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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

MUSICAL NARRATIVE AND CULTURAL CONTEXT  
IN THE ANIMATED MINISERIES  
*OVER THE GARDEN WALL*

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Music

Chloe Shekinah Resler

College of Performing and Visual Arts  
School of Music  
Music History and Literature

May 2022

This Thesis by: Chloe Shekinah Resler

Entitled: *Musical Narrative and Cultural Context in the Animated Miniseries Over the Garden Wall*

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Master of Music in College of Performing and Visual Arts in School of Music, Program of Music History and Literature.

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## ABSTRACT

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*Over the Garden Wall*, a television miniseries that aired in 2014 on Cartoon Network, is a distinctly American fantasy in the young adult genre. It is comprised of ten episodes, each set in a different historical period. The music of the series was written and performed by The Blasting Company and drew from a variety of historical influences, including Sacred Harp singing, ragtime, early jazz, Stephen Foster, Balkan folk music, and classic cartoons. The music serves several purposes throughout the miniseries: it helps set each episode in its respective historical period, aids in character development, and moves the narrative forward. Additionally, the consistent musical referencing of classic cartoons generates a feeling of familiarity for the teenage audience, and assists in transmitting the lessons of *Over the Garden Wall*. Ultimately, the miniseries contains many valuable themes for people of all ages, including the facing of mortality and the importance of family.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION, REVIEW OF LITERATURE, AND MUSICAL CONTEXTS

#### **Introduction**

*Over the Garden Wall* is a television miniseries that aired on Cartoon Network as a Halloween special in November 2014, and met with great enthusiasm, winning an Emmy award in 2015.<sup>1</sup> The show, a thoroughly American fantasy, drew inspiration from fairy tales, classic animation, and a wide variety of elements from historical and contemporary popular culture. It featured characters wrestling with such universal folkloric themes of mortality, danger, a long journey, and coming of age. Its ten episodes are set in a liminal space redolent of various periods of American history, and exude a kind of timelessness even as seen through the eyes of the teenage protagonist Wirt. The music of the series, written and performed by The Blasting Company under the direction of creator Patrick McHale, serves many purposes. Many songs featured in the series are diegetic; however, even when pieces are not part of the setting, music is far more than background: it helps to indicate the historical period of each vignette, aids in character development, and moves the narrative forward.

*Over the Garden Wall* is a remarkably rich literary work, dealing with themes pertinent to young adults, but appealing to those of all ages. Despite its popularity and its depth of artistry, it has been overlooked in scholarly musical literature. The music in *Over the Garden Wall* draws on a variety of historical references, and is intended to meet the young adult audience where they

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<sup>1</sup>"Creative Arts Emmy Awards Winners" (PDF). Television Academy. Retrieved September 12, 2015. <https://www.emmys.com/sites/default/files/Downloads/2015-creative-arts-winners-v1.pdf>

are. These deliberate choices make the transmission of valuable lessons and a beautiful story effortless, and are worthy of analysis.

### **Review of Literature**

*Over the Garden Wall* originally aired over the course of one week on Cartoon Network. It is fully available for viewing on Hulu, and is the primary source for this document. It is comprised of 10 episodes, each with its own title. For the purposes of streamlining, after each episode is introduced in the Summary section, it will be referred to by its number. For example, “Into the Unknown,” the ninth episode, will be referred to as E9. All of the visuals, music, and storylines referenced here can be found in *Over the Garden Wall* and are indicated by time stamps where appropriate.<sup>2</sup> Selections from the series soundtrack were later released in album format, available on streaming services such as Spotify and Apple Music. The soundtrack album is entitled *Over the Garden Wall (Original Television Soundtrack)*, and includes the titles listed in the table below.<sup>3</sup> Not all of the songs on the soundtrack album appear in the same form in the show. For example, “Send Me a Peach” is dominated by Jack Jones’ vocal performance on the album, but only the instrumental plays during the show. Similarly, many pieces of music in the show do not appear on the album. Nevertheless, the album is a logical starting place for naming, contextualizing, and discussing important songs accurately when they appear in the show. The soundtrack appears in the order following:

- 1) Prelude
- 2) Into the Unknown
- 3) You Have Beautiful Eyes

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<sup>2</sup>*Over the Garden Wall*, created by Patrick McHale (2014; Cartoon Network Studios/Warner Bros. Domestic Television Distribution), Hulu.

<sup>3</sup>Justin Rubenstein and others, *Over the Garden Wall (Original Television Soundtrack)* performed by the Blasting Company (Cartoon Network, 2016), digital release.



- 4) Pottsville C. M.
- 5) Patient is the Night
- 6) Adelaide Parade
- 7) Money for School
- 8) Ms. Langtree's Lament
- 9) Potatoes and Molasses
- 10) Off to Bed
- 11) The Beast is Out There
- 12) The Highwayman
- 13) A Courting Song
- 14) Endicott Manor
- 15) The Journey Begins
- 16) Half-Moon River
- 17) McLaughlin Bros. Jug Band
- 18) Over the Garden Wall
- 19) Send Me A Peach
- 20) Adelaide's Trap
- 21) Like Ships
- 22) More Bones to Sort
- 23) Old North Wind
- 24) Forward, Oneroi
- 25) The Fight is Over
- 26) Tiny Star

- 27) Old Black Train
- 28) The Old Mill
- 29) Come Wayward Souls
- 30) Potatus et Molassus
- 31) One is a Bird
- 32) Black Train/End Credits
- 33) The Clouded Annals of History
- 34) Can't You See I'm Lonely
- 35) Shine on Harvest Moon
- 36) Everything is Nice and Fine
- 37) Halloween Halftime- Bonus Track
- 38) Two Old Cat- Bonus Track
- 39) The Jolly Woodsman- Bonus Track
- 40) Tome of the Unknown- Bonus Track

The most important secondary source is *The Art of Over the Garden Wall*. It was created by Patrick McHale, features commentary by Sean Edgar, who organized the book, and was published in September 2017 (hereafter, “the Art book”). The Art book includes notes and many firsthand accounts from McHale and others who worked on the show about the show’s development and concept art, as well as images and music that inspired the team. Each page of the Art book is fully illustrated, often including reference images and small clippings alongside the concept art and the finished art. The book also details the process of creating *Over the Garden Wall* from its precursor, a brief, single-episode vignette called *Tome of the Unknown*, through its airing. *Tome of the Unknown* aired in 2013 and generated the mood and setting for

*Over the Garden Wall*, although very little of its content was retained. The Art book provides an invaluable glimpse into the goals and process of the show’s creators, and how the show interacts with music.

Interviews published online by newspapers and magazines—including the *Los Angeles Times*, *TV Guide*, and *The Mary Sue*—also provided information about the musical inspiration the creators drew from during the process of creating the show. Members of the Blasting Company were not interviewed themselves, and therefore most of the information shared about the musical process came directly from McHale. Journal articles provided necessary background information on some of the styles used throughout the series, including Sacred Harp singing.

### **Musical Contexts**

“Pottsville C.M.,” which plays throughout almost the entirety of the barn sequence in “Hard Times at the Huskin’ Bee,” contains the show’s reference to Sacred Harp singing. Sacred Harp singing is a 19th-century style of religious singing that continues in rural American communities. It is typically sung *a capella*, with relative pitch. The tradition first appeared in print in *The Sacred Harp* in Georgia in 1844,<sup>4</sup> a product of the American singing schools and meant for educational purposes. Most formal musical education in late-18<sup>th</sup> century America was in the Northeast, and Sacred Harp singing evolved from that pedagogical impulse, subsequently spreading to the South and Midwest in the 19th century. This practice is also called Shape-Note Singing,<sup>5</sup> based on the technique used to notate the major scale in the 1802 Philadelphia work *The Easy Instructor*. In the shape-note system, the major scale is notated with

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<sup>4</sup>Though the book was published in Georgia, it was printed in Philadelphia—still connected to the Northeastern singing school.

<sup>5</sup>Harry Eskew and Charles Reagan Wilson, “Sacred Harp,” *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Volume 12: Music*, ed. Bill C. Malone (University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 128.

the first through eighth scale degrees in this order: fa sol la fa sol la mi fa.<sup>6</sup> In Sacred Harp singing, it is typical for singers to go through the piece singing the shape note syllables before the lyrics are added, and this practice is present in the soundtrack version of “Pottsville C.M.” as well. Many Sacred Harp texts focus on otherworldly or sacred topics, with particular focus on the afterlife, as do the lyrics of “Pottsville C.M.:

O hie thee forth o'er golden mead  
Yon is the maypole set  
A ribbon to wind thy soul  
And to bind love to thy breast

From flesh removed our chalk footfall  
Tempers this holy ground  
Where timeless spirits meet  
Round the heart of Pottsville town.<sup>7</sup>

“Chalk footfall” is a nod to the fact that the Pottsville residents are skeletons, whose bones have been completely cleaned and are a chalk white. Furthermore, “golden mead,” the maypole, and the concept of a burial ground being a “holy ground” are all themes related to death in various folklores and religions. Sacred harp singing has three general categories, the first of which is the hymn.<sup>8</sup> This is the genre into which “Pottsville C.M.” falls. The remaining genres are fuguing tunes, which resemble a fugue, and anthems, which are not strophic in form.<sup>9</sup>

Sacred Harp may require the most explanation of the source musics, but it certainly isn't the only one. The Blasting Company made use of several other American genres, including jazz and bluegrass. The instrumentation of the background music in both E3 and E6, for example,

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<sup>6</sup>Eskew and Wilson, “Sacred Harp,” 128.

<sup>7</sup>“Pottsville C.M.,” *Over the Garden Wall* (Original Television Soundtrack), the Blasting Company (Cartoon Network, 2016), digital release.

<sup>8</sup>Eskew and Wilson, “Sacred Harp,” 129.

<sup>9</sup>Eskew and Wilson, “Sacred Harp,” 128.

relies heavily on clarinet and brass band timbres that are strongly reminiscent of early jazz. Further, Greg, Wirt's younger brother, is associated with early jazz and ragtime through the songs "Money for School" and "Potatoes and Molasses." In E6, the rhythm section of the frog's band includes a banjo and a bass, which were both present in the first jazz rhythm sections.<sup>10</sup> "Langtree's Lament" also references early jazz, including a simple jazz progression that involves a ii-V-I chord progression. The ii-V-I is perhaps the most iconic progression used in jazz across the decades.

*Over the Garden Wall's* reference to bluegrass comes in the form of Justin Rubenstein's version of "Old Black Train," the only traditional song that plays during the course of the series, with lyrics adjusted to fit the narrative of the miniseries more closely. Every other song was composed specifically for the show. "Old Black Train" is a bluegrass and folk standard with many versions, including those by Woody Guthrie and the Carter Family. The lyrics refer to death, with the train used as a metaphor for death. Some versions are focused on a Christian understanding of death and sin, while others are intended to convey the message that death comes for everyone regardless of status. Rubenstein's version focuses more on the actual journey, which is made to fit the journey that Wirt and Greg take through the unknown. The instrumentation, typical of many bluegrass and folk groups, is a voice and guitar. In traditional folk and bluegrass fashion, "Old Black Train" is strophic in form.

### Summary

*Over the Garden Wall* includes ten episodes, each set in a distinctive pseudo-historical American period. The time periods range from the colonial era to the modern day, with a variety of regional settings also represented. These periods are indicated through visual references and

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<sup>10</sup>Richard Jones-Bamman, "A Brief History of the Banjo," *Building New Banjos for an Old-Time World* (University of Illinois Press, 2017), 42.

musical styles. The creator, Patrick McHale, discussed each influence at length in interviews published online and in the book *The Art of Over the Garden Wall*. Many of the most important pieces heard throughout the miniseries can be found in the album *Over the Garden Wall* (Original Television Soundtrack). Though many of the styles represented throughout the miniseries are familiar to an American audience, some, including Sacred Harp singing, specific Bluegrass references, and early jazz and ragtime, required a brief discussion of context.

CHAPTER II  
SUMMARY AND MUSICAL ANALYSIS  
BY EPISODE

*Over the Garden Wall* is structured as a series of vignettes, taking place in a variety of pseudo-historical settings. These vignettes proceed chronologically through the story, with the exception of the ninth episode, which explains how the two half-brothers Wirt and Greg came to be wandering the Unknown in the first place. The miniseries evokes many different historical Americas, with each episode referencing a different period. After each episode is introduced, they will be referred to by acronym; for example, E1 rather than Episode 1. The presence of Wirt and Greg in this pseudo-historical America creates incongruous interactions, as in the case of final conversation between Wirt and Lorna, a character set in the 17th century in E7. After Lorna is freed from her demon, she intimates that she, perhaps, would welcome further attention from Wirt by saying, “Perhaps I’ll see you again. I hope so” (10:09). Wirt replies, in an utterly modern and insecure, adolescent way, “Smell ya later” (10:11).

McHale has described the series as a quilt,<sup>11</sup> in which each story is totally different in character from the others, but nonetheless forming a cohesive whole. The saga begins by dropping the viewers into the moment that Wirt realizes he and Greg are lost. The vignettes initially appear to have little to do with one another, save the common thread of Wirt and Greg’s attempts to return home, but as the series continues it becomes clear that there are several stories happening at once:

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<sup>11</sup>Patrick McHale and Sean Edgar, *Art of Over the Garden Wall*, ed. Cardner Clark (Milwaukie, OR: Dark Horse Books, 2017), 83.

- 1) The primary story is Wirt and Greg's journey through the woods, searching for a way home;
- 2) The secondary story follows the bluebird Beatrice's attempts to turn herself and her family back into humans after they were cursed by a real bluebird;
- 3) The tertiary story, which ends up resolving the primary story, consists of the attempts of Wirt and Greg to avoid and, subsequently, to defeat the Beast, who turns lost souls into edelwood trees.

Flora and fauna in this landscape share a kind of sentience and awareness with those of other imaginary places. The edelwood trees are trees with crying faces whose branches, when ground, create oil. The Beast is an allegory for death: as he states, "There is no other way. There is only me. There is only the forest, and there is only surrender" (E7, 11:01). Wirt and Greg's journey home is revealed, in the penultimate episode, to symbolize Wirt and Greg's attempts to survive a near-death experience.

### **Episode 1, "The Old Grist Mill"**

The title of Episode 1, which will hereafter be referred to as E1, "The Old Grist Mill," plays on the saying "that's more grist for my mill," which is an idiom referring to the acquisition of practical experience or knowledge that will be useful in the future. The very first introduction the viewer gets to the story and the setting is in the animation accompanying the song which, on the soundtrack, is entitled "Into the Unknown." (The episode by the same title will be referred to as E9, after its introduction here, to avoid confusion.) The lyrics are part of this glimpse as well:



Led through the mist by the milk light of moon  
 All that was lost is revealed  
 Our long bygone burdens, mere echoes of the spring  
 But where have we come and where shall we end?  
 If dreams can't come true, then why not pretend?<sup>12</sup>

In this way some of the principal themes of the show are introduced. The overriding problem of Wirt and Greg's wandering in the forest is present in the first line, as they were figuratively "[l]ed through the mist by the milk light of moon." The stories they become involved in are hinted at, both in the animation that accompanies the lyrics throughout the sequence and in the second and third lines: "All that was lost is revealed/Our long bygone burdens, mere echoes of the spring." There is wordplay on the exploration of mortality in the line "But where have we come and where shall we end," most clearly as a metaphor for the journey the boys take throughout the series, but also poetically referencing that a person's life, and thus a person, can end. The plot twist that they are not in a physical place is suggested in the final line before the chorus begins: "If dreams can't come true, then why not pretend?" The lyrics are vague, leaving the visual scenes to do most of the foreshadowing. Narration over sentimental piano music, similar to late 19th and early 20th-century popular song, follows and evokes the era of silent film and classic movies. As the story itself begins, the audience is introduced to Wirt and Greg, the protagonists, as they realize that they are lost in unfamiliar woods. Soon after, the boys meet both the Woodsman, a rather forbidding figure, and the bluebird Beatrice, and argue about whether they will ask one of them for help.

Patrick McHale has described in interviews that he was inspired by the visuals and the music of Romantic-era opera,<sup>13</sup> and in *E1*, that influence is clear. Richard Wagner, for example,

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<sup>12</sup>"Into the Unknown," *Over the Garden Wall* (Original Television Soundtrack), the Blasting Company (Cartoon Network, 2016), digital release.

<sup>13</sup>Patrick Kevin Day, "Over the Garden Wall Gets Lost in Creator's Imagination," *Los Angeles Times*, October 3 2014, <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/tv/la-et-st-over-the-garden-wall-cartoon-network-20141005-story.html>.

made frequent use of leitmotifs in his operas.<sup>14</sup> The episode sets up many themes that are used as simple leitmotifs during the course of *Over the Garden Wall*; they are clearly identified every place they appear, particularly in the case of “One is a Bird.” As Wirt comes onscreen and begins to recite poetry at 1:54, a clarinet can be heard in the background. It shortly develops into a woodwind ensemble. Woodwinds serve as Wirt’s leitmotif throughout the series, and we learn later on that he in fact plays clarinet. At 2:08, the audience is introduced to the Woodsman, who is accompanied by the minor mode, dark timbres, and theremin that are associated with his character throughout the series. Every time he appears, these sounds accompany him; early in the series, they accompany the Beast as well. (As the series continues, it will become clear that the Woodsman and the Beast have some kind of relationship but are separate characters, with the Beast getting his own auidial motifs, while those of the Woodsman remaining the same.) Beatrice is first seen onscreen at 2:32, where she offers help (or, rather, “help”) to the boys for the first time. Wirt’s reaction to the fact that a bluebird is talking to him indicates to the audience that, although Greg is not having trouble adjusting to the Unknown, it is a new and strange place for Wirt. The audience knows that the setting is surreal and magical in nature from the first few minutes of the first episode after Wirt says, “A bird’s brain isn’t big enough for cognizant speech... I’m just saying you’re weird, like, not normal” (2:49). Musically, Beatrice’s motif in the show is a theme taken from her mother’s lullaby, which is played at Beatrice’s introduction. The lullaby is called “One is a Bird,” and the lyrics are as follows:

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<sup>14</sup>Richard Wagner lived 1813-1883 and was a prominent composer working in opera.

One is a bird  
Two are the trees  
Three is the wind in the leaves  
Four are the stars  
Five with the moon  
Smiling down upon thee.<sup>15</sup>

Beatrice's theme, which is typically played on the piano and is often heard in the background when she is on screen or information is revealed about her, generally consists of the melody of the first three lines. The lyrics are not heard until the penultimate episode.

The Woodsman confronts them, brings them back to his home at the mill, and briefly introduces the Beast and what he does. Throughout E1, wordless vocal ensembles can be heard when the Unknown and the forest are discussed, or in transitions between scenes including dialogue. In E1, these transitions often include short animations and photos of the forest that surrounds the boys. One of these ensembles is present at the moment the boys are formally introduced to the Woodsman. In this scene, there is also an echo of "Come Wayward Souls," the theme that is connected to the Beast. For the duration of E1, this melody plays any time the Beast is mentioned. These ensembles create an eerie ambience, setting the mood of the forest. Wirt and Greg contemplate leaving, and consider knocking the Woodsman out to escape. Wirt moves on, but Greg does not, which comes back to bite them when a dog, who has eaten one of the black turtles seen throughout the series, attacks the mill in search of candy. In the second half of the episode, before the fight with the supernatural black dog, extended techniques reminiscent of classic horror music, such as dampened piano, sighing strings, and random notes, lead into the piece "You Have Beautiful Eyes," the song that dominates the fight scene. Ultimately, the boys destroy the mill, and the Woodsman directs them to follow a path through the woods until they

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<sup>15</sup>"One is a Bird," *Over the Garden Wall* (Original Television Soundtrack), the Blasting Company (Cartoon Network, 2016), digital release.

find a town. During these scenes, the instrumental pieces “The Journey Begins” and “Half Moon River” play, signaling the official start of Wirt and Greg’s quest to find a way home.

### **Episode 2, “Hard Times at the Huskin Bee”**

Episode 2 (which hereafter will be referred to as E2), “Hard Times at the Huskin’ Bee” opens with a vivid evocation of the music of the early talkies. This is the first episode in which the audience encounters the types of stories that will be told throughout the series, using the structure retained from the *Tome of the Unknown*. The initial story involved Wirt and Gregory collecting stories in order to escape the Unknown, and was more a sketch than a finished story.<sup>16</sup> Here, the episode takes place in a rural American town during the harvest season, which we learn both from the visuals throughout and the title, which refers to a gathering of people who all husk corn together as part of a celebration. The episode opens with gorgeous autumnal images and the sentimental fiddle of an American character. The animation matches the pastoral and sentimental musical character of the “Prelude,” which implies that storytelling will follow, according to the historical usage of sentimental music in early film. The boys are traveling down a road in an idyllic rural American scene, with rolling hills, stands of trees, simple wooden buildings, and a bountiful harvest. Wirt and Greg have been walking through the night, and just as they find Pottsville, Greg helps Beatrice out of a bush she has become stuck in. There is a discussion about Beatrice’s nature and she offers to bring them to Adelaide of the Pasture, whom she describes as a good witch who will help the boys return home, although Wirt is skeptical. The American topos is reinforced as Wirt, Greg, and Beatrice encounter pumpkins, a plant native to North America, and wander into a town organized around a large barn. The houses in town are wooden and their outer walls are clapboard, an architectural style that is typical of northeastern America. Though Wirt is hopeful, the town seems to be abandoned, except for enormous turkeys sitting at

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<sup>16</sup>McHale and Edgar, *Art of Over the Garden Wall*, 31.

kitchen tables. Eventually the boys hear music coming from the barn. When the group finally finds the inhabitants of Pottsville, they are introduced with Sacred Harp singing, giving an impression of both religiosity and a very specific musical style that is quintessentially American. The group fails to find help, instead running across Enoch, who is a giant pumpkin head attached to a body made up of many ribbons. He assigns them to "...a few hours of manual labor..." (7:10), a punishment which Wirt finds somewhat pleasant. However, Beatrice feels uneasy. After Beatrice suggests that they might be digging their own graves, Greg finds a skeleton, and a jazz funeral dirge begins playing in the background as the townspeople come back as a parade. The instrumentation distinctly recalls both martial ensembles and vintage New Orleans jazz, prominently featuring both a snare drum playing a military pattern and wailing clarinets. The funeral march that plays is strongly reminiscent of the introduction to "Dead Man Blues," a 1926 recording by Jelly Roll Morton's Red Hot Peppers. It is instantly recognizable as funeral music, and combined with Greg's discovery, Wirt becomes anxious about what might happen to the group. It is revealed that the vegetable people are living skeletons wearing costumes. After they escape, Wirt and Greg decide to follow Beatrice to Adelaide of the Pasture.

### **Episode 3, "Schooltown Follies"**

Episode 3 (which hereafter will be referred to as E3), "Schooltown Follies," opens with a similar shot of the group traveling through the woods. In stark contrast to the undated, but vaguely 19<sup>th</sup> century, rural Americana seen in E2, E3 is firmly rooted in the musical and visual aesthetics of the decades of roughly 1900–20. Miss Langtree<sup>17</sup> sports a distinctly Gibson-girl hairstyle<sup>18</sup> and the S-shape silhouette popular in the first decade of the 20th century, and the

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<sup>17</sup>Named after actress Lilly Langtry, according to *Art of Over the Garden Wall*, though Langtree does not experience the scandals that followed Langtry.

<sup>18</sup>McHale and Edgar, *Art of Over the Garden Wall*, 104.

setting of the episode is a one-room schoolhouse. A sepia photograph of Jimmy Brown, Miss Langtree's troublesome paramour, can be seen hanging above the piano while the characters eat lunch. All of the instrumental pieces in the episode rely on early jazz and syncopated band rhythms, with the clarinet as a lead instrument. The clarinet enjoyed a particular popularity in this style as a lead instrument; it is so characteristic of the first decade of jazz, particularly New Orleans jazz,<sup>19</sup> that it tends to read to audiences as a cue indicating the 1920s.<sup>20</sup> Characters are depicted as playing and singing much of the music throughout much of the episode, suggesting that the majority of this music is audible to Wirt, Greg, and Beatrice. The episode opens with "Adelaide Parade," which is stylistically, dramatically, and situationally reminiscent of "We're Off to See the Wizard" from the 1939 MGM film version of *The Wizard of Oz*, and which is, like its model, reprised throughout the series. Greg decides that he needs to make the world a better place, while Wirt is told by Beatrice that he's a pushover. Greg runs off, and in the process of looking for him, Beatrice and Wirt run across a schoolhouse, in which (for some reason) all the students are different animals. Wirt joins the class, to Beatrice's frustration. Miss Langtree sings "Langtree's Lament," a vocal feature in a simple jazz style which is structured, lyrically, like an alphabet song, and they lay out Miss Langtree's troubles with Jimmy Brown in detail. The central conflicts of the episode are revealed by Miss Langtree as she laments that she is not only having romantic problems, her father is also going to close the school, and there's a wild gorilla on the loose. Miss Langtree's father comes and visits during lunch, interrupting "Potatoes and Molasses"—a nonsense song that will, in the course of the miniseries, become synonymous with

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<sup>19</sup>Jonathan W. Stone, "Inventing Jazz: Jelly Roll Morton and the Sonic Rhetorics of Hot Musical Performance," in *Listening to the Lomax Archive: The Sonic Rhetorics of African American Folksong in the 1930s* (University of Michigan Press, 2021), 133.

<sup>20</sup>Legendary clarinetist Sidney Bechet and the prominent clarinet part in Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* (composed specifically for Ross Gorman, lead clarinetist in the Paul Whiteman Orchestra) represent two entirely different traditions, yet both immediately evoke, for listeners, the sounds of the 1920s.

Greg. He takes the instruments, and as he sleeps in the wood, it is revealed that the real reason he needs to close the school is because he is out of money. Greg steals the instruments and puts on a benefit concert, featuring “Money for School.” The gorilla comes to the benefit concert, and after Wirt tackles him, the head of the costume falls off. Jimmy Brown was stuck in the costume all along after he worked for the circus. Everything is resolved, and Wirt, Greg, and Beatrice continue on their way through the woods.

#### **Episode 4, “Songs of the Dark Lantern”**

“Songs of the Dark Lantern,” Episode 4 (which hereafter will be referred to as E4), opens with a stormy night, an out-of-control horse-drawn cart, and the Woodsman. The episode opens with dramatic piano figures reminiscent of *Sturm und Drang*, featuring rapidly repeating intervals and turmoil in the bass, while the melody above is played in octaves and involves chromatic motion. The cart driver repeatedly yells “The Beast is upon me!” (00:35), and after a sharp turn, the group is thrown off the cart along with a big pile of hay. They land just outside a creepy tavern, and the Woodsman watches as they go inside. Greg goes to get food, and Beatrice is kicked out of the tavern by the Tavern-Keeper. It falls onto Wirt to get directions. Wirt and Greg introduce themselves by their names, but the Tavern-Keeper isn’t satisfied and asks again. The episode is reminiscent of a musical. Everyone is given a fairy-tale archetype, e.g. the Butcher, the Baker, the Tailor, the Toy-Maker, and the Tavern-Keeper. Further, the characters are all implied to have a song attached to their archetype, as Wirt is told at 6:20, “Young Lover, sing us your love song!” Wirt is incorrectly identified at first as the Young Lover and struggles to get directions, but is later given the moniker of Pilgrim. The Highwayman gives a spooky performance, Beatrice hears the Beast singing in the woods, and flies into the woods to get directions. The Highwayman’s song is an homage to Cab Calloway, and sets the scene further

into the realm of cartoons from the 1930s and their adaptations of fairy tales. As the boys are telling stories of their travels, the Tavern-Keeper reveals the deeper nature of the Beast in her song “The Beast is Out There.” Her performance involves stylistic characteristics inspired by Betty Boop shorts meant to be eerie, such as vocal squeaks, a descending sequence, and a choral part in the accompaniment. It is in this episode that the Beast is first shown as a villainous figure, and the Woodsman is revealed to have a connection of some kind with the Beast. Beatrice screams, and Wirt and Greg rescue her on the back of Fred the Horse, who also gives them directions. After they ride away, it is clarified that even though the Beast and the Woodsman are connected, the Beast is manipulating the Woodsman by keeping his daughter’s soul in the lantern the Woodsman carries, and they are separate characters.

### **Episode 5, “Mad Love”**

Episode 5 (which hereafter will be referred to as E5), “Mad Love,” takes place in an enormous eighteenth-century manor. The music of E5 begins with a mock-Classical style string quartet, entitled “Endicott Manor” on the soundtrack, which sets the episode in the American colonial period. Beatrice takes Wirt and Greg to meet Quincy Endicott under the pretense that they are relatives, attempting to steal the two cents necessary to pay the fee to take the ferry to meet Adelaide. Endicott, despite his wealth, is haunted by a ghost that he saw in a portrait, and it is affecting his mental state. The storyline relies upon the suspense of wondering whether Endicott is insane, a classic horror trope, and wondering whether the group has gotten themselves into deep trouble in their quest to acquire two cents. Vaudevillian organ is the instrument heard over the majority of the episode, reminiscent of the 1931 *Dracula* movie. There is also the presence of quiet extended techniques, such as eerie high tones and plucked piano, similar to those heard in “The Old Grist Mill.” Greg, Fred, and Endicott start walking to the



painting, and Beatrice and Wirt trash the parlor in their search for loose change. Wirt and Beatrice get stuck in the armoire, and it is revealed that Beatrice used to be a human. As Greg, Fred, and Endicott are moving towards the painting, Fred begins to be suspicious about the mental state of Endicott and what that might mean for the supposed “ghost.” There are fleeting moments, as Greg and Fred walk with Endicott through the mansion, when they all take a deep breath; these moments are accompanied by quiet and peaceful piano, as in the greenhouse, but are interrupted by the organ. The piano interludes allow for rapid mood shifts between a moment of narrative peace and the suspenseful progression of the plot. Wirt and Beatrice find an entrance into a strange wing of the house and share secrets with one another, while Beatrice’s theme plays, adding depth to both her character and Wirt’s. Endicott’s group approaches the wing, and Fred’s suspicions about Endicott possibly having murdered the lady of the house are aired. However, Margueritte Gray, a French woman who owns a tea company that competes with Endicott’s business, walks in, and both Gray and Endicott faint. They were each so wealthy that their houses had connected without either of them realizing, and they each had thought that the other was a ghost. The references to the horror music culminate with the climax of the episode, and after the resolution, the string quartet returns. Endicott and Gray end up beginning a relationship and send off Wirt, Greg, and Beatrice, with two cents. Fred decides to stay behind. Greg throws the cents into a pond, saying, “I’ve got no sense (cents), no sense at all” (11:02).

### **Episode 6, “Lullaby in Frogland”**

“Lullaby in Frogland,” Episode 6 (which hereafter will be referred to as E6), opens with the group on a steamboat, emblazoned with “McLaughlin Brothers,” floating down a river surrounded by autumnal foliage. Musically, the first piece that plays is “McLaughlin Bros. Jug Band,” in the style of other jug bands, which are bands influenced by jazz and the blues,

incorporating a mixture of conventional and homemade instruments. It is quickly followed by “Adelaide Parade”— this time with Wirt’s enthusiastic participation. Beatrice is sighing frequently and is distracted, and the boat is full of frogs dressed in elegant turn-of-the-century attire. Wirt and Greg are chased around the boat because they embarked without paying the fee, and so they disguise themselves underneath an enormous coat and a bass drum with Greg’s frog as the head. During this chase scene, “Send Me A Peach” plays as a barbershop quintet, whose singers morph their vowels in order to sound like frogs. “Send Me A Peach” on the soundtrack album is sung in a crooning style reminiscent of classic pop music. Even though the song only plays as an instrumental track during the course of the episode as the boys are being chased, it establishes a relaxed mood in the first half of the episode. Wirt and Greg join the frog band, and Wirt accidentally knocks the bassoon player off the boat. In order to prevent being kicked off the boat, Wirt picks up the bassoon and begins to play the song titled “Over the Garden Wall” on the soundtrack. To everyone’s surprise, Wirt plays well. When he is complimented, he comments that bassoon fingering isn’t that different from clarinet fingering, conveniently ignoring the difference in embouchure between a single-reed instrument vs. that for a double reed. Furthermore, Greg’s frog has a wonderful singing voice. When the boat docks, the frogs jump into the mud to begin their winter hibernation, while Greg’s frog is offered a record deal. The music in the first half, including “Over the Garden Wall,” is best characterized as fun and lighthearted, meant to set a contented and relaxed tone. Beatrice avoids taking the boys to Adelaide’s that night, and flies off when she thinks they’re asleep. Harmonica plays over the scene as Beatrice tries to convince Wirt he doesn’t need to go home. As she takes off and flies through the night, the boys follow her and find Adelaide’s cottage, and “Adelaide’s Trap” begins playing. “Adelaide’s Trap” is somber in character, characterized by low strings and a dampened

plucked piano, similar to classic horror music. The mood of the music is decidedly sinister. It becomes evident that Adelaide is not a benevolent character, and that Beatrice was bringing Wirt and Greg to her so that Adelaide could have children to be her servants. In exchange, Adelaide was to provide magical scissors that would turn Beatrice and her family back into humans. Wirt and Greg manage to escape after Adelaide disintegrates in the fresh night air, but their friendship with Beatrice is on thin ice. For the remainder of the episode, besides the snippet of bassoon as the frog comes back, it is silent, and Wirt begins to question if they'll ever get home.

### **Episode 7, "The Ringing of the Bell"**

Episode 7 (which hereafter will be referred to as E7), "The Ringing of the Bell," opens with rain and pseudo-impressionistic piano arpeggios. The piano is playing water music, descending arpeggios without strict adherence to tempo. Beatrice is briefly seen searching for the scissors, and Wirt and Greg are looking for a place to wait out the weather. Wirt is frustrated, snapping at Greg. The Woodsman knocks down a tree to block their path, and gives them a warning about the Beast. Wirt manages to knock the lantern out of the Woodsman's hand and escape. As the boys encounter the Woodsman, his low brass and theremin theme plays. The music of the episode transitions in the direction of horror music at 2:20, when they see the cottage for the first time. Wirt and Greg's spirits are lifted temporarily by their victory over the Woodsman, and they head into an old shack that appears to be abandoned. A lone, mournful violin plays a melody that is stylistically reminiscent of the opening of Ännchen's third act aria in Carl Maria von Weber's 1821 opera *Der Freischütz*, a ghost story, over the top of the scene. Both phrases ascend quickly and utilize a minor scale with a raised seventh, which increases the tension and develops the unearthly mood of the story each phrase is setting up. Wirt and Greg light fires and find baskets full of turtles, which indicates that the shack is not abandoned. Lorna

emerges from where she has been doing her chores and warns them to hide in one of the baskets full of turtles as Auntie Whispers, an eccentric witch and Lorna's caretaker, approaches the door. Auntie Whispers's theme follows shortly thereafter and is characterized by an old, out-of-tune piano. The timbre of the instrument is reminiscent of ghostly musical cues found in horror music. Auntie Whispers can smell that Wirt and Greg are there, and makes a reference to people being eaten in the house. She rings a magical bell shaped like Lorna, which compels Lorna to tell her if there's somebody in the house.

Auntie Whispers eats one of the turtles, and then uses the bell to compel Lorna to clean the floor until it shines. It is briefly mentioned in the Art book that the turtles represent the "sins" of the Unknown, and that Auntie Whispers is taking the sin upon herself when she eats them.<sup>21</sup> This explanation is logical in the context of a 17th-century Puritan household. However, it does not seem to be internally consistent with the rules of the Unknown. Further, Auntie Whispers enjoys the taste of the turtles. It is possible that Auntie Whispers enjoys them as an idiosyncratic snack, and that the boys, and by extension the audience, is meant to find this habit unpleasant. In combination with Lorna's direction for the boys to hide when Auntie Whispers gets home, the turtles help create the pretense that Auntie Whispers is the dangerous person in the house. When Auntie Whispers falls asleep, Lorna has the boys come out, and Wirt offers to help Lorna clean the floor so she can escape. Wirt and Lorna sing a song together and blush when they touch hands, developing small crushes on each other, to Greg's clear disapproval. Auntie Whispers is accidentally awakened by Greg, and Wirt and Greg flee into a closet, which turns out to be full of bones. Lorna transforms into a demon and tries to eat them, so they jump out of a window. "More Bones to Sort," a Balkan-style tune in 7/4 that accompanies the scene while Lorna is attempting to catch the boys, is reminiscent of some pursuit music in early cartoons, mostly

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<sup>21</sup>McHale and Edgar, *Art of Over the Garden Wall*, 135.

involving the chases that were meant to be pell-mell and a bit wacky. Greg's frog has swallowed the bell, which Wirt uses to banish the evil spirit that is possessing Lorna. Lorna, now "cured" of possession, decides to stay with Auntie Whispers, and the boys head off into the woods again. Although Greg's spirits remain high, Wirt is clearly still discouraged and is fast losing hope. "Adelaide's Trap" plays again as the boys continue. The Beast celebrates the fact that Wirt and Greg might soon be lost forever.

### **Episode 8, "Babes in the Wood"**

"Babes in the Wood," Episode 8 (which will hereafter be referred to as E8), sees Wirt and Greg drifting down a foggy river. It is the most silent episode in the series. While they are on the river, the Beast can be heard singing "Jolly Woodsman" in the distance. Greg attempts to cheer Wirt up by playing a trumpet, but Wirt snaps at Greg, saying they'll never get home and that everything is Greg's fault. As Wirt lies down to take a nap, Greg pulls some leaves over the two of them and makes a wish on a star in the evening sky. Greg's journey up to Cloud City is accompanied by "Forward Oneroi," a piece implicative of both operatic music and some of the music in Old Hollywood movies like *The Wizard of Oz*, especially once the queen of Cloud City descends. Greg experiences a surreal dream sequence, presented as an homage to classic animation and soundtrack styles of the 1930s, in which Greg has fun with strange creatures and fights the North Wind. The two songs that play during the dream are "Everything is Nice and Fine" and "Old North Wind." Both songs are stylistically similar to the music of Betty Boop and Warner Brothers cartoons. After his dream victory over the North Wind, Greg asks if he can return and save Wirt. During the course of the dream, it begins to snow in the Unknown. Although it is never stated precisely when the Beast reenters the picture, Greg is next seen accompanying the Beast deep into the woods, under the pretense that Wirt and Greg will be able

to get home. Edelwood branches begin to grow around Wirt, and Beatrice searches for the two. After Wirt wakes up and finds Greg gone, he races around desperately looking for Greg. He slips and falls through ice, ending up disoriented and unconscious. Beatrice and the fish from the river pull him into a boat and, after only a few minutes, he slips back into unconsciousness. The Beast can be heard one final time singing “Jolly Woodsman,” but otherwise, the episode is silent.

### **Episode 9, “Into the Unknown”**

Episode 9 (which will hereafter be referred to as E9), “Into the Unknown” is the penultimate episode, and takes place just before the other events of the series—a prequel, so to speak. It explains most of the background information, including showing where Wirt and Greg are from and why they’re wearing strange clothing. The explanation of the boy’s circumstances is set later in the series as a flashback, wherein Wirt is reminded of the way he treated Greg; he is able to see his behavior in a new light after his travels and experiences. Wirt and Greg are from a modern America, sometime between the 1980s and the present, and it is Halloween night and the boys have improvised costumes. “The Fight is Over,” a rock song featuring the singing of creator Patrick McHale, opens the episode. Wirt has a crush on Sara, presumably a friend from school, and he wants to give her a cassette tape full of his poetry and clarinet playing. Of course, Greg decides that he wants to help. They run into a group of girls standing by the entrance to the football stadium, and the girls talk about how Jason Funderberker is planning to ask Sara out. Wirt is devastated and believes he has no chance. He and Greg walk away, and Wirt recites some poetry. Wirt realizes that the tape is still with the group of girls, and they have put it into Sara’s jacket pocket. “Tiny Star,” which plays at 5:00, opens with an 80s-style bass synth. The rest of the episode centers around Wirt’s attempts to get the tape back through a Halloween party and a subsequent gathering in the Eternal Garden cemetery. When the police find the group that has

gathered in the cemetery, the kids scatter, and Wirt and Greg end up on top of the cemetery wall. Sara finds the tape in her pocket, and Wirt feels that his life is over. The boys jump off the back of the wall and narrowly avoid being hit by a train after Wirt snaps at Greg. They roll into the water and both boys lose consciousness as “Old Black Train” plays. After the flashback ends and Wirt wakes up in Beatrice’s family’s tree, the audience hears “One is a Bird,” Beatrice’s theme, for the first time from its source—Beatrice’s mother. The episode ends with Wirt deciding to go out and search for Greg. Beatrice’s mother says, “You’ll be no good to your brother dead,” but Wirt replies, “I was no good to him alive, either” (10:50). He heads off into the storm.

### **Episode 10, “The Unknown”**

Episode 10 (which will hereafter be referred to as E10), “The Unknown,” is the showdown with the Beast. The musical content of each episode had been slowly decreasing up to this point, but E10 is once again full of music. The episode brings back many of the motives that had not been heard since the beginning of the show, opening with inquisitive woodwinds and bringing back the choral timbre and the melody from the verse of “Into the Unknown” on a music box. In a blizzard that is nearly a whiteout, Beatrice sees Greg and the Beast, but is beaten back by the wind. The Beast is setting impossible tasks for Greg in order to break his will. Between the lack of sleep, the difficult nature of the tasks, and the cold, Greg has become extremely tired and looks ill. Beatrice smacks into Wirt while they’re both looking for Greg. They decide to look for him together, their friendship repaired. The Woodsman searches for edelwood to grind into oil for his daughter’s soul trapped in the lantern, but then hears the Beast’s song and ventures out to find the source. “Come Wayward Souls,” the song that the Beast has sung snippets of occasionally throughout the show, plays in its entirety as the Beast succeeds in entrapping Greg in the edelwood stump. The Woodsman finds Greg and is utterly horrified.

The Beast provokes the Woodsman, trying to either steal the lantern back or to get the Woodsman to use Greg's edelwood tree for oil. Beatrice and Wirt find the Woodsman's lantern and Greg, wrapped in edelwood branches as "Potatus et Molassus," a version of "Potatoes and Molasses" set as a Latin requiem, plays in the background. Wirt tries, unsuccessfully, to revive Greg. The Woodsman has fallen at the hands of the Beast, who demands the lantern back. The Beast tries to get Wirt to take on the task of lantern-bearer, using the same trick he used with the Woodsman, but Wirt sees through it. Wirt realizes that the soul in the lantern is none other than that of the Beast, and gives the lantern back to the Woodsman. Wirt gives Beatrice the scissors that will make her family human, which he had stolen in order to escape from Adelaide. The group parts ways, each of them going home. The Beast tries to get the Woodsman to continue as lantern-bearer, but the Woodsman blows out the lantern, defeating the Beast once and for all. Once the Beast is defeated and Wirt decides to take Greg home, the sound of the music box returns. Wirt wakes up in the water, and manages to get help for both himself and Greg before passing out. "One is a Bird" plays in its entirety as the boys are found and rescued, fading into background music in the hospital. The two wake up surrounded by their friends from the cemetery. Sara and Wirt plan a date, while Greg amuses everyone with his frog. "Into the Unknown" concludes the series as the stories of the Woodsman, Beatrice and her family, Lorna and Auntie Whispers, Endicott, Langtree and Jimmy Brown, and Enoch are shown in snapshots of the resolutions of their stories. The final episode revisits, musically, all the themes of its overture, resolving each of the motifs individually.



### CHAPTER III

#### A COMPENDIUM OF MUSICAL STYLE REFERENCES

During the Summary and Musical Analysis section, many references were discussed by episode when they appeared. The references included in this chapter have been selected for several reasons. First, the references here are more specific, and are too specialized to discuss in the broad terms used previously. Second, these references have less direct effect on or relationship to the plot, and are present in order to create a familiar feeling for the young adult audience, as will be discussed in due time. In this chapter, as in previous, episodes will be referred to by an acronym; for example, E2 for Episode 2.

In E2, the violin's performance in the "Prelude" is reminiscent of the string style that is present in many classical works written in the early part of the 20th century meant to evoke Americana, in the sense that it relies on simplicity and an open texture. It is somewhat similar in temperament to Aaron Copland's *Appalachian Spring*, for example. The vibrato is slightly narrower and is not present from the onset of the note, and the melody is not embellished much in a classical style. Nevertheless, the stylistic aspects that might be present in American fiddle traditions, such as melodic embellishments or double stops, are absent. The character of the melody the violin plays can best be described as simple and unadorned, a style that is present in many works from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, used in an attempt to represent a cohesive American musical tradition.

All the episodes, including E4, were foreshadowed in the introductory sequence accompanying “Into the Unknown” with a still shot of a group of toys. The group includes the Tavern-Keeper, the Highwayman, the Butcher, the Baker, and the two musicians. It is the Toy-Maker, whom the audience sees working on another toy figurine by the fire, who initially speaks with Wirt. The episode recalls, in many ways, the 1933 Betty Boop short “The Old Man of the Mountain,” one of three featuring Cab Calloway. Calloway voiced all the characters in the short except for Boop herself, and in this short, Betty goes on a journey up the mountain to give the Old Man (of whom all the characters are afraid) his just desserts. As with many Betty Boop cartoons, the story is told through song. The Old Man of the Mountain has his own song, which Betty Boop must learn in order to defeat him.<sup>22</sup> The Old Man of the Mountain is strongly reminiscent of the Beast, who sings “Jolly Woodsman” and “Come Wayward Souls,” and who terrorizes the population of the Unknown. In E4, the counterpart to Betty Boop is the Tavern-Keeper, and the counterpart for Calloway is the Highwayman. The Tavern-Keeper’s vocal patterns are strongly reminiscent of the baby-doll singing style of Betty Boop, including the incorporation of her vocal quirks and squeaks. The Highwayman has a deep and charismatic voice, utilizing many of Cab Calloway’s phrasing patterns, including backphrasing—the practice of deliberately singing behind the beat in order to communicate an emotion or to highlight a phrase—and the softening of consonants to emphasize certain words. Softening of consonants is done by either leaving the ends of words off or by a lack of clear enunciation throughout the words, as the Highwayman does by blurring his words a bit on “And I make ends meet” (3:47).

“Lullaby in Frogland,” E6, takes place on a steamboat emblazoned with “McLaughlin Bros” on the back, and the song that opens the episode “Adelaide Parade” is called the

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<sup>22</sup>Fleischer Studios, prod. *The Old Man of the Mountain* (1933; New York, NY; Paramount Pictures), DVD.

“McLaughlin Bros. Jug Band.” Both are references to the historical toymaking company, the McLoughlin Brothers, with an altered spelling; the aesthetic of the McLoughlin Bros. toys is referenced in the Art book as a major influence on the visuals of the show, along with many other Victorian and 19th-century visuals. The choice to name the steamboat “McLaughlin Bros.” is perhaps a nod to the frogs and the boys being the same size in this episode. Either the frogs have suddenly become human-sized, including Greg’s frog, or the boys shrunk for the purpose of getting on the frog-size boat. This is never explained, but the boat being used as a reference to toys also contributes to the lighthearted mood in the first half of the episode.<sup>23</sup>

In the Art book, the creators explain many of the musical and visual references that they drew from as they produced the show. In early notes on McHale’s choices for the soundtrack, he stated, “Music is important in the show; the soundtrack will be influenced by historically American-style music... ranging from Stephen Foster to the Stooges.”<sup>24</sup> Opera and silent film are cited as being major influences on the show.<sup>25</sup> The operatic influence is most clearly seen in the music with the previously mentioned similarities to certain melodies in *Der Freischütz*. The silent film influence has also been discussed, mainly appearing in the sentimental character of the Prelude and the ragtime pell-mell character of the chase music used throughout the series. Both “Hansel and Gretel: An Opera Fantasy,” a 1954 film released by RKO Radio Pictures and based upon Engelbert Humperdinck’s opera *Hänsel und Gretel*, and Disney’s 1938 “Silly Symphony: Wynken, Blynken, and Nod” are referenced as significant influences both on the animation and on the connection of the visuals to the soundtrack. “Wynken, Blynken, and Nod” specifically influenced Greg’s fantasy dream sequence during E8, as can be seen in the

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<sup>23</sup>McHale and Edgar, *Art of Over the Garden Wall*, 85, 132.

<sup>24</sup>McHale and Edgar, *Art of Over the Garden Wall*, 17.

<sup>25</sup>McHale and Edgar, *Art of Over the Garden Wall*, 162.

similarities in their flights into the sky.<sup>26</sup> The creators also specifically name Hoagy Carmichael as having inspired “Patient is the Night.”<sup>27</sup>

Often, throughout *Over the Garden Wall*, the influence of the 1939 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer film *The Wizard of Oz* can be seen. The structure of the narrative imitates the story told in *The Wizard of Oz* in many ways. In *Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy suffers an accident and finds herself waking up, lost, in a strange land. She travels through the land, following the Yellow Brick Road and collecting a group of friends who all need something from the Wizard of the city of Oz. During their travels, the group is hampered by the influence of an evil witch who doesn’t want Dorothy to be able to return to her home. It turns out that the Wizard of Oz isn’t really a wizard at all, and that it’s up to Dorothy to get herself home. When she gets back, she wakes up as if from a dream and exclaims to her family and friends, “and you were there, and you were there...”<sup>28</sup> When the film is compared to the narrative arc of *Over the Garden Wall*, it is clear there are many similarities.<sup>29</sup> Wirt and Greg experience an accident and find themselves lost in a strange world, Adelaide turns out to be actively malicious and entirely unhelpful due to her connection with the Beast, Beatrice joins the group on their travels, and Wirt ends up getting them home. (Greg even remarks at the hospital that his frog was there, too.) There are superficial differences, namely the absence of the red shoes, the consistent presence of the yellow brick road, and the incredible city. However, the overall narrative structures of the two works are more alike than not. The similarities are apparent visually and musically in a few areas as well. The road that appears at the end of E1 and the beginning of E2, for example, visually references the

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<sup>26</sup>McHale and Edgar, *Art of Over the Garden Wall*, 142.

<sup>27</sup>McHale and Edgar, *Art of Over the Garden Wall*, 173.

<sup>28</sup>Victor Fleming, director, *The Wizard of Oz* (1939; Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer), DVD.

<sup>29</sup>The primary influence on *Over the Garden Wall* is the 1939 film. L. Frank Baum’s original book, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), differs on several plot points.

Yellow Brick Road. Additionally, “Adelaide Parade” sounds very similar to “We’re Off to See the Wizard,” and serves a similar purpose as a theme that appears several times throughout the show. Unlike in *The Wizard of Oz*, however, Greg and Wirt find themselves in terrible danger, and the meaning of “Adelaide Parade” is wholly twisted after Adelaide attempts to harm the boys. It does not return in any form after the meeting with Adelaide, and Wirt and Greg are not able to return home quickly.

Much of the inspiration for the art of *Over the Garden Wall* was taken from Victorian and Belle Epoque postcards, and there are a few places where these postcards influenced the instrumentation of the show as well. The Art book discusses many of these references, particularly in the influence they exerted over E2. The Art book goes into detail on 19th and early 20th-century images that influenced the character designs, such as the vegetable people from Pottsville. In fact, the storyline from E2 began with a Victorian postcard involving babies that grew from the ground in cabbage heads, but with a dark twist. Nineteenth-century visuals and costumes are often perceived by modern audiences as frightening and off-putting. Additionally, this is the only episode in which people in the Unknown, besides Wirt and Greg, are wearing costumes. Pottsville was influenced strongly by Victorian visuals because McHale wanted to include an episode that felt very much like a classic American Halloween.<sup>30</sup> Visually, the people of Pottsville are somewhat similar to the character present in the *Oz* book series known as Jack Pumpkinhead. There the correspondence ends, though; the personality of the characters in Pottsville, their origins, and their storylines have little in common with the whimsy of the *Oz* books.

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<sup>30</sup>McHale and Edgar, *Art of Over the Garden Wall*, 91.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS OF USES OF MUSIC

In *Over the Garden Wall*, music serves several purposes. It serves to indicate setting and place, allowing each episode to take on the character of the historical period it is set in. Songs of this nature include “Endicott Manor” (Classical quartet), “Money for School” (early jazz), “The Fight is Over” (1970s rock), and “Tiny Star” (1980s pop). Music moves the narrative along, as in a musical, with songs performed by the characters describing actions they are taking or events that have already occurred. “Langtree’s Lament,” for example, discusses Langtree’s problems with Jimmy Brown, and “Old North Wind” describes the fight between the Old North Wind and Greg as it happens. Music also serves to symbolize the mental state of the characters as the series progresses, both through motifs and sounds attached to each character and by symbolizing Wirt’s mental state (e.g., it is more frequent when Wirt’s spirits are high and he is motivated to continue, and decreases as Wirt becomes increasingly dejected).

Music of some kind plays almost entirely throughout E1 (in this chapter, as in previous, episodes will be referred to by an acronym; for example, E2 for Episode 2). This is the episode with the most music in the series, and is responsible for introducing the themes of the show. It opens with “Into the Unknown” accompanying an animation sequence involving the minor characters that Wirt and Greg encounter over the course of the series, and foreshadows the fate that each of them will face as the boys become involved in their stories. Greg’s frog, for example, is the character singing, and is shown playing the piano introduction. Beatrice is seen in human form distracted by a bird, foreshadowing the curse put upon her and her family. The

circus ensemble, including Jimmy Brown in his gorilla suit, is seen performing in a large auditorium. A black cat, implied at the end to be the voice of Enoch, is seen harvesting pumpkins with the turkeys. Toys in the shape of the tavern-goers in *Songs of the Dark Lantern* appear (presumably made by the toymaker, with whom Wirt later converses and who is not pictured as part of the group), and the audience sees Endicott find the portrait. Then the audience sees Adelaide finishing up a quilt, followed by the McLaughlin Brothers setting a toy boat on the river.<sup>31</sup> Lorna is shown sorting the bones, the fish fishes in the river, Greg takes the Rock Fact rock out of the garden, and finally, the audience sees the Woodsman's daughter look off into the woods. The introduction is a dumbshow, or a part of a play acted in mime to supplement the main action; in this case, it introduces the themes that will be explored throughout the miniseries, rather than leaving the audience to be entirely confused before the backstory is revealed in E9.

“The Old Grist Mill,” E1, also introduces musical motifs that communicate important information about each character. Wirt's motif involves woodwinds and plays when he is reciting poetry, two things that distinguish him and about which he is slightly embarrassed, keeping them a secret until “Mad Love.” Beatrice's motif is a theme sung by her mother, indicating her connection to and problems with her family, and her eventual reconciliation with them. The Woodsman is connected musically both to the Beast and to classic horror, audially indicating that he is a part of the strange, off-putting nature of the Unknown and that he is perhaps not to be fully trusted. This episode also serves to set up the central conflicts of the series, and when taking the music into account, it becomes clear that E1 is, functionally, a thematic overture similar to those found in some 19th-century operas and in classic American musical theater. The

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<sup>31</sup>The “McLaughlin Brothers” name, as mentioned previously, was taken from a toy company that manufactured whimsical toys in the last half of the 19th century, although they spelled their name “McLoughlin.” McHale and Edgar, *Art of Over the Garden Wall*, 85.

audience both hears and sees all the characters for the first time, and the music is comprised of themes and motifs that will be heard more fully throughout the rest of the series.

Greg's theme is not introduced in E1. It is not until E3 that the audience gains a deeper understanding of Greg's character, and learns his major musical theme. "Potatoes and Molasses" is a very significant song both for Greg's character development and in moving the plot of the episode forward. The lyrics of "Potatoes and Molasses" are nothing if not silly:

Oh, potatoes and molasses  
 If you want some, oh, just ask us  
 They're warm and soft like puppies and socks  
 Filled with cream and candy rocks  
 Oh, potatoes and molasses  
 They're so much sweeter than algebra class  
 If your stomach is grumblin' and your mouth starts mumblin'  
 There's only one thing to keep your brain from crumblin'  
 Oh, potatoes and molasses  
 If you can't see 'em, put on your glasses  
 They're shiny and large like a fisherman's barge  
 You know you've eaten enough when you start seein' stars  
 Oh, potatoes and molasses  
 It's the only thing left on your task list  
 They're short and stout, they make everyone shout  
 For potatoes and molasses  
 For potatoes and—<sup>32</sup>

The song is Greg's way of motivating the animals to eat and be happy. Though Greg is silly throughout the series, this is the first moment when it becomes apparent that he has a talent for cheering people up with his nonsense and keeping spirits high, and that he senses when more whimsy is called for. In the context of the Woodsman's warnings in the first episode about the importance of keeping up one's motivation in order to survive, this represents an element of foreshadowing. After this episode, Greg's character is associated with the instrumentation and rhythms of "Potatoes and Molasses" and "Money for School" up through the last episode, and

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<sup>32</sup>"Potatoes and Molasses," *Over the Garden Wall* (Original Television Soundtrack), the Blasting Company (Cartoon Network, 2016), digital release.



there is a reprise of the melody and lyrics of “Potatoes and Molasses” at the climax of the series, when Greg is in mortal danger.

The first time “Adelaide Parade” comes up in the series (E3, 00:24), Greg is singing it alone, and both Wirt and Beatrice refuse to participate. In the first half of E6, Wirt and Greg sing “Adelaide Parade” together and celebrate their hope that they will be going home soon. This is the point of the series when Wirt’s spirits are at their highest point, and the music is pleasant. The mood begins to shift when they are sitting in the mud around the campfire. After Beatrice flies off and the boys follow her, “Adelaide’s Trap” begins to play. The piece opens with a low and slow cello line and a dampened, almost plucked keyboard sound, developing into a duet in the low strings before the dampened keyboard returns. The climax is in the low strings as the Beast’s theme enters. The piece tapers into a chaotic section as the dampened keyboard and strings descend randomly, and then ends with a few bars of opened piano. The piece is in a minor key and moves more slowly and has a more legato character than the pieces through the rest of the episode. During the scene in which this song plays, Adelaide is revealed to have been tricking Beatrice, and Beatrice is revealed to have been tricking Wirt and Greg. This is a major turning point in the story and in Wirt’s disposition. Up to this point, the series has included music and musical cues throughout each episode. After E6, *Over the Garden Wall* becomes progressively more quiet—mirroring Wirt’s perspective and mood—until E10.

Because *Over the Garden Wall* is so musically dense, silence is just as important as such musical cues as “Potatoes and Molasses” in indicating mood. E8 is the quietest episode overall, despite Greg’s surreal ragtime dream sequence. Greg’s journey up to Cloud City is accompanied by “Forward Oneroi,” a piece implicative of both operatic music and some of the music in Old Hollywood movies like *The Wizard of Oz*, especially once the queen of Cloud City descends.

Cloud City is also reminiscent of the Emerald City, in that it is a delightfully eccentric place and that the queen of Cloud City offers to send Greg home. The animation sequence that occurs alongside “Everything is Nice and Fine” and “Old North Wind” is a love letter to early cartoons,<sup>33</sup> and the fight scene, in which Greg bottles up the North Wind, is accompanied by music similar to MGM silent film fight music. The musical sequence is deeply connected to Greg’s character, utilizing sounds that have represented him throughout the narrative and ending with Greg’s naive attempts to free himself and Wirt from the Beast. The lyrics of “Everything is Nice and Fine” are in many ways representative of Greg’s general mindset, particularly the opening: “Everything is nice and fine all the time/The softest clouds and rainbow skies ain’t gonna lie/We always have the most spectacular time together...”<sup>34</sup> After Wirt wakes up, the silence takes over once more. “Jolly Woodsman” plays again in the distance as Wirt realizes he has pushed Greg away and failed to protect him, and through the rest of the episode, the only background noise is a persistent single tone after Wirt hits his head.

The series is presented from Wirt’s perspective,<sup>35</sup> according to McHale; Wirt is experiencing the dream, and that influences the way the Unknown appears and acts. This can be seen when Wirt notices the sudden architectural shift in E5 (7:30), and in the implication, from Endicott’s tombstone, that the characters are people whose tombstones he saw immediately prior to entering the Unknown. This is also the reason that each vignette takes place in a historical setting. The settings mirror the time periods when the characters were alive; these periods are indicated by, for example, Endicott’s tombstone sporting a 17th- and 18th- century “death’s

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<sup>33</sup>McHale and Edgar, *Art of Over the Garden Wall*, 142.

<sup>34</sup>“Everything is Nice and Fine,” *Over the Garden Wall* (Original Television Soundtrack), the Blasting Company (Cartoon Network, 2016), digital release.

<sup>35</sup>McHale and Edgar, *Art of Over the Garden Wall*, 119.

head” motif, or a motif of a skull and crossbones or wings that appears at the top of a gravestone.<sup>36</sup> The music is most dense during the first half of the series, when Wirt is the most optimistic that he and Greg will get home. The growing silence is an aural cue that Wirt is losing hope, and E8 is the episode where Wirt begins to give up entirely. It is only when Greg is in danger and Wirt must save him that he regains his motivation, and the music grows again.

The music in the rest of the miniseries serves the dual purpose of narrative motion and indicating setting. For example, in E2, there are two main purposes to referencing Sacred Harp for “Pottsville C.M.” First, it instantly signals that Pottsville is located in a rural America, as this is where Sacred Harp singing was born<sup>37</sup> and the place that Sacred Harp singing continues as a practice. Second, it indicates the religious nature of the people of Pottsville. Because Sacred Harp singing is primarily a religious tradition, it is easier for Wirt and Beatrice to notice that they are celebrating the harvest in a sacred fashion. As Wirt remarks, “So, they’re some kind of weird cult, or something” (4:23). Cults have been a frequent subject in horror films, most recently in the 2019 film *Midsommar*; and Sacred Harp as a religious music is used here to set the scene as off-putting and foreboding, particularly when one of the pumpkin people says, “People don’t usually ‘pass through’ Pottsville” (5:14). Wirt relaxes when they are sent to work. However, the name Pottsville is reminiscent of a Potter’s field, or a place where those without financial resource have traditionally buried their dead. In combination with the religious overtones of Sacred Harp music, the sinister cult and death associations return towards the end of the episode as the boys are digging deep holes. After Wirt is left behind by Beatrice and Greg, it turns out that the skeletons they found are coming to life and putting on vegetable costumes—the

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<sup>36</sup>Edwin Dethlefsen and James Deetz, “Death’s Heads, Cherubs, and Willow Trees: Experimental Archaeology in Colonial Cemeteries,” *American Antiquity* 31, no. 4 (1996), 502.

<sup>37</sup>Earlier, it was explained that Sacred Harp comes out of the Shape Note tradition but is not quite the same. Shape Note singing was born in the urban Northeast in the late 18th century; Sacred Harp was first published in Georgia in 1844.

townspeople themselves are all skeletons. The funeral march, in this context, serves several purposes. At first, it reinforces the idea that Wirt and Greg are digging their own graves and might be in imminent mortal danger. As the scene progresses, it becomes clear that it was also foreshadowing the truth about the pumpkin people and their reverse funeral. Rather than coming to bury somebody, they are coming to restore somebody to life. This also suggests that the Unknown is a place filled with people who are already dead, a fact that is not fully revealed until the audience catches a glimpse of Quincy Endicott's tombstone during the penultimate episode.

In E3, music is vital in placing the episode in the early 20th century. "Langtree's Lament" features a typical, simple early jazz progression, ending with ii-V-I chord progression.<sup>38</sup> Miss Langtree's job is to teach "animals to count and spell" (7:33), as her father says, and "Langtree's Lament" is thus, as a song that goes through the alphabet and some numbers, fitting for the character. However, during the course of the show, it is not played in full and it does not move the plot forward other than to demonstrate that this is an early 20th century schoolhouse and that Wirt is willing to put up with a lot in order to prove his point (and annoy Beatrice). "Potatoes and Molasses" uses mild syncopation in the piano to reference ragtime and, in addition to the wind and brass instrumentation, helps place the episode firmly in the early 20th century.

The string quartet in E5 is entitled "Endicott Manor" on the soundtrack and opens with a fugal section. Juxtaposed with the elaborate mansion, it is a clear nod to the colonial setting the creators themselves acknowledge.<sup>39</sup> The music in the rest of the episode is more character-based and story-based than setting-based, in contrast to other episodes like "Schooltown Follies." The story of Endicott and Margueritte Gray, while the main focus of the episode, is not the most

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<sup>38</sup>"Langtree's Lament," *Over the Garden Wall* (Original Television Soundtrack), the Blasting Company (Cartoon Network, 2016), digital release.

<sup>39</sup>McHale and Edgar, *Art of Over the Garden Wall*, 119.

important narrative development. At 6:21, Wirt and Beatrice are trapped in a wardrobe, and begin to actually speak to one another about serious things. It is the moment that Wirt and Beatrice start to become friends, and is the first time that Beatrice expresses hesitation about taking the boys to Adelaide. It is also the scene in which the audience finds out that Beatrice was once human but is now under a curse. Piano music of a distinctly solemn character underscores the scene, incorporating Beatrice's theme, and as the group leaves the mansion afterward an excerpt from "Adelaide Parade" plays more slowly in the strings, indicating a transition out of a colonial European setting back into a more contemporary American setting.<sup>40</sup>

"The Ringing of the Bell," E7, is a deviation from the previous historical vignettes in that the music of the episode does not indicate time period and setting at any point. Even in episodes like E5, in which the topic of the episode is more closely related to classic horror tropes than to any colonial storyline, there is a nod to the setting in the string quartet. The vignette in E7 is set in a Puritan household, but the music of the episode comes mostly in the form of an imitation of Impressionistic piano music and horror music, with one very short vocal duet that is similar to musical theater love songs, as well as a klezmer chase scene. The musical character of both the strings and the piano is ghostly; they are ethereal and eerie. The episode is full of classic horror music, mirroring the horror of the episode's storyline. Lorna's monster form, her possession, and her propensity to eat people is typical of many classic monster movies. After Lorna is cured, the piano comes back, but has a slightly more hopeful character. Unfortunately for Wirt, she decides to stay with Auntie Whispers and they disappear into the mist, and what was left of his spirit falls while "Adelaide's Trap" plays again.

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<sup>40</sup>*Over the Garden Wall* (Original Television Soundtrack), the Blasting Company (Cartoon Network, 2016), digital release.

“Into the Unknown,” E9, is a flashback from the story happening in the Unknown, meant to explain what exactly has been going on and how the boys got into their predicament. It also provides context to Wirt and Greg’s relationship, and the responsibility to Greg that Wirt does not fully acknowledge, even to himself, until Greg is kidnapped by the Beast. Both visually and aurally, E9 immediately snaps the viewer out of the historical Americana that has been present in the rest of the series. The episode seemingly takes place in a setting contemporary to the 2014 airing of *Over the Garden Wall*. Blue light streams out of the windows of houses, creating an electric and digital feeling in direct contrast to the candlelit atmosphere of the rest of the series.<sup>41</sup> It is certainly set no earlier than the mid-2000s, since Wirt creates a mixtape on cassette and Sara has no way to play it, having no tape player. With that being said, the music of the episode is a bit ambivalent and does not place it directly in the early 2010s. “The Fight is Over” is somewhat similar in tone and character to Mott the Hoople’s 1972 version of David Bowie’s “All the Young Dudes.” “Tiny Star” is representative of the 80s, featuring heavy bass synth. The use, in *Over the Garden Wall*, of “Tiny Star” as a distinctly retro sound is part of a larger trend in video media produced in the 2010s to call on 1980s nostalgia, as can be seen in the popularity of such shows as *Stranger Things*.

The episode’s aural atmosphere pivots sharply when the boys narrowly avoid the train and tumble down the hill. American roots performer Justin Rubenstein sings a version of Bluegrass standard “Old Black Train” with lyrics adjusted to better fit the narrative of *Over the Garden Wall*. As noted in the Introduction, “Old Black Train,” a standard with many versions including those by Woody Guthrie and the Carter Family, has always been about death, with the train used as a metaphor for death. The Carter Family’s version focuses on needing to get one’s

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<sup>41</sup>McHale and Edgar, *Art of Over the Garden Wall*, 152.

affairs in order in a Christian sense, and Woody Guthrie's is bent towards the idea that death comes for everyone, rich and poor.<sup>42</sup> Rubenstein's version focuses more on the actual journey:

There's an old black train a-coming  
Scrapin' 'long the iron  
You don't need no ticket, boys  
It'll take you when it's time

Now, come on now, young strangers  
Weren't you someone's son?  
How'd you find this depot?  
Cause it ain't where you belong

You will pass a graveyard  
Stones worn by the years  
The train'll stop a minute  
But don't let it leave you here

[...]

This journey is a long one  
It'll take you all around  
Life rushing by your windows  
Before it lays you down<sup>43</sup>

The song reveals, finally, that the boys are actually having a near-death experience, not simply lost in the woods. After Wirt wakes up, Beatrice's mother sings "One is a Bird" and the theme transforms: not simply representing Beatrice, but representing family and how important it is. It is fitting that the theme plays as Wirt heads out into the blizzard to look for Greg.

"The Unknown" brings back the consistent background music that had slowly dwindled. The episode mimics the last act of an opera, especially with "Come Wayward Souls." In certain ways, particularly its identical opening melodic phrase in the voice, it is reminiscent of the

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<sup>42</sup>See the Carter Family lyrics: "That poor young man in darkness/Cared not for the gospel light/Till suddenly he heard the whistle blow/On the little black train and sighed/ "Have mercy on me Lord/Please come and set me right." and Woody Guthrie's lyrics: "Your million dollar fortune/Your mansion glittering white/You can't take it with you/When the train moves in the night."

<sup>43</sup>"Old Black Train," *Over the Garden Wall* (Original Television Soundtrack), the Blasting Company (Cartoon Network, 2016), digital release.

“Lachrimosa” from Giuseppe Verdi’s 1874 Requiem. “Come Wayward Souls” is the Beast’s dirge for his victims, so it is fitting that the melody would reference a notable historical requiem. As Wirt and Beatrice find Greg, “Potatoes and Molasses” returns, but not in the form it originally took. It is slowed down, somber, and translated into Latin, referencing the genre of Catholic requiem. Throughout the rest of the episode, as Wirt confronts the Beast, bassoon, piano, and extended techniques including high tones and creaks play.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

*Over the Garden Wall* is a work firmly placed in the genre of young adult fiction. It is recounted from the perspective of teenage Wirt, with music and visuals that reference classic cartoons and movies, which many American teenagers have grown up watching. At the surface level, *Over the Garden Wall* is about two boys and their journey home; however, the miniseries is truly about the process of becoming an adult and the importance of family. Wirt begins the show as the older sibling who is annoyed with Greg at every turn. He resents that, as the caretaker, he is responsible for Greg's actions. Greg, however, adores Wirt. He looks up to Wirt and loves spending time with him from the very beginning. When the Woodsman is introduced, he is frightening; when Beatrice is introduced, she is sarcastic and seems to dislike the boys. Both the Woodsman and Beatrice are not what they initially seem, however, and both are motivated by their own families. The Woodsman carries the lantern because of his grief over losing his daughter, while Beatrice leads the boys into a trap in order to save her family after she was responsible for their curse. Beatrice and the Woodsman each care for Wirt and Greg, and their involvement with the boys leads, ultimately, to all being reunited with their families: the Woodsman with his daughter, and Beatrice with her (human) family. Originally, Wirt's motivation is simply to find his way home. He is concerned with Greg's safety, but is inattentive, allowing Greg to wander off several times. When Wirt begins to feel that finding their way home will be very difficult, if not impossible, he loses sight of his purpose and permits Greg to wander

into danger. It is not until he is faced with the reality that he might *really* lose Greg that he realizes how much he loves Greg, and how much he does not want to lose him.

The “One is a Bird” theme parallels the journey that Wirt takes to realizing the importance of family. “One is a Bird” is Beatrice’s theme throughout the show, but it is not until Wirt meets Beatrice’s family that its full depth is shown. It is not only a melody related to Beatrice; more importantly, it is a melody given to Beatrice by her mother, whom she has not seen in a long time. Beatrice cares for her family deeply, but has left them, trying to fix her mistake without admitting to the fact that it is her fault. Despite everything, her family loves and misses her, and asks about her desperately as soon as Wirt mentions her. “One is a Bird” symbolizes family and the love and care that family members have for one another, and it likewise symbolizes Wirt’s love for Greg, of which Wirt himself needed to be reminded. Despite his regrets, Wirt did not treat Greg as poorly as he feels he did, and Greg was strong and rebellious in his own way. The scene in which the origins of “One is a Bird” are revealed is also the major catalyst Wirt needed to return to his quest and make sure that Greg returned home safely. He is no longer buffeted by the winds of circumstance. He has a mission that he must complete, and a motivation outside of himself. The audience is reminded through Wirt’s journey of how much their younger siblings adore them, the importance of family, and to look outside of themselves. For the young adult audience, *Over the Garden Wall* has a message that will inevitably resonate.

Musically, *Over the Garden Wall* draws upon historical cues and distinctly American sounds, as well as classic animation and Old Hollywood, to move the narrative forward, convey information about the characters, establish an ambience, and firmly place each vignette in its own distinctive setting. The soundtrack is overflowing with references to the cartoons that young

adults have grown up watching, and it reaches young adults where they are with its familiarity. Although the story appears to be a dream sequence at the end, Wirt and Greg's relationship is deeper and healthier at the end than at the beginning. Wirt learns to take responsibility for his actions, to take care of Greg, and how much he genuinely values their relationship. Further, Wirt comes away with the lesson that life is worth living, and that Greg is worth protecting and spending time with. Considering that *Over the Garden Wall* aired on and was developed for Cartoon Network, a television network aimed at children and teenagers, the character growth and the values imparted make it particularly well suited to its audience, and the parallel musical narrative is instrumental (so to speak) in bringing the point home.

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