
Letters to the Editor

From Mark Doran

The rejection of Walton's score for the 1969 film 'The Battle of Britain' and its almost complete replacement by one composed by Ron Goodwin has left so bad a taste in the mouths of Waltonians that many will no doubt refuse on principle to watch the film's occasional TV screenings – or will perhaps tune in solely for the climactic 'battle in the air' sequence for which Walton's music was retained. In the case of the film's most recent showing (Channel 4, 23 January), such die-hards would seem to have missed more than they bargained for: instead of proceeding to Goodwin's one remaining cue ('Leitmotivic' accompaniment to the withdrawal of the German invasion troops, leading to the RAF theme triumphant in B \flat major), the Channel 4 print ended with an approach to and presentation of *the superb C-major march originally composed by Walton for this juncture*.

To find that a piece of the discarded score has somehow made its way into a commercially distributed print is little short of astounding. Local tastes and sensitivities as well as differing censorship regulations mean that variant prints of internationally released films are the rule rather than the exception; but it is seldom indeed that a variant contains something which the film's producers did not wish to see released in *any* country. More to the point, the existence of this particular variant may be of considerable significance, since what it points to is the unnoticed survival, somewhere within the system, of *the final reel of the never-released original version*, with Walton's music exactly as the composer (and, one gathers, the director) wished it. And if one reel has managed to survive, why not more than one?

According to Channel 4, the print in question (actually a videotape copy of a 'master print') was straightforwardly acquired from MGM's Paris office; nor could anyone there have been aware

of its significance, given that the company itself does not knowingly possess any copy of the film's original version and cannot, as yet, explain how some of it came to be incorporated in a master print. Moves are now under way, however, to trace this particular print back to its point of origin, and it may be that an important discovery will result which – once the inevitable contractual and legal complications have been dealt with – will allow us a clearer view of Walton's musico-dramatic intentions than can be obtained from the concert suite arranged by Colin Matthews (OUP) or the fragments in the film's trailer (included in the commercially available video s057151).

I wonder, therefore, if I might ask interested readers to do two things while they wait anxiously for Channel 4's re-screening of the film (planned, I am told, for sometime next summer). First, they may care to let me know if their own videotaped copies of the film's previous broadcasts (and, if they happen to work in the industry, any film copies to which they might have access) contain definite or suspected Walton cues in other places; secondly, they might write to MGM's headquarters (2500 Broadway St., Santa Monica, Calif. 90404-3061), pointing out that a successful search for a full-length copy of the original version could lead to a highly profitable video release as well as the rectification of a notable miscarriage of artistic justice. Nor, incidentally, is this to devalue Ron Goodwin's effective and professional 'replacement' score, upon whose several virtues I have preached in public on a number of occasions – and which, it must be remembered, was itself a victim: its own 'battle in the air' cue was, of course, never used.

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