Music While You Work:
The Social Origins and Meaning of Tannoyed Music in Factories

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Twice a day there was a reprieve from the grey sameness of a working day: Muzac... it was... keenly looked forward to:
Val: It's the best part of the day when the records come on.
Stella: 12 o'clock! Jimmy Young! They missed him twice last week!
(from an ethnography of working in a tobacco factory by Pollert [1981, p.132])

For too long the role of music in the social relations and experience of factory life has been either ignored or treated with lofty disdain by industrial sociologists (Korczynski, 2003). This paper embraces the task of taking music's role at work seriously by examining the introduction of tannoyed radio music in factories in Britain in the second world war. It also examines the evidence on what the introduction of this form of music meant for the experience of factory work in this period.

Taking a long historical overview of music at work (.i.e. music within the aural space of the labour process), the second world war can be seen as a critical point of change. In pre-industrialised Britain many workers in many occupation sang as they laboured (e.g. see Thomas, 1999, pp.156-159): music and work were mutually constituted. With industrialisation employers (in factories and beyond), as part of the process of the imposition of rationalised discipline in the labour process, banned musical expression at work. Although there is evidence of exceptions to this opposition to music at work by employers, and there is evidence of resistance by workers to this policy, overall music and work became temporally, spatially and ultimately socially, separated from each other. This separation was maintained until the second world war when there was a large-scale and sudden introduction of tannoyed radio music into factories (Nicholas, 1996). This introduction of tannoyed radio music was encouraged by the state through government policy and through the introduction of a programme (Music While You Work) by the BBC which was specifically designed to be listened to within factories. Following the example set by state-run munitions factories, many employers also readily adopted the practice of playing Music While You Work in factories. The USA government and many USA employers also followed suit, readily adopting the policy of introducing tannoyed radio music into factories (Jones and Schumacher, 1992).

A number of key questions arise:

- Why did the state encourage the introduction of tannoyed music into factories in the second world war? Was the key driving force an official concern about factory workers' 'morale' or an official concern about output in wartime factories?
- Why did so many employers also introduce tannoyed music into factories?
What did the introduction of tannoyed music mean for the factory workers, many of whom were women who were experiencing factory work for the first time?

The paper will address these important questions by drawing on research carried out under the auspices of a British Academy grant. The research will include an examination of:

- Government records held at the Public Record Office;
- BBC archives pertaining to *Music While You Work*;
- Oral history records held within the Mass-Observation archives and within the Imperial War Museum archives.

References