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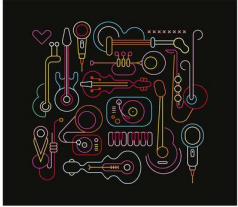
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Edited by *Ciro Scotto, Kenneth Smith, and John Brackett*

## **The Routledge Companion to Popular Music Analysis Expanding Approaches**

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### **‘Silence in the Studio!’**

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Shawn O’Donnell

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# ‘SILENCE IN THE STUDIO!’

## Collage as Retransition in Pink Floyd’s ‘Atom Heart Mother Suite’

*Shaugn O’Donnell*

Sophisticated technology and electronic effects have been essential components of Pink Floyd’s music from their earliest performances and recordings. For example, as early as May 1967 they employed live quadrophonic panning via their ‘Azimuth Co-ordinator,’ an original joystick device operated by keyboardist Rick Wright.<sup>1</sup> In the studio they continued the inventive audio practices of the EMI production team that also worked with The Beatles. The band’s consistent use of the Binson Echorec, both live and in the studio, exemplifies their interest in creating spatial and timbral effects simultaneously. Within this technologically rich aural palette, the sound-effect collage is Pink Floyd’s most identifiable sonic signature, as drummer Nick Mason highlights:

Once we realized their [sound effects] potential we quickly started introducing all kinds of extraneous elements, from the radio voice cutting into ‘Astronomy Dominé’ to the clocks on the outro of ‘Bike.’ This flirtation with ‘*musique concrète*’ was by no means unique—George ‘Shadow’ Morton had already used a motorbike on the Shangri-Las’ ‘The Leader of the Pack’—but it was a relative novelty at the time, and from then on became a regular element in our creative process.<sup>2</sup>

‘Astronomy Dominé’ is the first song on their debut album *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn* (1967), and it begins with the sounds of Morse code gibberish juxtaposed against a megaphone-distorted voice proclaiming astronomical terms. Table 20.1 illustrates the accumulative beginning created with this primitive collage that acts as a frame between external reality and Pink Floyd’s musical universe.<sup>3</sup> The extensive coda of ‘Bike’ concludes the album, and Table 20.2 provides a simplified timeline of this collage. With a duration nearly as long as the song proper, this collage functions as the outer frame of the whole album in addition to ‘Bike’ itself. Both songs, ‘Astronomy Dominé’ and ‘Bike’ were written by the band’s original guitarist, Roger Keith (better known as ‘Syd’) Barrett, as was most of their music during his time with the band (1965–1967). It is also worth noting that these *musique concrète* collages were considered avant-garde enough at the time to cause Capitol Records to cut both songs—‘Astronomy Dominé’ and ‘Bike’—from the U.S. release of *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*. The company’s censorship destroyed the album’s structure by removing

Table 20.1 'Astronomy Dominé', *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn* (1967)

:00	:09	:20	:26	:31	:42
Megaphone voice —————					
		Morse code gibberish —————			
	Guitar pedal (E) —————		Guitar riff —————		Verse 1 —————
			Drums —————		Full band —————

Table 20.2 'Bike,' *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn* (1967)

1:50	1:56	2:06	2:48	2:55–3:20
Steps	Explosion —	Violin sounds —————	Manipulated laughing —————	
	Gears / cranks / percussion —————		Clock	

Table 20.3 'Speak to Me' into 'Breathe,' *The Dark Side of the Moon* (1973)

:00	:25	:34	:37	:47	:00–:05
Heartbeat bass drum —————					
	Ticking clocks ———		Cash registers —————		
		Mad dialog —————			
				Laughing —————	
				Oscillator helicopter ———	
					Screams

the symmetrical framing that gives its unified form integrity, and such formal symmetries would later become a distinctive trait of Pink Floyd's mature albums (1973–1979).

Two framing collages from *The Dark Side of the Moon* (1973) may be more familiar to readers as that album marks the arrival of their mature style and charted for decades. *The Dark Side of the Moon* begins with the collage 'Speak to Me,' which serves both as an overture and structural upbeat as it foreshadows sounds heard later in the work, and escalates tension toward the downbeat of the subsequent song 'Breathe.' Table 20.3 provides a condensed overview of this collage, including the overlap into 'Breathe' and the record's structural downbeat. Side Two of the album—in that earlier vinyl era—also opens with a collage, the assemblage of cash register and coin sounds that underpins the song 'Money.' The concrete sounds of 'Money' are fully assimilated into the fabric of the song as they first establish and then fade into the 7/4 metre. These two examples are formally significant because of the overall continuous flow of *The Dark Side of the Moon*, where there are no internal gaps between any of the songs on either side of the album. Therefore, these two collages follow the only two moments of silence, both external to the work; the one that precedes its beginning and the one created by flipping the vinyl. Thus, these collages provide the gateways into the music on each side. One of the primary differences between *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn* and *The Dark Side of the Moon* framing collages is the degree of integration into the work proper. The 1973 frames incorporate materials, that is, rhythms and sounds, from the body of the musical work, while the 1967 frames have greater independence.

They are more of a juxtaposition of the real world against or onto the musical one, rather than a bridge between the two realms.

Not all of Pink Floyd's collages are external frames; many are internal to musical works and serve to highlight dramatic tension. Perhaps the most well-known example is the second half of 'Bring the Boys Back Home' from their 1979 rock opera *The Wall*. This collage (0:53–1:27) represents the dramatic climax of the work, the point at which the main character, Pink, transforms from a downtrodden and vulnerable musical artist into a neo-fascist rock demigod. Sounds and scenes from the past and present cascade through the character's mind, culminating in the rhetorical question: 'Is there anybody out there?' The opera's climactic aria 'Comfortably Numb' immediately follows. Like the framing collages discussed above, dramatic internal collages were not new in Pink Floyd's mature work. An early example is heard in their song 'Jugband Blues' from their second album, *A Saucerful of Secrets* (1968), another Barrett composition. This was his only song included on the second album, which in turn was his last with the band. The lyrics of 'Jugband Blues,' with lines like 'I wonder who could be writing this song?' are an autobiographical reaction to being absent from the band, a process that was initiated long before going into the studio. The collage (1:40–2:22) combines a Salvation Army band playing freely and vintage Pink Floyd atonal psychedelia, which, as soon as it climaxes, is abruptly mixed out of existence. After a moment of silence, Barrett returns alone, accompanied only by his acoustic guitar, a metaphorical portrayal of his isolation from the band. Like *The Wall* collage, this functions as an internal dramatic intensifier, despite being a less literal portrayal of events than the concrete sounds heard in *The Wall* example.

Whether framing or internal, Barrett's collages differ from Pink Floyd's later collages by degree of musical integration and literalness, but they also operate from a different perspective. Author Nicholas Schaffner describes the distinction as 'the difference between a conscious exploration of madness by observers themselves fundamentally sane and the visionary delirium of an artist who actually *was* going mad.'<sup>4</sup> While there is some substance to Schaffner's statement, there was an equally significant shift in musical perspective over the same years. Barrett-era Pink Floyd placed an emphasis on free improvisation and psychedelic whimsy, and that orientation slowly transformed into an emphasis on composition by the late 1970s in the band as led by bassist Roger Waters. Immediately after Barrett's departure, the band's use of collages and concrete sounds was less successful. They were often trivial, for example, using bird songs or church bells for atmosphere, or they were only heard in purely experimental works. Without Barrett, Pink Floyd had to rediscover how to successfully integrate collage techniques into their more traditional musical forms. The breakthrough collage in the rediscovery process is in 'Mind Your Throats Please' from the 'Atom Heart Mother Suite,' the title track of their fifth studio album, *Atom Heart Mother* (1970).

The 'Atom Heart Mother Suite' is scored for cello, brass, mixed choir, and Pink Floyd; Table 20.4 lists the relevant personnel. The band's compositional process, up until working on *The Wall*, typically involved repeated live performances of material prior to studio recording and the 'Atom Heart Mother Suite' was no exception. It debuted under the working title 'The Amazing Pudding' in January 1970 in a band-only incarnation, and by the end of March the form crystallized when the backing bass and drum tracks were recorded at Abbey Road.<sup>5</sup> Unhappy with their progress, the band did something unusual and enlisted the aid of composer Ron Geesin to 'superimpose "something grand"—heavenly choirs, brass fanfares, whatever—while they went off on an American tour.'<sup>6</sup> There are differing accounts of precisely who did what, but Geesin describes his contribution as

Table 20.4 'Atom Heart Mother Suite,' *Atom Heart Mother* (1970)

<i>Pink Floyd</i>	<i>Additional musicians</i>	<i>EMI personnel</i>
David Gilmour, guitar	Ron Geesin, co-composer	Produced by Pink Floyd
Nick Mason, drums	John Alldis, conductor	Executive Producer: Norman Smith
Roger Waters, bass	John Alldis Choir	Engineers: Peter Bown, Alan Parsons
Rick Wright, keyboards	EMI Pops Orchestra	Recorded at EMI Studios, Abbey Road
	Hafidi Hallgrímsson, cello	Released October 1970

Table 20.5 Formal design in the 'Atom Heart Mother Suite'

<i>Sections (Movements)</i>	<i>Times</i>	<i>Keys</i>	<i>Description</i>
a. 'Father's Shout'	0:00	E drone	Introduction, dissonant brass fanfare
	1:25	E minor	'Theme from an Imaginary Western' - heroic brass, rock accompaniment
	1:55	collage	Dissonant development, brass and tape effects
	2:21	E minor	'Theme from an Imaginary Western'
b. 'Breast Milky'	2:52	E minor	Cello theme with arpeggiated organ and bass
	3:56		Slide guitar replaces cello, brass enters second time
c. 'Mother Fore'	5:22	E minor	Static organ ostinato supporting untexted chorus; a few relatively strong motions to IV
d. 'Funky Dung'	10:11	G minor	Blues vamp on bass ostinato with percussive organ accompaniment, features guitar solo
e. 'Mind Your Throats Please'	14:56	E minor	'Theme from an Imaginary Western' returns
	15:26	atonal	Tone clusters on the synthesizers, plus other abrasive electronic sounds, climactic explosion
	17:56	collage	Electronic retransition featuring crossfades of previous material; 'Silence in the studio!'
f. 'Remergence'	19:12	E minor	Recapitulation of 'Father's Shout'
	19:41		Recapitulation of 'Breast Milky'
	22:12		'Theme from an Imaginary Western' - <i>terce de Picardie</i>

'the icing on the cake,' which amounts to most of the thematic material as well as all of the orchestration.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, when I refer to Pink Floyd as the composers of the 'Atom Heart Mother Suite,' I am referring to a quintet that includes Geesin despite the unfortunate omission of his name from the original album sleeve.

The suite consists of the six continuous movements or sections outlined in Table 20.5. The table gives the band's subtitles, approximate start times, key centers, and broad descriptions of each section. While the six movement titles are present from the work's first release, they were never specifically identified, as Geesin points out: 'They were never clearly identified to the consumer, either as "banding" on the vinyls or as track labelling or indexing on the CDs.'<sup>8</sup> Geesin may not be entirely accurate as internet fans/archivists document an EMI indexing for the initial CD release, although they ultimately reject those divisions as arbitrary and unsuccessful in modeling the form.<sup>9</sup> Because of these ambiguities, interpretations of the sectional divisions have varied over the years, and therefore Table 20.5 uses

Geesin's own form table as its primary source.<sup>10</sup> These divisions do not match the fan-cited EMI index location, nor their suggested improvements, but Geesin as co-composer and orchestrator remains the best existing source for this information.

The first section, 'Father's Shout,' introduces the work's principal theme, which grew out of a chord progression by guitarist David Gilmour that went by the working title 'Theme from an Imaginary Western' because, as bassist Roger Waters describes: 'it sounds like the theme from some awful western. It had that kind of heroic, plodding quality—of horses silhouetted in the sunset.'<sup>11</sup> The brass orchestration of this material enhances that interpretation, rendering the passage in a style one might refer to as 'spaghetti heroic.' Figure 20.1 presents a rough transcription of the chord progression and the principal line of the brass theme.<sup>12</sup> An introduction precedes this theme, beginning with an extensive low E pedal that serves as the work's outer frame. Unlike the earlier works with collage frames, Pink Floyd ease their way into this work through a low hum. In some early live performances without brass, a propeller plane taking off replaces this introduction and acts as a concrete frame with lift-off coinciding with the suite's structural downbeat. It probably goes without saying that the low pedal on the album is a subtler effect. On the recorded version, the band relocates the concrete sounds inward to a passage separating the two statements of the brass theme in this first movement. The transitory collage incorporates sounds such as artillery, horses, and a motorcycle. Paul Stump, in his history of progressive rock, describes these as 'apparently motiveless pieces of sampled sound [that] seem once again to emphasize the primacy not of composition but of engineering music.'<sup>13</sup> The line between composition and engineering in multitrack music is not nearly as sharp as Stump's statement implies, and some musical meaning can be found in the passage, despite the heavy-handedness of the concrete sounds. Geesin uses a chromatic brass motive (spanning E to C) to successfully link the collage to other sections of the work. It echoes an earlier use of the same chromatic motive in the introduction and it foreshadows its later use in the formally significant 'Mind Your Throats Please' collage. The transition's obsession with the chromatic motive of the introduction makes this passage recall that earlier framing section, and the additional inclusion of concrete sounds creates a sensation that this is an internal frame. It may not be a motivic collage in Stump's estimation, but it is a clear musical boundary, separating two distinct statements of the 'Father's Shout' theme. Internal formal boundaries, like outer frames, are the musical cracks where the outside world can work its way inside. Rick Littlefield writes about initial silence as a frame, and points out that 'it forms an iconic, or similarity, relationship with all the interior silences to follow in the piece.'<sup>14</sup> The same might also be said about frames created by sounds and their resonance with all the subsequent internal formal boundaries.

The second movement, 'Breast Milky,' introduces a contrasting theme scored for solo cello and the band, the beginning of which is transcribed in Figure 20.2.<sup>15</sup> The cello plays



Figure 20.1 First Theme, 'Father's Shout'



The image displays a musical score for the 'Second Theme, 'Breast Milky''. It is arranged in two systems. The first system includes staves for cello, keyboard, and bass. The cello part is in bass clef, the keyboard in treble clef, and the bass in bass clef. Above the cello staff are chord annotations: Em, Am, G(maj6), and Em. The second system includes staves for piano, keyboard, and bass. Above the piano staff are chord annotations: Abm, Eb, Eb, Am, B7, and Em. The piano part features triplet markings at the end of the second system. The keyboard part shows a complex melodic line with many sixteenth notes. The bass part provides a steady accompaniment.

Figure 20.2 Second Theme, 'Breast Milky'

the theme twice, the second time supported by triplets as shown at the end of the example, before the progression is treated as a chord chart with improvised slide guitar replacing the cello as the melodic material. The progression is notable for the stepwise voice leading of the keyboard part that smoothly diverts away from the thus-far persistent E minor tonic, far enough away that it requires a tritone root motion to get back in time for the last bar. The strong motion to  $E\flat$  ( $bII$ ), in this theme seems to symmetrically counterbalance the emphasis on  $F$ , or  $\sharp II$ , in the earlier 'Imaginary Western' theme, though that notion is likely more a product of my own analytical desire rather than anything immediately perceptible in the work.

The next two movements are less thematic. 'Mother Fore' remains in E minor, but the choir and organ ostinato drastically change the harmonic rhythm. In 'Father's Shout' and 'Breast Milky' there are two themes, a collage, and an introduction, while in roughly the same five-minute span, 'Mother Fore' sits on E minor with just three large motions to the subdominant, not as a modulation, just a contrasting harmony. Texture is the primary source of musical interest as the choral entrances unfold. Figure 20.3 is a transcription of the opening eight bars of the choral section, primarily to illustrate its non-thematic content and static nature. The fourth movement, 'Funky Dung,' introduces another contrasting groove, but more significantly, it modulates abruptly to G minor, finally providing a contrasting key area after more than ten minutes of the original E minor tonic spanning the first three movements. This section is also the vehicle for an improvised guitar solo, which is idiomatic and melodic, but not thematic. Just as I am arguing that the 'Atom Heart Mother Suite' is pivotal for Pink Floyd's collages, I would argue that it is also a significant milestone in David Gilmour's guitar work, foreshadowing his mature style as soon to be heard on the album *Meddle* (1971) and in the film *Live at Pompeii* (1972).

'Funky Dung' concludes with a return of the brass providing a brief retransition to the statement of the 'Father's Shout' theme that begins the next movement. As shown in Table 20.6, this bridge leading back to the restatement of the theme achieves its goal by integrating studio and traditional compositional techniques. The guitar solo recedes by increasing the reverb and decreasing its prominence in the mix. It becomes further



Figure 20.3 'Mother Fore' excerpt

Table 20.6 'Funky Dung' retransition to 'Mind Your Throats Please'

ca. 12:20	14:30	14:37	14:44	14:50
Gm	G	F	C	B <sup>7</sup>
Guitar recedes: reverb increases, presence in mix decreases; stereo placement allows low pedal and high synth tones to occupy foreground simultaneously, voices enter.	Segment of the 'Imaginary Western' progression; instrumentation recalls elements of previous movements, voices most prominent.			Brass takes over in preparation for the return of the 'Father's Shout' theme. Traditional dominant to get back to opening material.
Gm: i	I	VII	IV	
Em:	III	♯II	VI	V <sup>7</sup>

obscured by a low pedal and high synthesizer tones, which are able to coexist in the foreground through careful stereo placement. Less technology-oriented are the references to previous material, such as the low brass pedal, the choral vocalizing, a progression derived from the 'Imaginary Western' theme, and finally, the most traditional gesture is the loud dominant chord lock for the last two bars.

The triumphant arrival of the first theme that begins 'Mind Your Throats Please' creates the sensation that this movement will be the conclusive return of the primary themes to end the work, but it quickly reveals itself to be a false recapitulation as the movement instead functions as a dissonant development section. Table 20.7 outlines the broad design of this crucial movement. After the brief return, the music radically departs from any previous material. The bulk of the movement is atonal, organized around highly dissonant tone clusters and other abrasive electronic sounds. The density of sound increases until reaching a climactic explosion (17:42) that brings the segment to a close. It might be possible to interpret the tone clusters as a harmonic outgrowth of the chromatic riff heard in the introduction and transitory collage of 'Father's Shout,' but as before, that may be more analytic desire than any direct correlation. What is significant, however, is the electronically altered voice stating, 'here is an important announcement' just before



Table 20.7 'Mind Your Throats Please' outline

14:56	15:26	17:42	17:56
'Father's Shout'	Synth tone clusters, voices and brass enter later; 'Here is an important announcement'	Traumatic impact	Retransition
Em	Atonal, increasingly dissonant	Explosion	Collage

Table 20.8 Final retransition timeline

17:47	17:56	18:02	18:16	18:26	18:34	18:43	18:51	19:10
Post-trauma clangs _____					Noise _____			'Silence!'
Leslie piano _____								
		'Breast Milky', arpeggios _____				'Breast'		
			'Father's Shout' – introduction _____				Progression to V _____	
							'Funky Dung' – percussive organ, drum track _____	

the moment of explosive impact, seemingly in reference to that impending event, which is interesting in multiple ways. First, it places great emphasis on a concrete sound in the role of a boundary. Second, as the first intelligible text, it suggests that this is not just any formal boundary, it is a particularly important partition. And third, it demonstrates self-awareness, that is, the work suddenly seems to be aware of its own construction, not unlike breaking the fourth wall in theater.

This moment of formal self-awareness calls particular attention to the concluding segment of the movement, the collage that provides the path back to tonality and the work's principal themes, that is, the primary retransition leading to the real recapitulation. It is not surprising that rather than composing a bridge linking the atonal passage to the recapitulatory material in 'Remergence,' the band instead solves their problem using the tools of the studio. They use splicing techniques and the mixing board to create a collage of previous musical material, and the resulting retransition is unlike anything possible in live performance. A composer could traditionally score a reminiscence of all the themes in a similar fashion, but the use of the mixing board to cross-fade all the fragments creates layered waves of sound, and the composite effect is decidedly psychedelic. The layers create heavy dissonance with multiple keys and grooves sounding simultaneously, and this unnatural polytonality effectively bridges the gap between the previous atonality and the upcoming return of E minor. The final cross-fade ironically summarizes the self-contradictory struggles this retransition has in performing its function by fading in a bass progression providing the structural dominant, as well as another altered voice demanding 'silence in the studio!' In the end, it is a traditional dominant chord that facilitates the return of the principal theme, while the vocal command brings the studio artifice to the forefront of our attention, another moment breaking the fourth wall. Table 20.8 presents a loose chronology of items in this synthetic retransition.

Now the earlier 'here is an important announcement' seems to refer to the follow-up 'silence in the studio' and magnifies the sense of the work's self-awareness. The importance shifts from the explosion to the demand for silence and its accompanying dominant. The cry for silence to successfully get the recapitulation underway suggests that this is a

musical work that recognizes the thinness of its own skin, that is, it is aware of the fragility of its existence as an independent work. If anthropomorphizing a musical work seems somewhat over the top, it should at least be clear by now that Pink Floyd is very conscious of framing and formal structure, and that they are particularly interested in exploring the areas between reality and their musical works. The beauty and effectiveness of the 'Mind Your Throats Please' collage is in the ironic contrast between its traditional function and its electronic technological realization. It successfully bridges radically different musical worlds, and stands as a pivotal turning point in Pink Floyd's use of collage. What was once juxtaposition or self-contained experimentation, even in the highly effective Barrett era, subsequently becomes fully integrated into the dramatic structure of their formal designs.

### Notes

- 1 Nick Mason, *Inside Out: A Personal History of Pink Floyd* (San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 2005), 73–76.
- 2 Mason, 83.
- 3 For more on accumulative processes in rock music, see Mark Spicer, '(Ac)cumulative Form in Pop-Rock Music' in *Twentieth-Century Music* 1.1 (2004): 29–64. For an introduction to musical framing see Richard C. Littlefield's 'The Silence of the Frames' in *Music Theory Online* 2.1 (1996).
- 4 Nicholas Schaffner, *A Saucerful of Secrets: The Pink Floyd Odyssey* (New York: Delta Books, 1991), 176 (emphasis original).
- 5 Schaffner, 151, places the debut of 'The Amazing Pudding' in Paris on January 23, 1970, but Glenn Povey and Ian Russell, *Pink Floyd: In the Flesh: The Complete Performance History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 89, locate the first performance in Yorkshire on January 17, 1970.
- 6 Schaffner, 151–52.
- 7 Bruno MacDonald, *Pink Floyd: Through the Eyes of... the Band, Its Fans, Friends and Foes* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997), 189.
- 8 Ron Geesin, *The Flaming Cow: The Making of Pink Floyd's Atom Heart Mother* (Brimscombe, UK: History Press, 2013), 84.
- 9 David Schuetz et al., *Echoes FAQ 4.0*, [www.pink-floyd.org/faq/faq4.html](http://www.pink-floyd.org/faq/faq4.html) (1999, last accessed June 2017), section 5.
- 10 Geesin, 85.
- 11 MacDonald, 273.
- 12 All transcriptions are the author's own.
- 13 Paul Stump, *The Music's All That Matters: A History of Progressive Rock* (London: Quartet Books, 1997), 67.
- 14 Littlefield, section 3.4.
- 15 There is an outdated gendering of these movement titles with their implications of a masculine brass 'Father's Shout' first theme contrasted by a feminine cello 'Breast Milky' second theme, so it is worth pointing out that they were whimsical afterthoughts. Only after the 'Atom Heart Mother' title was arbitrarily culled from a newspaper headline, and a cow chosen as the album cover art, did the sections receive titles for reasons of royalty payments. See Geesin, Chapter 6, 'Atomic Dung Flies,' for more detail.