

Approaching the BBC News hourly countdown from a fresh new angle, the piece addresses concerns with previous versions of the music raised on the BBC News website's own 'Have your Say' page, as well as public perception of the channel illustrated in a BBC Trust Review of News and Current Affairs. Though discussing the 2006 update to the countdown, I believe the online comments do give an insight into how it could be improved, especially considering the music has remained unchanged (aside from various remixes) since 1999 and David Lowe's original version.

In general, the comments are positive - Lowe's music is respected greatly by the public - but criticisms include complaints of the 'dated' nature of the music, with one user commenting on the lack of 'any sort of decent harmonic progression or melody'.¹ Further research into audience perception of the BBC News channel revealed that although the BBC is seen as synonymous with the news in the UK, output is generally perceived to have one tone/personality. The formality of the BBC's news output, an overly 'serious' approach, can be a barrier for 18-24 year olds and the socioeconomic group C2DEs, though this approach is highly regarded by the vast majority of viewers. Surveyed members of the public in the 18-24 and 25-39 age brackets called BBC News coverage 'drab and outdated', and 'lack[ing] impact'.²

Combining these public viewpoints provides a picture of BBC News as a trustworthy, respected source but one that often does not meet the demands of younger viewers, lacking excitement, impact and creativity.

This new piece attempts to combat some of these perceptions. Though retaining a formal tone at its heart to accompany the serious subject matter of 24-hour news, the work injects a contemporary feel by moving away from the Lowe's analogue synthesisers and making use of timbres inspired by the soundworld of current blockbuster films. Orchestral elements of the piece draw inspiration from the work of Hans Zimmer and Steve Jablonsky, attempting to bring Hollywood action-style soundtrack elements into the countdown to attract disengaged younger and C2DE audiences to BBC News. The piece also makes use of a 'breakbeat' rhythm synonymous with drum & bass and dance music culture, echoing the funk/soul roots of the sample whilst also providing a link to contemporary underground and urban musics.

A tanpura drone is integrated into the fabric of the music, forming part of the swirling string and synthesiser texture. Its inclusion acknowledges the near 5% of the population of England and Wales identifying as Indian or South Asian³ in an attempt to partly fulfil the BBC's Royal Charter requirement to 'reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities' of the UK.⁴ (Note: It was important not to include Asian elements simply for the sake of the music appearing more diverse: the tanpura forms the base of its ensemble in Indian music and is an integral part of the texture of the countdown).

In addition, the work retains the well known and loved 'pips' counting down to the hour. These pips have become synonymous with the BBC and widely used across TV and

¹ 'Have Your Say', BBC News Website (2006) <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/talking_point/4992088.stm>

² BBC Trust Review of News and Current Affairs (2014)

<http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/our_work/news_current_affairs/audience_research.pdf>

³ 'Ethnicity and National Identity in England and Wales: 2011', Office for National Statistics

<<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/articles/ethnicityandnationalidentityinenglandandwales/2012-12-11>>

⁴ Royal Charter for the Continuance of the British Broadcasting Corporation (2016)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/577829/57964_CM_9365_Charter_Accessible.pdf>

radio, and thus a sense of continuity with other BBC services would be maintained if this piece were to be used on the news channel (Note: The pips also double as a 5 second cue for the news anchors). In addition to the pips, a stopclock is used to add urgency and build tension as we approach the 00:00 mark and the beginning of the headlines. The harmony is fairly straightforward, yet more dynamic and fluid than the previous countdown theme, with harmonic rhythm increasing as we approach the climax to further build excitement.