

Progress Music

James Bulley

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In the Golden Age, progress music was heard in the
background by nearly everybody.

The first phone, the first car, the first house,
the first summer holiday, the first TV — all to progress music.

Then the arrival of sexual intercourse, in 1966,
and the full ascendancy of the children of the Golden Age

Martin Amis, *The Pregnant Widow*, 2010

This project explores a speculative era of 'Progress Music', unfolding narratives written from and through the archive. Here, form is found first as textual historical analysis, and then in the documentation of a multi-channel sound-film artwork, *Progress Music I*. This is a document of a time in 1960s Britain where the rapid rise of industry, communications and air travel was teamed with a spirit of idealistic public-information-film commissioning to inspire patternings of rhythmic, experimental, and incisive industrial documentary film. It is illustrated here by the collaborative work of British filmmaker Geoffrey Jones, and the composer and co-founder of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop Daphne Oram, on the British Petroleum (BP) documentary film *Trinidad and Tobago* (1964).¹ This inquiry began in 2012, stemming from research in the Daphne Oram collection, hosted at Goldsmiths, University of London, where I became curious about *Trinidad and Tobago*. In February of 1964, during the development of the 19-minute short film, Oram travelled to Trinidad to make field recordings and visit the yearly Carnival. On her return to her studio at Tower Folly in Kent, Oram composed a bombastic, electronically-effected concrète set of tape pieces, utilising pioneering sampling and tape manipulation techniques. For the final edit of the film, Jones then used Oram's soundscape works to create a highly detailed and rhythmic 'visual' graphic score that precisely defined his editing and shot selection (Jones, 2004).

'Progress Music,' as both text and installation work, is a project that maps alternate pathways through a speculative era, delineating a shifting, indeterminate relation to the archive, exploring stories as ever-changing, unstable, authored in the contemporary. Through this mechanism, the project seeks to highlight a vital but oft-overlooked time in experimental film and sound practice in Britain, refracted through the lens of two of its most underrepresented actors, Jones and Oram.

Archive

At first, the barren practicality of the housing of the Daphne Oram collection is chastening the modern archive is delimited by principles of preservation, classification

and inter-relation. Light and temperature-controlled environs induce sterility — a context-free capsule frozen in time. Gone are the nostalgic days of dust, of Jules Michelet's feverish breathing and Walter Benjamin's card systems. Contemporary archives swim in a networked stream, perpetual and dematerialised. Surrogacy ghosts them from their shelves, away from the concerned purview of the archon.² Digital reformation unfetters the information in lines of data and meta-data — searchable, browsable, zoomable. Tactile encounters in the place of origination have become distant and rarefied. The material remains untouched, structured and conserved from the chaotic environment outside, liberated by digital avatars from institution and hierarchy. These surrogate fragments are summoned at will, activated and mediated by technology. In a visual-internet age, archival material shifts like ink on blotting paper — no sooner is it posted than it pixelates, reappearing cropped from context, reformulated, reanimated, a digital *I'm Sitting In a Room*.³ The scale and form of the originating stuff is made skeletal in myriad transformations. But archival material does not only emanate outwards. Each archive has an inversion — that which is not there — excluded by choice, flippancy and chance. As the historian Carolyn Steedman has adroitly observed, 'there is history because there is absence' (Steedman, 2001, p. 146): writing history is the stuff of non-presence — stories are framed by what exists and refracted by the space between.

Sounds Index

The following index details the provenance of the sound fragments referenced throughout this writing.⁴

The sound excerpts referenced throughout this writing can be accessed by appointment with Special Collections & Archives at Goldsmiths, University of London.

Sound 1. 'Tuesday at Carnival' (February 1964) (excerpt from ORAM/11/DO283).

Sound 2. 'Flute and steel drum manipulation' (April 1964) (excerpt from ORAM/11/DO019a).

Sound 3. 'The Eyes Have It' and 'Come Leh We Go' sung by Mighty Sparrow (February 1964) (excerpt from ORAM/11/DO286).

Sound 4. 'Carnival' (February 1964) (excerpt from ORAM/11/DO285).

Sound 5. 'Drumming at Hindu wedding ceremony from distance' (February 1964) (excerpt from ORAM/11/DO284).

Sound 6. 'Drumming at Hindu wedding ceremony close' (February 1964) (excerpt from ORAM/11/DO284).

Sound 7. 'Bongo and Shango manipulations' (February 1964) (excerpt from ORAM/11/DO284).

Sound 8. 'Cocoa Songs' (February 1964) (ORAM/11/DO03).

Sound 9. 'Kiskadee' (February 1964) (excerpt from ORAM/11/DO284).

Sound 10. 'Traffic in Trinidad' (February 1964) (excerpt from ORAM/11/DO089).

Sound 11. 'Abide With Me' (February 1964) (excerpt from ORAM/11/DO089).

Sound 12. 'Steel drum manipulation' (April 1964) (excerpt from ORAM/11/DO019a).

Image Index

See Figure 1

Plate 1 'Flight to Trinidad and Tobago' (ORAM/7/8/001).

Plate 2 'Arrival in Trinidad and Tobago' (ORAM/7/8/003).

Plate 3 'Palm cutting' (ORAM/7/8/004).

Plate 4 'Car in palms' (ORAM/7/8/016).

Plate 5 'Family at harvest' (ORAM/7/8/038).

Plate 6 'Outside the wedding ceremony' (ORAM/7/8/013).

Plate 7 'Wedding ceremony' (ORAM/7/8/048).

Plate 8 'Steel-pan workshop' (ORAM/7/8/014).

Plate 9 'Daphne Oram and turtle' (ORAM/7/8/047).

Plate 10 'Drumming group' (ORAM/7/8/017).

See Figure 2

Plate 11 'Steel-pan band at Trinidad Carnival' (ORAM/7/8/024).

Plate 12 'Carnival man' [ORAM/7/8/019].

Plate 13 'Carnival costumes' (ORAM/7/8/020).

Plate 14 'Carnival costumes' (ORAM/7/8/021).

Plate 15 'Carnival man and police man' (ORAM/7/8/025).

Plate 16 'Carnival costumes' (ORAM/7/8/037).

Plate 17 'Carnival devil' (ORAM/7/8/027).

Plate 18 'Daphne Oram on Maracas beach' (ORAM/7/8/066).

Plate 19 'New York City view' (ORAM/7/8/064).

Plate 20 'View from the plane' (ORAM/7/8/068).



Figure 1 © The Daphne Oram Trust.



■ 11



■ 12



■ 13



■ 14



■ 15



■ 16



■ 17



■ 18



■ 19



■ 20

Figure 2 © The Daphne Oram Trust.

Beginnings

One Saturday morning in 2012 I hunched over a desk in the reading room of Goldsmiths Special Collections, digitising one of the last boxes of slide photographs in the Daphne Oram collection. The slides were dirty and scratched, and the scans came up on screen in blocks. Decades of deterioration had rendered ruin on the set of holiday photographs. A dusted narrative unfolded from aeroplane window, palm-lined shore and road, traversing city streets and continuing out into fields of sugar cane, cocoa and spice. Amongst the Caribbean landscapes were two washed-out shots of the British composer Daphne Oram, seated on a beach. In the first she looks away, inspecting the undercarriage of a turtle (Plate 9); in the second, one of the last of the sequence, she sits alone on a beach, centred, smiling at the camera (Plate 18). Curious, I moved through to the reading room adjoining the closed stacks where the collection is preserved and leafed through a grey series box containing a half-catalogued stack of papers that I thought might provide context. I came across Oram's notes regarding the film soundtracks she had worked on in the early 1960s, and found amongst them a handful of thin airmail paper and a thick dark green notebook. The papers were a four-page typed treatment for a film entitled 'Trinidad and Tobago.' Their heading denoted their sender:

GEOFFREY JONES (FILMS) LIMITED
28 HAMILTON TERRACE, N.W.8. CUN. 4276

Figure 3: Excerpt from 'Trinidad and Tobago Treatment' (Oram, 1964). © The Daphne Oram Trust.

Geoffrey Jones's work seems known now only to the most inveterate British film enthusiasts, his fate cast in a post-war industrial era, shadowed in the glow of the documentary masterpieces of John Grierson, Humphrey Jennings and Paul Rotha. His was a uniquely 'pure' documentary art form (Russell and Taylor, 2010, p. 7), a self-contained genre centred on dynamic rhythmic editing, free from commentary, closely synchronised to music. His work teems with a musicality born from childhood trips to the cinemas of North West London where, accompanied by his mother, Jones watched a wide range of British, German and Russian films, including early shorts by Norman McLaren and Len Lye, and the epoch defining silent film *Man With A Movie Camera* (1929) by Russian filmmaker Dziga Vertov. Vertov's film had an indelible influence on the young Jones, and it became a driving force in the pursuit of his own visual language.⁵ In the 1930s, Vertov had proved a divisive figure for pre-war British documentary makers,

his rapid editing and playful camera technique generally regarded as either lacking in substance and overtly exoticised (Roberts, 2000, p. 99) or ingenious and virtuosic (Grierson, 1966, p. 129). British documentary filmmakers of the time sought to explore a very different focus, emphasizing the dignity and stature of working people and the nation: a portraiture of empire, of industry and its propagators. This so-called 'Golden-Age' of documentary in Britain eclipsed the quality of drama produced at the time, which often paled in the big-budget shine of the American releases that populated the British cinemas. Crucial to the resonance of this documentary era was the film maker John Grierson who headed up the Empire Marketing Board (EMB) creating informational documentaries that were sent out across the British Empire before World War Two. At the EMB, and in his following position as the head of the General Post Office (GPO) film unit, Grierson was responsible for nurturing the early careers of numerous now well-known artists and filmmakers, including the Scottish animator Norman McLaren, and the New Zealand artist Len Lye.

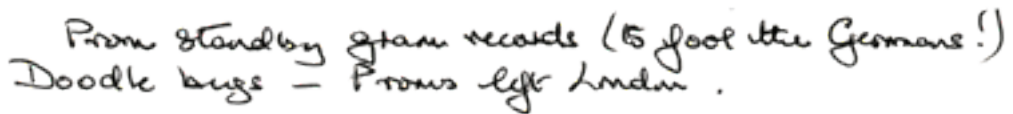
In the 1930s, sound and music in British documentary filmmaking was often functional, romantic and derivative. But there were notable exceptions: the 1936 GPO production *Night Mail*, directed by Harry Watt and Basil Wright, introduced an innovative visual-sound narrative, tracking the journey of a Postal Special train from Glasgow to London. The film showcases the compositional dexterity of Benjamin Britten, whose music develops to a surreal staccato underlay for the rapped rhythmic verse of W. H. Auden's extraordinary 'beat' coda.⁶ *Night Mail* heralded the potential of a novel film-sound combination, and in its evocative imagery portrayed the towering industrial landscapes of the British North as a sleeping giant, ready to awake:

Towards the fields of apparatus, the furnaces,
Set on the dark plain like gigantic chessmen. (Auden, 2002, p. 2)

Whilst the arrival of the Second World War necessitated a shift in focus towards national propaganda, the experimentalism of the British film and music industries endured. Humphrey Jennings' documentary *Listen to Britain* (1942) showcased a stark lack of spoken narration, informed by his work with the *Mass-Observation* organisation.⁷ In predominantly utilising music and diegetic sound, Jennings cast ambiguity on his intention, allowing the viewer space to understand the film from their own perspective.

The early 1940s saw rapid technological advances in the broadcasting of film and sound in Britain. In October 1943, a 17-year-old Daphne Oram arrived in London to take up a position at the BBC.⁸ Oram worked in the music department at the Royal

Albert Hall, exploring novel microphone techniques for radio broadcast of instrumental performance, and studying composition privately with the composer Ivor Walsworth. As bombs fell over London, Oram and her colleagues broadcast concerts from a balcony high up under the domed glass roof of the hall, tracking audio gain against the dynamics of the score, ensuring that a 78rpm disc recording of the same piece was cued up, so if the hall were to be evacuated, the concert broadcast could appear to continue as normal:

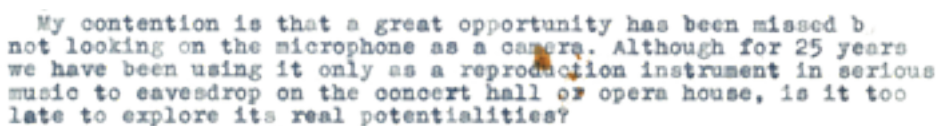


From standby gram records (to fool the Germans!)
Doodle bugs - Frons left London.

Figure 4: Excerpt from 'Handwritten biographical interview transcript by Daphne Oram' (c.1988) © The Daphne Oram Trust.

Just a mile away on Southampton Row, Jones had begun studying at the Central School of Art and Crafts, where he encountered the work of Italian film-director Luciano Emmer⁹ whose narrative films probed the internal rhythm of the still image. Jones was captivated by Emmer's work *Goya* (1951), in which a tightly choreographed topographical dance amongst Francisco Goya's 33 series of prints *Bullfighting* plays a precise duet to the interlocking rapidity of Andrés Segovia's flamenco guitar. At Central, Jones organised screenings of the graphic sound experiments of Len Lye and Norman McLaren who had been experimenting with 'Visual Music' — drawing directly onto the optical soundtrack of film. What was seen and heard became one and the same.¹⁰ Jones also screened Dutch filmmaker Bert Haanstra's *Glas* (1958), a hypnotic feat of editing that illustrated the precocious potential of non-verbal sound-film. *Glas* is a film of process whose focus is not strict narrative or dramatis personae, but the systems and mechanics of glass making — the rhythmic music of manufacture.

Whilst working at the BBC, Oram studied the technological advances taking place in the film industry. In 1950, she distributed a paper to colleagues entitled *The Broadcasting of Music* in which she proposed that, rather than paying attention to the work of Stockhausen, Schaeffer and the serialists, the BBC should look for inspiration to the nascent film art being produced in Britain at the time.



My contention is that a great opportunity has been missed by not looking on the microphone as a camera. Although for 25 years we have been using it only as a reproduction instrument in serious music to eavesdrop on the concert hall or opera house, is it too late to explore its real potentialities?

Figure 5: Excerpt from 'Broadcasting of Music paper' (Oram, 1950) © The Daphne Oram Trust.

Oram's interest in the relationship between film and music grew in her time at the BBC. Personal correspondence from 1957 details her plans to create a drawn sound machine, through which a new landscape for sound composition could be explored.¹¹ She researched the work of experimental filmmakers, including Norman McLaren,¹² and, as part of the newly established Radiophonic Workshop¹³ was sent in October 1958 with three colleagues on a fact-finding mission to the *Journées Internationales de Musique Expérimentale* at the Brussels World Trade Fair. There, as well as witnessing Edgard Varèse demonstrate his *Poème Électronique*, Oram met the pioneering American visual-sound artist Jordan Belson, who at the time was organising a series of audiovisual shows with musician Henry Jacobs known as the 'Vortex Concerts' at the planetarium in San Francisco.¹⁴ On her return to London, Oram resigned from the Radiophonic Workshop (only six months after it had opened), on 1 November 1958, frustrated by its lack of ambition, and anxious to pursue her own ideas. Oram left London and moved to an old Oast House in Kent named 'Tower Folly,' where she set about gathering the equipment she required to start her own electronic music studio.

Meanwhile, by the early 1950s, Jones had completed his studies at the Central School of Arts and Crafts. Influenced by Emmer's illustrative films, he created his own hand-drawn animations, which earned him a job with an advertising agency. Jones then took up a role as supervisory director for animation at the Shell Film Unit where he made his first documentary *Shell Panorama* (1959), his only film with spoken commentary. When the in-house animation department at Shell was closed in 1961, Jones formed his own company, 'Geoffrey Jones (Films)' and was re-contracted as a freelancer. The result was the giddy rhythmic journey of *Shell Spirit* (1962). In the early 1960s at Tower Folly, Daphne Oram focused on the creation of her drawn sound machine, a project she titled *Oramics*. The composer would draw onto a synchronised set of 10 35mm film strips, overlaid on light sensitive components that generated electrical charges to control amplitude, timbre, frequency and duration of sound. In early 1960 she was awarded a grant from the Gulbenkian foundation to develop the 'Oramics Machine'.¹⁵ To support her work Oram took on a series of commissions, including composing animation soundtracks for the drinks company Horlicks, composing the anthology *Electronic Sound Patterns* for EMI records, and designing electronic sound effects for Jack Clayton's 1961 film *The Innocents*.

Snow

In September 1962, the head of the British Transport Film Unit¹⁶ Edgar Anstey invited Jones to begin work on a new commission to explore the forthcoming electrification of the railways. Jones agreed and set off across the British Isles, filming the length and breadth of the rail network. As he travelled, Jones became acutely aware of the juxtaposition between the comfortable well-heeled passengers and the hostile conditions faced by the railwaymen working in all weathers to keep the trains running. In January 1963, Anstey met Jones for an update on the film's progress. Jones described to him an idea for a different short film, focusing on the railway in winter and documenting the reality for the workers pitted against the inclement conditions. With a sharp eye for an excellent filmic subject, and aware of the rapidly changing weather, Anstey commissioned *Snow* (1963) the next morning.

In *Snow*, the hypnotic tension of its cascading soundtrack is the linchpin of the film. Initially, Jones had wished to use the hit song *Teen Beat* by the American drummer Sandy Nelson, but was unable to obtain a licence. Hearing of Oram's work at the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, Jones asked her to rework Nelson's song, employing British musician Jonny Hawksworth to record a new arrangement, expanding it to twice its length and filtering and effecting the result. Oram finished the sound score in February 1963. The resultant film was edited by Jones in tight counterpoint to Oram's tape manipulations. It is a staccato masterpiece, a virtuosic interplay of rhythmic film editing and clattered electronic manipulation that embodies the passenger train's progress, made possible by untold human endeavour.¹⁷ After Jones had finished shooting *Snow*, further work on the railway electrification project was put on hold as it became apparent that work across the rail network had not progressed sufficiently at that time. In the autumn of 1963, Jones was then approached by a film officer for British Petroleum (BP) to create a documentary about their operations in Trinidad and Tobago. With his railway project on hold, Jones agreed. In the winter of 1963, he flew out to the islands with his friend and director of photography Wolfgang Suschitzky¹⁸ to spend five weeks filming for the documentary. Buoyed by his experience working with Oram on *Snow*, Jones asked her to join them. He posted her a four-page brief for the film, typewritten on wafer thin airmail paper (Oram, 1964). Jones proposed that Oram should create a location sound score that could act as the foundation for a rhythmic, narration-free documentary. Jones planned to use a graphic scoring technique, allowing him to compose and edit his filmed material precisely to the timbral and rhythmic character of the sounds produced by Oram:

Method... To compose a framework in sound that throughout the film will be evocative of the subject, and to make the action of the individual pictures, and, or, the action of the transition from picture to picture, relate to the rhythm, textural instrumentation, and where used, the melody in the composition.

Figure 6: Excerpt from 'Trinidad and Tobago Treatment' (Oram, 1964) © The Daphne Oram Trust.

The film, titled *Trinidad and Tobago*, was to be structured into four sections — history, landscape, work and play. Under each heading Jones added his impressions as to the film and sound materials required:

Work. Visual.

The emphasis here is on manual labour, skill and dexterity. Sequences will also contain portraits illustrating the multi-racial composition of society, and details of crops unfamiliar to audiences outside the tropics. Special attention will be given to team work, and the interrelation of actions in cutting.

Figure 7: Excerpt from 'Trinidad and Tobago Treatment' (Oram, 1964) © The Daphne Oram Trust.

Mama Dis Is Mas!

—Lord Kitchener, 1964¹⁹

Mas

Oram joined Jones and Suschitzky in the last week of January 1964, taking photographs as she flew in over the Caribbean with a Kodak Bantam camera loaned by her mother (Plates 1 & 2). The islands of Trinidad and Tobago had gained independence from Britain in 1962, just one year after BP had begun operating off their eastern coast. Trinidad was famous for its yearly Carnival, a celebration that Jones planned to make the centrepiece of his film. In the late eighteenth century, 'Mas' traditions had started in Trinidad, when French plantation owners held masquerade parties to mark the beginning of fasting for Lent. In response, the slaves working on the plantations formed their own parallel celebration, 'Canboulay' (from the French '*cannes brulées*', meaning burnt cane). Canboulay featured stick fighting, and a call-and-response protest music called 'Cariso'. Cariso music was a form of vocal protest for the enslaved population, and its verses carried oral traditions from their ancestral homes. During Canboulay, torches of burning sugar cane were carried in procession as symbols of resistance. After the abolition of slavery

in 1834, Canboulay merged with Mas, becoming Carnival, a celebration of freedom, multiculturalism and defiance. From 1845, large influxes of indentured immigrants from India, Syria and Africa dramatically changed the ethnic composition of Trinidad and Tobago, adding new folk musics into the existing Creole mix. In February 1881, stick fighting, torch burning and percussion music were banned in response to the Canboulay riots where descendants of freed slaves protested against attempts by British police to crack down on the celebrations.²⁰ It wasn't until the mid-1930s that the traditions began to reappear, transformed amongst large orchestras of tuned inverted oil drums. These steel pans were forged in the industrialisation of the time — a processual by-product of the swelling petroleum industry, sculpted as a melodic percussion instrument, a unique 'rolling' of history in a physical sounding vessel.

From the documents and photographs amongst the papers of the Oram collection, it was clear that over her three weeks in Trinidad, Oram travelled widely (Plates 3 & 4) — her notebooks refer to around 20 1/4" tapes of sound recordings made during the trip. I spent days listening to a stack of uncatalogued tapes that seemed to relate to her work on the film, eventually confirming at least six of the tapes as being from the trip.²¹ As I sat listening, I pieced together how Oram's soundtrack was recorded and composed. One tape was particularly curious. Unlabelled except for a small sticker on its reel simply denoting 'Birthday Message,' it seemed unlikely to relate at first. As the tape crackled and began, the crisply modulated tones of Oram's Received Pronunciation came to life through the loudspeakers. What followed was a 20-minute message recorded from her Hilton hotel room in Port of Spain and sent to her father back in Wiltshire — an oral birthday card that described in detail her time spent recording in Trinidad (Sound 1). 1964 was a defining moment for Carnival in Trinidad, marking not only the advent of the first official steel pan 'panorama' competition, but also the moment that Trinidad's Carnival reached across the globe, inspiring communities in London to launch a now famous offshoot in Notting Hill. Oram was enthralled by the music of carnival, and on her arrival immediately began meeting and recording the local musicians who were taking part. She visited a steel pan yard to learn the mechanics of how the instruments were made (Plate 8) and set up a recording room in a small theatre near her hotel in the capital, Port of Spain. In the theatre, she recorded sessions of Shango spiritual music with a local percussion-flute duo (Sound 2), and taped a cappella performances of *The Eyes Have It* and *Come Leh We Go!*²² (Sound 3) with the calypsonian, Mighty Endeavour. She also recorded some of the most well-known steel bands of the time, taping performances by Mighty Sparrow, Lord Kitchener and Lord ('Warlord') Blakie. Unfortunately, these latter

recordings do not survive, and the only reference to the sessions having taken place are Oram's cursory notes and accountings (Oram 1964b).

On the first day of carnival Oram woke early to walk down Frederick Street in the centre of Port of Spain. She watched thousands of revellers dressed in the surreal attire of striped robbers, horned devils and African warriors spill out of bars and alleyways into the morning light, the aftermath of all-night jump-up calypso parties across the district (Plates 12 & 13). She spent the second day of carnival in Savannah Park, viewing proceedings from a large photographer's platform that provided a perfect centre point for the Carnival parades. She watched enthralled as carnival-goers dressed as Vikings, bronze-helmeted Goths swathed in fur, and children wearing oriental carpets as robes danced to vast steel bands numbering as many as 4000 players (Plate 11). In the intense heat of the day, Oram found a cool spot, ducking underneath the viewing platform to sit and watch proceedings through the dangling legs of the people sitting on its edge. Every now and then she dashed out with her Nagra tape recorder and microphones to record the bands as they passed (Sound 4). She took numerous photos of carnival-goers in the park throughout the day, marvelling at their barely describable costumes (Plates 14–16). After Carnival, Oram spent days back at the hotel collating and listening through the tapes she had recorded. On the Sunday, her driver invited her to attend his niece's Hindu wedding ceremony (Plates 6 – 7). At the wedding, Oram captured a recording of the traditional stick drum battle outside of the venue (Sounds 5 & 6).

Trinidad and Tobago

*Trinidad and Tobago*²³ begins with Jones and Suschitzky's serene vistas of coastal landscapes and mangrove swamps, ancient and untouched by human hand. Footage of birds duets with flute, floating atop undulating waves of echo-effected Shango drums (Sound 7). The drums and flute increase in pace, propelling a visual multicultural exposition, a journey through architecture, iconography and people at work and play. We jump to footage of Cocoa bean workers, their circular stamping of beans ground to dust²⁴ cut incisively against the gestural sounds of their work song (Sound 8).²⁵ After the historical landscape sequence, Jones unfurls a dynamic encounter with the mechanics of progress. Oram's manipulated drum loops and steel pan recordings scatter percussive counterpoint to footage of manual and mechanical labour. Sweeping footage of blazing sugar cane,²⁶ accompanied by a slowed tattoo of low sonorous drumming (a fleeting evocation of Canboulay) is immediately overrun by oil lines, pylons and transportation. The echoing drums are subsumed by the rapid

back-and-forth of high frequency bongo patterns, an industrial rattle that speeds up and slows down in mimicry of the machinery. As we watch an oil drill burrow down into the ocean floor, the patterns spiral into a clattering steel pan introduction, heralding the climactic carnival sequence (Sound 4). The recordings that Oram, Jones and Suschitzky captured of Carnival are the main feature of *Trinidad and Tobago*. Indeed, in an interview late in his life, Jones commented that the combination of sound and film was deemed so effective that audiences were convinced that they must have been recorded simultaneously (something, he notes, that would have been nigh impossible at the time).²⁷ The carnival sequence in *Trinidad and Tobago* is bizarre, joyous and fantastic. Cultures merge and entwine — parodies of British colonials with huge papier mâché heads dance with Trinidadians, dressed in US navy uniforms, who stumble cartoon walks to triumphant discordant brass music, pipes in one hand, fake guns in the other. A giant red and black devil toots a paper clarinet (Plate 17), glaring menacingly as geisha women sway amongst crowds of Western tourists dressed as scarecrows. At the end of the sequence, just before the end credits of the film, we see a tiny flash of Wolf Suschitzky in amongst the multitude, Jones' self-referential nod to his hero Dziga Vertov.

Tuning

The changing soundscape of Trinidad fascinated Oram. The arrival of BP and other oil companies had brought a wave of imported machinery and vehicles to the island. As the number of cars grew, so did the background noise of traffic, and Oram's notes are littered with lost battles against the noise, including numerous attempts to capture clean recordings of the song of the local onomatopoeic kiskadee bird (Sound 9):

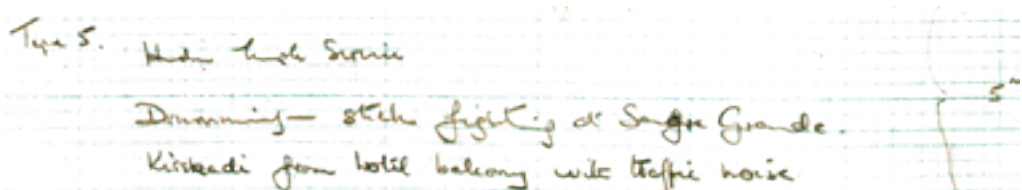


Figure 8: Excerpt from 'Trinidad and Tobago Notebook' (Oram, 1964b).

When Oram discussed the problem of traffic noise with Jones, he asked her to record separate tapes of the sound, so that she might thread the interruptive car horns and

throbbing engines into musical rhythm for him in sections of the film. Oram went out into Port of Spain the following morning and recorded over 20 minutes of traffic sounds for Jones (Sound 10). A roadside meeting with a family, their horse and cart laden with the day's harvest (Plate 5)⁵ led to Oram being invited to visit a sugar cane farm, where she recorded the burning of the cane and the slashing and cutting of the resultant crop. The following day she organised a visit to hear a police brass band, where she recorded a bombastic militarised version of *Abide With Me*. In retrospect, the triumphalist brass fanfares and distant gun salutes of her recordings evoke a faded afterglow of colonialism, slipping away in the dawn of Trinidad's independence (Sound 11).

As her trip drew to a close, Oram spent a few days swimming and relaxing on Maracas beach to the north of the island, renowned as one of the most beautiful on Trinidad. She flew back to England at the weekend, waiting an extra day longer than planned in order to fly via New York (Plate 19) with Jones and Suschitzky. On her return to Tower Folly she immediately set to work, reviewing, editing and composing the tapes from Trinidad. She spent February creating the composition for the film; looping, splicing and adding effects to the tape recordings to structure and compose the otherworldly soundtrack, providing Jones with what he later called the 'matrix' of the film (Jones, 2004).

Return

Jones' *Trinidad and Tobago* documents an age when progress was celebrated in the industrialised world, a time when mechanisation was teamed with prosperity, spiriting things forward, a progression against the odds. In Oram's deftly manipulated soundtrack, the steel pan drum acts in counterpoint to this progression, a tuned inversion of an industrial by-product whose rhythms celebrate human expression and ingenuity. Listening to Oram's raw tape recordings provides a uniquely unmediated document of a pivotal time in the island's culture. In the early 1960s the country was changing rapidly; old manual industry was being replaced by mechanisation, and the newly independent nation was celebrating its freedom from colonial rule. This was a time of self-determination, and it is clear from both the working notes and the final film that Oram and Jones sought to capture this vibrancy, replete in contradictory ebullience. *Trinidad and Tobago* represents a forgotten impressionistic form of what a public information film could be. It is indicative of a mostly unrecognised spectrum of rhythmic, artistic documentary sound-films that stretches from Vertov's *Man With A Movie Camera* through Grierson's *Night Mail* and Haanstra's *Glas*, to the morose

environmental coda of Derek Williams' 1970 documentary *The Shadow of Progress. Trinidad and Tobago*, alongside these films, portrays an era of 'Progress Music', employing radical 'syncretic' techniques²⁸ to combine sound, music and film to create novel combinatory meanings.

In the five years following *Trinidad and Tobago*, a surfeit of visual material born from the ubiquity of television caused hyperactive short-form advertising to become the industry standard, and for Jones, the commissions dried up. The days of open briefs and forward-thinking commissioning came to an end. Oram and Jones worked on only two other films together: *Rail* (1967) saw the completion of Jones' railway electrification project with Anstey, for which Oram provided additional sound effects on top of Wilfred Joseph's score, and *This Is Shell* (1970), for which Oram provided additional sound effects as counterpart to Donald Fraser's music.²⁹ Oram's experiences working with Jones on *Trinidad and Tobago* had a profound impact on her compositional practice, enabling her to master highly intricate tape manipulation techniques and furthering her work with sound-visual narrative. Following the completion of the soundtrack she remained fascinated by the timbral characteristics of the steel pan (Sound 12). Two years later, in her composition *Episode Metallic* (April 1965) she became the first electronic musician to manipulate the steel-drum, adding effects and splicing her recordings from Trinidad with other *concrète* acoustic material to form the sound element of the futuristic sculpture *Nucleus* by Andrew Bobrowski. *Nucleus*, an early example of electronic interactive art, was exhibited alongside Barbara Hepworth's *Theme on Electronics* in December 1965 at the Mullard Electronics Centre in London. In the sounding sculpture, the concrete rhythmic music of Trinidadian progress became the raw material for the ethereal electronic music of a new atomic era.

Knowledge that is organised in slips and scraps knows no hierarchy.

— Esther Leslie, *Walter Benjamin's Archive*, 2015

Progress Music I

Progress Music I is the first in a series of film-sound installations by the author, originally commissioned by South Kiosk³⁰ for a solo gallery exhibition in October 2014 (Figs. 9 & 10). Taking as its provocation the fragment of writing by Martin Amis that prefaces this chapter, it is a generative non-linear film-sound installation that seeks an alternate, non-textual extrapolation of a speculative era of 'Progress Music' through an autonomous film archive, developing and mapping pathways through its corpus. *Progress Music I* is composed entirely from hundreds of fragments of 1960s British industrial documentary



Figure 9: *Progress Music I* installation view, South Kiosk, London 3–25 October 2014.
Photograph: Ben James



Figure 10: *Progress Music I* installation view, South Kiosk, London 3–25 October 2014.
Photograph: Ben James

films and their soundtracks, collected by the author. As such, the work is an example of 'plunderphonics,' what Chris Cutler has defined as a practice that 'radically undermines three of the central pillars of the art music paradigm: originality (it deals only in copies), individuality (it speaks only with the voice of others), and copyright (the breaching of which is a condition of its very existence)' (Cutler, 2015, p. 143). By employing a plunderous methodology, the piece communicates only from the material it is comprised of.

Progress Music I is structured by three distinct movements; I. Landscape, II. Machines and III. Progress, with each movement exploring different sound-film synchronicities relating to its categorisation. Human actors are removed from the source material by editing, echoing the 'pure documentary' style of Jones and other filmmakers, enhancing focus on the mechanics, landscapes and industry of the era. The installation runs on a 12-minute loop, with each four-minute movement unfolding different patternings of syncretic sound and film at each play through. Each movement of *Progress Music I* generates new combinations of film-sound material in

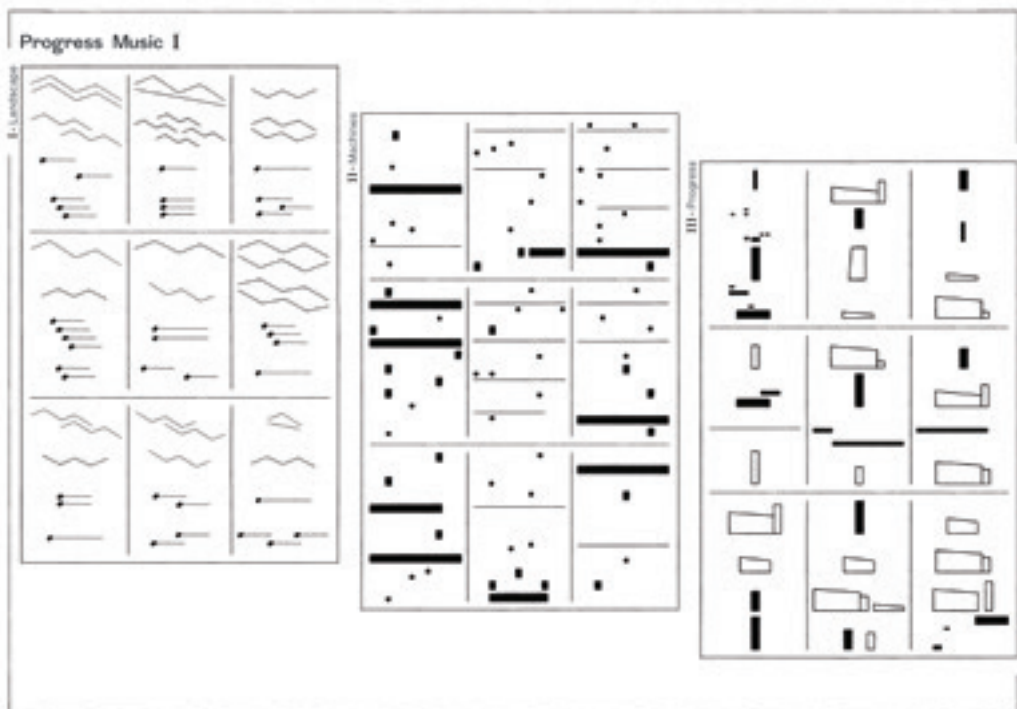


Figure 11: *Progress Music I* instruction score.
October 2014

real-time using chance and procedural techniques, rendered in custom software. This software also spatialises the material over nine CRT cube monitors with loud speakers attached to them. The rhythmic, contrapuntal composition of *Progress Music I* is defined by an overarching instruction score (Figure 11), which draws inspiration from the compositional methodologies of Geoffrey Jones and Daphne Oram's collaborative work on *Trinidad and Tobago* (1964). The resultant spatialised nine-channel film-sound composition excises and portrays 'Progress Music' in its core tenets, combining and recombining rhythmic fragments of sound and film in real-time to spatially explore the power of syncretic rhythmic editing to portray the rise and documentary vitality of the 1960s industrial complex. The *Progress Music* installation series is what Hal Foster has called an 'archival art,' a setting somehow successive to site-specific art that aims 'to make historical information, often out or displaced, physically present' (Foster, 2004, p. 4). In *Progress Music I*, history is presented as live composition, a complex combinatory patterning, altering in each telling, rendering its material visible, audible and malleable in the present.

Conclusion

As both textual analysis and film-sound installation, 'Progress Music' activates the historic material it is drawn from. As Wolfgang Ernst has noted, 'it is the energy of utilisation which activates the archive' (Ernst, 2005, p. 101). Within 'Progress Music' archival material is activated by re-composition, provoking speculative narratives and untold histories to unfold. In this practice-research project explorations are made into a vital and underrepresented era of industrial short film in Britain. The traces of material that form the corpus of the research are necessarily reordered, decontextualised and reclassified, freed from their originating archives and fragmented in the spaces of book and exhibition. Writing between and amongst them is not intended as fiction — it is a conversation engendered where there wasn't one, connections made that now might become apparent. The era of 'Progress Music' that I have defined here merits further detailed and discursive examination. Its commercial commissioning processes, ties to industrialised processes now recognised as environmentally detrimental, and relatively sporadic and lesser-known practitioners may have caused it to fall under-the-radar. It is clear however that in its tenets of audiovisual synchronisation, what Holly Rogers has described as 'the use of music and sound to determine the pace and structure of a narrative' (Rogers, 2014, p. 83), and in its vibrant portrayals of the mechanics of industrialisation it provides an important insight into the pre-atomic

industrialised period and demarcates a genre of documentary film that is often overlooked. Its core techniques draw rich inspiration from the 'visual music' techniques that occurred in animation in the 1950s and 'Progress Music' can be seen as a natural successor to the experimental documentaries of the post-war period. Furthermore, in the rapid fusion of sound and film that underlays 'Progress Music' we can speculate an important precedent for music video³¹ which at its core has markedly similar stylistic and technical audiovisual syncretic methodologies. 'Progress Music' might then be understood not only as an important witness to a bygone era, but also as a key point in the development of audiovisual culture.

Endnotes

- 1 Daphne Oram was one of Britain's earliest and most innovative composers of electronic music. She died in 2003 and left behind a wealth of compositions, writings and recordings. Her archive is a history written in life, a biographical template teeming with reflections and addenda.
- 2 In Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever*, Derrida describes the archon as "first of all the documents' guardians. They do not only ensure the physical security of what is deposited and the substrate. They are also accorded the hermeneutic right and competence. They gave the power to interpret the archives." (Derrida, 1995, p. 10)
- 3 Alvin Lucier's 1969 piece *I Am Sitting in a Room* involves Lucier recording himself narrating a text, and then repetitively playing back and re-recording the fragment until the words become unintelligible, and only the resonant frequency of the room remains.
- 4 These sound media and image plates 1 – 20 in Figures 1 and 2 have been included with the kind permission of the Daphne Oram Trust and were digitised with the assistance of Goldsmiths Special Collections, Tom Richards and Goldsmiths Electronic Music Studios.
- 5 Jones discusses his early years and the formative influences on his work at 02:40 in the DVD extras for the BFI release 'Geoffrey Jones: Rhythm of Film' released in 2004.
- 6 The original score manuscript for *Night Mail* by Benjamin Britten (1936) is preserved in the British Library as part of the Benjamin Britten Archive (MS 60621). W. H. Auden's verses for *Night Mail* also provide the core fragmentary sample for a track uploaded by anonymous 'user18081971' to the music hosting website 'Soundcloud' in February 2015. The track is one of nearly 300 tracks that have reputedly been uploaded by the musician Richard D. James (also known as Aphex Twin) since January 2015.
- 7 The *Mass-Observation* social research organisation was co-founded by Jennings in 1937. The organisation sought to use anthropological methods to gather records of the everyday lives of the people of Britain.
- 8 See: 'A letter from P. A. Florence, Engineering Establishment Officer,' where Oram is offered a post as 'Technical Assistant (Class II) on the unestablished staff of the Engineering division in Programme Engineering based in London at a weekly wage of £2.15.0d' (ORAM/3/1/109).

- 9 For a detailed account of the work of Luciano Emmer, see: Jacobs, S. (2011). *Framing Pictures: Film and the Visual Arts*. Edinburgh University Press.
- 10 Experiments in visual and electronic music had begun in Russia decades before this. See Andrey Smirnov's book *Sound in Z* (2013) for detailed information about the many pioneering figures in Russian film and music of the early 20th century.
- 11 See: 'Pen and pencil notes detailing plans for the Oramics technique'. [ORAM/1/1/008]. Copies sent to Mr Porter and Mr Garrard at the BBC on 4 April 1957.
- 12 See 'Radiophonic Workshop Log Book 2', notes by Daphne Oram and Alec Nisbett in the BBC Written Archives (1957) (R97/23/1).
- 13 For further information about the founding of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop and its legacy, see Louis Niebur's *Special Sound: The Creation and Legacy of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop* (2010).
- 14 See: 'Radiophonic Effects Committee and Electronic Composition Workshop 1956-68' in the BBC Written Archives (R97/9/1).
- 15 For full details of the Oramics machine, see: sub-fonds ORAM/1 in the Daphne Oram Collection. Also see: Richards, T. (2017). *Oramics: Precedents, Technology and Influence*.
- 16 In the aftermath of the Second World War, the British prime minister Clement Atlee had created the British Transport Commission (BTC), a vision of integrated, publicly owned transport, whose aim was to inspire the British population with a feeling of progress into the future. Within the commission was British Transport Film (BTF), which aimed to use the innovative short-film form to communicate to the public and its own employees the technological progress being made as transport networks were upgraded across the country. At this time, the BTF was headed by Edgar Anstey, a filmmaker who had learnt his craft under John Grierson.
- 17 *Snow* went on to gain an Oscar nomination in 1965 and received over 14 other major awards at film festivals.
- 18 Wolfgang Suschitzky is perhaps best known for his collaborations with Paul Rotha in the 1940s, and his work on Mike Hodges' 1971 film *Get Carter*. Suschitzky is also a successful photographer whose photographs have been exhibited at the National Gallery, London.
- 19 Lord Kitchener's *Mama Dis Is Mas* was the calypso hit of the steel band panorama competition in 1964.

- 20 For an overview of the history of Carnival, see *Carnival: Culture in Action - The Trinidad Experience* (2004) edited by Milla Cozart Riggio.
- 21 The tape section in the Daphne Oram collection consists of over 500 tapes, about half of which are catalogued and digitised at this time. It includes full compositions, field recordings, audio letters and process tapes relating to around 100 different works and projects.
- 22 *Come Leh We Go!* was a calypso originally written in the early 1960s by the Guyanan singer King Fighter.
- 23 *Trinidad and Tobago* was released as part of a British Film Institute DVD collection entitled 'Geoffrey Jones: The Rhythm of Film'. The collection also features a unique interview with Jones, filmed in the last few months of his life, where he discusses *Trinidad and Tobago* and his collaborations with Daphne Oram.
- 24 *Cocoa* production had been affected by a severe drought in Trinidad (1957 – 1962) and the film captures a rare moment of optimistic recovery before the industry changed beyond recognition with the mechanisation of the late 1960s.
- 25 *Cocoa Songs* can be heard at 04:18 in Jones' final *Trinidad and Tobago* film.
- 26 Sugar cane is burned before harvesting to remove the leaves and insects from the crop.
- 27 Jones discusses this audience reaction to the carnival sequence of *Trinidad and Tobago* at 20:24 in an interview included in the DVD extras for the BFI release 'Geoffrey Jones: Rhythm of Film' released in 2004.
- 28 The film-sound theorist Michel Chion has described 'synchresis' as a simultaneity of disparate sound and image, deriving new meaning and form in each recombination (Chion, 2009, p. 214).
- 29 Both films can be seen on the DVD '*Geoffrey Jones: The Rhythm of Film*' published by the BFI in 2004.
- 30 For more about *South Kiosk* gallery, please see their website: <http://www.southkiosk.com/> [accessed: 2018-01-24].
- 31 In fact later in life Geoffrey Jones used his virtuostic editing technique on a number of uncredited music videos where he worked as editor.

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