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Alarms on Record

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Alarms on Record

The *ur*-text of rock 'n' roll, Chuck Berry's, 'Johnny B. Goode', concerns itself with a guitarist who 'could play the guitar just like a-ringing a bell'.¹ Subsequently, popular music has both maintained and deepened its relationship with the sonically disruptive. In the following I wish to trace the growing presence of alarm bells, horns, and sirens in pop music and, hopefully, I will account for some of the reasons for their presence. It is my belief, however, that it is the fact that popular music is dominated by its recorded form that accounts for its openness to such sounds.² And it is with the record form that I begin.

Thomas Alva Edison registered 1,093 United States patents and yet out of all of these the phonograph was his favourite: 'Which do I consider my greatest invention?', he pondered,

Well, my reply to that would be that I like the phonograph best. Doubtless this is because I love music. [...] Music is so helpful to the human mind that it is naturally a source of satisfaction to me that I have helped in some way to make the very finest music available to millions who could not offer to pay the price and take the time necessary to hear the greatest artists sing and play.³

Developed during 1877, the phonograph was the first device capable of recording and reproducing sound. Music, however, had not been Edison's primary consideration when developing the machine. In fact, he hadn't really had any considerations at all. The momentous discovery of sound recording was an accident; a moment of serendipity that occurred during the course of other experiments he was making.⁴ As Andre Millard has stated, 'Edison always said that the phonograph was his only real discovery, the one invention he stumbled upon rather than deliberately set out to find'.⁵

Consequently, the phonograph was launched without any specific purpose in mind. Edison instead envisioned various futures for the machine. Writing in the *North American Review* in June 1878, he contemplated: 'Letter-writing, and other forms of dictation books, education, reader, music, family record; and such electrotype applications as books, musical-boxes, toys, clocks, advertising and signalling apparatus, speeches, etc. etc.'.⁶ In a supplementary patent he added:

amusement and instruction ... for instance, a revolving cylinder containing phonograms of the letters of the

¹ 'Johnny B. Goode' (Chuck Berry). Publ. by Arc Music Corp. It could be considered that this simile only concerns itself with the ease with which Johnny B. Goode can play the guitar. But why choose a device that can make *that* sound?

² I am here using 'popular music' in its broadest sense, including all the popular genres that can trace their lineage back to the original rock 'n' roll of the mid-1950s.

³ Thomas A. Edison, *The Diary and Sundry Observations of Thomas A. Edison*, ed. Dagobert D. Runes (New York, NY: Philosophical Library, 1948), pp. 169—70.

⁴ See Thomas Alva Edison, 'The Perfected Phonograph', *North American Review*, 146 (June 1888), 641—50.

⁵ Andre Millard, *America on Record: A History of Recorded Sound* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 37.

⁶ Thomas Alva Edison, 'The Phonograph and Its Future', *North American Review* (May—June 1878), 527—36 (p. 531).

alphabet ... can be used in teaching the alphabet ... a dog's bark ... used in a toy animal ... clocks may be provided with phonogram cylinders or wheels to call off the hours, to give alarms.⁷

Such lists are quoted in virtually all histories of sound recording. As Jonathan Sterne has indicated, they are used to illustrate one of two things: 'that Edison was brilliant (or at least prophetic) because all of the uses [...] eventually came to pass; or, that nobody had any idea what to do with the technology when it was invented and, therefore, needed to be told'.⁸ What interests me here, however, is something that Edison could not have foreseen: music not only came to dominate this list of uses, it also eventually *incorporated* many of them. To give just one example, in Tom Clay's 1971 recording, 'What the World Needs Now is Love/ Abraham, Martin and John', we hear a child receiving an English lesson, a police alarm, a dog barking, Martin Luther King's 'promised land' speech, and family recordings of the Kennedys. This was a ground-breaking record – possibly the first pop song to make extended use of 'samples' - but it was also a hit, reaching number eight in the U.S. charts.⁹

While Edison is proud that he transformed the reach of music, it is equally significant that his phonograph helped to transform the idea of what music could be. Indeed, the phonograph was ahead of the Futurist artist and composer Luigi Russolo, who in his famous 1913 manifesto campaigned for an 'art of noises':

We will delight in distinguishing the eddying of water, of air or gas in metal pipes, the muttering of motors that breathe and pulse with an indisputable animality, the throbbing of valves, the bustle of pistons, the shrieks of mechanical saws, the starting of trams on the tracks, the cracking of whips, the flapping of awnings and flags. We will amuse ourselves by orchestrating together in our imagination the din of rolling shop shutters, the varied hubbub of train stations, iron works, thread mills, printing presses, electrical plants, and subways.¹⁰

Phonograph listeners were already delighting in such sounds. The most popular recording artist of the late nineteenth century was the monologist Russell Hunting, whose greatest achievement was 'The Steamboat'.¹¹ On this recording Hunting assumed ten different voices and mimicked the various sounds of a ship in motion.¹² The phonograph

⁷ Patent filed 24 April 1878. Quoted in Steve Jones, *Rock Formation: Music, Technology and Mass Communication* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1992), p. 17.

⁸ Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 203.

⁹ Furthermore, it was released on the ultra-commercial Motown Records.

¹⁰ Luigi Russolo, *The Art of Noises*, trans. Barclay Brown (New York, NY: Pendragon Press, 1986), p. 26.

¹¹ See, Roland Gelatt, *The Fabulous Phonograph 1977–1977*, 2nd revised edn (London: Cassell, 1977), pp. 53–54. Edison regarded 'The Steamboat' as the most remarkable record ever made on a phonograph.

¹² The original acoustic recording process, which involved artists projecting their voices and instruments into a recording horn, was not suited to making field recordings, hence in 'The Steamboat' the sounds are mimicked rather than captured. The adoption of electric recording in the mid-1920s, which introduced amplification and microphones, revolutionised the recording world. Record companies were soon collecting ambient noises. The earliest identified sound effects disc is Columbia Records, 'London Street Sounds', recorded via a microphone set up in Leicester Square

would later offer for sale the 'ZANG-TUMB-TUUUMB' sounds of war over which Russolo and his colleague Filippo Marinetti enthused.¹³ In 1918 HMV released a disc of the Royal Garrison Artillery firing off a gas barrage in front of the French city of Lille.

The phonograph helped to reveal the musicality of noise. Its process of isolating sound and making it repeatable meant that anything it captured could be given aesthetic consideration. Russolo believed that industrial machinery, which made modern life 'so prodigal in different noises', had the same effect.¹⁴ He argued that the industrial soundscape had already influenced and made tolerable the 'complicated polyphony' of contemporary classical music, and what he now urged was music's actual incorporation of everyday sounds.¹⁵ Less self-consciously, and more successfully, the phonograph encouraged the same thing. What aided it in this process was its dual functionality: it swallowed sound and it also produced sound. Consequently, the phonograph was able to feed upon itself. Music recordings eventually began to cannibalise other recordings and, as they did so, they consumed whatever was out there: sound documents of machinery and war; adverts; foreign language instructions; soundtracks; recordings of sirens and alarms.

In particular, recordings of sirens and alarms. In researching this piece I quickly came across more than 50 records that incorporate some sort of tintinnabulistic din or spiralling siren (see 'Alarm Songs' below). And, if I were a hip-hop expert, I'm sure I could have identified 50 rap records alone that incorporate the sound of police cars. Here the audience for popular recorded music has been more accommodating than that of the classical music hall.¹⁶ For example, in 1924, Edgard Varèse debuted his composition *Hyperprism*, written for a small orchestra and sixteen percussion instruments (including a siren, gongs, cymbals, and a lion's roar). The audience ruined the initial performance of this piece by giggling nervously each time it reached the mimicked wail of a river-siren.¹⁷ In contrast, the 2007 Mercury Music Prize, awarded for the best popular music album of the year, went to a band called The Klaxons. One of the best tracks on this record, 'Atlantis to Interzone', delivers on the promise of their name. The lead instrument is a howling siren.

It took a while for the alarm to rise to such prominence. When the first alarms and sirens appear on records they are either subtle or mimicked, or otherwise they bookend the musical work. The Beatles, as so often, were pioneers. Their 1967 recording 'A Day in the Life', pre-

at 2.30 p.m. on 11 September 1928. See, Robert and Celia Dearing with Brian Rust, *The Guinness Book of Recorded Sound* (Enfield: Guinness, 1984), p. 181.

¹³ Russolo, p. 26.

¹⁴ Russolo, p. 24.

¹⁵ Russolo, p. 24.

¹⁶ For an extended discussion of the classical rejection of 'noise' see, Douglas Kahn, 'The Sound of Music', in *The Auditory Culture Reader*, ed. Michael Bull and Les Back (Oxford and New York, NY: Berg, 2003), pp. 77–90. Kahn argues that 'only the briefest and most infrequent instances of worldly sound were allowed into Western art musical practice' (p. 79). Furthermore, he believes that it was classical music's attempt to distance itself from the music of the phonograph that led it to demarcate clear lines between what was musical and what was noise: 'Phonography [...] promise[d] an alternative to musical notation as a means to store sonic time and, in the process, [to] deliver *all sound* into artistic materiality, and musical discourse responded by trivializing the complexity of significant sounds and their settings' (p. 79).

¹⁷ See David Toop, *Ocean of Sound: Aether Talk, Ambient Sound and Imaginary Worlds* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1995), p. 81.

It was not until the advent of hip-hop that the alarm and, in particular, the siren, crept inwards from the peripheries of the disc. Developed in the Bronx district of New York in the 1970s, and first heard on record in 1979 with The Fatback band's 'King Tim III (Personality Jock)' and 'Rapper's Delight' by the Sugarhill Gang, hip-hop commercially fulfilled Futurism's musical brief.²⁴ It did it by means of its principal instrument: the record player. At first through the scratching techniques of the original Bronx DJs, and later by extensive use of sampling technology, it was now that the cannibalisation of records began in earnest. Grandmaster Flash's 1981 classic, 'The Adventures of Grandmaster Flash on the Wheels of Steel', introduced the world to records made of records.²⁵

Rap historian Chairman Mao has described 'Adventures . . .' as the foundation of turntablism, 'the "Johnny B. Goode" of turntable music'.²⁶ But, sadly, there is no bell ringing here. What Flash did do, however, as he cut back, forth, and across various hit records, was introduce a recording world in which harmony, texture, and musical development could effectively and enjoyably be breached. As Flash himself explained:

Unlike all the other established genres of music – they're confined – meaning that 8 times out of 10, there had to be a melody, right, and on top of the melody, the singer had to sing in a certain key; there was an intro; there was a chorus; there was a bridge. With hip-hop that don't matter. You can sing off key; our subject matters that we can talk about are almost unlimited; musically speaking we can take a piece of Frank Sinatra, we can take a piece of Led Zeppelin, a horn blast from James Brown, a horn blast from anywhere. If it's properly strung together – this was hip-hop.²⁷

This collage technique would later incorporate all manner of sound effects, including sirens and alarms.²⁸ Two factors furthered this process. First, as hip-hop's subject matter broadened, found sounds were introduced into the mix to help provide narrative illustration (it is pertinent that the genre's first socially conscious record, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's 1982 single, 'The Message', featured the sound of police sirens, albeit only at its close). Second, whereas the

²⁴ It should not be forgotten that one of the most sampled bands of all time was the studio-based Art of Noise. This group released their records on a label called Zang Tuum Tumb.

²⁵ During the 1930/40s *musique concrète* composer Pierre Shaeffer created music using recordings of machinery and other man-made sounds. His work differed from hip-hop in important ways. Shaeffer took pains to obscure his original sound sources, believing that they needed to be made unrecognisable for them to be considered musical. And yet he still considered his results a failure, he later stated 'Musique Concrète in its work of assembling sound, produces sound-works, sound-structures, but not music' (quoted in Kahn, p. 83). Douglas Kahn argues that John Cage, who also made experiments with pre-recorded material, was ambivalent concerning the musical status of this work (Kahn, pp. 85-86). What further differentiates hip-hop from these *avant garde* composers is that many of its products were commercially successful, whereas Shaeffer and Cage's experiments have seldom been heard.

²⁶ Chairman Mao, 'You Spin Me Round (Like a Record Baby): Last Night a DJ Saved Hip-hop', in *The Vibe History of Hip-hop*, ed. by Alan Light (London: Plexus, 1999), pp. 69-71, 74-79 (p. 76).

²⁷ Interviewed on the television programme *Planet Rock*. Dir. Don Letts. B.B.C. Television 1996.

²⁸ In *Wild Style*, one of the early hip-hop movies, we witness Grandmaster Flash's D.J. skills in action. This sequence begins with drum beats and ends with sirens. See, *Wild Style*. Dir. Charlie Ahearn. Wild Style. 1983.

rhythmic flow of scratching techniques was dependent on 'beat matching' the various drum breaks and percussive elements of records, sampling and sequencing technology, introduced in the mid-1980s, made it possible to synchronise the whole world of recorded sound.²⁹

By 1987, LL Cool J was using a sampled police siren as the lead instrument in his record, 'I'm Bad'. This device provides the hookline in the chorus as it was to do in many rap records to come. However, it was two 1988 albums, Public Enemy's, *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold us Back*, and N.W.A.'s, *Straight Outta Compton*, that established the police siren as one of hip-hop's most important instruments. Public Enemy's album takes the collaging techniques of hip-hop to an extreme – 'We used samples like an artist would use paint', claimed producer Hank Shocklee.³⁰ This record is not only saturated with sirens but, by playing with sound sources, it made other instruments sound like sirens too. Who knows exactly what it is this that howls in tracks such as 'Rebel Without a Pause' and 'Cold Lampin' with Flavor'? Public Enemy's great achievement here is that they fulfil Shocklee's brief to be 'music's worst nightmare'.³¹ In comparison N.W.A.'s album was musically conservative, it was also far less siren drenched - only 'Gangsta Gangsta', which follows the LL Cool J blueprint, features them prominently.³² But it is the title of this track that is significant. Although preceded by records such as 'I'm Bad', it was the success of N.W.A.'s album that made 'gangsta rap' the genre's most profitable strain. And so the world was treated to countless foul-mouthed testimonies of tough life on the streets, and the sirens went wailing again and again.

But people also danced to alarms. House and techno music were fostered on the same sampling and sequencing technology that the hip-hop producers used.³³ During the famous rave summer of 1988 (this being another of the alarm's golden years) dancers were triggered by the sirens in Royal House's, 'Can You Party' and Mantronix's awesome, 'King of the Beats'. Moreover, any time there was a break in the music ravers would blow their own air-horns. In 1991, they were also treated to the frantic sounds of a fire alarm going off in Human Resource's petrifying 'Dominator' ('bigger, and better, and rougher, and tougher', indeed). Eventually, the alarm became such a mainstay of the dance music scene that it was eulogised; witness the Chemical Brothers' 1995 paeon, 'Song to the Siren'.

By 2006, pop music was so accustomed to the art of noises that even a mainstream performer like Beyoncé, one of the world's most successful recording artists, could issue a song in which the sirens wail: her track, 'Ring the Alarm', does just that: the sirens are sounded throughout. But why should her audience want this? In the above I have suggested that

²⁹ The first modern (and affordable) digital sampler, E-mu's SP1200, was introduced in August 1987. Digital sequencing is dependent on MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface), which allows digital instruments to control and synchronise each other. The earlier 'sampling' performed by Tom Clay on 'What the World Needs Now is Love / Abraham, Martin and John', involved the manual sequencing of analogue tapes.

³⁰ Alan Light, 'Public Enemy', in *The Vibe History of Hip-hop*, ed. by Alan Light (London: Plexus, 1999), pp. 165-69, 172-75 (p. 168).

³¹ Light, 'Public Enemy', pp. 165—69, 172—75 (p. 166).

³² The video mix of the title track (not included on the album) does, however, feature copious amounts of police sirens.

³³ The links between hip-hop and the house music scene are often overlooked. The early British releases, in particular, are indebted.

it is the record, rather than the concert hall, that more readily accommodates noise. However, this does not explain why the popular audience should enjoy it. It becomes even more puzzling when you consider the fact that this audience has allowed its music to be interrupted by sounds that are usually considered annoying or tyrannical. We hate being woken up in the mornings; why then listen to the same alarm on record at night? We're supposed to consider the police as our oppressors; why then invite their sirens to our dance?

There is a *phenomenological* reason why these sounds are more acceptable on record. Whereas the conventions of the classical music concert can be considered ritualistic, the record and the alarm both break with the ritual ordering of sound: the record by transporting noises in time and space; the alarm by interrupting the ambient flow. The record form, like the alarm, is suited to sounds that jolt and shock. There is also an *acoustic* reason why these sounds are tolerated: they *are* musical. Percussionists play bells; bands feature horn sections; and the siren itself was designed to generate sounds of definite pitch.³⁴ There is also a *narrative* reason why the majority of the records that I have mentioned include sirens and alarms: these sound effects are part of the story they wish to tell (even 'Blockbuster' has a line about the police). Perhaps most important, there is a *sociological* reason why sounds that are rejected in the classical concert hall are accepted when heard on popular records. It is part of pop mythology that the music is consumed and created in a place that is itself sonically disruptive: the street. Russolo requested that the concert hall crowd embrace, '*the noises of trams, of automobile engines, of carriages and brawling crowds*'.³⁵ This was more natural for the pop audience who, in theory at least, were already among them. We only have to witness George Lucas' film *American Graffiti* (in which early-1960s American teenagers cruise around town obsessively listening to the radio in their cars), or Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (in which a character disrupts the neighbourhood by endlessly playing Public Enemy's 'Fight the Power' on his beat box), to see how much popular music is infused by, and itself infuses, the sounds of the street.

Yet this still does not explain why the sound of sirens and alarms are enjoyed. One possible solution is provided by Jacques Attali who in his great book, *Noise*, points us towards the *carnivalesque*:

Symbolically, noise control was first implemented in relation to an individualized sound object – the automobile. [...] We see noise reappear, however, in exemplary fashion at certain ritualized moments: in these instances, the horn emerges as a derivative form of violence masked by festival. All we have to do is observe how noise proliferates in echo at such times to get a hint of

³⁴ The siren was invented in the late 18th century by the Scottish natural philosopher John Robison. It was not given the name 'siren' until 1819, when French engineer Charles Cagniard de La Tour devised an acoustical instrument of the type. De la Tour's machine was christened 'siren' in reference to the sea creatures in Homer's *Odyssey*; this was due to its ability to create notes under water. See, J. A. Zahm, *Sound and Music* (Chicago, IL: A. C. McClurg and Company, 1892), p. 62.

What has made sirens and *alarm* bells and horns problematic musically is the lack of control that a musician can exert over these devices (something that has changed with the advent of sampling and sequencing technology). An example of the difference between mechanical and musical devices can be heard in Roxy Music's, 'Street Life'. The song begins with a riff that is played on recordings of car horns; when this riff returns during the body of the song it is played, less-jarringly, by *real* horns.

³⁵ Russolo, p. 25. Emphasis in original.

what the epidemic proliferation of the essential violence can be like. The noise of car horns on New Year's Eve is, to my mind, for the drivers an unconscious substitute for Carnival, itself a substitute for the Dionysian festival preceding the sacrifice. A rare moment, when the hierarchies are masked behind the windshields and a harmless civil war temporarily breaks out throughout the city.³⁶

Here, Attali considers drivers reclaiming control of their own car horns and alarms. The situation in popular music is much more powerful: it allows musicians and listeners to usurp the sirens of the powers that be. The perfect example of this process can be heard at the start of *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*. The album opens with a live recording of Public Enemy's first London concert. The show commences with the sound of an air-raid siren and band member Professor Griff declaring, 'London, England: Armageddon has been in effect . . . Consider yourselves, warned!'.³⁷ What is the audience response? They cheer deliriously; and, brilliantly, they also sound their own air-horns. This carnivalistic logic of 'inside out' can be witnessed in a club-culture story that Sheryl Garratt recounts:

One night a police car turned its siren on to try and clear the crowd [dancing in Charing Cross Road after they had left the club, The Trip], and to the Officers' amazement everyone went mad, dancing even more. The wailing sounded like the siren sample on the acid anthem 'Can U Party', recorded by Todd Terry under the name Royal House. When the same thing happened outside Clink Street, the siren wasn't even needed. Clubbers danced around the patrol car's flashing light singing the record's hookline 'Can you feel it?'.³⁸

It should nevertheless be remembered that the response to music's alarms wasn't always so gleeful, and neither was their sound. As drug usage within the club scene intensified, the mood and the music grew darker. Simon Reynolds was witness to the hardcore scene in the early 1990s and he provides a different, perverse, explanation for the appeal of its alarms:

Midway through [Human Resource's] 'Dominador', a startlingly realistic alarm-bell lets rip, cueing the Pavlovian response to flee. Hardcore was full of similar sound-effects – sirens, church bells – that created a sense of emergency and insurgency. This was the *panic-rush*, as celebrated in tracks like Praga Khan's 'Rave Alarm', HHFD's 'Start The Panic', John + Julie's 'Red Alert' and Force Mass Motion's 'Feel The Panic'; an edgy, jittery exhilaration caused by the metabolic acceleration and paranoiac side-effects of doing too much Ecstasy and amphetamine. The original Greek panic, the 'panic fear' of the horned god Pan, was a transport of ecstasy-beyond-

³⁶ Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis, MN and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), pp. 123-24.

³⁷ This track is listed as, 'Countdown to Armageddon'. No authorship or publishing details are given.

³⁸ Sheryl Garratt, *Adventures in Wonderland: A Decade in Club Culture* (London: Headline, 1998), p. 129.

terror. Activating the brain's 'flight-or-fight' response speed floods the body with the adrenalin-like neurotransmitter norepinephrine. In a panic state, perceptions are heightened, sense-impressions are more vivid, because you're on red alert. As with a soldier in a combat situation, such a drastic intensification of the immediate present can be a Dionysian thrill. But the side effects of too much speed (hypertension, paranoia, heart arrhythmia) are unpleasant, while the attrition wreaked by long-term abuse leads to a kind of physical and spiritual battle-fatigue. By late 1991, you could see the walking wounded on the dancefloor.³⁹

Sounds like fun.

But what about all the people listening to these records at home – why should they want to rattle around their rooms to the street-sounds of alarms? *N.W.A.* found that the biggest audience for their gangsta rap resided, not on the poverty-stricken streets of Compton, but in the suburban bedrooms of white teenagers, both in America and abroad.⁴⁰ Here, the siren was calling to a world in which 'nothing will ever happen – and *nothing ever has*'.⁴¹ It is a suburban mentality that lies at the heart, and is the inspiration for, much of Britain's popular music. Indeed, Michael Bracewell considers suburbia, 'the spiritual home of English pop'.⁴² For Simon Frith, it is the desire to escape these confines in search of a supposed 'authenticity' that accounts for the peculiarities of the British music fan. It also helps to account for a love of alarms:

to understand the urge to 'authenticity' we have to understand the strange fear of being 'inauthentic'. In this world, American music – black American music – stands for a simple idea: that everything *real* is happening elsewhere.⁴³

Reflecting this, perhaps the most honest of all alarm songs is the Clash's, 'White Riot', in which Joe Strummer looks jealously at black culture and wishes that he could have a riot of his own. And the most poignant is the Pet Shop Boys', 'Suburbia', in which Neil Tennant sings:

Listen – a siren screams
There in the distance
Like a roll-call
Of all the suburban dreams.⁴⁴

³⁹ Simon Reynolds, *Energy Flash: A Journey Through Rave Music and Dance Culture* (London: Picador, 1998), p. 111.

⁴⁰ This is best encapsulated on the cover of fellow gangsta-rap artist Ice-T's album, *Home Invasion* (Priority Records RSYN1, 1993). The sleeve depicts a white teenage boy, sat at home, listening to Ice-T's record. We also see the demonic visions that the music is conjuring in his mind. This was the first Ice-T album released in the wake of the scandal caused by his song 'Cop Killer', recorded with the band Body Count.

⁴¹ Guy Debord's motto for new towns in, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1994), p. 126. Emphasis in original.

⁴² Michael Bracewell, *England is Mine: Pop Life in Albion from Wilde to Goldie* (London: Harper Collins, 1997), p. 24.

⁴³ Simon Frith, 'Playing With Real Feeling – Jazz and Suburbia', *Music For Pleasure* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), pp. 45-63 (p. 61).

⁴⁴ Suburbia (Neil Tennant/Chris Lowe). Publ. Cage Music Ltd./10 Music Ltd.

Alarm Songs

- The Beach Boys, 'Caroline No', *Pet Sounds* (Capitol T2458, 1966). Closes with the air-horn of an American train.
- The Beatles, 'A Day in the Life', *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (Parlophone PMC7027, 1967). The bell of an alarm clock marks the end of the first orchestrated section.
- The Beatles, 'Drive My Car', *Rubber Soul* (Parlophone PMC1267, 1965). 'Beep-beep, beep-beep, yeah!'
- The Beatles, 'Everybody's Got Something to Hide Except Me and My Monkey', *The Beatles* (Apple PMC70678, 1968). A hand-bell is rung throughout.
- The Beatles, 'I Am the Walrus' (Parlophone R5655, 1967). Musically inspired by two-tone drone of a police siren. An alarm introduces the 'sitting in an English garden' section.
- Berry, Chuck, 'Johnny B. Goode' (Chess 1961, 1957). Includes the line, 'he could play that guitar just like a-ringing a bell'.
- Beyoncé, 'Ring the Alarm', *B Day* (RCA 88697091252, 2006). Begins with a siren, which returns for the second part of each verse.
- Black Sabbath, 'War Pigs', *Paranoid* (Vertigo 6360011, 1970). An air-raid siren joins the opening riff.
- Chemical Brothers, 'Song to the Siren', *Exit Planet Dust* (Junior Boys Own XDUSTLP1, 1995). Begins with 30 seconds of sirens, which return for the breakdown section. The female vocals could be described as trying to sound like Homer's sirens.
- The Clash, 'Police on my Back', *Sandinista!* (CBS FLSN 1, 1980). Cover of the Equals song. Makes more extensive use of the police-siren guitar line, and also adds the warning siren of a train.
- The Clash, 'White Riot' (CBS 5058, 1977). Opens with an old-fashioned police siren; an alarm bell sounds for the fade.
- Clay, Tom, 'What the World Needs Now is Love/Abraham, Martin and John' (Mo-west MW5002F, 1971). Includes recording of J.F. Kennedy assassination. Police sirens can be heard.
- The Equals, 'Police on my Back' (President, 1967). Principal guitar line mimics the sound of a police siren.
- The Exploited, 'Cop Cars', *Punks Not Dead* (Secret SEC1, 1981). Starts with a genuine police siren; a guitar mimicking a police siren; and Wattie Buchan singing 'me-ma, me-ma, cops are after me'. The fade has a different version of the police-siren guitar.
- Fatback Band, 'King Tim III (Personality Jock), XII' (Southbound, 1979). First recorded rap.
- Frankie Goes to Hollywood, 'Two Tribes' (Zang Tuum Tumb ZTAS3, 1984). Begins with an air-raid siren and public service announcement about nuclear attack.
- Gorillaz, 'El Manana', *Demon Days* (Parlophone 3116911, 1995). Begins and ends with a police siren.
- Grandmaster Flash, 'The Adventures of Grandmaster Flash on the Wheels of Steel' (Sugarhill SHL557, 1981). The first record to showcase the scratching and sequencing skills of the hip-hop DJ.
- Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, 'The Message' (Sugarhill SHL117, 1982). Closes with street sounds, including a police siren.
- Human Resource, 'Dominator' (R&S RSUK4, 1991). Three minutes in a *very* loud alarm bell goes off.

- Hunting, Russell, 'The Steamboat' (Columbia, late 19th c.). Monologist impersonates a steamboat.
- Ice-T, *Home Invasion* (Priority Records RSYN1, 1993). See footnote 40.
- Jones, Grace, 'Pull Up The Bumper' (Island WIP6696, 1981). Intro features car horns, which return for the 'pull up/to it/don't drive/through it' section.
- The Kinks, 'Mr. Churchill Says', *Arthur (Or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire)* (Pye NSPL 18317, 1969). An air-raid siren introduces the up-tempo section of the song.
- The Klaxons, 'Atlantis to Interzone', *Myths of the Near Future* (Polydor RINSELP1, 2007). Opens with rave-era sirens, which return to punctuate each chorus and verse.
- Kraftwerk, 'Autobahn', *Autobahn* (Philips 6305231, 1974). Opens with the sound of car horns. They return at around 10 minutes, in the break.
- KRS-One, 'Sound of Da Police', *Return of the Boom Bap* (Jive CHIP 142, 1993). Chorus chants the 'Whoop! Whoop!' sound of an American police siren.
- Lethal Bizzle, 'Police on my Back' (V2 VVR50444937, 2007). Grime version of the Equals song, samples the police-siren riff of the Clash version and adds genuine police siren sound effects.
- L.L. Cool J., 'I'm Bad' (Def Jam 6508567, 1987). Chorus combines scratching; L.L. Cool J. claiming 'I'm bad'; police announcements; and a wailing police siren.
- 'London Street Sounds', (Columbia, 1928). The earliest known sound effects record.
- Madness, 'Night Boat to Cairo', *Work, Rest and Play EP* (Stiff BUY 71, 1980). Opens with a fog horn.
- Mantronix, 'King of the Beats' (b-side of 'Join Me Please) (Capitol V15386, 1988). Begins with a siren.
- Mötörhead, 'Emergency', *Ace of Spades* (Bronze BRO106, 1980). Air-raid siren opens and closes the song.
- N.W.A., 'Gangsta Gangsta', *Straight Outta Compton* (Priority BRLP534, 1988). Starts with a police siren, which returns to back each chorus.
- Pet Shop Boys, 'Suburbia' (Parlophone R6140, 1986). Features a police siren among many other sound effects (mostly dogs barking).
- Pink Floyd, 'Time', *Dark Side of the Moon* (Harvest SHVL 804, 1973). Clocks and their alarms for the first 50 seconds.
- Public Enemy, *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold us Back* (Def Jam 4624151, 1988). 'Countdown to Armageddon' opens the album with an air-raid siren and a live crowd who have brought their own sirens with them. 'Rebel Without a Pause', 'Cold Lampin' with Flavor', and 'Night of Living Baseheads' all have distorted instruments that wail and howl like sirens.
- Public Enemy, *Fear of a Black Planet* (Def Jam 466281, 1990). Both 'Anti-Nigger Machine' and 'Burn Hollywood Burn' feature police sirens. Also includes 'Fight the Power'.
- Rascal, Dizzee, 'Sirens' (XL XLS272CD, 2007). Chorus states, 'I can hear the sirens coming'. So can we, they are all over the track.
- Royal House, 'Can You Party?' (Champion CHAMP79, 1988). The sirens arrive 2.20 and return 4.48.
- Roxy Music, 'Street Life' (Island WIP 6173, 1973). Intro played on car horns. When this riff returns it is played by a 'proper' brass section.
- The Ruts, 'Babylon's Burning' (Virgin VS271, 1979). Opening combines police siren and alarm bell.
- Slipknot, 'Pulse of the Maggots', *Vol 3: (The Subliminal Verses)* (Roadrunner RR83888, 2004). Opens like *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold us Back*, with an air-raid siren and live crowd. The siren returns at 1.40 and resurfaces throughout.

- Sugarhill Gang, 'Rapper's Delight' (Sugarhill SHL101, 1979). First rap hit.
- Sweet, 'Blockbuster' (RCA 2305, 1973). Air-raid siren for first 30 seconds of the song. Returns, more quietly, at 1.20 for the line 'the cops are out'. Comes back for the fade.
- Tenor Saw, 'Ring the Alarm' (Techniques 070929, 1985). Doesn't feature any sound effects, but great dancehall track about bell ringing.
- U.K. Subs, 'C.I.D.' (City NIK5, 1978). Police-siren guitar solo.
- Varèse, Edgard, *Hyperprism* (1923). The music sub-consciously mimics a river siren.
- Varèse, Edgard, *Ionisation* (1929—31). Orchestrated for percussion and sirens.
- Wonder, Stevie, 'Living for the City', *Inner Versions* (Motown STMA8011, 1973). The drama that appears during the break in the song features various street sounds, including a police siren.
- Yankovic, Weird Al, 'Christmas at Ground Zero', *Polka Party!* (Scotti Brothers, 1986). Features an air-raid siren.

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