use is cynical in intention.[89]

Davies, of course, had his own penchant for sacrilege and parody, and it is clear even then that by appropriating this chant to inauspicious ends he was doing something that was practised widely, with clear significations for music lovers and cinema audiences alike. Indeed, Davies taps into a language of popular medievalism and contributes to a broader cultural dialogue that negotiates meaning at the horizon of scholarly rediscovery and interpretation (of medieval *objets trouvés*) and mass popular imaginaries. Simultaneously, it should be said, he is revisiting his own idiosyncratic canon of compositional practice.

There is another chant, one with less intertextual currency, that acts as a musical protagonist in *The Devils*, and is subjected more overtly to abasement at the altar of cinematic excess. The 'Ave Maria' appears a number of times in the film, including once as a foxtrot. On two occasions it is employed in Davies's score for moments of absurd bathos. First, a wallowing Sister Jeanne believes that Grandier has arrived at the convent following an invitation to take up a post there, and as she runs through the corridors, the 'Ave Maria' melody is played on ascending ornamented and heavily vibrato strings, only to be interrupted abruptly at the sight of Grandier's assistant, Father Mignon. Any comedy here is immediately turned on its head: moments later, Jeanne is subject to cruel torture (or exorcism).

Later in the film, in the middle of several scenes of possession and debauchery, the 'Ave Maria' returns again. Davies's music here responds to the following composition brief, probably indicating its composition at a later stage in the film's post-production:

[88] Variously sized fragments of the 'Dies irae' chant appear widely in cinematic popular culture, forming an instantly recognizable musical signifier (usually of doom) for even the most mainstream audiences. Memorably, it takes centre stage in Wendy Carlos's synthesized score for Stanley Kubrick's 1980 *The Shining*; but it also appears widely in Disney franchises (*The Lion King*, *Pirates of the Carribean*), action films (*Big Trouble in Little China*) and elsewhere, to say nothing of its use in early and silent cinema (and opera). This became the subject of a widely viewed *Vox* explainer video released in 2019, 'Why This Creepy Melody Is in So Many Movies' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-3-bVRYRnSM>, accessed 6 April 2021).

[89] Robin Gregory, 'Dies irae', *Music and Letters*, 34 (1953), 133–9 (p. 138; emphasis added). I am grateful to Daniel Trocmé-Latter, who first drew my attention to this quotation (personal communication; see also 'A Disney Requiem? Iterations of the "Dies irae" in the score to *The Lion King* (1994)', *Music and the Moving Image* (forthcoming).

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> MAX
> Ken would like an extra piece of music in REEL 10:
> After Jeanne says 'I am free' down to the laughter when the king shakes the empty box (27 seconds).
> The type of thing Ken suggests is the full Hollywood treatment: a syrupy hymn sung by a celestial choir with harps etc.[90]

Here, scenes of religious frenzy are interrupted by the arrival of King Louis XIII himself (disguised as Duke Henri de Condé): a discordant parody of a fanfare plays. The King here withdraws a golden relic box that he claims contains Christ's own blood, which the witch hunter Father Barre promises will dispel the demons possessing the nuns. As he opens it, Sister Jeanne professes her freedom and the room erupts in ecstasy, followed by peaceful silence; the music in Example 5, involving the organ, the choir and more, then plays. However, the rising diminished triads that mark out the second half of this passage, which deforms the 'Ave Maria' with its deluge of Hollywood syrup, indicate a sudden and again absurdist inversion: the box is empty. 'What sort of a trick are you playing on us?' the King jokes before leaving to another fanfare. Hysterical laughter descends into chaos; this is where, in its uncut form, the 'Rape of Christ' would begin.

Those absurdist rising diminished triads mark out the absence at the heart of a holy relic (and thus make a mockery of religious pretence and power) paradoxically with a kind of musical excess: a significatory, stylistic excess, emptying the musical container ('Ave Maria') of its authenticity and signalling the artifice of its imaginative displays. I have referred to the idea of 'excess' such as this throughout the present article to describe, perhaps in a rather too capacious (though not an unfitting) way a range of phenomena. But excess as a concept serves the function of drawing a line across and connecting some of the disparate themes in this article. Excess, for example, characterizes medievalism, being in a sense the present-day overflow of a period long sealed off (historiographically speaking) yet accruing in the process a kind of limitless imaginative currency.[91] Excess and excessiveness are practically synonymous with Russell's filmmaking style in the popular reception of his work,[92] forming the basis of his present-day reappraisal as a modern 'mannerist'.[93] Opera too, in so far as *The Devils* mirrors *Taverner*, negotiates its own politics of excess.[94] Excess in particular has a complex, but

[90] Quoted from London, British Library, MS Mus. 1409, fol. 74[r].

[91] It might be worth considering discussions of 'excess' in the context of the Gothic here: that being, after all, an early species of popular medievalism. Indeed, according to Fred Botting, gloomy Gothic 'atmospheres' have 'repeatedly signalled the disturbing return of pasts upon presents and evoked emotions of terror and laughter'; Gothic excess concerns transgression, religious irrationalism (impinging as it were on the present to horrific effect) and the corrupting force of power, all of which inform *The Devils*. Botting, *Gothic* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 1–3. Russell himself broached the subject more overtly in the film *Gothic* (1986).

[92] See Thomas Prasch, 'Behind the Last Veil: Forms of Transgression in Ken Russell's *Salome's Last Dance*', *Ken Russell*, ed. Flanagan, 195–210 (p. 198).

[93] See Kevin Flanagan, 'Introduction', *Ken Russell*, ed. Flanagan, xi–xxv.

[94] As discussed in Peter Brooks, 'Body and Voice in Melodrama and Opera', *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera*, ed. Mary Ann Smart (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 118–34 (p. 121).

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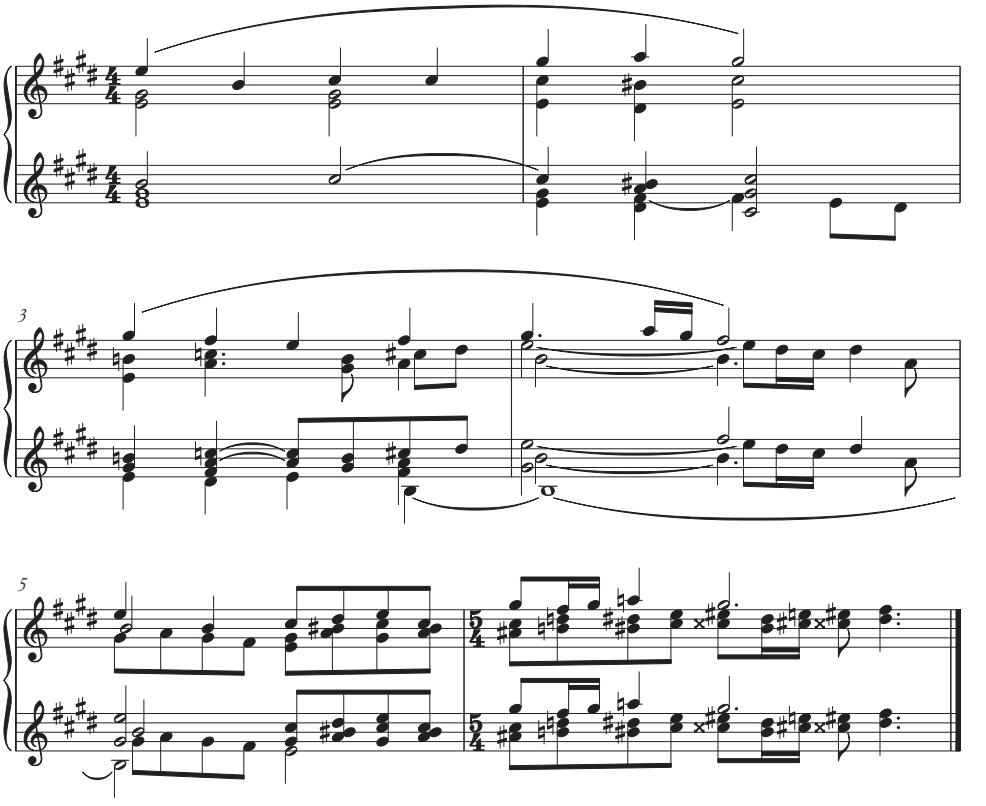
Example 5 'I am free' reduction (transcribed from London, British Library, Add. MS 71264, fol. 17[r–v]). Reproduced by kind permission of the Peter Maxwell Davies Estate.



no doubt important, place in conceptions of artistic modernism, as in recurrent narratives of 'rupture' that define it.[95]

The film theorist Kristin Thompson sees excess as a crucial part of film more generally, and her thinking on the subject forms the justification for the paracinematic reading strategy mentioned above, 'homogeneity' – excess's Other – being only a perceived emergent property of a work consisting of often disparate constituent parts. Inconsistencies in plot and pacing, moments of perceptual shock and more can come, she writes, to disrupt a sense of wholeness in a film; in recognizing the complexity of a work teetering on dissolution along the fault lines of excess we are intrigued 'by its strangeness' and made aware of how 'the whole film – not just its narrative – works on our perception'.[96] The question of 'authenticity' looms large here: not in any

[95] See, for example, Jed Rasula, 'The Pathic Receptacles of Modernism', *Ré-inventer le réel* (Tours: Presses Universitaires François-Rabelais, 1999), 143–63 (<https://books.openedition.org/pufr/4132>, accessed 6 April 2021).

[96] Kristin Thompson, 'The Concept of Cinematic Excess', *Theoretical Perspectives in Cinema*, ed. David Allen and Teresa de Lauretis, special issue, *Ciné-Tracts: A Journal of Film, Communications, Culture, and Politics*, 1/2 (summer 1977), 54–63 (p. 63).

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essentialist sense of the term (whether something is or is not 'authentic' is a rabbit warren), but rather as something disunifying – as an aesthetic, a colour or a mood that connects the practices of the film's contributors just as it threatens to collapse the whole excessive, paracinematic edifice. *The Devils*, much like some of Davies's most assiduously 'authentic' works (all the 'Taverner' pieces, the *Missa super L'homme armé* and more), is *excessively* authentic.

Indeed, it is notable that Russell and his crew took every opportunity to boast of the research they did to make the film historically accurate at the time of its making and release – a striking move given its unashamedly anachronistic experience.[97] Warner Brothers even decorated their marketing for *The Devils* in the USA with a disclaimer that pre-empted (and in the process perhaps contributed to) the kind of censorious uproar that would make it unsellable there:[98]

> It is a true story, carefully documented, historically accurate – a serious work by a distinguished film maker. As such it is likely to be hailed as a masterpiece by many. But because it is explicit and highly graphic in depicting the bizarre events that occurred in France in 1634, others will find it visually shocking and deeply disturbing.
>
> We feel a responsibility to alert you to this. It is our hope that only the audience that will appreciate THE DEVILS will come to see it.

In other publicity, as in the American audience trailer, this same thing is often simply shortened to '"THE DEVILS" is not a film for everyone …'. In the first instance, the passage's defensive tone indicates some desire to be recognized according to the normative standard of a 'distinguished film maker' – an oddly self-defeating gesture which stakes its claim for a highbrow status that Russell himself would consistently undermine in his long and rocky career. Perhaps this is merely a savvy (if ultimately failed) attempt at promotion through controversy;[99] whatever its intended purpose, it is interesting that historical 'authenticity' is leveraged here into a politics of censorship.[100] Is historical veracity, I wonder, expected here to mitigate the film's immoral, or 'pornographic', excesses; or does it, in fact, facilitate them? This film might disturb you, but at least it does so 'authentically'.

Authenticity's contradictory, disunifying and excessive impulse is embodied, then, by the early music that plays so strong a role in this film and in Davies's work of the time. And this might account for the prevalence in works discussed here of Britain's then most significant and popular exponents of the relatively young 'early music'

[97] This is particularly notable in the documentary *Director of The Devils* (see above, n. 25), in which Russell speaks in confident tones about basing the film on historical sources. That said, in the same documentary he discusses wanting to give the film a contemporary feeling, and to give medieval Loudun the feeling of being a 'modern town' with 'modern people'.

[98] Discussed in Crouse, *Raising Hell*, chapter 7.

[99] Despite what Crouse says, I think this is likely. There were some similar tactics in Britain; they just failed to work in the USA.

[100] The text on the poster also utilizes a medievalized decorative drop capital at the start of the text.

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movement: Munrow and the Early Music Consort of London. Early music, it is worth remembering, has in the past operated in a sphere neither strictly 'high' nor 'low', and has been described (for example by Nick Wilson) as then being a 'new social movement [… providing] a voice for the identity-less [… which could counter] the alienation of the market'.[101] Its influence became widespread, not least in the medieval-minded folk revival that took place roughly at the same time, in the progressive rock movement that would come, and in myriad costume dramas which littered the popular imaginary landscape of the time; not to mention in Davies's avant-garde generation. Young has noted the very real and 'growing interest in medieval-period reconstruction' in the 'music, cinema listings and television schedules of the late 1960s and early 70s', which he sees as a staple of a post-war British culture finding its identity in the 'grain of the past'.[102]

The modern history of early music has its own politics of 'authenticity' which becomes by extension one of excess, too, as in the eventual attempts, connected to the English 'a capella heresy' debate in the 1980s, to purge the movement in Britain of 'Catholic Continental excess'. This much was intended, according Helen Dell, to 'keep the borders clearly marked between the folk and medieval music-making of England and that of the continent'.[103] An excess of history, of interpretation, was seen in some quarters and in some of the more stylized interpretations of the repertoire as being problematic or even threatening. Such a politics makes distinctions between the authentic and the 'inauthentic' meaningless – or such was the opinion of Richard Taruskin, whose criticism of the 'authentistic' mode of interpretation saw it as an essentially modernist endeavour. His account of the 'falseness' of the notion of an 'authentistic performer [stripping away] the accumulated dust and grime of centuries to lay bare an original object in all its pristine splendour' is suggestive of material surpluses and excesses too.[104]

Russell and Davies are staging something of a dramatization of the politics of early-music excess in *The Devils*. In this way, Russell's cinematic vision affords us in turn a more nuanced second look at Davies's own 'ironical' treatment of the musical materials of the period. Indeed, connected with and dovetailed into Davies's score, the early–modern sonic continuum becomes something of a snake eating its own tail in *The Devils*. All the same, the discontinuities of musical time create opportunities, in conjunction with Russell's paracinematic style, for the viewer (or listener) to locate new types of transgressive meaning.

[101] Nick Wilson, *The Art of Re-enchantment: Making Early Music in the Modern Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7.
[102] Young, *Electric Eden*, 205.
[103] Helen Dell, '"[A] single, true, certain authenticity": The Authenticity Wars in English Twentieth-Century Folk and Medieval Music Revivals', *Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies*, 10 (2019), 439–51 (p. 447).
[104] Richard Taruskin, 'The Pastness of the Present and the Presence of the Past', *Authenticity and Early Music*, ed. Nicholas Kenyon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 137–207 (p. 205).

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Getting to understand what is meant by modernist medievalism – by the persistent fascination held by identifiably 'modernist' composers like Davies for early music, and for 'medievalness' more generally – is not an easy task.[105] This is partly because serious-minded composers of new music (of older generations, especially) tend by habit, if not by training, to distract, to focus their discussion on the more technical, recondite aspects of their craft and to form a picture of what influence the 'past' might have on their work through that lens. Indeed, it is something of a theme of Davies's own writings on the subject that, for all the colour, excess, fun and absurdity of his musical medieval personality, when prompted to discuss the subject the tone becomes wholly dry.[106] In turn, such perspectives have coloured our latter-day reception of the legacies of musical modernism.

In this way, *The Devils* is suggestive of a kind of crack in the carefully crafted modernist edifice: one that articulates the transgressive and communicative power of Davies's medievalism (and, by association, that of British music since the war) in the context of a broader current in challenging and popular medievalist artwork more generally. In an unusually candid account of Davies from a 1979 issue of *Gay News*, the journalist Alison Hennegan's description of his London flat is similar to Russell's scene-setting description at the beginning of this article: 'filled with objects from those [medieval and early Renaissance] centuries, many of them glowing with unostentatious beauty, […] rejoiced in by being used rather than "preserved"'.[107] In a short yet broad discussion that deals with a range of subjects, including the challenges experienced by homosexuals in contemporary music, protest and politics, and in particular Davies's alleged 'turning his back on the modern world' (in reference to his retreat to Orkney), Hennegan goes on to describe her spiking his enthusiasm following a comment on the unusual anachronisms of his own cluttered medieval room:

> I know, I know! Everything we're touching now and looking at in this flat is old, part of the past. And then you turn round and you're looking at the future. And we're just a juncture between the past and the future. And just to say 'this is it' and blinker yourself, whether backwards or forwards, is absolute nonsense. There's no way of understanding one's particular point in time if you do that.[108]

[105] I have avoided filling this article with accounts of the medieval (or, indeed, the Renaissance), of early music and of the history of modernism (musical or otherwise). That 'forward-looking' modern composers have consistently drawn on the influences of the distant past is clear. All the same, see Alexander Kolassa, 'Intertextuality and (Modernist) Medievalism in British Post-War Music', *Intertextuality in Music: Dialogical Composition*, ed. Paulo Ferreira de Castro, William Everett and Violetta Kostka (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 114–28.

[106] A case in point might be the promisingly entitled 'Echoes of the Past in the Present', *Peter Maxwell Davies: Selected Writings*, ed. Jones, 53–5, a transcript of a conversation between Roger Smalley and Davies mostly discussing the presence of early music in some of Davies's pieces. The two composers talk mainly of formal and technical matters. Likewise, in a Radio 3 interview with Tom Service on *Music Matters* (2014), both Davies and Birtwistle (there in celebration of their eightieth years) seem a bit put out when pressed on the nature of the influence of medieval music on their work, it being merely something they used in order to rebel (against the conservative music-education establishment of the time) in their student days.

[107] Alison Hennegan, 'Safer "Out" Than In', *Gay News*, 168 (May–June 1979), 19–20, quoted in *Peter Maxwell Davies: Selected Writings*, ed. Jones, 136–43 (p. 138).

[108] *Ibid.*, 139.

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This might seem out of keeping, but Davies's outburst is revealing: his account of the present as poised precariously but excitedly between past and future proposes a popular sort of counterpoint to typical teleologies of musical modernism which see the past primarily as a wellspring of incidental materials with which to access the future. Indeed, his talk of 'understanding' our 'particular point in time' goes somewhat beyond the typical injunction to learn from the past and suggests a more vitalistic reading of history's presence as being essential to now, and to the future, and in that sense essential to modernism writ large.

It is often said that a good (or successful) film score is one that goes barely noticed. Given the relative dearth of recognition of Davies's score for *The Devils* (an absence more than filled by that very score's noisy, ugly excess), one might see here alone reason to celebrate. But the challenge that the film's score proffers to our conception of popular film, musical modernism and British musical modernism specifically, as well as of widespread and multimedia imaginative medievalisms (and the intersection of all these and more), suggests to me a missed opportunity. Davies's trashy, excessive score, in conjunction with Russell's own cacophonous cinematic vision, speaks powerfully to our understanding of both history and the distant past, and in turn to that of our modern world as well.

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