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AN AUDIENCE RESEARCH REPORT

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LR/67/358

SOME MORE ABOUT TASTES IN
LIGHT, ENTERTAINMENT, MUSIC

British Broadcasting Corporation
1967

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MUSICAL TASTES

1. Five years ago in the course of lengthy interviews with a large sample of the adult population, several questions were put in an attempt to gauge people's musical tastes (see the report 'Music' LR/63/358). Though providing some statistical information in an area that had, perhaps surprisingly, not attracted much attention from social scientists, it revealed once again that if a subject is complex ordinary simple questioning methods are inadequate to elicit precise and unambiguous replies.

2. Amongst the voluminous results were the following:

Kinds of Music	Particularly liked by %	Liked by %	Disliked by %	Particularly disliked by %
Light Music	24	61	13	2
Military Bands	24	36	38	2
Dance Music	22	62	14	2
Musicals	15	65	18	2
Pop Music	14	38	36	12
Brass Bands	12	37	43	8
Country Dance Music	11	50	36	3
Orchestral Concerts	9	36	49	6
Opera	9	34	43	14
Jazz	7	32	41	20
Chamber Music	1	12	55	32

The difficulty in using results such as these stems both from the considerable problem of classifying, in universally understandable terms, anything so heterogeneous as music; and equally from the vagueness or 'multi-dimensionality' of such a word as 'like'.

LIGHT MUSIC AS BACKGROUND

3. With 'light music' both these difficulties comes to a head. It is almost universally 'liked', but in this connection the word 'liked' could hardly be more indefinite in meaning. Its meaning may well be conditioned by the uses to which the listener puts light music and the needs he is attempting to gratify by listening to it. There can be little doubt that, above all, light music is used as a background - bringing gratifications such as filling the vacuum of loneliness, diverting the mind from thought (or its absence, as Professor Galbraith has suggested in another context), lightening the spirits, and so on. Indeed most listening to light music in the daytime on weekdays is of a kind which listeners are quite prepared to admit is 'not very attentive'. Even the 'serious music' on the Music Programme is widely used as background. (See 'The Measurement of Audience Attentiveness' LR/63/2452, and 'The Music Programme' LR/66/267).
Furthermore,

different kinds of 'Light music' are, it seems, found appropriate for background listening in different situations. This was demonstrated in another enquiry ('The Caroline Phenomenon' LR/65/213), from which the following is an extract:

Kinds of music programmes desired by those who want background radio when:	Pop %	Light Music %	Serious Music %
Getting up	34	42	4
At dinner or tea	35	58	4
Alone at home (housework)	47	52	5
Spending an average evening at home	41	34	13
At a party	82	75	-
When friends drop in	68	42	3
Doing odd jobs out-of-doors	64	43	2
In a car	76	19	4

4. Though there must of course be occasions when (and people by whom) light music is not primarily used as background, there is little documentary evidence on this point. The 'Pop' addict presumably pays close attention when listening to 'Pick of the Pops' or 'Easy Beat' just as the devotees of the more 'serious' light music no doubt give most of their attention to 'Friday Night is Music Night'. But in so far as 'familiarity' is one of the most attractive characteristics of 'Light music' - it is as 'comfortable' as an old shoe - it is ipso facto less necessary to listen to it attentively. Many passages in a well-loved book can, at the tenth reading, conveniently be skipped without losing the thread. So can 'bits' of a well-known piece of music, and for this reason alone it is likely that any 'attentiveness ratings' for light music will nearly always be comparatively low. But when people claim to 'like' a certain kind of music, it may legitimately be surmised that most of them probably mean that they like it 'when they are listening properly' i.e. attentively. Future research will, presumably, disclose how far this is so but until this has been done, the meaning to be attached to a person's statement that he 'likes' a certain kind of music must remain uncertain.

CLASSIFYING LIGHT MUSIC

5. The extremely wide range of 'light music' also presents a problem. 'Familiar operatic overtures and arias' can be considered light music and so can 'Pop'. What is worse, many of its sub-divisions defy easy description in terms which the public would recognise. To prepare for a possible thorough inquiry into 'Light Music', some preliminary studies were made over a year ago in an attempt to arrive at a meaningful classification system, based on evidence collected from the public itself. They resulted in a list of twelve categories which, as they seemed worth further study, were included in an 'omnibus survey' carried out early in 1966*.

* The enquiry, which was conducted in the early months of last year, involved the distribution of questionnaires by post to some 11,250 persons. 10,000 were selected from the electoral registers of Great Britain and 69% of the questionnaires sent to them were duly returned by post. A sample of the non-respondents were, however, followed up and interviewed personally with the result that the response rate was, in effect, raised to 77%. The remaining 1,250 were a sample of 15-20 year olds and completed questionnaires were obtained from over 1,000 of them. The questions relating to wave-lengths were confined to 4,000 of the 10,000 elector questionnaires and to a corresponding proportion of those distributed to minors.

Tastes in Light (Entertainment) Music

	Distribution of Replies							Total	Index (Max +100 Min -100)
	Like very much (a)	Like (b)	(a&b)	In- diff- erent	Dis- like (c)	Dis- like very much (d)	(c&d)		
	%	%			%	%			
Music and songs from musicals since the last war, like 'My Fair Lady', 'South Pacific' or 'Salad Days'	32	48	80	14	5	1	6	100	+54
Music and songs from older musicals by people like Ivor Novello and Noel Coward and other light operettas of the 30's and 40's	17	42	59	24	14	3	17	100	+28
Earlier light operas like those of Gilbert and Sullivan and Edward German	10	29	39	31	23	7	30	100	+ 6
Overtures and well-known excerpts from operas	8	24	32	31	26	11	37	100	- 4
Light orchestral pieces like Strauss waltzes and Souza marches	13	41	54	27	15	4	19	100	+22
Dance tunes of the 30's and 40's like those of George Gershwin, Jerome Kern and Irving Berlin	18	51	69	22	8	1	9	100	+39
Traditional Jazz	5	20	25	30	30	15	45	100	-15
The latest 'pop' tunes	15	29	44	25	19	14	33	100	+ 6
The more tuneful 'pop' numbers of recent years	13	48	61	23	12	4	16	100	+27
Numbers from modern folk-song groups	10	39	49	31	16	4	20	100	+18
'Old Time' Dance music	13	42	55	26	15	4	19	100	+23
Negro Spirituals	5	25	30	35	26	9	35	100	- 5

6. The relevant section of the questionnaire reads as follows:

"Now here is a list of some different kinds of light popular music and songs. Please put a tick against any which you like, and a cross against any which you dislike. Just leave blank any kind about which you have no feelings one way or another".

Then followed twelve categories, shown in the table opposite.

One objective of this exercise was to provide evidence of the clarity and comprehensiveness of the categories. A scrutiny of the 'internal consistency' of the results suggests that most of them are reasonably clear and unambiguous and it is because of this that it has been thought worth while to issue the results in this report. Nevertheless further improvements will have to be introduced before the classification can be regarded as wholly satisfactory. Furthermore, the potentially important dimension of 'medium of performance' has not been dealt with at all e.g. whether the music is played by a brass band, cinema organs, 'light orchestras', dance bands, 'piano and rhythm section', etc.

RESULTS

7. The table presents the answers of the full sample, the column on the extreme right summarising them in the form of index numbers. These indices, which have a maximum of +100 and a minimum of -100, have been arrived at by awarding 'points' as follows:

2 ticks	+1 point
1 tick	+ $\frac{1}{2}$ point
1 cross	- $\frac{1}{2}$ point
2 crosses	-1 point

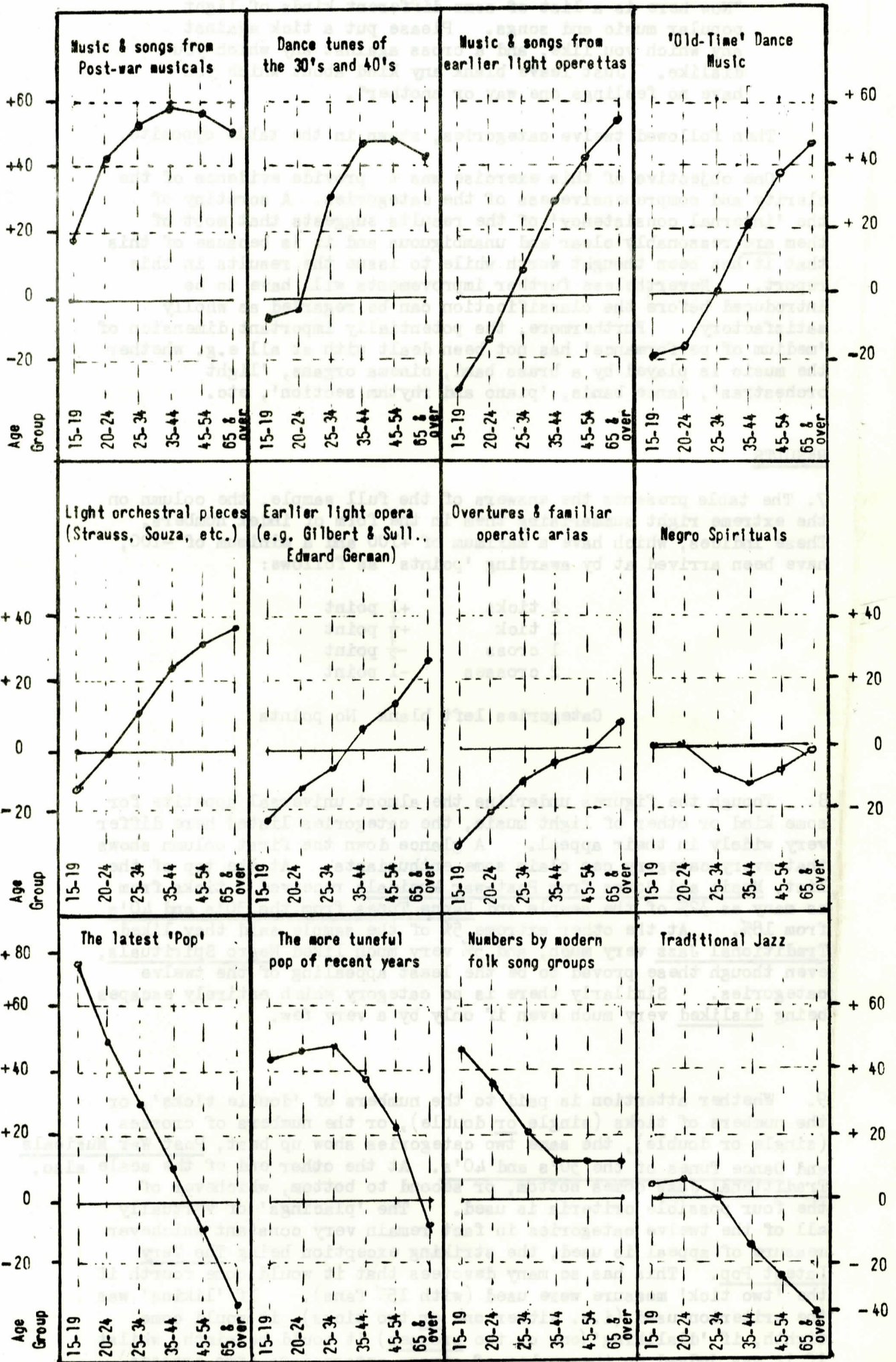
Categories left blank No points

8. Though the figures underline the almost universal appetite for some kind or other of light music, the categories listed here differ very widely in their appeal. A glance down the first column shows that every category can claim some enthusiasts. At the top of the list, Music and Songs from Post-war Musicals received 2 ticks from as many as 32% of the sample and Dance Tunes from the 30's and 40's from 18%. At the other extreme 5% of the sample said they liked Traditional Jazz very much, and 5% very much liked Negro Spirituals, even though these proved to be the least appealing of the twelve categories. Similarly there is no category which entirely escapes being disliked very much even if only by a very few.

9. Whether attention is paid to the numbers of 'double ticks', or the numbers of ticks (single or double), or the numbers of crosses (single or double), the same two categories show up best, Post War Musicals and Dance Tunes of the 30's and 40's. At the other end of the scale also, Traditional Jazz comes bottom, or second to bottom, whichever of the four possible criteria is used. The 'placings' of virtually all of the twelve categories in fact remain very constant whichever measure of appeal is used, the striking exception being The Very Latest Pop. This has so many devotees that it would come fourth if the 'two tick' measure were used (with 15% fans). If 'liking' was the criterion used (i.e. either one or two ticks), it would come eighth, if 'disliking' (one or two crosses) it would be ninth, whilst if it was judged on the number of strong antagonists (two crosses) it would be eleventh.

AGE AND LIGHT MUSIC TASTES

Index numbers (see para. 7) showing the extent to which persons in different age groups 'like' or 'dislike' each of the twelve categories of light music studied.



AGE AND TASTE

10. The light music tastes of various sections of the community differ widely, the most extreme differences, not surprisingly, being associated with age. As the diagram opposite clearly reveals, only Negro Spirituals shows no age relationship. Seven of the other eleven categories exhibit a generally rising appeal with increasing age; though Music and Songs from Post-war Musicals, fairly popular even with the 15-19 year olds, show little further increase after the age of 30. The other four categories completely reverse the trend, The Very Latest Pop showing the steepest gradient of all. It is almost universally liked by the 15-19 year old age group and cordially disliked by most of those over 50. It is noticeable that the music of the listener's adolescence seems to retain its appeal in his later life, e.g. 15-19 year olds, more than any others, like contemporary 'pop', The More Tuneful Pop of recent years continues to appeal to those up to 34, Dance Tunes of the 30's and 40's appeal most to those in the 34-54 age range (who were growing-up at the time) and tails off amongst those over 65, and so on. Such a simple hypothesis is clearly quite inadequate, on its own, to 'explain' light music tastes but it may perhaps go part of the way.

EDUCATION AND TASTE

11. As to terminal education age, virtually all the categories appeal more strongly to the less well-educated than to those with higher education. This result was only to be expected in the light of earlier enquiries, the tastes of the better educated tending to lie in the more complex and sophisticated fields of 'Serious music'. Thus Earlier Light Operas and Overtures and Excerpts from Operas stand out as being the only ones 'liked more' by the small minority of the population who continued their full-time education beyond the age of 15 than by those who completed their education earlier. The same tendency is visible in the case of Traditional Jazz but for this category it is a case of reducing disliking rather than increasing liking.

FACTORS DETERMINING TASTE

12. This analysis in terms of age and terminal education age confirms what would no doubt be widely expected, viz. that light music tastes are at least in part determined by factors that may perhaps be respectively labelled 'nostalgia' and 'degree of sophistication'. In the hope of clarifying the determinants of taste more precisely, a detailed analysis of the data was carried out, using the technique known as factor analysis. This examined the interrelationship of the likes and dislikes expressed by informants in the survey in order to group the categories in a way which achieves the maximum simplification of the complex pattern. Factor analyses are rarely

simple to interpret and the present instance proved no exception. Nevertheless the analysis did provide one useful result, in that it suggested that it would be reasonable to group the twelve categories as follows:

- Group 1: Overtures and well-known excerpts from operas
Earlier light operas, like those of Gilbert and Sullivan or Edward German
Light orchestral pieces like Strauss waltzes and Souza marches
- Group 2: The latest pop tunes
The more tuneful pop numbers of recent years
- Group 3: Dance tunes of the 30's and 40's like those of Gershwin, Kern and Berlin
Music and songs from older musicals etc.
Music and songs from musicals since the last war
'Old Time' dance music
- Group 4: Negro spirituals
Numbers by modern folk song groups
Traditional Jazz

Those who 'like' (or 'dislike') any one category in a group tend also to 'like' (or 'dislike') the others in the same group. Those who 'like' Group 1, 'dislike' Group 2. Those who 'like' or 'dislike' Groups 3 and 4 do so irrespective of their likes or dislikes of the other two groups.

13. It would be tempting to speculate about what brings the categories in a group together - what they have in common - but this must await further research. The most fruitful research in the future is likely to concentrate on studies of the 'attributes' of pieces of music to which listeners respond favourably or unfavourably e.g. its 'melodiousness', its rhythmic pattern, its 'mood' or 'variety of mood', its degree of complexity, and so on. A little information on this comes from another survey ('The Public for Serious Music' LR/64/1378) which probed the attributes informants chose as describing their preferred musical works. Of the twelve listed, by far the most commonly endorsed attribute was 'melodic or tuneful' (chosen by three out of four). Next came 'rhythmical' and 'exciting to listen to', both of which were chosen by over 50%. Others fairly widely selected were 'not too advanced', 'colourfully orchestrated' and 'varied in mood'. Most of these descriptive attributes relate primarily to 'serious music', and had the enquiry been restricted to 'light music', the paramountcy of melody would undoubtedly have been even more pronounced.

CONCLUSION

14. The small amount of new material presented in this report can, of course, do little to answer what are probably the most widely asked questions about the listening and viewing public's appetite for light (entertainment) music. These questions almost invariably involve predictions - usually of audience size - e.g. 'If so many people like rather square, slightly old-fashioned music, why don't more of them listen to it when we broadcast it?' 'Why doesn't Radio 390 attract more listeners?' 'Why does the latest pop generally draw larger audiences than less sharp material?' and so on. Before they can be answered satisfactorily further research is needed into the use listeners make of light music programmes and the gratifications they may satisfy; to say nothing of technical studies to find the most rewarding ways of asking questions about tastes and appetites in general. Perhaps the only conclusion to be drawn so far is that, as most types of light music start with the advantage of having fairly wide acceptability, it is likely that the size of the audience is mainly determined by other factors which help a broadcast to satisfy the needs of the public (for instance its suitability as a background to other activities in given sets of circumstances).

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Medium of performance

Brass band

Antenna organ

light string orchestra of Grand Hotel

more elaborate orchestration of Friday Night.

Color nos

big band

Groups

intimate piano groups