

Barry Gray – A life of music

Barry Gray was born on 18th July 1908, in Blackburn, Lancashire, the only child of John, commercial stationer, and Florence, spinster who had married the previous September. Gray's own, simple biography states he was born to musical parents and encouraged to learn music from a very early age. However, his academic career would have started in 1913 when he became a pupil at St Silas School in Blackburn. He later attended Blackpool High School, when the family moved on his fathers return from the Great War.

The exact nature of Gray's musical studies is still under investigation. The ubiquitous biography contains his now famous line "*His first piano teacher, a sound theorist, is reputed to have remarked, 'Here's a young lad who takes to manuscript paper like a duck takes to water.'*" It then states he studied harmony, counterpoint and orchestration with a Professor from the Royal Manchester College of Music. Barry was quite honest here; he studied *with* a Professor *from* the College. These may have been private lessons or even a postal course. He never attended the College in any way, as a trawl through its archives revealed. It is later versions of the biography that have put a little spin on his words. He also studied with a Doctor of Music at Blackburn Cathedral, "*..keeping his nose to the musical grindstone until he was twenty-two.*"

His musical education complete for now, Gray moved south to London. His first professional work was with music publishers B. Feldman & Co. Gray considered this "*..the heart of the music business*" and gained valuable experience scoring for theatre and radio orchestras, song writing and arranging piano scores and orchestrations. Feldman & Co published Gray's earliest known work "Someone Else Took You Out of My Arms (but they can't take you out of my heart)" in 1932.

In his original biographical note, Gray recalled that he "*..later studied composition with Matyas Seiber, the eminent Hungarian teacher*". This would have been much later as Seiber did not take up formal teaching until 1942, when he was invited to join the Morley College, under the directorship of Tippett. By this time, Gray was already serving with the RAF in India! There is a tentative link between the two. Seiber came to England in 1935 and worked as an advisor to a music publisher. Where this Feldman's Gray may have studied with Seiber privately, or simply learned from him, during their time as colleagues.

In 1938 Gray became staff Arranger-Pianist for the International Broadcasting Corporations Radio Normandy in Hallam Street, London where he remained until he was called up on 10th September 1940. Barry maintained his loyalty to Radio Normandy frequently returning to the IBC studios, the remaining section of the organisation, throughout his recording career.

Barry was called up and reported to RAF Padgate in Lancashire, one of the main RAF receiving and training camps for enlisted men. Quick to capitalise on his skills, Barry became resident conductor of the camp dance band, a post he held until being posted overseas. The camp band was not only there to entertain the troops, but to raised funds for the RAF by giving public performances. Musicians would also take the opportunity to raise funds for themselves, by doing spots with local dance bands.

Amongst the Padgate band during Barry's tenure where Al Fontaine, who went on to become band leader at London's famous Café De Paris, and a saxophone player by the name of Cliff Townshend. Many years later Cliff's son formed a band and wanted to make a record. Barry stepped in and provided their first studio session. He was probably quite surprised, and pleased, at the success young Pete and friends made with their own type of music.

Leaving Blighty for India on 15th May 1943 Gray was destined to join the 3rd Tactical Air Force on its formation, to provide offensive support to operations in Burma, in the December of that year. You might think Barry's commitment to music would have to end with his posting overseas. Far from it; he organised the first of his many concert productions whilst still aboard ship en route to India! In addition to his duties he continued composing and arranging for several publishers, sending the finished works back to England from his postings throughout India, Africa and Burma. Published material from this time includes the "I Overhead A Conversation" (Campbell Connelly & Co.) a song that went on to be broadcast by Charles Shadwell and The B.B.C Variety Orchestra. A copy of this was one of the few recordings from this period to survive in Gray's own archive. Completing his service, Gray was demobbed from RAF in 1946, having reached the rank of Pilot Officer.

Gray returned to London and describes his return to Civvy Street thus "*..composed and arranged free-lance for the BBC, writing special material, lyrics, music and orchestrations for many radio shows. He also composed and arranged for such artists as Eartha Kitt and Hoagy Carmichael and wrote songs and special scores for several films.*" Sadly, details of this era are still elusive. One Carmichael connection so far identified is the 1949 Chappell release of "If You Don't Love Me", which Gray arranged along with Paul Francis Webster and Ray Golden. In 1948 Gray co-wrote the lyrics to the song "When Love Has Passed You By" for the feature *Noose* (aka *The Silk Noose*). A crime drama set in London, the film was directed by Edmond T Grenville and produced by Edward Dryhurst. Prolific and much respected light music composer Charles Williams (*Girls In Grey*, *Young Ballerina* aka *The Potter's Wheel Interlude*) provided the score. The following year Gray again joined up with Dryhurst again, providing the lyrics to a song entitled "A Rainy Day In Paris", published by the Irwin Dash Music Co.

In the same year Barry joined Vera Lynn as accompanist-arranger, remaining with her until 1959. During their time together he scored her arrangements for the stage, Decca recordings and radio and TV shows. He also toured with her in Denmark, Holland, Belgium, Brussels and Germany. Between 12th April 1952 and 6th February 1954, Gray and Lynn appeared with Tony Hancock and Jimmy Edwards in the popular Shanks and Davies review "London Laughs" at the Adelphi Theatre in London. Billed as "the new laughter review", the show featured musical plaques and comedy sketches, punctuated by solo performances from the stars. Barry appeared in the first half, accompanying Vera Lynn in "Sincerely Yours", the theme from her popular war time radio series of the same name. A spelling mistake in the programme leaves him forever credited as Barry Grey. In 1954 Lynn re-recorded her famous war-time hit, "We'll Meet Again" This version was used in the final scene of *Dr Strangelove*. So, Barry has another film arrangement to his credit! Vera also provides another Carmichael connection as Gray would have arranged "Two Sleepy People", scored by Carmichael, for a Lynn recording in the early 1950's.

It was through Vera Lynn that Gray made his most important, and career defining contact – Gerry Anderson. Gray knew Roberta Leigh through their mutual association with Lynn who had recorded several of Leigh's children's songs that Gray had arranged. In 1956, Leigh took the outline for her television series, "The Adventures Of Twizzle", to Anderson and his AP Films partner Arthur Provis. She stipulated that Gray be appointed as musical director. However, Leigh did not want Gray to compose the music for the series. Her friend, Leslie Clair hummed tunes into a tape recorder and Leigh wanted Gray to arrange, orchestrate and record these for the show. The first session recording for *Twizzle*, and indeed all Gerry Anderson productions, took place at the Gate Studios in Elstree on September 6th, 1957 and cost a princely £115.0.0. A 13 piece combination was utilised, with the legendary Bert Weedon on guitar.

By 1955 Gray, and his widowed mother (Barry had lost his father back in 1942), had moved to 242 Dollis Hill Road. Gray set up his own recording studio by converting two of the downstairs rooms. One became the recording studio and another, the sound studio, where the musicians sat. The house

was sound-proofed with egg boxes; even the hall was lined with them! Although effective the studio was small. If an orchestrated sound was required Barry would have to record it in its separate sections, strings in the morning, brass in the afternoon and so on, and then overlay all the tracks to create the finished piece. It was at Dollis Hill that the music for the next Anderson production, Torchy The Battery Boy, also created by Roberta Leigh and originally titled "Topsy Turvey Land", was recorded. The first session, which had just 7 players so they probably all fitted in, took place on March 9th, 1958. The story goes that Leigh sang her own tunes into the tape recorder and Gray once again orchestrated them into the final themes. The story of the hummed tunes was considered to a bit of an urban myth. However, Gray's estate provided the evidence to support it, at least for Torchy, in the form of his carefully kept session record books. One page did not contain details of musicians and studio and costs but was headed "Topsy Turvey Land – Roberta Leigh. Songs taken down". There followed a list of 16 song titles along with their duration. He had indeed taken down, or transcribed, the songs from a recording.

The next Anderson/Gray collaboration was "Four Feather Falls". Gray's involvement with this series went much further than the music. He developed the format for the western series, originally titled "The Magical Town Of Four Feather Falls" and wrote the script for the initial episode. The concept was bought by APF, and with the series retitled, it was sold to Granada Television in 1958 and reached the screen in 1960.

The relationship continued through Crossroads To Crime (1960), Supercar (1960-1961), Fireball XL5 (1962-1963), Stingray (1963-1964), Thunderbirds (1965-1966), Thunderbirds Are Go! (1966), Captain Scarlet (1967), Thunderbird Six, Joe 90, The Secret Service (1968), Doppelganger (1969), UFO (1960-1970) and Space: 1999 season one (1973-1974). For personal reasons, Gray declined the invitation to compose the music for the second season of Space: 1999 and he was replaced by Derek Wadsworth. He was also Gerry Anderson's first choice to produce the music for Terrahawks, in 1982, but it was not to be and he was replaced by Richard Harvey. Sadly, Space: 1999 season one proved to be Gray's last music for film or television series.

It was undoubtedly the latter half of the 1960's that was Gray's busiest time, both professionally and personally. He had become increasingly interested in electronic music having bought a Clavioline in 1958 which he used on Torchy. The electronic organ had featured in Four Feather Falls and his next acquisition, an Ondes Martenot, debuted in Supercar in 1961. Over the years the Cordovox, Transicord, Baldwin Electronic Harpsichord, Miller Spinetta and Hammond Organ along with an audio sweep oscillator and ring modulator were added to his collection of weird sounds. As well as electronic music he developed his own electro-musical sound-effects, which he named "Musieffects". By 1966 Gray's reputation with electronic sound was growing. He was invited to contribute electronic music and effects to four feature films in that one year. The first of these was "Dr. Who And The Daleks", an Amicus feature based on the popular BBC television series Doctor Who. This was closely followed by the sequel, "Daleks' Invasion Earth 2150 AD". On both films Gray supplemented the music scores of Malcolm Lockyer and Bill McGuffie with electronic effects created on his Miller Spinetta. These were primarily in the title themes for both films and the creation of noises for the interiors of the TARDIS and the Dalek City in the first film and the Dalek spaceship in the second. Gray also supplemented Lockyer's score for Island Of Terror, and then provided electronic music to reinforce Bernard Herrmann's score on Francois Truffaut's adaptation of Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451. The same year saw the first of the Thunderbirds feature films, "Thunderbirds are Go!" and Barry finally, after over 30 years in the music industry, got to conduct a full symphony orchestra. In 6 sessions between 9th and 11th October 1966, Barry's spectacular score was recorded at Anvil Studios in Denham. By the end of December 1966 Gray had re-arranged several of his pieces from the score and was back in the studio re-recording for the soundtrack album released by United Artists.

In late 1966 Barry moved to Red Gables, a large detached house in Esher, Surrey. One of the first things he did was to install a purpose built recording studio. Although still not large enough to accommodate more than 14 musicians it was a great improvement technically on Dollis Hill Road.

16th March 1967 between 9am and 1pm found Barry at Pye studios recording the first session for the new Anderson series Captain Scarlet and the Mysterons. 26th July and he is with The Spectrum recording their famous end title song "Captain Scarlet". Between both dates came a far more important one. On 20th May 1967, at Esher Registry Office, Barry Gray married his sweetheart Joan Cheeseman. Completing the family were Joan's children, Simon and Amanda, whom Barry adopted as his own. They bounced into Red Gables, their laughter adding to the wonderful music already there. Back to the musical grindstone, with the rest of 1967 taken up with Captain Scarlet and the second Thunderbirds feature "Thunderbird Six".

Insight into Barry's home life, and sense of fun, is provided by the various personal songs he starts to compose at this time. Frequently just a new lyric to an old favourite, he would croon about his family and friends. Listening to one in particular makes you feel these musical jokes were also an outlet for frustrations he may not otherwise have voiced. Set to Jerry Bock's "Sunrise, Sunset" from "Fiddler on the Roof", "Clocks" describes wife Joan's hobby of collecting clocks. Barry vividly describes various clocks around the house through several verses, none of which are particularly complimentary. One tells of the installation of a particularly large clock which involved actual alteration to a room "...we had to cut half the woodwork away," sings Barry, with a slight inflection that could be taken for disapproval!

In "You Really Must Visit Red Gables", Barry sings of mildew in his beloved billiards room, ants in his new studio "... where dad sits composing with ants in his pants!" son Simon's ability to break anything and daughter Amanda's penchant for large earrings and keeping bugs in a jar. The same tune is used at least twice more. "You Really Must Visit The Lantern", that tells of The Lantern Tea Rooms in Bognor Regis, once kept by Joan and "The Dantons", a farewell song for Guernsey friends Barbara and Bill Danton, composed on the eve of an extended trip to England and Spain.

1968 and things moved up a gear. His first priority was to complete the music for Joe90. Recorded on January 18th, 1968 at the Olympic Studio in Barnes, the Joe 90 theme featured guitarist Vic Flick, who performed the world-famous guitar riff on John Barry's arrangement of "The James Bond Theme. The most music-laden episode of the series was *International Concerto*, for which Gray supervised son Simon doubling for Joe during filming of the sequence in which Joe's hands replace those of concert pianist on the piano keyboard.

Before commencing work on the Joe 90 incidental music, Gray returned to Thunderbirds one more time, recording the score for the second Thunderbirds feature, "Thunderbird Six", over six sessions on 1st, 2nd and 5th of February, 1968 at the Olympic Studio utilising a 56-piece orchestra. Then scoring, arranging and recording for The Secret Service. On top of this he was working on ideas and preliminary sketches for the live-action film Doppelganger. The Doppelganger score was recorded across five sessions on consecutive days from Thursday 27th to Saturday 29th March 1969. The science fiction theme allowed Gray to return to his electronic music and extensive use was made of the Ondes Martenot in the score.

During 1970, the Gray family moved from Red Gables to Guernsey. Taking his studio with him, Gray continued to record all the electronic sounds and music for UFO, periodically commuting to London for the orchestral sessions at the Pye Studios. The same approach was adopted for Space: 1999 a few years later. It was around the time of Space: 1999 that Barry tried to branch into situation comedy, submitting test pieces for the themes to The Good Life and My Wife Next Door.

Both were distinctively Gray and sadly not quite what was required for the lighter shows. As history recalls, he lost both commissions to Burt Rhodes and Dennis Wilson respectively.

From 1977 until shortly before his death, Barry was the resident pianist at the Old Government House Hotel on Guernsey, entertaining the hotel residents by playing piano and organ during dinner. During one evening in August 1983 he revealed a secret to Bramwell Tovey, then Principal Conductor of Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet. A secret not shared again until 2008, then by his old RAF pal, Al Fontaine. Although skilled pianist, Barry accepted his own piano playing was not up to scratch and he always hired a pianist for major recordings. However, on this evening Mr Tovey was very impressed with Barry, particularly the remarkably large reach of his left hand. A conversation followed and Barry produced from his pocket a meat skewer with a fountain pen cartridge attached. He fastened this contraption to the little finger of his left hand, playing the root of the chord with it and the 10th with his thumb. This with such dexterity he quite amazed Mr Tovey. Al recalled a small hammer-like device which Barry attached to his little finger of his left hand back in the 1940's.

In 1979, Gray was invited to compose a fanfare for the opening of the "Filmharmonic 79" concert, at the Royal Albert Hall, and to arrange a twelve-minute orchestral suite of his film and television compositions. Gray accepted and guest-conducted the 93-piece National Philharmonic Orchestra through a special arrangement of music from Doppelganger, Thunderbirds, Thunderbird Six and Space: 1999. Gray later conducted the Rank Concert Orchestra performing an arrangement of his 'Pinewood in Space' suite for an album, "Musical Highlights From Filmharmonic 79". The Filmharmonic concert was a great success and concert organiser Sidney Samuelson immediately requested that Gray compose the Royal Fanfare for the entrance of Her Majesty The Queen and Prince Philip for the 1980 Royal Film Performance along with arrangements of "Great Songs United Artists Style". The following year he composed and arranged themes for the stage show section of the 1981 Royal Film Performance.

Throughout 1981, Gray maintained a close association with Robert Mandell of ITC New York, re-arranging and re-dubbing music for the Supermarionation Space Theatre shows for American television. These were 90 minute compilations of episodes of Stingray, Thunderbirds, Captain Scarlet And The Mysterons, Joe 90, UFO and Space: 1999. These compilation features subsequently found their way onto sell-through home video in the UK with titles such as "Countdown To Disaster", "Revenge Of The Mysterons From Mars", "Invasion UFO" and "Cosmic Princess".

Barry Gray died suddenly in hospital in Guernsey on April 26th, 1984, leaving a legacy of wonderful music which we are proud to be honouring with this special concert tonight.

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