

Musical Styles

Anna Stanley - Class of 2023- Psychology

Baker Street was a 1965 musical featuring lyrics by Marian Grudeff and Raymond Jessell, additional numbers composed by Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick, and orchestrated mainly by Don Walker (Suskin). *Baker Street* follows a typical musical theatre sound, but it makes use of an interesting orchestration to give its songs a unique yet unified sound. The songs of *Baker Street* are generally upbeat, and represent the stories they are trying to tell through both lyrics and use of different colors and melodies.

Baker Street's orchestration utilizes a combination of the traditional string sound commonly associated with older musicals and a heavy woodwind presence, following the typical style of orchestrator Don Walker, as described by scholar Steven Suskin. There are many instances with flowing melodic lines played back by the violins, and transitions to lighter, more spoken sections with lots of instrumental interjections and emphases. This style is heard in many songs in *Baker Street*, such as "It's So Simple" and "I'd Do it Again". The use of reed colors gives the songs a charming and upbeat feel, while the more traditional string-dominated sections give a sense of contrast within the different sections of a song. There are also ballad style songs with a much bigger emphasis on the typical string sounds and smooth melodies, such as "Finding Words for Spring", "What a Night This is Going to Be", and "A Married Man" (Suskin). Interestingly, Don Walker utilizes a harp for Baker Street's pit, with harp arpeggios introducing and concluding "A Married Man", as well as being used to signify a romantic connection in a section of the song "Letters." Walker uses other creative instrumentation in *Baker Street*, such as having percussion imitate the clicking sound of a rushing horse and buggy in "Pursuit." Since *Baker Street* is centered around the adventures of Sherlock Holmes and Watson, there are some songs occurring during tense moments, such as "I Shall Miss You" and "Pursuit", that are able to build an ominous atmosphere through the use of the bassoon tone, a minor key, dissonance, and biting brass interjections.

Though *Baker Street* is definitely not a vaudeville inspired musical and does not feature brass as heavily, the brass is used in suitable moments, such as the jolly song "Jewelry" sung by jewelry-stealing culprits that features a trombone melody, a jazzy interjection, and a triumphant trombone gliss. Trumpets are also used as a sort of motif in "I'm in London Again", playing bell tones reminiscent of those that come from the Big Ben to symbolize London. In Irene's in-universe performance before this song, she sings a comical song about the Wild West with trumpets playing a "western" melody while wood blocks are used to create the effect of horse hooves running.

The best example of all these styles rolled into one is the song "Letters", wherein Irene sings about different love letters she has received, with the mood changing for each distinct letter she has received from a different lover. This song opens with a beautiful flute note, representing Irene, and she sings a melody holding out long notes at the end as instruments, particularly strings and reeds, add flourishes during these drawn out notes. It goes into a section with a tambourine line meant to evoke a Latin style as she sings about the next person. At the point that she mentions the letter is from the King, a royal brass line is played. Here the western style from Irene's earlier performance is brought back as she then sings about a letter

from her lover in Wyoming, utilizing a comical American cowboy accent and dialect throughout with lyrics such as “I bless the shinin’ day when you was born” (Grudeff). The song functions as a list song of her different lovers, and it ends with the man most important to the plot going forward, Captain Gregg. His letter is introduced with a snare roll along with a poignant string and harp feature that functions as a signifier of the emotional importance of Captain Gregg compared to the other men listed. “Letters” is able to effectively tell a story and move the musical along through both its actual lyrics and the stylistic musical choices that were made, providing a great example of the musical team’s talent in telling the story of *Baker Street*.

Works Cited:

Grudeff, Marian, et al. *Baker Street, : A Musical Adventure of Sherlock Holmes*. 1st ed., Doubleday, 1966.

Suskin, Steven. *The Sound of Broadway Music: A Book of Orchestrators and Orchestrations*. Oxford University Press, 2009.