Startling or seductive? An analysis of Play for Today's title sequences

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Abstract:

Play for Today (1970-84) has been widely regarded as a prestigious vehicle for one-off dramas on topical issues. Based on accounts by producers, composers and graphic designers, this article will provide a historical analysis of the changing image of Play for Today through the close analysis of its seven title sequences. Focusing on how the different sequences invested the strand with a particular identity and prepared audiences for the plays that followed, it identifies two main modes of address. It argues that the Play for Today 'image' was at its most 'startling' during the periods 1971-73 and 1977-82 when the title sequences signalled to viewers that Play for Today would present important – often politicised – drama with a proximity to the news. Other sequences – during 1973-77– sought instead to 'seduce' viewers by foregrounding the strand's humanism and eclecticism.

Keywords: Play for Today, BBC, television drama, title sequences, musical idents, graphic design, producers.

Introduction

Play for Today was a long-running strand of 294 one-off dramas from 1970-84 which replaced the Wednesday Play (1964-70) and emphasised its contemporaneity. A mean average of over 20 Plays for Today were shown annually, in a regular BBC1 prime-time slot, usually directly following the news which, by virtue of television 'flow', helped to give the strand an added topicality and importance. While Play for Today became associated with social realism and the left-wing perspectives of some of its creative personnel – such as David Hare, David Edgar, John McGrath, Barrie Keeffe and Trevor Griffiths – the plays were thematically and stylistically varied. Generally, the most radical Plays for Today were commissioned by producers Tony Garnett, Margaret Matheson, Kenith Trodd and Richard Eyre. However, Play for Today's mainstays were much less political and were primarily concerned with home and family. Such humanist – or human-centric – dramas were generally favoured by producers Graeme McDonald, Mark Shivas and Innes Lloyd and David Rose at BBC Birmingham's Pebble Mill.

According to Play for Today producers, there was no official role of lead producer overseeing the strand.[1] Trodd claims that Play for Today was 'unique for never appointing an Executive Producer credited on air as the mastermind of fiscal and content control' and that it was sign of the strand's 'eclecticism and integrity […] that despite being for so long the BBC's principal flagship for dramatic originality, it always allowed the artists' voices to speak for themselves'.[2] However, the strand's copious variety posed a significant challenge to its main producers concerning how to introduce such an eclectic range of plays and signify to viewers what they might expect. As this article indicates, Play for Today producers could grant extensive creative latitude to musicians and graphic designers to assist in attracting viewers to the plays. However, at other moments, producers asserted their own distinctive visions of the strand and looked for title sequences that would startle as well as seduce viewers.

There were new title sequences in the autumns of 1970, 1971, 1972 and 1973, reflecting a rapid turnover and a strand trying out new identities. This contrasted with the Wednesday Play, which for most of its run retained the same Carl Davis musical ident, but used three different visual accompaniments, including the famous chessboard motif. The second and third Play for Today title sequences employed discordant music and startling, confrontational visuals. However, the best-remembered title sequence was introduced in 1973, seducing viewers with its warm, humanist style until its replacement in September 1976 by a short-lived sequence involving a rearranged version of the previous sequence's musical ident. In 1977, incoming producer Margaret Matheson instigated a new title sequence with a startling and radical style which survived for five years. The final change in Play for Today's title sequence was in October 1982 and reflected the strand's unsettled later identity. In the discussion that follows, the seven Play for Today title sequences are analysed in chronological in order to establish how they invested the strand with a particular identity and prepared audiences for the plays that followed. Although critics have often attached reductive labels to the strand, or identified it with particular kinds of play, the main feature of the plays was their variety. In this respect, while the title sequences were often successful in fashioning an identity for Play for Today, the plays themselves would not always match this, both conforming to and running counter to the meaning proposed by the titles.

My analysis of the sequences is grounded in original interviews with Play for Today producers Kenith Trodd, Richard Eyre and Margaret Matheson who have helped to illuminate the role of producers in moulding the strand's identity through decisions regarding the title sequences. Compared with many other long-running television dramas, Play for Today frequently changed its title sequences. K.J. Donnelly (2005: 145-149), for example, emphasises the significance of Eric Spear's

flugelhorn-led 'jazz lament' musical ident for the establishment of *Coronation Street*'s continuing identity (Granada/ITV, 1960-date). The discussion that follows will, by contrast, consider how decisions concerning sound and images prepared viewers for a strand whose plays, unlike *Coronation Street*, contained different characters and settings each week. The analysis of the role of music and graphic design in creating Play for Today's image also draws on original interviews with some of those commissioned to create idents for Play for Today – the graphic designer Sid Sutton and composers Carl Davis and Nick Bicât – alongside recently-published information from the BBC Motion Graphics Archive. Following Len Masterman (1980: 74-75), the discussion will attend to the 'function' of television title sequences and the the 'image' they project of the programme strand. Ellis (1992: 128) argues that titles are constructed to attract the television viewer who 'glances' rather than, as in the cinema, attentively gazes at the screen. Re (2016: 156) argues that their main function is to seduce the viewer into entering the textual world by providing a flavour of what to expect. These ideas will be assessed in relation to Play for Today, identifying how far the title sequences seduce the viewer with its images and sounds or encourage a more detached viewing relationship (Ellis 2002: 14-15).

In considering these questions, the mode of auditory address is crucial. As John Ellis (1992: 128-129) suggests, sound is proportionately more important to television than to cinema, given its need to entice a potentially distracted domestic audience. For Philip Tagg (2000: 97), this means that 'signature tunes and title music' possess particular importance. He identifies three main functions which these employ: reveille, [affective] preparation and mnemonic identification. The reveille function involves attracting attention: e.g. 'Something new!' the 'Oyez' of street criers, classical overtures or opening numbers in music-hall. The affective preparation function prepares the audience for the style of the particular programme ('Ah! This sort of thing!'); the mnemonic identification function makes the programme memorable and gives it an identity (Tagg 2000: 93-97). These are all functions which can be identified, to varying degrees, in Play for Today's changing title sequences and will be considered below.

Title sequence #1 (1970-71): *Middlebrow sophistication*

The first Play for Today title sequence begins with busy low woodwinds, signifying a middlebrow BBC musical habitus. It was composed by Joseph Horovitz, who had lived through cataclysmic European history and shared an educational background with a number of Play for Today creative personnel.[3] He was subsequently commissioned by Play for Today producer Irene Shubik to compose musical idents for *Wessex Tales* (BBC2, 1973) and *Rumpole of the Bailey* (Thames, 1978-91). The musical sequence consists of a J.S. Bach homage: a triple fugue in A-minor, with clarinet doing the higher part, oboe performing a counterpoint harmony and bassoon a lower part. It is broadly akin to Carl Davis's earlier Wednesday Play musical ident in which he had used classical instrumentation and a straightforward melody to create an enticing contemporary mood. Horovitz's sophisticated Baroque ident, while more reserved, also suggests the contemporary through the use of a jazz rhythm section of double bass and brushed drums. In this, he followed the popularisation of Bach's music by jazz groups such as the Swingle Singers and the Jacques Loussier Trio during the 1960s as well as electronic pioneers Wendy Carlos and Delia Derbyshire. Combining the 'elite' and the 'popular', as well as the cerebral and the sensory, the first Play for Today theme, in this way, carries a residual trace of the BBC's 'improving' Third Programme ethos.

This is also evident in the leisurely pace of this longest of all Play for Today title sequences. Visually, we see fragmented, animated letters, not synchronised with Horovitz's rhythm, which eventually combine to form 'PLAY FOR TODAY'. This three-dimensional logo is composed of solid letter-forms, lit from one side so that they cast shadows.[4] This was photographed in a studio and involved 24 varied lighting set-ups creating abstract patterns from two or more letter forms. The photos were tinted and filmed on a rostrum camera using in-camera dissolves. The 28 shots dissolve briskly into each other while editing pace increases. The letters themselves evoke the typography used in a 1925 advert by Austrian poster designer Julius Klinger, reinforcing the sequence's straddling of high and low culture. Although the sequence suited many of the plays making up the first series, which attracted a mean average audience of 6.4 million, it was not, it seems, sufficiently rooted in the contemporary and only lasted one series.

Title sequence #2 (1971-72): *Atonal confrontation*

In August 1971, producer Irene Shubik approached Delia Derbyshire of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop (1958-98) to work on the Play for Today *O Fat White Woman* (4 November 1971) as well as a new musical ident to replace Horovitz's existing one. The Radiophonic Workshop's initial remit was to provide experimental sounds for radio; Briscoe and Curtis-Bramwell (1983: 25) and Niebur (2010: 5-7) note its European musical and cultural influences. Derbyshire's resulting fourteen-second studio composition evokes atonal twentieth-century classical music, using extensive tape editing. A quaking, fanfare-like figure or ostinato in C#-diminished enters, with an A# bass note; this sounds like a tape-manipulated trumpet sound, reversed and sped up. This is repeated a semitone up as D-diminished with what may be a manipulated trombone sounding a bass B note. This striking, minor-key piece concludes with juddering percussive thuds. Mixing elements of an ostinato and fanfare, Derbyshire creates a reverb-drenched rhythm signifying modernism and a cacophonous urban present while the fanfare fulfils the reveille function of attracting the attention of the viewer in a startling manner.

This is confirmed by the visuals. The first shot presents an unfurling roll of wallpaper against a black background. Then, a patterned paint-roller imprints black letters on yellow; there is a cut from a slither of unfolding paper to the finished painting; a dramatic zoom out reveals 'PLAY FOR TODAY' in black bold uppercase painted onto the yellow 'poster' attached to a murky brick wall, overlaid with clashing coloured paint, graffiti and printed letters.

A faded 'poster' reads 'JUMBLE SALE' in archaic commercial typeface, over the 'SATURDAY' and 'THE YOUTH', suggesting an attempt to appeal to an audience younger than that addressed by the previous title sequence. This matches various iterations of a generational conflict or 'generation gap' in the second series in plays such as *The Pigeon Fancier* (9 December 1971), *Still Waters* (13 January 1972) and *Ackerman, Dougall and Harker* (10 February 1972). The use of a fly-poster and graffiti, combined with atonal music, indicates a more confrontational relationship with the viewer, setting up the expectation of hard-hitting contemporary drama.

The series, however, saw a notable drop in average audiences – to 5.45 million – and this title sequence did not last any longer than its predecessor.

Title sequence #3 (1972-73): *Syncopated Workshop Modernism*

The electronic musical ident for the third series also emanated from the BBC Radiophonic Workshop. Malcolm Clarke's atonal fragment of musique concrete uses an EMS Synthi (also known as the 'Delaware').[5] It opens by thunderously hailing the audience and ends with clanging, stretched-out notes – via tape manipulation – connoting modernism and industrial processes. Even more than Derbyshire's previous ident, Clarke's composition justifies Philip Tagg's claim that TV title music uses opening fanfares with attention-grabbing forte (loud) sounds to fulfil the reveille function (2000: 130).

Visually, 'PLAY FOR TODAY' is presented on a black background, first in contemporary uppercase, black bordered by white, then, gradually, green within white borders. Six, quickly-cut shots display the title in segmented letters contained within a broken circle. The final screen reveals the title and segmented circle, stencilled in white. The edits and changes in colour are neatly synchronised with each different sound. This accessible minimalism suggests clattering industrial production line processes and carries connotations of the idea of the 'workshop' . employed by Joan Littlewood and Ewan MacColl's Theatre Workshop (1945-78) and other cultural groups. The third series of Play for Today also became both more socially critical and experimental in works such as *Hard Labour* (12 March 1973), *Speech Day* (26 March 1973), *Carson Country* (23 October 1972) and *Steps Back* (14 May 1973). However, the average audience continued to drop – to 4.12 million – and Play for Today's title sequence was changed yet again. The ensuing replacement marked a significant change in the way the Play for Today strand was presented.

Title sequence #4 (1973-76): *Charming humanism*

In 1973, Graeme McDonald was now de facto lead producer on Play for Today and the BBC Drama Department commissioned Carl Davis to compose a musical ident for a new Play for Today title sequence, having used him previously for The Wednesday Play.[6] As Davis explains:

> They didn't tell me what they wanted. The idea of actually composing something which had to do with many *different kinds of plays* and do something that was *attractive* and seemed *timely*: that was what was called for. And also that the tenor of the series was going to be contemporary to the 1970s. I thought, it is very difficult for me to do something very short. There is an art to this. The people who write commercials and these sort of idents and so on. It's a very special craft because you've got to squeeze into a few seconds what is going to announce the character of the play, in this case the whole series: plays that were really going to *run the gamut*. So, in the end, and again, because of the general friendliness of the people involved, I thought I'd play a little trick on them… I actually wrote six different themes! I'm just going to test the water here and maybe one of the six will stick, and be [of] the right character. There was a meeting… And, I played them all and, sure enough, it was number six that I was asked to do. And that's what we recorded.[7]

Davis explains the aims and inspiration behind his theme:

> At the time, there was something [that] had been used [for] a series [of] film reviews… It was a really jazzy, funky piano solo. I used to think it was by Nina Simone but it wasn't…[8] I loved it… It seemed to have just the right thing. It was… you know, [a] funky piano solo, it was contemporary and charming and very idiomatic.

The new title sequence proved immensely popular and, unlike its predecessors, it was retained for three series and 67 individual plays. Davis's melodious ident, the only one to be subsequently re-arranged, is the most popularly remembered of Play for Today musical idents and is the most straightforwardly major-key. Compared with Horovitz, Derbyshire and Clarke's compositions, Davis's catchy theme fulfils Philip Tagg's requirement for mnemonic identification: proving both memorable in itself and providing Play for Today with a strong musical identity (2000: 96). Unlike previous idents, Davis's composition is played on the piano supported by a snare drum and organ. Tagg (2000: 185) highlights the importance of having an identifiable melody: Davis's simple ascending then descending diatonic major-key chord progression in F-major achieves this. For Davis, the musical key is crucial in establishing any music's 'character'; he chose F-major, which conveys the 'pastoral', as in Beethoven's Sixth Symphony. All chords in this key are used in a repeated

chord sequence imbued with 'openness and casual charm': F / Gm / Am / B-flat / C / Dm B-flat / Am / Gm C / F.[9] This is the only Play for Today musical ident it is easy to imagine viewers remembering, whistling to themselves or even dancing to.

The striking visuals were 'shot entirely in-camera without the need for further editing'.[10] It begins with the red uppercase 'PLAY FOR TODAY' stencil typeface on a black background, which shines neon white.[11] This glow effect was created by backlighting a red coloured gel and mixed to a clear version with a camera flare filter. This is followed by a 'rapid montage' of fourteen monochrome production stills from previous or upcoming Plays for Today, functioning as, what Fiske calls, an 'intertextual memory jogger' (1987: 100).[12] Visually, there are jump cuts between characters' faces in time with the music, if not exactly to the beat. 'PLAY FOR TODAY' appears again, shining white, followed by more images, from which the camera zooms in and out consistently. Finally, the title flashes white, then disappears, as Davis's tune abruptly ends. The graphic design foregrounds technology: dramatic and emotive zooms, everyday electricity and the motif of illumination replace the paint seen in the 1971-73 titles. Tagg (2000: 97, 127) notes how idents are repeated before each episode 'in conjunction with particular characters, environments and moods', and must also communicate 'something specific' about the programme, setting it apart from others in its genre and distinguishing it within the televisual flow. The use of photographs in this sequence focuses on the characters' facial expressions, stressing their individual human agency and departing from the more depersonalised character of earlier Play for Today titles. Its greater length of 32 seconds compared to most other Play for Today titles also enables a greater opportunity to, in Re's terms, seduce viewers by showing them varied, sometimes familiar, actors' faces. Across 1973-76, Play for Today audiences grew significantly: averaging 5.84 million and from December 1975 to February 1976, it achieved an all-time high. The title sequence used from October-December 1975 consists of fourteen stills from all of the ten plays broadcast during the period, and illustrates its wide appeal.

The particular images selected emphasise the range of the strand's democratic dramatisation of contemporary British society. We see nine young and seven middle-aged adults, alongside two young teenagers and two more elderly characters: a cradle-to-grave gallery of British lives with an emphasis upon working-age adults. Of the twenty different actors' faces, there are seven women and thirteen men. Fifteen of the actors had either appeared previously in Wednesday Plays or Plays for Today or were to appear again subsequently. Six pictured players appeared multiple times *within* the 1975/76 series: Alan Bates, Dinsdale Landen, Georgina Hale, Alison Steadman, John Lyons and Geoffrey Hinsliff. Recurring actors included those known for working-class roles – Warren

Mitchell, Colin Welland, Dave Hill and David Daker – alongside those associated with playing affluent professionals: Bates, Landen and Leo McKern. The images themselves provide brief glimpses into the mix of stories in which the characters are involved. We see, for example, Joe (Dave Hill) and Christine Potts (Alison Steadman) in Trevor Griffiths's *Through the Night* (2 December 1975), an ordinary couple in an NHS ward concerned about her diagnosis for breast cancer. Hill looks unsure but resigned, whereas Steadman's gaze is more defensive and inquisitive, her casual hairdo and intelligent eyes signifying her status as a tenacious everywoman. Next come stills from Leon Griffiths's *A Passage to England* (9 December 1975) in which we see the pensive, expectant Pramila (June Bolton) and a zoom in to Dharam (Renu Setna)'s impassive, clever eyes and furrowed brow. The presence of Asian actors not only signified Britain's increased ethnic diversity but also contributed to a sense of a broader sense of community suggested by the conjunction of close-ups of actors Tariq Yunus, Colin Welland and Leo McKern at the climax of Carl Davis's musical ident. Cumulatively, these familiar and unfamiliar faces made an affective appeal to viewers, indicating the range of human stories they might expect. In doing so, the title sequence sought to appeal to those beyond its core 'serious' drama audience, encouraging many viewers of mainstream drama into watching.

Title sequence #5 (1976-77): *Universality*

In 1976, Play for Today's unofficial lead producer Graeme McDonald commissioned graphic designer Sid Sutton to design visuals for a new title sequence.[13] McDonald gave Sutton a rearranged version of Carl Davis's 1973-76 musical ident with which to work, but granted him complete freedom to develop his own graphic concept, which subsequently became the strand's most lavish, optimistic title sequence. McDonald's use of a rearranged version of Davis's ident pays compliment to the original's mnemonic power. In the new version, Davis's chord sequence is still major-key but higher: A-flat (Bb) instead of F – creating a sense of jauntiness. Percussion initiates a faster rhythm and trumpet replaces piano, appearing within the title sequence, as Sutton notes, 'when the sun burst through the letters'.[14] The buoyant trumpet-led melody also suggests affinities with mainstream television of the time – such as the rousing sports themes of Barry Stoller's *Match of the Day* (BBC1, 1970- date) and Keith Mansfield's *Grandstand* (BBC1, 1975-2007).

The visual grammar of Sid Sutton's design is simple and economical, yet its realisation was a demanding logistical feat.[15] This single-shot time-lapse sequence, shot on 35mm film, progresses from early morning to afternoon. While the use of a single shot provides a contrast to the fast, 'action'-signifying cutting in *Match of the Day*'s titles, it is still a strongly kinetic sequence (Masterman 1980: 115). Rapidly moving white clouds against the sky provide a backdrop to the bold, black and uppercase 'PLAY FOR TODAY'. As the sky turns blue and the sun finishes its ascent, the typeface turns grey, with a brown border, forming a still centre and casting a shadow on the bare surface. Sutton's concept was for the rising sun to symbolise 'Today', while the temporal lighting changes of the sun enhanced the sense of 'Drama'.

Sutton recalls deciding that, to gain the requisite clear skies, they would need a seaside shoot. Thus, during August 1976, amid the hottest summer on record, Sutton negotiated for his three-man crew – himself, cameraman Alan Taverner and assistant cameraman Vic Cummings, both from Caravel Films – to spend the weekend in Southwold on the Suffolk coast.[16] According to Sutton, a one-metre wide, three-dimensional title-logo using Pump typeface, was 'cut from cork, painted and set up on a large sheet of white painted block board, protruding from the top floor window of a house on the coast to avoid spill from street lighting'.[17] The resplendent simplicity of Sutton's concept required thirteen-and-a-half hours of stop-motion location shooting from 4am, and took three days to complete due to inclement weather, a plague of ladybirds and the extreme exposure range required.[18] Following the sense of human particularity evoked by the use of stills in the previous Play for Today title sequence (1973-76), this single-shot title sequence is more universal in character, evoking nature and the passage of time. According to Sutton, producer Graeme McDonald 'loved' the result, and Sutton's design went onto win a Design and Art Direction Wood Pencil award for Television Graphics. It was the only time that Play for Today titles were afforded the cost-intensive luxury of location film-shooting and emphasised how highly Play for Today was valued by the BBC and its status as a television landmark amid a changeable televisual landscape.

The BBC's investment in Play for Today was mirrored by public loyalty. The seventh series (1976-77) marked the zenith of the strand's popularity, with audiences averaging 7.01 million. Producer Graeme McDonald commissioned writers as stylistically and tonally eclectic as Rhys Adrian, Les Blair, John Bowen, Brian Clark, Bernard Kops, Peter McDougall and Jack Rosenthal who carried on the tradition of Play for Today's humanism even though this was not signalled so directly by the universalising character of the new opening titles.

Title sequence #6 (1977-82): *'Startling and radical' minimalism*

In 1977, Margaret Matheson succeeded Graeme McDonald and claims that, by January 1978, BBC management were used to her 'stirring it up' with controversial, political Plays for Today.[19] With her provocative approach, Matheson rivalled Kenith Trodd for whom she had previously worked; Matheson had been a secretary in the BBC's typing pool which, according to David Hare, gave her a 'caustic' view of the Corporation hierarchy (2015: 147). Matheson immediately put her stamp on the strand with a new title sequence. As she explains:

> I didn't want a slick and soothing title sequence. I wanted something more arresting. When I was small I walked back and forth to school over a narrow road bridge which had a huge red DANGER sign beside it because it was on a bend. I wanted the Play for Today titles to be like the Danger Bridge. Anything could happen. I asked Nick Bicât […] to do the drum roll. I liked the slightly homemade look of the finished sequence but I don't know if anyone else did.[20]

Composer Nick Bicât, brother of Tony Bicât who wrote and directed the Play for Today, *A Cotswold Death* (12 January 1982), describes his role:

> [W]hen Margaret Matheson took over as producer of Play for Today in 1977, she commissioned me to write a new musical ident for the logo. She wanted something startling and radical that echoed the French theatre tradition of banging the floor to signal the beginning of the play, so I scored it for solo percussion. I asked for three tympani, four orchestral tom-toms and two cymbals to the delivered to the BBC's Lime Grove Studios and played Margaret the four or five rhythmic patterns and fills I'd written down. Over the next hour or two, I improvised around these, adjusting them according to her comments and reactions until we had the sequence the way she wanted it.[21]

In contrast to Matheson's perception that the title sequence she had commissioned was 'dumped' soon after she left, it was used for five series and 112 episodes: the longest-lasting of all Play for Today title sequences. Richard Eyre, who succeeded Matheson as unofficial lead Play for Today

producer in 1978, 'thoroughly approved' of this 'proprietary credit', retaining it on the grounds that '[it] made you sit up'.[22]

Bicât's musical ident is an unaccompanied drumroll which ends sharply with a crash cymbal. Visually, we see 'PLAY FOR TODAY' in red capitals against an off-white background. After five seconds, there is a jump cut into a close-up of the letters, synced with the cymbal; followed by a fade to black. The graphical concept here was to 'enhance the dramatic impact' of the drumroll and 'together to create a short, simple typographic logo'.[23] This eight-second title sequence's brevity and lack of showy visual effects reveals Matheson's refashioning of the titles as more directly confrontational and artistically minimalist than the sophisticated sequence that preceded it. According to Sid Sutton, Matheson 'came in and apparently said […] "I don't like title sequences, I just want a caption".'[24] The directness of the sequence served as a stark reveille that jolted the viewer and disrupted the smoothness of televisual flow. It also signalled a confidence that Play for Today had no need to announce itself unduly and that it was what followed that really mattered. The Matheson-Eyre era's 'startling and radical' flavour is exemplified by theatrical and political Plays for Today such as David Edgar's *Destiny* (31 January 1978) and Barrie Keeffe's *Waterloo Sunset* (23 January 1979). Across the 1977-82 period Play for Today's average audience dipped to 5.66 million, a figure still above the stand's overall average. The great longevity of the title, however, resides in its forthrightness and ability to introduce a wide range of different plays rather than just the more openly political.

Title sequence #7 (1982-84): *Failing grandeur*

This Play for Today musical ident, by an unidentified composer, is the sole modal ident and another fanfare. An initially muted tympani, accompanying low-pitched brass instruments, evokes the 'cinematic'. Its opening G-minor chord is augmented by the 9th and 11th notes to build tension and grandiosity. The minor-key melody's lower harmony uses the major 7th which, coupled with the brass gives it a mediaeval sound reminiscent of Neil Richardson's *Mastermind* (BBC, 1972- date) ident. In a diatonic progression, it transitions to major chords – E-flat (D#), then F-major, with the brass-played melody hitting the fifth note of each chord to convey a triumphant sound. It moves to G-sus4 and resolves, quietly, on G-major, the parallel of the original G-minor.

Visually, 'PLAY FOR TODAY' is present throughout in stately, embossed yellowish capitals. A three-dimensional logo was shot single frame on a rostrum camera as the light was moved to create the animation of the changing shadows from white to black. The lettering's shadows' sundial-like movements evoke the 'natural' passage of time in a manner reminiscent of Sutton's 1976-77 design. However, these visuals fail to match the grandeur of the music and feel bland: its rostrum camera aesthetics appear perfunctory compared to Sutton's location shoot on 35mm. The imposing sonic introduction is hampered by bathetic graphics: implying that Play for Today is losing its earlier vitality and confidence and resorting to recycling its past glories.[25]

The final Play for Today era's average audience was 5.25 million, slightly lower than 1977-82's overall average. During this period there was a marked decline in the percentage – 28 % – of all-filmed Play for Today productions. This was, in part, ironic, given the 'cinematic' connotations of the music employed in the titles. The last Plays for Today also indicated a gravitation towards private, domestic-centred dramas, representing what Carl Gardner and John Wyver discerned as a 'shift away from the social and political issues of today' (1983: 127). Play for Today's domestic turn was epitomised by video productions such as Reg Gadney's *Last Love* (1 March 1983), David Hopkins's *Wayne and Albert* (15 March 1983) and David Cregan's *Reluctant Chickens* (12 April 1983). This also involved a shift towards more middle-call milieux than had been the case in earlier seasons, suggesting a dwindling of the eclecticism and more wide-ranging humanism of earlier seasons.

Conclusion

This analysis of Play for Today's title sequences has shown the strand's consistent seriousness of purpose, but also dispels perceptions of a single 'image' of the series or an association with only kind of play. The changes in title sequences for the first three series reveal a degree of uncertainty about how best to welcome the viewer and provide a clear identity for the series. During the period 1973-76, the strand's image became confidently humanist, combining a montage of stills featuring close-ups of actors' faces with Carl Davis's major-key musical ident. Davis's score survived in a rearranged form but was then used to accompany Sid Sutton's universalising design based on the visualisation of a 'day'. Its aesthetic ambition was reacted against by the producer Margaret Matheson who sought a more austere and arresting image for the strand, employing a musical ident by Nick Bicât that partly recalled the earlier experiments of Delia Derbyshire and Malcom Clarke. By its final phase (1982-84), the Play for Today's identity had become confused and diluted, and this was represented by the mismatch in its titles between a grandiose, 'cinematic' musical ident and bland visuals which partly recycled Sid

Sutton's earlier single-shot approach (1976-77). Unlike all the others, the 1973-76 title sequence set up clear expectations of recognisable actors whose faces signified Play for Today's humanism and tonal mix of seriousness and humour. In doing so, it sought to seduce viewers with the prospect of engaging drama rather than the more distanced viewing-position encouraged by other, more abstract designs.

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Notes

1. Richard Eyre, email to author, 4 August 2021; Kenith Trodd, email to author, 10 August 2021; Margaret Matheson, email to author, 18 August 2021.
2. Kenith Trodd interviewed by author, 22 October 2020.
3. Horovitz's (1926-) Jewish family fled Vienna from the Nazis, migrating to England in 1938. He read music and modern languages at New College, Oxford, where writers Dennis Potter and Jeremy Sandford later studied.
4. These and subsequent technical details cited are from Ravensbourne University's BBC Motion Graphics Archive. 'Play for Today (1970) Concept and creative process', available at <https://www.ravensbourne.ac.uk/bbc-motion-graphics-archive/play-today-1970>.
5. Pink Floyd's cutting-edge 'On the Run' from *Dark Side of the Moon* (1973) used the similar EMS Synthi AKIS. Earlier in 1972, Clarke had used the Delaware for his exceptionally atonal, avant-garde soundtrack for the Doctor Who serial, *The Sea Devils*.
6. Kenith Trodd recalls working on the 1960s The Wednesday Play as script editor when producer Tony Garnett employed Davis, the 'most upmarket', 'popular' and 'in-demand writer of television themes' to compose its ident. Interview with Trodd, op. cit.
7. Carl Davis, interviewed by author, 4 June 2020. Davis didn't specify whom 'they' referred to but it most likely included Play for Today producer, Graeme McDonald, Head of Drama Group, Shaun Sutton and Head of Plays, Christopher Morahan.
8. This, the ident music for long-running review show *Film…* (BBC2, 1971-2018), was Billy Taylor's 1967 instrumental version of his and Dick Dallas's

jazz song 'I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free' which was later performed by Nina Simone at Montreux in 1976. Davis also claims he would have instructed his fixer to hire 'jazz players' to perform his Play for Today ident, though cannot recall who played on the recording, which he did not attend.

9. Quotes from interview with Davis, op.cit.; email to author, 15 June 2020.
10. BBC Motion Graphics Archive, 'Play for Today (1973) Concept and creative process', available at <https://www.ravensbourne.ac.uk/bbc-motion-graphics-archive/play-today-1973>.
11. When Play for Today initially employed this title sequence in autumn 1973, there was a less striking graphic design for the title caption: white typewriter-like text on a light blue background.
12. The choice of images changed according to the seasonal sub-set of plays being shown. There were nine sets of stills within the three series. Broadly, these consisted of one set each for October to December, January to March and April to July.
13. Sid Sutton, interview with author, 9 August 2021. Sutton had designed graphics for the popular Sunday night drama series *The Brothers* (1973). Subsequently, Sutton devised vivid title sequence graphics for *Scene* (1977), *Shoestring* (1979), *Doctor Who* (1980) and *Bergerac* (1983).
14. Interview with Sutton, ibid.
15. BBC Motion Graphics Archive, 'Play for Today (1977) Concept and creative process', available at <https://www.ravensbourne.ac.uk/bbc-motion-graphics-archive/play-today-1977>.
16. Interview with Sutton, op. cit.
17. Sid Sutton, email to author, 28 August 2021. Pump typeface was designed for Letraset by New York-based designer Bob Newman in 1970; it had also been used for Play for Today's 1972-73 title sequence.
18. Interview with Sutton, op. cit.
19. Margaret Matheson, email to author, 20 January 2017.
20. Margaret Matheson, email to author, 18 September 2020.
21. Nick Bicât, email to author, 11 June 2020.
22. Richard Eyre, interviewed by author, 16 November 2020. There is, however, one anomaly in how Play for Today was introduced during the 1977-82 period. Both Stewart Parker's *Iris in the Traffic, Ruby in the Rain* (24 November 1981) and Jim Allen's *United Kingdom* (8 December 1981) were prefaced with a different title sequence. This design featured neon-style yellow, blue and red lettering on a black background, bordered by broken red and blue lines at the top and bottom and lacked editing, visual effects or music.

23. BBC Motion Graphics Archive, 'Play for Today (1978) Concept and creative process', available at <https://www.ravensbourne.ac.uk/bbc-motion-graphics-archive/play-today-1978>.
24. Interview with Sutton, op. cit.

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