



# GATHERED FROM COINCIDENCE

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A singular history of  
Sixties' pop

by  
Tony Dunsbee

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*Take what you have gathered from coincidence*

“It’s All Over Now, Baby Blue” – Bob Dylan  
(© 1965 Warner Bros. Inc., renewed 1993 by Special Rider Music)

*To my wife Nicky,  
with love and thanks for her patience and belief  
in my ability to give at least this much semblance  
of form and meaning to a lifetime’s obsession.*

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## Chapter 1

# The Intro ...

This may or may not turn out to be the book in my head but I'm still driven, even now in retirement, to write it by my undimmed passion for the music of the Sixties and a desire to set – no pun intended – the record straight. The *one and only* record? Well, all right then, by no means, but informed by my ambition to set down *my* record of the interweaving of the events of those tumultuous years and the impact of the music made in parallel to them, as I lived through the decade then and as I recall it now. Make no mistake, then: this is unashamedly a highly selective rather than a comprehensive account, dictated wholly by my own personal tastes and interests as they were shaped and developed by the consecutive twists and turns of the era. Such omissions as there may be, therefore, are entirely of my choosing and for which, this being so, I am unrepentant.

Yet at first sight, it's a journey not even worth attempting. Can there really be any cultural significance in critically appraising a leap of ten years that, judged by the first and last Number 1 records of the period at least, rewarded musical retrospection rather than evolution? Emile Ford and the Checkmates, in January 1960, did no more than put a rock-and-roll gloss on a vaudevillian song originally recorded in 1917<sup>1</sup>, while in December 1969 the then still seemingly respectable Rolf Harris shamelessly plundered the style and content of rousing patriotic ballads from the Edwardian music hall, to rapturous popular acclaim. Did we all blink and miss the in-between bit?

Of course, if you remember the Sixties, so they yawningly keep saying, then you weren't there. But as one who does and was, the sadness for me is that most of the popular myths circulating in Britain today about the Sixties are perpetuated by people who weren't there; not least because many of them weren't even born then. What's worse is to find, as I have done in the course of my researches, that this state of affairs is compounded not just by false conjecture but by errors and omissions of objective fact across a range of supposedly reputable reference works. (To take a simple three at random, see how quickly *you* can find: a) the title of the Hollies' second LP, b) the title of the Merseybeats' third hit single, and c) Spencer Davis's date of birth.)

For those of us who were there as the decade unfolded, the Sixties definitely were memorable but – disappointingly for the scandal-mongers – by no means for the sensational reasons attributed to my generation by the latter-day media. Increasingly irked, therefore, by the general acceptance of the distortions of this false memory as I have grown older, I'm making my

own statement about the historical significance of the music of the Sixties by writing this book.

In his intensely personal memoir of how listening to music has enriched his life, Ian Clayton, the northern broadcaster and writer, captures, seemingly effortlessly and succinctly, the essence of the quest thus:

... we all collect records. The records then become a soundtrack to our lives. Records are about escaping, finding out, searching and planning routes. Of course for most of us the records we gather never bring us anywhere near the people who make them. Records are just ‘things’ that we end up hoarding. But records can be more than ‘things’.<sup>2</sup>

This, then, is the true burden of the mystery. Pop music, as a distinctive strand of entertainment, undeniably came of age in the Sixties, becoming an industry in its own right; and while it brought variable combinations of wealth, artistic fulfilment and hedonistic pleasure to those performing, it also offered enjoyment and escapism to those who became their fans and audiences. It was, however, only for a decadent minority that that escapism was ever transmuted into grosser excesses in the garden of earthly delights.

Dominic Sandbrook rates “teenage affluence” as “the single biggest factor in explaining the spectacular development of popular music between the mid-fifties and the early sixties”.<sup>3</sup> Thanks, so he says, to the increasing availability of cheap radios and record-players, “music was more accessible than ever before, not only played in concert halls, pubs and restaurants, but enjoyed in the privacy of the office, the living room and the teenage bedroom”.<sup>4</sup> That in itself, though, is implicit testimony to the power of the promoters of pop music in what must now seem almost the steam age of broadcasting media.

Throughout my early childhood in the 1950s, the radio was on all day long in our house. In the week, my mother relied on the BBC’s Light Programme as a constant source of mildly entertaining distraction from the tedium of her household chores; the pattern continuing through the weekends, when my father was home from work. This, then, interspersed with interludes selected by my parents from their modest collection of 78s and LPs on the radiogram, provided the musical wallpaper to my home life and from which, for me, as an only child, there was no escape. Looking back on it now, even nostalgia cannot compensate for the reality that this represented for me – as, I suspect, for many others of my post-war generation – a depressingly prematurely middle-aged introduction to so-called ‘popular’ music.

Although initiated little more than two months after the end of the war in Europe in 1945, as a new beginning in mass-appeal radio broadcasting, the Light Programme remained reliant for what now seems an extraordinary

length of time on stalwarts intended to boost production in wartime factories, the clue being in their titles. For example, I can recollect clearly the two daily doses – morning and afternoon – of the light orchestral medley *Music While You Work* (first broadcast in 1940) and the three lunchtime editions a week of the variety show *Workers' Playtime* (first broadcast in 1941).

The theatre organ also featured prominently. There was Sandy MacPherson, resident organist at the Empire Theatre, Leicester Square, who had actually been one of the first performers when the Light Programme was launched on 29<sup>th</sup> July 1945. His theme tune was “Look For The Silver Lining” and his regular programme *The Chapel in the Valley* always struck me as a piously cheerless mix of requests and homilies, more often than not relating to distressed gentlefolk who had fallen on hard times. For light relief, by contrast, there was Reginald Dixon, resident organist at the Tower Ballroom, Blackpool, with his inescapable theme tune “I Do Like To Be Beside The Seaside”.

Then there was music from the bandstand and the ballroom, from the likes of Henry Hall (he of “The Teddy Bears' Picnic”), Jack Payne, Joe Loss, Victor Sylvester and Edmundo Ros, not to mention the multiplicity of the BBC's own resident orchestras. At the coarser end of this spectrum, complete with its opening cry of “Wakey, Wake-eye!” all set to ruin your digestion on Sunday afternoons, came *The Billy Cotton Band Show*, its oompah approach to anything vaguely musical leavened only fleetingly by resident singers Alan Breeze and Kathy Kay.

If this seems grim – and I'm not making any of this up – it's because it was; and as the Fifties tried to accommodate to rock'n'roll, it didn't get much better. The iron grip of ‘live’ music on the BBC at the time, reinforced through the negotiating strength of the Musicians' Union representing the members of all those bands and orchestras employed directly by the Corporation, meant that air time for records – so-called ‘needle time’ – was at an absolute premium for years and years and years.

If you only wanted to hear records, you were pretty much restricted to the homely fare of request programmes such as *Housewives' Choice* every weekday morning or *Children's Favourites* (with ‘Uncle Mac’) every Saturday morning. Whilst the playlist of the former predominantly fell into what we know today as the ‘easy listening’ category, the latter, under Uncle Mac's custodianship, was stuck in a timewarp of excruciating novelty records from years gone by. “Sparky's Magic Piano”, for example, had originally been recorded in 1947, whilst “(How Much Is) That Doggie in the Window?” by Lita Roza and “Christopher Robin At Buckingham Palace” by Petula Clark had both been released in 1953.

Far and away the leader in the field of record requests, however, was *Two-Way Family Favourites* at Sunday lunchtime. Famous for romantically

connecting its principal presenters Cliff Michelmore and Jean Metcalfe, its format was a simple exchange of family messages and dedications between the UK and British forces overseas. However, it was:

... one of the few BBC radio programmes devoted exclusively to records, so its audience was in consequence huge, going far beyond the audience at which it was aimed. It offered the ‘real thing’, the popular records themselves which by the late 1950s were what people wanted to hear, as against versions of the songs being played live in a studio in London.<sup>5</sup>

Even so, there were two obvious drawbacks to request programmes such as these. Firstly, their musical content was generally conservative, only to be expected given, as John Peel noted, that “there wasn’t much popular music at the time that wasn’t conservative”.<sup>6</sup> Specifically, as he remembered:

Glenn Miller and his Orchestra featured an awful lot, as did Doris Day, Guy Mitchell, Frankie Laine, Johnnie Ray and Winifred Atwell. Selections from *Okelahoma!*, *Carousel* and other popular musicals were also on pretty heavy rotation ... [They] also featured lots of light classical stuff ...<sup>7</sup>

And secondly, half the airtime was, of course, taken up with reading out the requests. Hence, for example, what came eventually to be an apparently generous ninety minutes’ airtime for *Two-Way Family Favourites* equated to no more than forty-five minutes of actual music.

It was not until the late Fifties that anything seriously resembling a regular programme of contemporary popular music for a target audience below the age of forty struggled onto the Light Programme. *Saturday Club*, hosted by Brian Matthew, began in 1958 as the successor to *Skeffle Club*. It quickly became the listening highlight of the weekend, *the* radio programme on which up-and-coming solo artists and groups would not only perform live in the studio but also be interviewed about their current repertoire and future aspirations. In other words, it began to set the stamp of authority on the critical appreciation of pop music as a genre in its own right and to exercise its own influence on that genre. (It was, for example, the *Saturday Club* producer Jim Grant who had the vision to see the hit potential of the Shadows’ “Apache” as an A-side rather than the originally intended B-side and promoted it as such.<sup>8</sup>) In 1959, it was supplemented by its Sunday companion *Easy Beat*, again with Brian Matthew in charge, but this was much less to my taste, since initially it tended to be heavily dependent on trad jazz and standards performed live by resident musicians such as Kenny Ball, Monty Sunshine and George Melly.

The impetus for pop music programmes on television came with the breaking of the BBC’s broadcasting monopoly by the establishment of ITV

in 1955. This said, however, it has to be acknowledged that from the very outset ITV sought to accommodate and contain a comfortable version of popular music within the variety show format of *Sunday Night at the London Palladium*. Originally running from 1955 to 1967, it very much projected an old-fashioned, establishment view of light entertainment, showcasing musical celebrities as ‘star turns’. (It is, therefore, intensely ironic that such a staid programme should inadvertently give rise to the coining of the term ‘Beatlemania’ by Fleet Street, following the Beatles’ appearance on 13<sup>th</sup> October 1963 and the behaviour of their “screaming fans who made themselves very audible not only inside but outside the theatre too”.<sup>9</sup>)

One of the earliest exclusively pop shows, beginning in December 1956 and running until February 1961, was *Cool for Cats*, transmitted by ITV in 3 fifteen-minute evening slots a week and hosted by Kent Walton, who came to the show as an already established DJ on Radio Luxembourg. Kent introduced current rock’n’roll records, augmented by dance routines from the resident Dougie Squires Dancers, a lively young troupe including the still unknown Una Stubbs.

The BBC’s first comparable programme was *Six-Five Special*, broadcast on Saturday evenings from February 1957 to December 1958, with the well-established DJ Pete Murray as the main host, supported by Jo Douglas. Its scheduling was not only musically significant but also represented the Saturday component of the ending of the so-called ‘toddlers’ truce’, the hitherto strictly enforced closedown of BBC television between six and seven o’clock every evening so that children could be put to bed before adult viewing began.

Originally conceived as a magazine programme for young people, it was the musical content that came to predominate under the guiding hand of innovative producer Jack Good – a mix of skiffle, trad jazz and rock’n’roll, all performed live before a young jiving audience on the studio floor. Led by trombonist Don Lang, his Frantic Five were the resident ‘band’ but more colourful performances, in this black-and-white era of broadcasting, came from the likes of Lonnie Donegan, Tommy Steele and Wee Willie Harris.

However, when Jack Good switched allegiance to ITV, he sparked an early ratings war between the two channels that ran for years. Good is best remembered today as the producer of ITV’s *Oh Boy!*, which ran from September 1958 to May 1959. Going out live at six on Saturday evenings from the stage of the Hackney Empire, it was “ITV’s answer to the *Six-Five Special* on the BBC, and quite revolutionary in its time: non-stop rock’n’roll with a studio audience, most of them girls who screamed solidly for half an hour”.<sup>10</sup>

Most notable for promoting Marty Wilde as a British rock star (staunchly supported by the Vernons Girls, the Dallas Boys and resident orchestra Lord

Rockingham's XI, with Cherry Wainer on the organ), amongst its other no less significant achievements were plugging "Move It" (the "first original British rock and roll classic"<sup>11</sup>) and helping Cliff Richard emerge as a rock'n'roller in his own right:

Jack Good ... worked really hard in creating an image for me: he went through the songs line by line telling me how to stand, how to look, where to look, how to curl my lip and what to do with my hands. Jack turned me into a front man ... He didn't want an Elvis impersonator; what he wanted was someone who had the same appeal as Elvis and who would have the same impact. I couldn't see that I was that someone.<sup>12</sup>

Coming up with *Drumbeat* from April to August 1959, the BBC's mission was clearly retaliation, as recalled by Adam Faith, who was persuaded to audition by John Barry and whose own pop career was subsequently nurtured by the programme:

*Drumbeat* was going to be an all-new, fast-moving show, based around live artists singing the latest hits. Not terribly original – Jack Good had done that with *Six-Five Special* years earlier. But ... all these TV pop shows had really taken off. Every kid in the country tuned in to them. If you became a teen favourite now on a show like *Drumbeat*, your chances of stardom were extremely good.<sup>13</sup>

As well as Adam Faith, other guest stars included Cliff, Anthony Newley, Petula Clark, Billy Fury, Dickie Valentine and Paul Anka.

That same June, however, the BBC pulled a masterstroke by launching *Juke Box Jury*, which quickly moved to a regular Saturday evening slot where it ran until December 1967.<sup>14</sup> Masquerading as a panel game whilst shamelessly plugging the latest pop releases, it was constructed to a very simple formula and presided over by the urbane David Jacobs. Every week four 'celebrity' panellists, drawn from the world of music and TV light entertainment, were asked to comment on the excerpts of records 'played' on the juke box prominently placed on stage and to judge whether they would become 'hits' or 'misses'. As the chairman, Jacobs would acknowledge a majority vote by the 'jury' either for a 'hit' by dingling a bell, of the sort still to be found today on hotel reception desks, or a 'miss' by sounding a klaxon, the rasp of which most closely resembled a ratchet mechanism desperately in need of oiling.

In an element of the 'game' transposed directly from *What's My Line?*, the presence from time to time on the set of the performer of a record under discussion would be disclosed to the audience but not the panel. Having delivered its 'hit' or 'miss' verdict, the 'jury' would then either be delighted or discomfited by the artist being invited to step out on stage. Whatever the outcome, the revelation was greeted by all concerned with the greatest hilarity

and surprise, such were the simple pleasures of television in those days.

*Juke Box Jury* was transmitted live before a studio audience, who became a distinguishing feature of the programme in their own right. For instance, as each new record was played, the cameras cut between shots of the panellists looking thoughtful and members of the audience looking vacant, although rowdier elements would do the ‘hand jive’ to the beatier numbers. There was also a selected ‘jury’ in the audience, armed with discs marked ‘Hit’ and ‘Miss’, to whom Jacobs would turn for a verdict in the event of a tie on the part of the celebrity panel.

In danger of getting ahead of myself here, it is nevertheless worth noting that ITV saw fit to plagiarise *Juke Box Jury* in due course in the ‘Spin-a-Disc’ section of its competing show *Thank Your Lucky Stars*; out of which emerged the temporary fame of Janice Nicholls from Wednesbury, with her Black Country catchphrase “Oi’ll give it foive”. That, however, was a development to come in the Sixties. To end the pop ratings battle of the Fifties, in September 1959 ITV brought on *Boy Meets Girls*, another Jack Good production in succession to *Oh Boy!*; with Marty Wilde and the Vernons Girls still the main attractions but now augmented by Joe Brown.

Notwithstanding these various efforts, the fledgling British pop music industry of the late Fifties was still struggling to disentangle itself from the post-war legacy of seemingly all-pervading American culture. “Whereas”, says Dominic Sandbrook, “the war had left Britain tired and battered, it had invigorated American capitalism, turning it into a strident, vulgar, commercialised threat to British identity and traditions”.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the musical stranglehold of unadulterated Americana in Britain wasn’t effectively broken until the full-scale eruption of the Beatles in 1963. Until then, as noted at the time by Michael Braun, the British press would “patriotically bemoan the fact that the top-selling records have always been made by Americans or by singers such as Cliff Richard and Billy Fury who have studied Elvis, [Frankie] Avalon, and [Paul] Anka and mastered American accent and presentation”.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, a British chart of best-selling records, equivalent to the initiative of the American *Billboard* magazine from July 1940 onwards, did not come into being until the publication, on 14<sup>th</sup> November 1952, of the first “Record Hit Parade” by the *New Musical Express* [NME]; an idea, albeit belated, “novel in its day because it recognised records as an important commodity in their own right”.<sup>17</sup> Originally only a Top 12, it expanded to a Top 20 in October 1954 and Top 30 in April 1956. (Other charts proliferated over time, causing confusion and inconsistency for music historians and those with long memories alike, but I’ll declare my hand here and now as a dedicated NME reader and chart-follower for much of the Sixties.)

The weekly revision of the chart was a heaven-sent mechanism for promoting sales of music papers and records alike. It also became a significant

and keenly observed ritual for performers themselves, a measure of their worth and prospects. As Adam Faith testified:

Everyone in the record business lived in a state of suspended animation on the day the charts were announced. The biggest weekly telephone call was the one that came over from *New Musical Express*: if you got that, you'd made it.<sup>18</sup>

Looking back so far, these diverse beginnings now seem fragile, primitive, even quaint – definitely of another age – and yet, against all odds, they do represent the dubious foundations on which the superstructure of the Sixties' music industry came to be built. In the opinion of the music genealogist Pete Frame, December 1959 brought a “pretty grisly” year to an end, leaving fans “waist deep in the soggy middle ground between rock'n'roll and The Beatles”.<sup>19</sup> Against this background, then, was it any wonder that the seemingly sunlit uplands of the Sixties beckoned to the likes of me, in the hope that British pop music would finally escape the gloom of Fifties' mediocrity to come of age?

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## NOTES

- 1 By Ada Jones and Billy Murray, as cited by Warwick, Kutner & Brown, “The Complete Book of the British Charts” (Omnibus, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2004), p. 420.
- 2 Ian Clayton, “Bringing It All Back Home” (Route, 2007), p. 14.
- 3 Dominic Sandbrook, “White Heat: A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties” (Abacus, 2007), p. 102.
- 4 Dominic Sandbrook, *op.cit.*, p. 103.
- 5 Quoted from the Light Programme pages of [www.radiorewind.co.uk](http://www.radiorewind.co.uk).
- 6 John Peel & Sheila Ravenscroft, “Margrave of the Marshes”, (Corgi, 2006), p.66.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 Rob Bradford, CD liner notes to *The Shadows Complete Singles As & Bs 1959-1980* (EMI, 2004).
- 9 Mark Lewisohn, “The Complete Beatles Chronicle” (Pyramid, 1992), p.124.
- 10 Cliff Richard, with Penny Junor, “My Life, My Way” (Headline Review, 2009), p.61.
- 11 Alwyn W. Turner, “Halfway to Paradise: The Birth of British Rock” (V&A, 2008), p.124.
- 12 Cliff Richard, with Penny Junor, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-62.
- 13 Adam Faith, “Acts of Faith” (Bantam, 1996), p.50.
- 14 As testimony to the programme's early popularity, the theme tune to *Juke Box Jury* (“Hit

And Miss”, by the John Barry Seven) was one of the first television themes to become a best-selling record in Britain, reaching No.18 in April 1960.

- 15 Dominic Sandbrook, “Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles” (Abacus, 2006), p.136.
- 16 Michael Braun, “Love Me Do: The Beatles’ Progress” (Penguin, 1964), p.11.
- 17 Dafydd Rees, Barry Lazell & Roger Osborne, “40 Years of NME Charts” (Boxtree, 1992), p.1.
- 18 Adam Faith, *op.cit.*, p.63.
- 19 Pete Frame, “Rock Family Trees” (Omnibus, 1993), p.57.

## Chapter 2

# 1960

### **FIRST NO.1 OF THE DECADE –**

**“What Do You Want To Make Those Eyes At Me For?”**

**by Emile Ford & The Checkmates**

### **LAST NO.1 OF THE YEAR –**

**“It’s Now Or Never” by Elvis Presley**

New Year’s Day 1960 dawned on a Friday and, as it did so, in Liverpool the last of the revellers from the Cavern Club in Mathew Street were straggling home. For the cost of a ticket at 4/6d each, they had chosen to celebrate New Year’s Eve with a mixture of jazz and skiffle from a line-up that included Micky Ashman’s Jazz Band, the Yorkshire Jazz Band, the Dallas Jazz Band, Hank Walters with his Dusty Road Ramblers and the Swinging Blue Genes. Undoubtedly they welcomed the freshness of the early morning air and the chance to stretch their limbs after the noisome heat of the barrel-vaulted cellar, for:

There was only dancing – the Cavern stomp – when there was room to move ... Most people smoked and within minutes of opening, the Cavern could contain hundreds of sweaty bodies. Condensation would cover the walls and drip off the ceilings. There was no ventilation.<sup>1</sup>

Recuperating through the day, those possessed of sufficient stamina and enthusiasm could return that same night to see the Swinging Blue Genes again, this time sharing the bill with the Cy Laurie Jazz Band.<sup>2</sup>

By now, the Swinging Blue Genes were in their third incarnation and well-established regulars at the Cavern. Some six months after its opening, they had first played there as the Blue Genes, on 31<sup>st</sup> July 1957. (Three weeks earlier, one 15-year-old James Paul McCartney had first encountered 16-year-old John Winston Lennon, on 6<sup>th</sup> July, performing with the Quarry Men at the Woolton Parish Church fete. As it happens, the Quarry Men played the Cavern themselves on 7<sup>th</sup> August 1957, a week after the Blue Genes’ debut, and again on 24<sup>th</sup> January 1958 – performances reportedly neither accomplished nor popular.<sup>3</sup> But it would be another three years after that until the Beatles took the stage at the Cavern for the first time, on 9<sup>th</sup>

February 1961; and when they appeared there in their first evening concert, on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1961, it would be as visiting guest group for the Blue Genes' Guest Night!)\*

The band mixed skiffle and trad jazz, the mis-spelling of 'Blue Genes' for 'Blue Jeans' owing as much to its members' unwitting illiteracy as to a possibly sub-conscious namecheck of the American rock'n'roller, Gene Vincent – of whom more anon. According to Ray Ennis (guitar and vocals), their original aim was to “combine good quality music with a bit of fun”<sup>5</sup>, but they inclined towards rock'n'roll as time went on. Ralph Ellis (guitar and vocals), poached by the Blue Genes in 1958 from his rival eponymous skiffle group after they went head-to-head at the Stanley Dale National Skiffle Contest<sup>6</sup>, characterised this as a transition to a “rock'n'roll front line with a trad jazz rhythm section”<sup>7</sup>.

It was a popular shift of emphasis with the punters, even with those initially drawn to the Cavern for its jazz. Given the prevailing cultural preference for jazz at the time, however, their approach also attracted hostile reviews in the local press. On 10<sup>th</sup> January 1960, as part of Liverpool's first-ever jazz festival, they played with Acker Bilk's Paramount Jazz Band. Acker himself reportedly found them too loud and the music critic for the *Liverpool Daily Post*, Derek Jewell, damned them with equally faint praise, describing them as being “unhappily, more in line with contemporary mass-produced and mass-reflected taste – all whining words and jangling guitars”<sup>8</sup>.

Despite these knocks, they doggedly defended their often uncomfortable musical middle ground, whilst simultaneously playing throughout the year with a host of established stars – amongst them, Sister Rosetta Tharpe (the legendary American gospel and blues singer who accompanied herself on amplified electric guitar) and the jazz bands of Humphrey Lyttelton, Acker Bilk (again, despite his earlier reservations), Terry Lightfoot, Nat Gonella and Ray Ellington.

Nonetheless, in the end the honour of formally breaching the Cavern's barricades against acceptance of rock'n'roll fell not to the Swinging Blue Genes but to Rory Storm and the Hurricanes, the group for which a certain Richard Starkey – *aka* Ringo Starr – then played the drums. On the night of Sunday, 17<sup>th</sup> January 1960, they took on the local 'jazz brigade' by launching unannounced into a set of Jerry Lee Lewis songs. For their pains, they were shouted down by the second number and showered with pennies (then substantially weighty coins and a painful reinforcement of disapproval). To add to their woes, Ray McFall, then owner of the Cavern, docked 10 shillings from their fee as a fine for daring to play rock'n'roll.<sup>9</sup>

By the middle of the year, however, McFall was feeling the pinch from a significant loss on a jazz festival and the stirrings of competition from clubs in suburban Liverpool offering rock'n'roll nights. He therefore opted to

promote his first ‘Rock Night’ at the Cavern, on Wednesday, 25<sup>th</sup> May 1960, with an entrance fee of 2/6d; the acts being Cass and the Cassanovas (later becoming the Big Three) and who else but Rory Storm and the Hurricanes. Unsurprisingly, for this event the ‘jazz brigade’ was ousted by a younger age-group; and very soon afterwards Rock Nights had become a runaway success.

By this time, then, the influence of American rock’n’rollers on British pop performers – current successes and hopefuls alike – was pronounced. And nobody could deny they were a mixed bag. The young John Lennon, for example, cited Elvis as supreme in determining from the outset the musical direction he wanted to take himself; but was almost equally in awe of other contemporaries of Presley such as Little Richard, Carl Perkins, Buddy Holly, Eddie Cochran, Gene Vincent, Jerry Lee Lewis and Chuck Berry. Indeed, the day of the Woolton Church fete was no less memorable for him in being the first day he sang Gene Vincent’s “Be Bop A Lula” on stage than also happening to be the day he first met Paul – who, in his turn, then more than impressed John by demonstrating how he could play Eddie Cochran’s “Twenty Flight Rock”.

Sadly, Holly was already dead by 1960, having been killed in a plane crash en route to a tour date in Minnesota on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1959, together with fellow performers Ritchie Valens and the Big Bopper. He had, however, toured the UK in March 1958 with the Crickets, including an appearance on *Sunday Night at the London Palladium*, and among those who went to see him live were those destined for varying degrees of imminent prominence themselves in British pop music; such as Dave Clark, Allan Clarke, Freddy Garrity, Mick Jagger, Graham Nash, Paul McCartney and Brian Poole.<sup>10</sup>

Holly’s extraordinary influence in Britain in his lifetime, given that he was only 22 when he died, was multi-faceted and cannot be under-estimated. As Alwyn Turner observes:

... in his brief career he had changed the course of the music, and nowhere more so than in Britain. His simple guitar, bass and drums line-up, without sax or piano, became the norm; his Fender Stratocaster (a ‘strangely shaped guitar’, noted the *NME*) and his horn-rimmed glasses were passed on through Hank B. Marvin of the Shadows to future generations; and his experimental approach to writing rock songs influenced the beat boom yet to come.<sup>11</sup>

The body and quality of compositions he left behind him were such that his fame was sustained throughout the Sixties – in common, as we shall see later, with several other artists – by intermittent posthumous releases and re-releases of his records, together with many cover versions, which have

continued down the years. In the course of the decade, noteworthy covers were to come from the Rolling Stones (“Not Fade Away”), the Beatles (“Words of Love”), the Searchers (“Listen to Me”) and Peter and Gordon (“True Love Ways”). Historically, however, the most celebrated of them all, actually pre-dating Holly’s death, must surely be “That’ll Be The Day” by the Quarry Men. Regarded today as probably the rarest and most collectable recording of all time<sup>12</sup>, it was cut at their own expense – 17/6d – as one side of their first record in 1958, at Phillips Sound Recording Service in Liverpool, by a line-up already including the three guitars of John Lennon, Paul McCartney and George Harrison.

Compared to Buddy Holly, the repertoires of Eddie Cochran and Gene Vincent were slight, yet both established strong reputations in their different ways amongst aspiring British musicians.

Whilst Cochran is best remembered today for three songs – “Summertime Blues” (1958), “C’mon Everybody” (1959) and “Three Steps to Heaven” (1960) – it was his performance of “Twenty Flight Rock” in 1956, in the seminal rock’n’roll film *The Girl Can’t Help It*, that first caught the attention of his British fans, Paul McCartney included. Unfortunately, when he eventually came to Britain, in January 1960, he was not destined to survive the year.

After appearing on *Boy Meets Girls* on 16<sup>th</sup> January, he embarked on a lengthy tour, supported by Gene Vincent and Billy Fury, with a young Brian Bennett (then of Marty Wilde’s Wildcats) providing accompaniment on drums. This included a week in March at the Empire Theatre, Liverpool, where he was seen by, amongst others, John Lennon, George Harrison and John Peel (the latter rating it as one of his “Ten Best Gigs of All Time”<sup>13</sup>). With the end of the tour approaching, on 17<sup>th</sup> April, he was travelling by taxi from Bristol with his girlfriend Sharon Sheeley and Vincent, when the car veered off the road and crashed in Chippenham, Wiltshire. While both Sheeley and Vincent sustained serious injury, Cochran was killed, aged 21; making “Three Steps to Heaven” his painfully apt musical epitaph on its posthumous British release in May.

Gene Vincent, then aged 25 and who broke his collarbone in the crash, was already partially disabled, following a motorcycle accident in 1955 which had permanently damaged his left leg and required him to wear a calliper. The resulting discomfort meant that when singing he had to adopt an awkward stance, with his left leg thrust out behind him at the microphone and unwittingly contributing an air of menace to his stage persona.

As with “Twenty Flight Rock”, Vincent’s classic hit “Be Bop A Lula” was also showcased in *The Girl Can’t Help It*. The first record that Paul McCartney ever bought<sup>14</sup>, it reached No. 16 in the *NME* Top 30 when released in Britain in the summer of 1956, its legacy set to endure long beyond its fleeting total of 3 weeks in the charts.

Three years on, “rescued”, in Pete Frame’s words, “from oblivion”<sup>15</sup> and brought to Britain in December 1959 by Jack Good to headline on *Boy Meets Girls*, Vincent allowed Good, as with Cliff Richard before him, to mould his looks for maximum performing impact, so that “by the time the star reached the television screen, he was dressed in black leather and ostentatiously dragged his damaged leg behind him”; a modern cross, to Good’s eyes, between Shakespeare’s Richard III and Hamlet.<sup>16</sup> Three months on, when John Peel saw him at the Liverpool Empire, he was firmly established as the archetypal moody rocker, looking “completely out of control ... almost completely [ignoring] the audience, staring wild-eyed into the wings as though demons lurked behind the Empire’s plush curtains”.<sup>17</sup>

Prior to Cochran’s death, he and Vincent had been scheduled for another Liverpool concert, at the Stadium, on 3<sup>rd</sup> May. After the car crash, Vincent flew back to America to recuperate but returned to Britain for the Stadium commitment. In these changed circumstances, the promoter, Allan Williams, decided to augment the support acts with local groups and hence Vincent became the catalyst for what went down in history as the “first ever Merseybeat rock’n’roll show”<sup>18</sup>; featuring Rory Storm and the Hurricanes, Bob Evans and the Five Shillings, Cass and the Cassanovas and Gerry and the Pacemakers.

Yet for the time being, at least, all this activity by over-enthusiastic lads in the north-west of England directed towards forming groups was bucking the trend of the charts nationally. Of all the best-selling singles making the Top 40 in 1960 as a whole, almost 60% were American in origin (in May and again in July the figure was as high as 65%) and well over half were by solo male artists, whereas only 14% were by groups.<sup>19</sup>

This said, it was a British group, Emile Ford and the Checkmates, with their revamp of “What Do You Want to Make Those Eyes at Me For?” (a song first recorded in 1917), who held the No.1 spot from before Christmas 1959 for the first four weeks of 1960. Ford also had the distinction of being the first black British-resident male performer to reach No.1 in the charts and the record, an early success as producer for the quixotic Joe Meek, sold over a million in the UK alone. Nevertheless, for those of us eagerly awaiting some sign of progression musically in the new decade, it was not a promising start, especially given some of the other chart contenders at the turn of the year.

Even allowing for the impact of the just-concluded holiday period, novelty and sentimentality had a worryingly strong foothold in the January charts. For instance, there were the Avons, with “Seven Little Girls Sitting in the Back Seat”; Max Bygraves, with “Jingle Bell Rock”; and the Beverley Sisters, with “Little Donkey”; not to mention piano medleys from Russ Conway and Winifred Atwell.

Then one step beyond even these questionable limits of popular taste, there was Tommy Steele's "Little White Bull", from his musical comedy film *Tommy the Toreador*, showing how rapidly the first hothead flush of British rock'n'roll could dissipate in the face of calculated transition to mainstream showbusiness. (For Steele, of course, this process had already begun several years earlier, with a starring role in pantomime following his chart success with his version of "Singing The Blues". As Barry Miles succinctly put it: "Exit the rock'n'roller, enter the all-round entertainer".<sup>20</sup>) In this frivolous farce, he starred as Tommy Tomkins, a sailor from London who ventures into bullfighting on landfall in Spain, supported by a core of familiar actors from the *Carry On* stable – including Bernard Cribbins, Sid James, Eric Sykes and Kenneth Williams.

On concurrent release was Cliff Richard's second film, *Expresso Bongo*, adapted from the successful 1958 stage musical parodying the discovery of stars like Tommy Steele in the coffee bars of Soho; with Cliff as singer Bert Rudge, manipulated into the pop persona of 'Bongo Herbert' by crooked agent Johnny Jackson (played by Laurence Harvey). Taken from the film soundtrack, both an EP and the single "A Voice in the Wilderness" gave Cliff Top 20 hits by the end of January, an early indicator of the increasingly profitable links to be exploited between the complementary cinema and music industries as the Sixties progressed.

Whilst the likes of Cliff Richard and Adam Faith may have trodden in Steele's footsteps in pursuit of wealth, aspiring to buy smart cars and houses (for "conspicuous consumption was an essential part of the glamour" of stardom<sup>21</sup>), for now, at least, they saw themselves – and were still being projected – as teen idols. Yet if any further proof was needed of how precarious the musical pretensions of younger performers were at this time, it came in spades at the end of March with the direct entry at No. 1 in the charts of Lonnie Donegan's "My Old Man's A Dustman". There could, after all, be no clearer sign of how much the novelty factor in records endeared itself to an older record-buying public. Described variously as a "modernised version of a traditional song sung by World War 1 troops"<sup>22</sup> and an "archetypal music-hall comedy song"<sup>23</sup>, sales were boosted on release by its live performance on *Sunday Night at the London Palladium*. Catching "the popular imagination like nothing he had cut previously", on the strength of first-week sales of over a quarter of a million records it went straight to No.1; making Donegan the first British act and only the second in history, after Elvis with "Jailhouse Rock" in January 1958, to achieve this. Staying at No.1 for four weeks, total sales eventually reached over a million.

There was no doubt that the song not only had an obvious, in-your-face humour but also a raucous, irritating catchiness about it. Whilst its runaway success was nothing less than deplorable to those of us craving the emergence of new musical departures, it has to be conceded that, for its

time, it proclaimed the light-hearted Donegan king of that particular genre, surpassing his previous achievement of a No.3 chart position in February 1959 with the almost equally insufferable “Does Your Chewing Gum Lose Its Flavour (On The Bedpost Overnight)?” In the long term, history has been kind to Donegan, following his death in 2002, acknowledging his broader-based jazz, skiffle and blues influences on the next generation of popular British musicians; yet it is salutary to reflect that many others would have seen these comedy diversions as his greatest achievements. At this juncture, however, he was not quite done with chart success and in June his return to more melodic roots with the ballad “I Wanna Go Home” reached No.5. Based on the traditional “The Wreck of the John B”, this was a very British take on an old song that the Beach Boys were later destined to revisit in their own distinctive way in 1966, as one of the classic suite of songs constituting *Pet Sounds*.

As the year progressed, so the relentless success of best-selling novelty records continued: Tommy Steele with the pseudo-Cockney rant “What A Mouth (What A North And South)”, Rolf Harris with “Tie Me Kangaroo Down Sport”<sup>24</sup>, Peter Sellers and Sophia Loren with “Goodness Gracious Me!” (a spin-off from the film in which they both starred, *The Millionaires*, and produced by George Martin in his pre-Beatles incarnation), Charlie Drake with “Mr. Custer”. Some, like Anthony Newley, even tried to breathe new hip credibility into old English folk songs such as “Strawberry Fair”. Nor were American artists who should have known better immune to this money-spinning gimmickry; notably Perry Como with “Delaware”, Bobby Darin with “Clementine”, a precocious 16-year-old Brian Hyland with “Itsy Bitsy Teeny Weeny Yellow Polka Dot Bikini” (notwithstanding the exotic image it conjured up in the days of the one-piece swimsuit) and, at the very end of the year, even Frank Sinatra with “Ol’ Macdonald”. Yet stranger in its own way was the converse of these aberrations, the emergent phenomenon of the professional comedian with pretensions to be taken seriously as a balladeer, as exemplified at the height of summer by Ken Dodd with his first hit, “Love Is Like A Violin”. As Dr. Johnson once famously observed: “It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all”.

As we have already seen, the dominant presence in the charts was that of solo male artists; and of the younger British contingent, the most consistent and successful by far were Cliff Richard and Adam Faith, both with a steady stream of hits throughout the year, including a No.1 each (Faith with “Poor Me” in March, Richard with “Please Don’t Tease” in July and August). However, Richard, accompanied by the Shadows, had also taken a significant step towards international recognition, in the vanguard of what, some years later, would become known as the ‘British Invasion’, by embarking in

January on a six-week tour of Canada and the USA. Performing alongside American pop stars such as Frankie Avalon, Bobby Rydell and the instrumental rock group Johnny and The Hurricanes in the “Biggest Show of Stars 1960 Winter Edition”, Richard was so overcome by nerves on the opening night in Montreal that he was physically sick before going on stage. Travelling through a North American midwinter was also hard and relentless:

We went everywhere by Greyhound bus and for six weeks we spent hours and hours on the move, anything from eight to sixteen hours at a stretch, freezing cold and uncomfortable, trying desperately to sleep in our seats with nothing more than overcoats to keep us warm ... a long time to be living like this ...<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, it represented a landmark in taking the fight for popular music supremacy back across the Atlantic.

Back home, the rivalry between Richard and Faith was intense, to the extent that Faith prided himself on being the contrasting ‘bad boy’ to Richard’s ‘good boy’ image. Taken to its extreme, he even wanted people to think “that if Cliff Richard and I were walking towards them with cut-throat razors in our hands, they’d expect Cliff to use his for a shave, and for me to use mine to slit their throats”.<sup>27</sup>

Of the two, however, Faith was handicapped by a particularly intimidating management regime, in the person of Eve Taylor, whom he later described as a “cruel and destructive woman” who “looked and sounded like Thora Hird, and behaved like Attila the Hun”.<sup>28</sup> With the end of the year approaching, against his better judgement Faith allowed her to dragoon him into recording the mawkish “Lonely Pup In A Christmas Shop”. As he pointed out, he had had five hit records in a row and “good songs were getting harder to find”<sup>29</sup>; but this, he knew intuitively, was a step too far:

Despite knowing that the song could be disastrous for me, I let myself be bullied and browbeaten by Eve into recording it.

The song was a big hit, all right.<sup>30</sup> But for me, it was the beginning of the end and it nearly buried my record career. It attracted universal derision from the critics and the fans alike. It was a ridiculous, stupid thing to do, and it served me right. It was against all my instincts, and was one example of how little control I had over my singing career.<sup>31</sup>

Hence it came home to Faith, as many other singers before and after him, that the key to his survival in the long term was to secure as high a degree of artistic autonomy as possible. Disillusioned by this particularly galling experience and concerned, too, at the distance widening between himself and his erstwhile arranger John Barry, as Barry’s own popularity grew, Faith unilaterally determined to take a new direction and set about recruiting a backing

group, the Roulettes. Not only was this a move calculated to bring him more personal satisfaction but it also, of course, followed the unmissably impressive precedent set by Cliff Richard and the Shadows; a collaboration through which Richard, working notably with Bruce Welch at that time, was extending his range by actively exploring songwriting as well as performing.

Nevertheless, with the possible exception of Anthony Newley, it appeared there simply were no other young British male singers with the necessary combined strength of personality and material capable of making a consistent impact on the higher reaches of the charts in the course of the year. Artists such as Craig Douglas, Mark Wynter, Billy Fury or Marty Wilde could make only fitful showings in the hit parade, such was the strength of male solo competition from America. Even if a breakthrough could be achieved, it was often only on the back of recording cover versions of American originals and, as such, more likely than not to be short-lived; a classic case in point being that of Ricky Valance (born David Spencer, in April 1939). He has the distinction of being the first Welshman to reach the British No.1 spot, as he eventually did for the first two weeks of October with his cover of Ray Peterson's infamous 'death disc' "Tell Laura I Love Her". Having overcome much initial resistance from broadcasters to the song's morbid theme of Tommy's farewell with his dying breath to his sweetheart Laura, after a fatal crash in a stock-car race, Valance then found himself doomed to be consigned to musical history as a one-hit wonder.

Of all the transatlantic challengers, 1960 marked a watershed for Elvis Presley in particular. On completion, at the age of twenty-five, of his 2 years' service as an Army conscript with a posting in Germany, Presley famously touched down fleetingly on British soil for a refuelling stop at Prestwick Airport, Glasgow (then a US Air Force base), on the evening of 3<sup>rd</sup> March, en route for home and demob. Once out of the army and back in harness as a full-time entertainer, his manager, 'Colonel' Tom Parker, saw to it that a steady stream of product – films as well as records – ensued, although by now the musical content was increasingly softening towards balladry from the original stripped-down rock'n'roll of his early career. In effect this was the launch of a 'new' Elvis, who, as noted incredulously by rock historian Robert Palmer:

celebrated his return to civilian life by donning a tux and singing a television duet with ... Frank Sinatra? Apparently, Elvis (or his management) was out to prove that he could be as malleable as any of the impeccably coiffed and manicured 'teen idols' being manufactured to order by the corporate music business.<sup>32</sup>

Whether through loss of edge or not, in April, with "Stuck On You", not even Elvis could overcome the obstacle of the massive sales of "My Old Man's A Dustman", paradoxically finding himself blocked at No.2 by Lonnie

Donegan, the only other performer until then to have rivalled him with a direct entry to the British charts at No.1. By November, however, a resurgence of his popularity carried him again straight to No.1 with "It's Now Or Never", a modern reworking of the 1901 Italian ballad "O Sole Mio". Advance orders of almost half a million were rapidly followed by sales of over 750,000 in the first week of release and six weeks later it became a million-seller, staying at No.1 for an unbroken nine weeks.

Below Presley, from the late Fifties onwards, there had been a flourishing second order of male North American teen-and-twenty performers, steadily growing in number and regularly scoring hits in Britain. As well as Cliff Richard's erstwhile touring companions Frankie Avalon and Bobby Rydell, they included the likes of Neil Sedaka, Paul Anka, Jimmy Jones, and Sam Cooke. Of these, the late Cooke (killed in a shooting in Los Angeles in December 1964) stands out today as an early exponent of the genre that became soul music. Back in 1960, his British hit of the year was "Chain Gang" (reaching No.8 in October), following the lesser success in July of "Wonderful World" (only making No.27 in the *Record Retailer* chart and subsequently covered to greater effect by Herman's Hermits in April 1965); but he was outdone by Jimmy Jones, whose "Good Timin'" was No.1 for the first three weeks of July.

By way of complete contrast, Neil Sedaka was a brassily precocious singer/songwriter, already successful as a composer of hits for others and readily distinguishable by his strident delivery over his own piano accompaniment. Seeing him perform was like watching Liberace on speed. In collaboration with Howard Greenfield, Sedaka perfected the composition of "songs of neurotic love"<sup>33</sup>, their lyrics typically interweaving the emotional insecurity of adolescence with unfulfilled yearnings of desire and sentimental speculation. The turn of the year from 1959 to 1960 brought him notable success with his smash hit "Oh! Carol". Ostensibly written in praise of his high school girlfriend Carole Klein (who later became singer/songwriter Carole King)<sup>34</sup>, it first entered the charts in November 1959, making No.3 twice, in December and January. Coasting thereafter, his next release "Stairway To Heaven" nevertheless spent 14 weeks bouncing around the Top 30, from 2<sup>nd</sup> April to 2<sup>nd</sup> July, climbing and dipping several times in the process and peaking twice at No.12, in May and June.

For solo female singers, the early Sixties were lean years and 1960 was no exception, when they provided only 8% of Top 40 entries. While the main contenders from America were Connie Francis and Brenda Lee, and even the French *chanteuse* Edith Piaf, at the age of 44, could reach No.22 in May with "Milord", it was the beginning of the end for British artists such as Alma Cogan who had previously enjoyed a long run of chart success in the

Fifties. Against this decline of her predecessors' fortunes, the young Shirley Bassey's career, however, remained in the ascendant, the characteristically passionate intensity of her delivery elevating ballads that in others' hands would have been merely safe and unremarkable to entirely another dimension. For example, with her version of "As Long As He Needs Me" (Nancy's song from Lionel Bart's hit musical of the day *Oliver!*), she gained the No.2 slot in late October, denied the No.1 placing by Roy Orbison's "Only The Lonely".

The time for others ultimately destined to establish themselves in history as British queens of pop in the Sixties was still to come; although, at 21, Mary O'Brien had taken a decisive step nearer fame by ending her year's membership of close-harmony girl trio the Lana Sisters. In the perverse traditions of pop, the three were not sisters, of course, but two friends whom Mary had joined in response to an advertisement in *The Stage*. Despite the fact that the Lana Sisters shared Eve Taylor as their manager with Adam Faith, they have left precious little of a legacy in their own right. Yet their popularity at the time was sufficient to ensure a recording contract with Fontana and at least three television appearances; on *Six-Five Special*, *Drumbeat* and a Christmas *Tommy Steele Spectacular*. After twelve months of what she acknowledged had been "good tough training"<sup>35</sup>, in early 1960 Mary elected to team up instead with her brother Tom and friend Tim Feild to form The Springfields and hence:

... with a catchy name and a strong identity, they embarked on a frenetic round of concerts and cabaret appearances. They were booked in at Butlin's holiday camps, and spent sixteen weeks on the road in an old Volkswagen bus. Their trademark was versatility: with folk-harmony accessibility, a collection of instruments that included piano, guitar, bongos and conga drums, and songs composed by Tom that featured words in Hebrew, German, Greek, Czech and Russian, the band could play to any audience.<sup>36</sup>

So it was that through this mix of the mundane and the exotic began to emerge Mary's new persona as Dusty Springfield, with the twin advantages of age and professional experience at this stage over current schoolgirls Helen Shapiro, Marianne Faithfull, Sandra Goodrich and Marie Lawrie. As for Priscilla White, who had turned 17 in May, her musical future beckoned imminently in the Liverpool clubs and coffee bars where she worked part-time as an office assistant, occasional cloakroom attendant and even waitress.

A much larger share of the Top 40 – over 13% – fell to instrumentals. At a time when songwriting in general was unimaginatively formulaic, not that far removed from the 'moon/June' romantic cliché, instrumentals

– at their best – enabled the listener to attach their own imaginative associations to danceable tunes. Where the performers displayed a high degree of technical proficiency into the bargain, admiration, if not a desire for emulation, provoked added enjoyment. In a year in which the American sounds of Duane Eddy and Johnny and The Hurricanes became commonplace, it was the Shadows who eventually prevailed over all other competition and secured the No.1 slot for six consecutive weeks from 20<sup>th</sup> August with their seminal interpretation of “Apache”; knocking Cliff Richard’s “Please Don’t Tease” from top place in the process. Composed by Jerry Lordan and actually recorded first by the popular guitar virtuoso Bert Weedon<sup>37</sup>, it even included Cliff himself on bongos in the opening bars – which, in retrospect, he argued was the record’s unique selling-point, to “ensure [The Shadows] were given the best possible promotion”:

... at the very beginning there is a little drum intro – I think two bars. Well, that was me: that was it, my contribution; but they were able to go to the press and say, ‘Cliff Richard plays the drums in the opening of the record’, and it had the desired effect.<sup>38</sup>

Be that as it may, there can be no doubting Jim Grant’s judgement over Norrie Paramor’s as to the merits of “Apache” over “Quatermasster’s Stores”, the whimsical version of the traditional Scouting and Army refrain originally favoured as the A-side.<sup>39</sup> For the Shadows, the tight structure and pace of “Apache”, with its insistent beat, marked a quantum leap away from the tentativeness of their first instrumental release (as the Drifters) a year earlier, “Jet Black” coupled with “Driftin’”, and pushed them firmly in a new – and highly profitable – direction, irrespective of their association with Cliff. Eventually selling over a million copies, the arrangement deserves recognition as a genuine departure in style to create the first two-minute wonder of the year truly of the Sixties rather than the Fifties; and it was, of course, only the first of a monumental string of hit records from the Shadows stretching out for years to come.

Leaving the technical impact of the tremelo on the music to be played aside, the physical organisation of the Shadows as a guitar band also has its deserved place in British pop history, the classic line-up of Hank Marvin (lead guitar), Bruce Welch (rhythm guitar), Jet Harris (bass guitar) and Tony Meehan (drums) laying down the blueprint for aspiring groups for the rest of the decade and beyond. This said, British male vocal groups built in this image were still struggling to get into their stride; with the exception, perhaps, of Johnny Kidd and The Pirates, who managed to take “Shakin’ All Over” to No.3 in July. On stage they dressed as pirates, reputedly following an accident suffered by Kidd himself (*aka* Fred Heath), when he was forced to wear an eyepatch after being hit in the eye by a broken guitar string<sup>40</sup>, but their musical

competence was not betrayed by this nod to pantomime. Although the lyrics of “Shakin’ All Over” owe as much to the old spiritual “Dem Bones” as they do to contemporary rock’n’roll, earlier songs such as “Shake, Rattle and Roll” and “Whole Lotta Shakin’[Goin’ On]” had already imbued any reference to ‘shakin’ with clear sexual connotations. In addition, the record is an instrumental triumph, with its distinctive pizzicato riff, its hiccupping tempo and its impassioned guitar break all genuine indicators of a shift in style.<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless, the greatest paradox of the year was that the most significant contribution towards the creation of a new music for the Sixties turned out to be the leaving of the country by a group who had yet to cut a record professionally. On 16<sup>th</sup> August, under an agreement between Liverpool music promoter Allan Williams and German club-owner Bruno Koschmider, the Beatles (now configured as a five-man line-up of Paul McCartney, John Lennon, George Harrison, Pete Best and Stuart Sutcliffe) left for Hamburg. They were to spend three-and-a-half months as resident band at first the Indra Club, then the Kaiserkeller, both venues in the red-light district of St. Pauli. Here endurance, versatility and inventiveness were the watchwords of their musical apprenticeship, in front of largely unsophisticated and often intimidating audiences just out for a good time – from teenagers in the early evening to over-18s after ten o’clock at night, until from two in the morning onwards they were left with the tail-enders, a rough and ready assortment of drunks and local mobsters, the latter in particular vividly remembered by John:

All these gangsters would come in – the local Mafia. They’d send a crate of champagne on stage, imitation German champagne, and we had to drink it or they’d kill us. They’d say, ‘Drink, and then do “What I’d Say”’. We’d have to do this show whatever time of night. If they came in at five in the morning and we’d been playing seven hours, they’d give us a crate of champagne and we were supposed to carry on.<sup>42</sup>

Given the obviously disreputable nature of the club district itself, the opportunity for them to make the acquaintance of any vaguely respectable young German peers was remote – and yet one day, drawn by the music and fate, a young commercial artist called Klaus Voorman ventured into the Kaiserkeller basement and found himself intrigued by this group who “played together so well, so powerful and so funny”.<sup>43</sup>

Voorman having conveyed his enthusiasm to friends Astrid Kirchherr and Jurgen Vollmer (both photographers), this unlikely trio of intellectuals quickly became club regulars and the Beatles’ drinking companions. The closeness that developed between them was driven in large part by Astrid’s

infatuation with Stuart Sutcliffe, prompting her to take the earliest professional photographs of the group, at the club and various other locations around Hamburg. (These include the iconic black-and-white picture of the five early Beatles in leather jackets against the backdrop of an open-sided goods truck in a railway siding; and her trademark half-shadow portraits were prophetic precursors of the monochrome images used later for the sleeves of their second and third LPs, *With The Beatles* and *A Hard Day's Night*.) What is more, by the beginning of November Astrid and Stuart were engaged.

From October, the Beatles shared club billings at the Kaiserkeller with fellow Liverpudlians Rory Storm and The Hurricanes, through which a closer association with their drummer, Ringo, began to develop, as he spent “a lot of sitting-out time watching the Beatles and requesting songs from them”.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, along with fellow Hurricane Lou Walters, Ringo was invited to join John, Paul and George on 15<sup>th</sup> October, when they made another amateur recording at their own expense, of the Gershwin standard “Summertime”, at the Akustik studio, the first known occasion on which the future foursome played together.<sup>45</sup>

Little did the Beatles appreciate, however, the peril of association with other visiting British musicians, which was destined to bring their first experience of Hamburg to an untimely end several weeks before Christmas. In a fit of pique at the time they had started, in their breaks at the Kaiserkeller, to spend (and play) with Tony Sheridan and The Jets at a newly-opened rival club, the Top Ten, Bruno Koschmider gave them a month's notice at the end of October for alleged breach of contract. At the same time, coincidentally, it came to the attention of the German police that George was under 18, meaning he could not legally be or work in the clubs after midnight, and on 21<sup>st</sup> November he was deported; as were Paul and Pete Best soon afterwards, at the end of that month, for alleged arson in respect of a minor fire at the Bambi Kino, a cinema also owned by Koschmider, where he had provided the group with makeshift lodgings. This left John and Stuart to make their own way back to England, which they did separately; John by train in mid-December and Stuart last of all, eventually flying home (with his air fare courtesy of Astrid) in late February 1961.

Despite the ragged disarray of their piecemeal retreat to Liverpool, the Beatles' time abroad had initiated both personal and professional relationships of lasting meaning for the group's future, which they would revisit and consolidate in the months ahead. And, unlikely as it must have seemed to them then, with the core of the group reunited on John's return, the best was yet to come, for they had unexpectedly been booked by Bob Wooler as a late addition to a concert bill on 27<sup>th</sup> December at the Litherland Town Hall Ballroom; where, if the music on offer was not to the crowd's taste, fighting habitually broke out on the dance floor. Since they were still virtually

unknown locally, Wooler had had to press promoter Brian Kelly hard to give them an opening alongside the three existing acts of the Del Renas, the Deltones and the Searchers.<sup>46</sup> In Stuart Sutcliffe's continuing absence in Germany, Pete Best had secured Chas Newby as temporary stand-in on bass guitar and the rest, as Wooler's eye-witness account makes clear, is history:

The stage at Litherland is quite high, so [the audience] were all looking up and I was looking down at the sea of bewildered faces. They hadn't seen or heard anything like it. Yet they were familiar with the songs because the Beatles were doing songs by Little Richard, Chuck Berry, and Carl Perkins. They were all familiar with those [songs], but it was that extra something the Beatles always gave to their performances and songs. And that was the beginning of Beatlemania.<sup>47</sup>

This, then, was the turning-point for the group whose ultimate destiny was to change the style, direction and influence of British pop music forever. Yet their immediate success, as Wooler evidences, lay in the originality not of their material but of their performance, their unique live interpretation of classic rock'n'roll standards which had no parallel in the contemporary commercial record charts. The critical factor was that the music they played then was instantly recognisable as music to dance to but given a new spin. Indeed, this was just as much a requirement of them from the local concert fixers in Liverpool as it had been from Bruno Koschmider in Hamburg, whose constant entreaty to them had been to 'mach shau' – to 'make show', with a view to keeping audiences engaged whilst they drank their way ever deeper into his clubs' profits.

By virtue of their time away, as well as the hard school of knocks they had endured in Germany, the Beatles found themselves out of step, in every sense, with the trend that had blossomed in their absence for aspiring groups at home to ape the Shadows:

Every group was copying their sober, terribly neat stage dress of grey suits, matching ties and highly polished shoes. They did little dance steps, three one way and three the other. In their appearance as well as in their music, everything was neat, polished and restrained.<sup>48</sup>

In contrast, the Beatles "played loud and wild and looked scruffy and disorganised", creating a sound "light years away from the discreet Shadows" – a sound which "you had to run away and hide your ears from, or go as wild and ecstatic as the people producing it".<sup>49</sup> John Lennon, for one, was unrepentantly proud that the Beatles "played what we liked best", whilst robustly contemptuous of the fact that "everyone else was playing Cliff Richard shit".<sup>50</sup>

Notwithstanding the arrogance of Lennon's youth, it could not be denied in general that music of a more temperate persuasion held sway with the mass of the record-buying public throughout the year. Whether the young bloods from Liverpool and elsewhere cared for it or not, for now melodic songs, predominantly on the theme of young love and as singable as they were danceable, continued to be the best sellers. Cliff and the Shadows even pushed beyond the boundaries of the success of their singles with LP sales strong enough to secure the No.7 and No.10 positions amongst the Top Ten albums of the year, with *Cliff Sings* and *Me And My Shadows* respectively.<sup>51</sup> Here was a difficult but potentially lucrative extended market for their talents, in competition not so much with their British and American peers as with the film and show soundtracks beloved of adults rather than teenagers.

Just how wedded older buyers of the period could be to songs from the shows is illustrated most obviously (or painfully, depending on your point of view) by the soundtrack to *South Pacific*. First entering the album charts in November 1958, it was the top-selling LP of 1959 and then again of 1960; falling to No.3 in 1961 and No. 5 in 1962, before its four-year run in the Top Ten came, at long last, to an end.<sup>52</sup> (No-one then, of course, could have foreseen the ominous precedent thus set for *The Sound Of Music*, to which I shall endeavour to make as little reference as possible in the pages to come.)

The longing for escapism implicit in the phenomenally extended success of sales of *South Pacific* is, of course, in itself the clearest statement possible of the total lack of interconnection then between the music business and events in the wider world. No-one then thought to make great assumptions about popular music, to inflate it to an art form or to credit it with any specific insight into the human condition: it was there to be enjoyed at a superficial level and to turn a profit in the process.

The closest pop came to the most marginal of intrusions in current affairs in the course of the year arose from the disingenuous marketing of a now little-remembered record by the pianist Russ Conway. 1960 had begun with a 33-year-old Elizabeth the Second as Queen, in the seventh year of her reign and seven months pregnant with her third child. The new Prince, Andrew, was born on 19<sup>th</sup> February, coinciding with the release of Conway's "Royal Event". Recorded on 31<sup>st</sup> January and backed with "Rule Britannia", it had the distinction of being the last 78rpm record to be pressed and issued by EMI – and caused a minor furore when played as a new release on *Juke Box Jury*. Panellist Pete Murray, the disc jockey, was beside himself, denouncing it as being in the "worst possible taste" as a blatant attempt to cash in on the royal birth, and declared that he would refuse to play it.<sup>53</sup> His outrage missed the point, that the tune's crime against taste actually lay in its composition,