

British R&B

A Study of Black Popular Music Revivalism in the United Kingdom, 1960–1964

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a study of rhythm and blues as it was performed and received in the UK between 1960 and 1964 as well as the conditions and events that precipitated its arrival. *British R&B* is concerned primarily with understanding how the category of “rhythm and blues” came to be defined, debated and redefined in the UK during this period. Drawing tools from musicology, sociology, critical race theory and cultural studies, this dissertation addresses the consumption and emulation of rhythm and blues primarily through close readings of contemporaneous discourse and exemplary musical performances. The goal of this project is to provide a cultural and musical study of the short-lived genre of British R&B that allows the complexity of the phenomenon to be highlighted and better understood; one that avoids the common, opposing pitfalls of uncritical celebration and out-of-hand dismissal. The historical moment of early 1960s’ British R&B is at once exalted and derided, and, depending on one’s point of view, labeled appropriation in either the most positive or most negative senses of the term.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette dissertation est une étude du « rhythm-and blues » tel qu'il était interprété et reçu au Royaume-Uni entre 1960 et 1964, ainsi que des conditions et des événements qui ont précipité son arrivée. Plus particulièrement, *British R&B* analyse de la façon dont la catégorie « rhythm-and-blues » a été définie, débattue, et redéfinie au Royaume-Uni au cours de cette période. À l'aide d'outils théoriques offerts par la musicologie, la sociologie, la théorie critique de la race, et les études culturelles, cette dissertation traite de la consommation et de l'émulation de la musique « rhythm-and-blues » grâce à des analyses détaillées du discours contemporain et de performances musicales exemplaires. Le moment historique du R&B britannique, au début des années 1960, a été tour à tour exalté et ridiculisé, et selon différents points de vue, étiquetée en tant que forme d'appropriation culturelle dans les sens les plus positifs comme dans les sens les plus négatifs du terme. L'objectif principal de ce projet est donc de soumettre une étude culturelle et musicale du genre R&B britannique qui permet de mettre en évidence et de mieux comprendre la complexité de ce phénomène de courte durée, et ce sans sombrer dans la célébration sans critique ni dans le rejet catégorique.

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1 - INTRODUCTION

The lights dim. The crowd roars. On stage stands a band of white, British musicians. A typical New Orleans-style front line of trumpet, trombone and clarinet begins to play a blues riff backed by a rhythm section of bass, drums and banjo. A few moments later two African American men stride onstage. One sits at a piano, settling in for a moment before accompanying the frontline riff. The other turns to plug his electric guitar into an amplifier. A blare of feedback emanates from the amp before the gain is turned down. He turns to the microphone, faces the awaiting crowd and sings:

*The gypsy woman told my mother, before I was born,
You got a boy child coming, gonna be a son of a gun.
He's gonna make pretty womens, jump and shout.
Then the world wanna know, what this all about.
But you know I'm here...*¹

The date was October 26, 1958. On this evening, in Manchester's Free Trade Hall, Muddy Waters gave one of his first live performances in the UK. Although a recording of the concert appears to contradict such assertions, Muddy Waters' "screaming" electric guitar was ostensibly so unsettling that it motivated more than a few early exits from this performance and drove at least one critic to take refuge from the sound in a men's washroom for the bulk of the bluesman's set.² While extreme, this critic's response to Waters' "downhome" bottleneck slide

¹ This scene is reimaged from the audio recording of the event on the Muddy Waters' LP *Live at the Free Trade Hall* (Krazy Kat 7405, n.d.). This riff is played on the original recording of "Hoochie Coochie Man," and typically in live performance, by harmonica and guitar.

² The critic in question was Jack Florin, quoted in Sandra Tooze, *Muddy Waters: The Mojo Man* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1997), 165. This performance, part of a ten-date tour of England arranged by jazz trombonist and bandleader Chris Barber, featured Waters and pianist Otis Spann as special guests with the Chris Barber Band—at the time, one of Britain's most popular traditional jazz ensembles. Waters' first appearance in England occurred ten days before as the headliner for a jazz festival in Leeds. While *Melody Maker* noted that "many audience members staged a walk-out" during Waters' set during that

style on his somewhat overdriven Fender telecaster is not terribly difficult to imagine. After all, in 1958, few if any, British musicians sounded much like Muddy Waters. At least not yet.



Figure 1.1 – Muddy Waters during his 1958 UK Tour³

Four years after his initial tour of the UK, however, re-creations of Waters’ Chicago-based electric blues sound became the cornerstone of a music scene emerging from the jazz clubs of London’s Soho district. Although Waters was the most revered and reproduced singer, his was but one of the many models from which musicians within the scene drew. Similarly emulated were other artists contained within the British musical category “rhythm and blues,” a

first concert (*Melody Maker*, October 28, 1958, 9), there is little evidence to suggest that a similar act of protest occurred at the Manchester concert.

³ Photo by Terry Cryer. Used with the kind permission of the Terry Cryer Estate.

classification applied at the time to just about all iterations of black popular music. Even if Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley were the earliest and most ubiquitous sources of inspiration, other danceable blues-based musics of America (and even some iterations filtered through Jamaica) likewise provided a set of expressive possibilities that were repurposed within this London scene. These reiterations of popular black sound came to be recognized by the music industry, press and practitioners alike as "British R&B." Over the course of 1963 the rhythm and blues boom gained ever-greater attention in the British popular music weeklies and attracted exponentially larger audiences in London clubs. If 1963 was British R&B's coming out party, 1964 would be the year R&B wed with the broader British popular music market.⁴ Throughout 1964, rhythm and blues as performed by British artists infiltrated the pop charts. By the end of the year the Animals' rendition of "House of the Rising Sun," Cilla Black's cover of Dionne Warwick's "Anyone Who Had a Heart," and the Rolling Stones' version of Howlin' Wolf's "Little Red Rooster" all reached #1. The honeymoon would be short-lived, though. By mid-1965 the term R&B as it was used in prior years ceased to be a useful genre designation. The music and musicians it once described no longer fit. Few attempted faithful recreations of African American rhythm and blues artists after 1964. Nonetheless, the expressive conventions of American rhythm and blues left their imprint on the British musical landscape. Waters and his ilk were no longer direct models, but their legacies—the band names, the blue notes, the bravado—would continue to resonate.

This dissertation is a study of British R&B as it was performed and received in the UK between 1960 and 1964 as well as the conditions and events that precipitated its arrival. In order to provide a better sense of the circumstances that made the emergence of British R&B possible the contemporaneous reception of American rhythm and blues in the UK and the routes by which

⁴ And thanks to the "British Invasion," beyond the borders of Great Britain.

it was made accessible to British audiences are also addressed. I am concerned primarily with understanding how the category of “rhythm and blues” came to be defined, debated and redefined in the UK during this period. This dissertation is driven by the following questions: How did British R&B come about and, more importantly, what did this music mean to the white, British, and predominantly young public who created and consumed it? How did the spatial, racial and social distance between British youth and the black cultures associated with rhythm and blues influence the ways in which these musics were valued? What did the emulation of these styles provide for burgeoning sub-groups/cultures? Once rhythm and blues emerged into the field of mainstream popular music, what did it provide—socially, culturally, personally—that other genres could not? More broadly, how do we understand the processes of evaluation, appropriation and consumption of rhythm and blues in terms of the music’s relation to cultural and identity formation within British society during the first half of 1960s?

Drawing tools from musicology, sociology, critical race theory and cultural studies, *British R&B* addresses the consumption and emulation of rhythm and blues primarily through close readings of contemporaneous discourse and exemplary musical performances. The analysis of discourse considers the roles audiences and musicians alike played in these processes as well as the roles played by commercial entities (i.e. record labels, clubs, societies, etc.) and mass media (including, but not limited to the popular music press and television broadcasts) in shaping ideas about R&B. Detailed examinations of select recordings and live performances provide an opportunity to interrogate musical works as sites of reiteration, emulation, and difference. The goal of this project is to provide a cultural and musical study of British R&B that allows the complexity of the period to be highlighted and better understood; one that avoids the oppositional pitfalls of uncritical celebration and out-of-hand dismissal of a historical moment

that is at once exalted and derided and depending on one's point of view, labeled appropriation in either the most positive or most negative senses of the term.

WELL, WHAT WAS (BRITISH) R&B?: INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

While many potential answers to this question circulate in popular discourse, most start from a contemporary or “presentist” perspective informed by historical hindsight and guided by certain ideological assumptions about what can and should be deemed relevant.⁵ Many recent scholarly studies addressing the affinity for black musics in Britain suffer from a similar lack of historicization as they rely almost exclusively on autobiographies, memoirs and interviews with participants held some fifty years after the fact as source materials for their narratives and critiques.⁶ Furthermore, British R&B has yet to receive detailed analytical attention as a genre or historical phenomenon in its own right. Most writing on the subject is contained within narratives of British blues revivalism and/or British blues-rock. Other studies that touch on the consumption and reproduction of R&B in Britain at this time either address Anglo-American popular music more broadly or focus on a specific artist or fanbase.⁷

Bob Brunning's *The Blues in Britain: The History 1950s to the Present* positions British R&B of the early 1960s as a nascent exponent of what Brunning considers a living, if

⁵ See Paul Myers, *It Ain't Easy: Long John Baldry and the Birth of the British Blues* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2007) for example.

⁶ For instance trad jazz is discussed from this perspective in Dave Gelly, *An Unholy Row: Jazz in Britain and its Audience 1945-1960* (Sheffield, UK and Bristol, CT: Equinox, 2014). Dave Allen, “Feelin’ Bad this Morning: Why the British Blues?” *Popular Music*, 26:1 (2006), 141-156 addresses British blues in this vein as well.

⁷ In general pop/rock histories and in many textbooks British R&B is often folded into discussions of the Beat Boom or the British Invasion, a flattening that misrepresents the clear distinctions made between beat and R&B at the time. For an example see Bob Stanley, “Needles and Pins: The Beat Boom,” in *Yeah, Yeah, Yeah: The Story of Modern Pop* (London: Faber and Faber, 2013), 130-143. For examples of the latter categories, see David Malvinni, *Experiencing the Rolling Stones: A Listeners Companion* (Blue Ridge Summit, PA: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, 2016), and Dick Hebdige, “The Meaning of Mod,” in *Resistance Through Rituals: Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, second edition, Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds. (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 71-79.

underground tradition of British blues performance.⁸ In Bob Groom's trailblazing 1971 work, *The Blues Revival*, the performance of R&B by white Britons is considered ancillary to what he perceived to be the larger purpose of the transnational revival of the blues in the early 1960s: the "discovery of the blues by a large and appreciative white audience" via the unearthing of rare records and of the even more elusive retired African American performers.⁹ Two recent collected volumes edited by Neil A. Wynn, *Cross the Water Blues* and *Transatlantic Roots Music: Folk, Blues and National Identities* pay cursory attention to British R&B within broader discussions of the revival of American musical practice in the UK.¹⁰ Ulrich Adelt's monograph *Blues Music in the Sixties* addresses similar territory with a focus on the racial politics of the white adoption of blues by American and European audiences.

The most detailed scholarly discussion of British R&B to date is contained in Roberta Freund Schwartz's *How Britain Got the Blues: the Transmission and Reception of American Blues Style in the United Kingdom*.¹¹ Schwartz's chapter "'London: The New Chicago!': The R&B Boom of 1963-1965" chronicles British R&B's roots in the trad jazz revival; the formation of the London R&B scene; visits from African American artists via touring jazz, blues and folk festivals; and the dissemination of blues and R&B records in the UK. Schwartz also attends to the debates about authenticity in the blues revival that were rampant throughout 1963 and 1964. More than any other prior study, *How Britain Got the Blues* features the voices of critics,

⁸ Bob Brunning, *Blues in Britain: The History 1950s to Present* (London: Blandford, 1995).

⁹ Bob Groom, *The Blues Revival* (London: Studio Vista, 1971), 6. Groom notes, however that a number of "British beat groups... well acquainted with black R&B music... helped spark off a nation-wide R&B boom with their interpretations of Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley numbers" (98).

¹⁰ Jill Terry and Neil A. Wynn, eds., *Transatlantic Roots Music: Folk, Blues, and National Identities* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2012) and Neil A. Wynn, ed., *Cross the Water Blues: African American Music in Europe* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2007). I will engage with these texts and other relevant scholarly literature on blues revivalism shortly. There is also no shortage of trade and mass-market books that address the pre-blues-rock period in Britain.

¹¹ Roberta Freund Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues: the Transmission and Reception of American Blues Style in the United Kingdom* (Aldershot, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2007).¹¹

musicians and early blues scholars of the period. This is achieved through extensive reference to contemporaneous discourse coupled with recollections found in secondary sources. Moreover, Schwartz makes a point of detailing, with a reasonable degree of accuracy, through what channels and at what moment particular American blues records would have been available to a British audience, although at no point does she engage in substantive discussions of the sound of the music.¹² Despite a thorough historical grounding that might have suggested a more complex (sub)generic intersectionality, Schwartz situates British R&B firmly and exclusively within a broader British blues history that deemphasizes or completely elides the more commercial and modern aspects of rhythm and blues. While she acknowledges the widespread popularity of R&B in 1964 she seems hesitant to draw attention to the mainstreaming of blues forms. Furthermore, artists who were firmly understood at the time as part of the British R&B movement—for example the R&B modernist Georgie Fame or the Britpop-soul singer Dusty Springfield—fail to garner any more than a passing reference, if they are recognized at all. The narrative of British R&B contained within *How Britain Got the Blues* therefore reflects either a relatively presentist understanding of what could and should be considered British R&B or an emphasis on one specific school of thought about the genre that was active during the period. In regard to the latter, it is worth noting, per Simon Frith and Howard Horne, that this scope aligns with the

¹² I say “with a reasonable degree of accuracy” here not as a knock on Schwartz’s research abilities, but rather to draw attention to the massive change in the availability of discographical information in the ten years since *How Britain Got the Blues* published. A number of online, user-generated resources such as www.45cat.com and www.discogs.com have made relatively comprehensive, usually quite accurate information about historical record releases, typically accompanied by images of record sleeves and/or the disc itself, available through a simple google search. Youtube, the digital reissue of once out-of-print recordings, and streaming services have similarly made hearing these records often no more than a mouse-click away.

belief held by many British R&B practitioners, although by no means all, that “‘commercial’ music meant lying music, pop was by its nature false.”¹³

Not all literature that addresses R&B as performed and consumed in the UK in the early 1960s takes such a tack, however. A good deal of the scholarship on the mod subculture, for example, emphasizes the coexistence of a variety of R&B forms on bands’ setlists and in DJs’ record crates at the time.¹⁴ As these texts indicate, it was not uncommon to hear versions of Muddy Waters’ “I Got my Mojo Working,” Prince Buster’s “Madness,” James Brown’s “Night Train” and Mary Well’s “Two Lovers” in certain Soho clubs on any given night.¹⁵ John Stratton’s discussion of what he has dubbed the musical “melting pot” of London in the early 1960s similarly notes that in clubs such as the Flamingo, Jamaican sound men (DJs) traded sets with British R&Bers performing a wide array of African American popular styles.¹⁶ Two chapters in the collected volume *She’s So Fine: Reflections on Whiteness, Femininity, Adolescence and Class in the 1960s* underscore the plurality of British R&B by explicating the roles played by “Brit Girl” singers during the boom of 1963–1964.¹⁷ Patricia Juliana Smith’s chapter on Sandie Shaw, Lulu, and Cilla Black’s rise to fame during this period emphasizes these singers’ reliance on material originally performed by African Americans while Annie J.

¹³ Simon Frith and Howard Horne, *Art into Pop* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987), 88.

¹⁴ See Keith Gildart, *Images of England through Popular Music: Class, Youth and Rock ‘n’ Roll, 1955–1976* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2013); Dick Hebdige, “The Meaning of Mod”; and Paolo Hewitt, ed., *The Sharper Word: A Mod Anthology, Revised and Updated* (London: Helter Skelter Publishing, 2009).

¹⁵ As David Brackett notes, the American category of R&B as it was conceived at the time likewise represented a wide range of styles including, but not limited to soul-jazz, Motown pop, and blues-retro throwbacks. David Brackett, “The Dictionary of Soul,” in *Categorizing Sound* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016), 233–279.

¹⁶ John Stratton, “Melting Pot: The Making of Black British Music in the 1950s and 1960s,” in *Black Popular Music in Britain Since 1945*, Jon Stratton and Nabeel Zuberi, eds. (Farham, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), 27–45.

¹⁷ Laurie Stras ed., *She’s So Fine: Reflections on Whiteness, Femininity, Adolescence and Class in the 1960s* (Farnham, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2010.)

Randall's chapter "Dusty's Hair" analyzes Dusty Springfield's long-standing affection for and emulations of rhythm and blues.¹⁸

In short, the existing literature on British R&B typically compartmentalizes stylistic elements of what was broadly understood as "rhythm and blues" in the UK between 1960 and 1964. In each of these histories certain musical and historical components of British R&B serve as stepping-stones within a specific teleology culminating in a later, more coherent practice, genre, or style. The structure of each of these narratives requires a process of selection that prizes a select subset of styles, audiences or artists over others. In other words, each narrative asserts a sort of boundary policing that serves to include and/or exclude. By contrast, the historical narrative that runs throughout this dissertation is a direct representation of the way the story(ies) of R&B unfolded in the British music press. By focusing on the genre as it was described in *Melody Maker*, *New Musical Express*, *Jazz Journal*, *Record Mirror* and numerous other publications in the first half of the 1960s, I strive to unswervingly reflect the ways in which R&B was conceptualized, misunderstood, venerated and disparaged by critics, fans, musicians, and the music/pop culture industry.¹⁹

This approach often complicates as much as it clarifies. Take, for example, a *Melody Maker* article from March 30, 1963 titled "Well—What is R&B?" The piece, presenting a variety of opinions about rhythm and blues from London musicians, exhibits a distinct lack of consensus about just what sounds and practices should be contained within the category. Many of the R&B practitioners quoted in the article—organist/saxophonist/bandleader Graham Bond,

¹⁸ Annie J. Randall, "Dusty's Hair" and Patricia Juliana Smith, "Brit Girls: Sandie Shaw and the Women of the British Invasion," in *She's So Fine*, 113-136, 137-192. See also Annie J. Randall, *Dusty!: Queen of the Post Mods* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹⁹ This is not to say that I believe this study to be entirely free of aesthetic bias. One is never immune to some degree of selective predisposition. Nonetheless, I have done by best to avoid ideological pitfalls by taking R&B in Britain during a specific period as my object of study, rather than a broader historical or generic set of parameters, and by remaining vigilantly attuned to synchronic discourse about the music.

Manfred Mann drummer Mike Hugg, and R&B “founding father” Alexis Korner—attempt to distance themselves from the term, instead describing their endeavors as “blues” (Korner), “modern jazz with a beat” (Bond), and “a very basic sort of jazz, laying the accent on rhythm, rather than harmony” (Hugg). This was the case despite the regular invocation of the R&B label by the press, clubs and even the artists themselves.²⁰ Promoter and author Bill Carey summarizes the discord represented in these positions by asserting “R&B is what jazzmen call rock-n-roll and rockers call jazz.”²¹ While this article does little to clearly define “R&B,” it underscores just how multifaceted British R&B had become at this point and hints at the types of debates and positions active at the time. When combined with the hundreds, if not thousands, of other features, columns, record reviews and letters to the editor written about British R&B between 1962 and 1964, however, this article contributes to a mosaic representation of a complex phenomenon.²²

WHY BRITISH R&B?: THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

One of the key factors enabling a broad range of musical styles to be reproduced under the blanket term “British R&B” circa 1960–1964 was the long history of black music revival in the UK. A specific affinity for and consumption of popular black music genres in Britain can be traced back, at the very least, to the nation’s first “Hot Rhythm Club,” formed in 1933. The club, which quickly earned the support of leading music publication *Melody Maker*, drew its members together on a weekly basis to collectively listen to imports and rare British releases of early,

²⁰ Artist resistance to genre terms is, of course, not unique to British R&B. Musicians from Duke Ellington to Kurt Cobain rejected the labels typically used to describe their work.

²¹ A year later Carey offered another witty adage to distinguish between R&B and beat: “In beat, the audience screams at the group... in R&B the group screams at the audience.” Quoted in Bob Dawbarn, “A Massive Swing toward R&B,” *Melody Maker*, April 18, 1964, 8-9.

²² There was very little discussion of R&B in the UK prior to 1962, most of which I discuss in chapter three.

mostly African-American jazz 78s.²³ Ten years later, George Webb formed his Dixielanders, a band modeled on early black New Orleans jazz bands like King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band and the New Orleans Rhythm Kings.²⁴ In the late 1940s the reproduction of New Orleans-style jazz came to be known as traditional jazz, or simply "trad." As noted earlier (and will be further discussed in chapters 2-4), it was from within the trad jazz infrastructure that R&B in Britain was first recreated. Black music's perceived ability to more accurately represent unmediated feeling, coupled with the "resistance to commercial pressures" that performing trad jazz represented, appealed to British R&Bers, even if the form of trad itself did not.²⁵ In other words, rhythm and blues was understood as a more direct means to express oneself through an alternative musical style. Furthermore, the performance and consumption of R&B in its many forms offered a white British youth audience not strictly contemplative and/or emotional expressions of individuality and collective identity, but bodily expressions of identity and difference as well.

British R&B contends that a spectrum of related, often overlapping attitudes and values about black sound motivated British interest in rhythm and blues and that these attitudes and values can broadly be contained within a musical/social concept of revival. The dominant system of valuation employed within British R&B typically asserted a "traditional" revivalist stance that most prized the music "of the folk." As I will address shortly, this value system is quite clearly represented in the Rolling Stones' revival of Howlin' Wolf's "Little Red Rooster" and the many, many renditions of Muddy Waters' "I Got My Mojo Working" produced in the UK between 1962 and 1964.²⁶ I would like to suggest, however, that even if a particular genre, artist or work does not align with how one anticipates revival to sound or be practiced, said genre/artist/work

²³ Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues*, 9-10.

²⁴ Hilary Moore, *Inside British Jazz: Crossing Borders of Race, Nation and Class* (Hampshire, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 38-39.

²⁵ Frith and Horne, *Art into Pop*, 71.

²⁶ See chapters six and four, respectively, for more about the revival of these songs.

can nevertheless be anchored in revival-influenced values. While a source artist/genre was commonly perceived to have a higher aesthetic value and a greater ability to “honestly” express “real feeling” in relation to how far (s)he/it could be positioned from the mainstream, popular music industry, it is important to recognize this was not universally the case. Furthermore, non-traditional revivalist practices did not necessarily preclude revivalist impulses. The example of Dusty Springfield is again useful here.

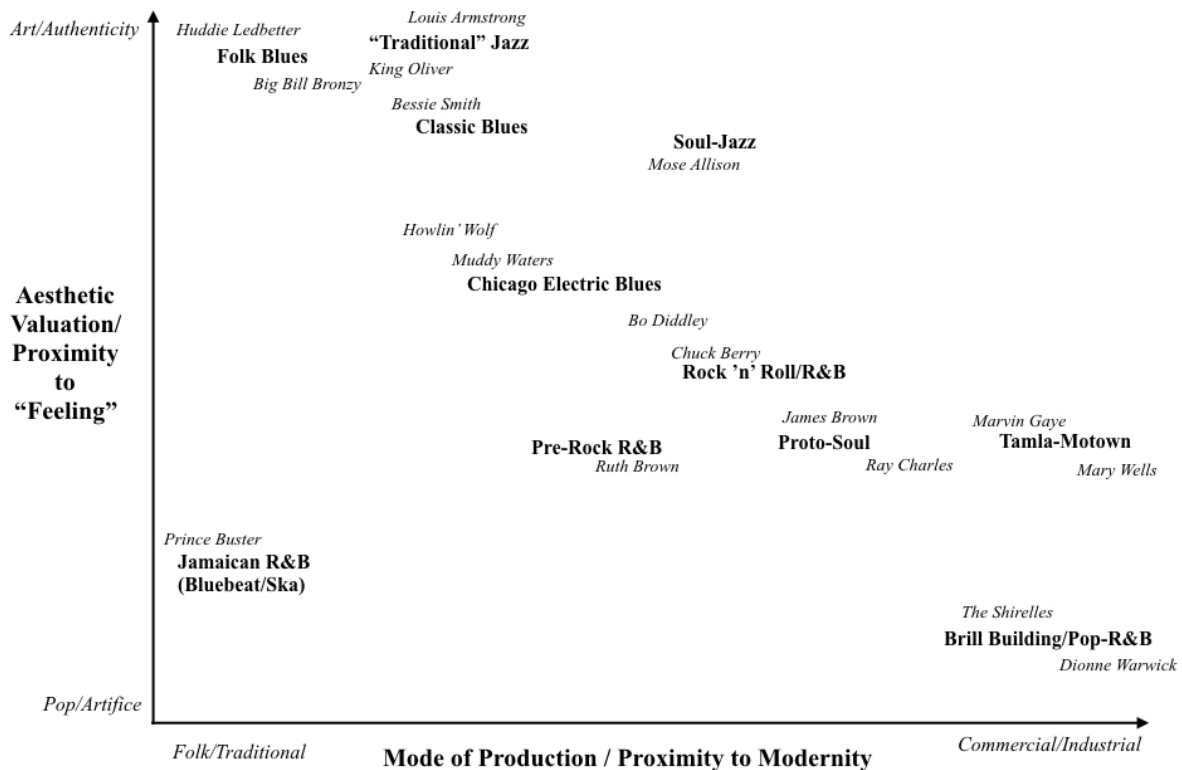


Figure 1.2 – Perceived Value of R&B and Related Revivalist Source Genres²⁷

Speaking to *Melody Maker* in November 1964 about her “favourite subject,” Springfield exclaimed that “I wish I had been born coloured. When it comes to singing and feeling, I just

²⁷ Each artist in this chart was covered/revived in Britain during the period addressed in this dissertation (with the exception of Mary Wells, whose records were frequently spun by London DJs).

want to be one of them and not me.”²⁸ Just a little more than a year prior, Springfield broke away from the pop-folk trio, the Springfields, which she had been a member of since the start of the decade. Her November 1963 solo debut single, “I Only Want to Be with You,” signaled that Dusty was moving toward reinventing her sound in the model of America’s black popular music of the day. Nine of the twelve tracks on her initial album, *A Girl Called Dusty*, were covers of songs popularized by African Americans in recent years including The Shirelles (“Mama Said,” 1961), the Supremes (“When the Lovelight Shines Through His Eyes,” 1963), and Dionne Warwick (“Wishin’ and Hopin,” 1963). As Annie J. Randall notes, Dusty’s decision to specialize in reproducing R&B records stemmed from a “wholehearted embrace” of African American traditions—inspired by an introduction to her father’s Bessie Smith records as a child—and was coupled with an unwavering dedication to crediting the sources of her musical inspiration.²⁹ This suggests that recreating black sound was more than just a means to a commercial end for Springfield, but an allegiance to what she understood to be a tradition. As Randall argues, “African American expressive traits... seemed to magnetize Dusty...[they] allowed [her] to express herself in ways that white European traditions did not.”³⁰ While Springfield’s commercially-released and heavily-marketed versions of these songs did not necessarily align with revivalism as it was most-often practiced at the time and these songs may have seem far removed from the traditional folk musics typically recreated within a revival, nonetheless, principles of revival guided Dusty’s attraction to R&B. The following discussion outlines the theories of music revival, genre and identity formation that *British R&B* employs and expands upon to better understand what drew British listeners and performers like Springfield to African American popular music in the early 1960s.

²⁸ Ray Coleman, “Pop Probe: Dusty,” *Melody Maker*, November 21, 1964, 3.

²⁹ Annie J. Randall, *Dusty: Queen of the Postmods!*, 22-23.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 25.

Music Revival in Theory and Practice

The practice of revival in Western Europe and North America was initially motivated by two major intellectual preoccupations of the nineteenth century: cultural evolution and romantic nationalism.³¹ The first of these interpreted the cultural production of European peasant classes as survivals of earlier practices in comparison to more “advanced” cosmopolitan popular and art forms. This framework was similarly extended to other “primitive” peoples and cultures whose modes of expression had yet to sufficiently “evolve” (i.e. non-Europeans and people of color). The second intellectual movement was romantic nationalism, an idea summarized by German philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder’s assertion that “folk poetry and customs reflect the soul of a nation.”³² The scholarly collection and study of folksong motivated by these two trends began in earnest during the early years of the twentieth century, most notably represented by Cecil Sharp’s anthologizing of English folksong and John Lomax’s *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* (1910).³³ Sharp’s and Lomax’s collections respectively served as foundations for the emerging field of folklore studies in England and North America. These written anthologies of folksong would be followed by a different sort of song collecting that strove to capture not only music and lyric, but the sound of folk performance practice as well—the field recording trips of John and Alan Lomax 1930s representing some of the earliest efforts of this kind.³⁴ Although the term “revival” was first used in reference to song collecting by Cecil Sharp

³¹ Although these modes of understanding cultural formations and historical change may have been theorized within academic circles, cultural evolution and romantic nationalism were debated and propagated in the popular sphere as well.

³² Caroline Bithell and Juniper Hill, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Music Revival* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 6.

³³ For a discussion of folksong collecting between Herder and Sharp, see Matthew Gelbart, *The Invention of “Folk Music” and “Art Music”: Emerging Categories from Ossian to Wagner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

³⁴ Folklore studies is a field often noted and more recently critiqued for the selective valuation of forms and styles based on the scholar’s aesthetic and ideological agendas.

in 1907, it did not gain popular traction until Charles Seeger applied the term to the renewed interest in folk music during the early stages of the folk and blues revivals of the late 1950s and early 1960s.³⁵

In 1999, nearly a century after the foundational documents of music revival were published, Tamara Livingston suggested the following theorization of the revival process and its motivations:

Music revivals can be defined as social movements which strive to “restore” a musical system believed to be disappearing or completely relegated to the past for the benefit of contemporary society. ... Through this re-creation... revivalists position themselves in opposition to aspects of the contemporary cultural mainstream, align themselves with a particular historical lineage, and offer a cultural alternative in which legitimacy is grounded in reference to authenticity and historical fidelity. Music revivals are middle class phenomena which play an important role in the formulation and maintenance of a class-based identity of subgroups of individuals disaffected with aspects of contemporary life.³⁶

I cite Livingston at length here as this definition echoes much of the literature on music revival that predates her work.³⁷ Her understanding of revival as a phenomena associated with the “disaffected middle-class” is particularly resonant with the literature of the 1960s folk and blues revival movements of the US and the UK. Jeff Todd Titon, for example, offers that for he and his revivalist contemporaries, “singing folk songs was one way to assert humanity in an absurd universe.”³⁸ Furthermore, Titon aligns the blues revival he participated in with a romanticized view of the blues and rural black life stemming from a “reject[ion of] conformity to middle-class values.” He recalls that, in his experience, “blues revivalists... embraced the music

³⁵ Seeger first used the term in his 1953 article “Folk Music in the Schools,” which was reprinted in a 1958 issue of *Sing Out!* Neil V. Rosenberg, “Introduction,” in *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*, Neil V. Rosenberg, ed. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 17.

³⁶ Tamara E. Livingston, “Music Revivals: Towards a General Theory.” *Ethnomusicology*. 43:1 (1999), 66.

³⁷ Owe Ronström similarly cites three modes of revival production—historization, aesthetization, and authenticity. Owe Ronström, “Traditional Music, Heritage Music,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Music Revival*, 43-59.

³⁸ Jeff Todd Titon, “Reconstructing the Blues,” in *Transforming Tradition*, 221.

of people who seemed unbound by conventions of work, family, sexual propriety, worship and so forth.”³⁹ Georgina Boyes has similarly suggested that, in this regard, revivals function “as an antidote to industrial capitalism, war, and modernity.”⁴⁰

The historically black genres of greatest interest for early London revivalists (hot jazz and classic blues of the 1920s) and the later generation of R&B enthusiasts (Chicago electric blues of the 1950s) were strongly associated with the expression of an “authentic” U.S. Southern African American identity and what the revivalists often valued as the essence of the black cultural experience.⁴¹ In her discussion of the British blues revival, a movement she considers “one of the most unlikely events in recent cultural history,” Susan McClary emphasizes that the early “embrace” of the blues by young British art school students was an important element of their individual and collective identity informed by their specific historical and cultural contexts. She argues that, as with trad jazz in the decade or so prior, the blues was viewed as an authentic, anti-commercial, populist form of expression by the “bohemian subculture” of the London art schools.⁴² As I demonstrate in chapter four, authenticity invoked through an association between the blues and “truth” runs throughout the discourse of the blues revival. It is through the frame of authenticity—the expression of honest emotion, singing about one’s lived experience, etc.—that original and later revivalist practitioners were evaluated. As Leighton Grist has noted, it was this sense that rhythm and blues was the honest music of black Americans that contributed to an “a-materialist” perception of the genre and allowed it to stand in opposition to the artifice of

³⁹ Titon, “Reconstructing the Blues,” 225.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Terry and Wynn, *Transatlantic Roots Music*, 14.

⁴¹ Richard Middleton refers to the blues epochs referenced here as “periods of ‘downhome’ assertiveness.” “Through a Mask Darkly,” in *Voicing the Popular: On the Subjects of Popular Music*. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 43.

⁴² Susan McClary, “Thinking Blues,” in *Conventional Wisdom* (Ewing, NJ: University of California Press, 2001), 54.

commercial popular song.⁴³ As Tilton, Boyes and McClary before him do, Grist concludes that the blues revival in Britain was “a response to a specific material context; that is, cosmopolitan, 1960s British modernity.”⁴⁴

As I noted earlier, Bob Groom’s *The Blues Revival* only engages briefly with the revivalist *performance* of blues and R&B. In regard to this process he notes that “on the whole, white blues has been content to re-create rather than renew... concentrating on mastering the instrumental techniques of the great bluesmen, in order to reproduce their playing as exactly as possible.”⁴⁵ Despite his assertion that “there is no good reason why white musicians should not sing and play the blues,” he concludes that most “white blues” is “imitative” and “a long way from the indefinable essence of real blues.”⁴⁶ Groom’s statements—particularly his use of terms like “re-create,” “renew” and “reproduce”—reinforce a salient point about the nature of the British blues/R&B revival and about music revivals in general. As Mark Slobin addressed in his concluding essay to the 2014 *Oxford Handbook of Music Revival*, the “re-” prefix can be used in a myriad of ways in regard to music revivals. With the assistance of the *Oxford English Dictionary* to “help map out this verbal territory,” Slobin highlights three broad definitions: 1) to reverse or restore a “previous state of things”; 2) a taking back or return of “imitations to originals”; and 3) a neutral, technical “makeover” of an existing form or thing.⁴⁷ Within this broad frame, Groom’s opposition of “re-create” and “renew” suggests that revivals are often perceived as *either* the mere re-enactment of musical works *or* as a more integral revitalization

⁴³ Leighton Grist, “The Blues is the Truth: Blues, Modernity and the British Blues Boom,” in *Cross the Water Blues*, 202-217. Schwartz also has a section in *How Britain Got the Blues* titled “The Blues Are Truth” (95-104) that addresses similar territory.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 211. Grist’s more original contribution to the discourse of the blues boom is to recognize the modernist, “folk-popular hybrid” practices of African American blues prior to the revival.

⁴⁵ Groom, *The Blues Revival*, 102.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Mark Slobin, “Re-flections” in *The Oxford Handbook of Music Revival*, 666-668.

of a cultural practice. Thirty years prior, Slobin registered reservations about the term revival for these very reasons.⁴⁸ At the time he even called for an abandoning of the label and concept altogether, noting that revival in the sense of bringing a practice or thing back to its original state is a virtual impossibility. “When people seem to be reviving things,” he contended, “that is, exhuming them and breathing new life into them, what they get is something new.... In culture, context counts for more than half of meaning, form for less.”⁴⁹ Owe Ronström has since offered that revival is more accurately “an act of translation”⁵⁰ defined by “decontextualizations” and “recoding operations,” what he refers to as “shifts” in which “the absent is presented, for the purposes of the future, by the use of culturally bounded expressive forms.”⁵¹ Most recently, the editors of the *Oxford Handbook of Music Revival* recognized that the term revival is more accurately “a shorthand to encompass a range of more nuanced processes.”⁵²

As Jill Terry and Neil A. Wynn emphasize in their introduction to *Transatlantic Roots Music*, in British roots music revivals (broadly understood as trad, skiffle, folk and blues), “blurred” distinctions existed between what music should be classified as folk/traditional and what could be considered popular/commercial music. This was evident in terms of how and why the revival’s source materials were valued and to what degree later emulations of those roots musics were thought to be authentic to the source.⁵³ Further complicating the perception of R&B in Britain was the almost exclusive consumption of the genre via sound recording, an

⁴⁸ Mark Slobin, “Rethinking ‘Revival’ of American Ethnic Music,” *New York Folklore* 9:3-4 (1983), 37-44.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 37.

⁵⁰ Ronström, “Traditional Music, Heritage Music,” 44.

⁵¹ Ibid, 45.

⁵² Furthermore, they note the increasingly common trend set in motion by Rosenberg to replace the “re-” prefix with “trans-”; a move that allows for a more fluid understanding of the revival process. Responding in part to Slobin’s concern, Neil V. Rosenberg titled his 1993 edited volume on folk revivals *Transforming Tradition*. Bithell and Hill, *The Oxford Handbook of Music Revival*, 5.

⁵³ Terry and Wynn, *Transatlantic Roots Music*, 3. They later call on Karl Hagström-Miller’s work to reinforce the complex (mis)understanding of “folk.”

arrangement that precluded any chance of “insider” cultural knowledge and left the “objectified” sound on record entirely open to interpretation and subject to the imagination.⁵⁴ As Titon argues, it was through collecting American blues records—itsself an act of “appropriation”—that British and American blues revivalists constructed their very object of interest.⁵⁵ He notes that so many revivalist

discoveries... were mixtures of invention and interpretation, and in a way instead of finding our object, blues, we constituted it.... This is not to say there was nothing “out there” called blues.... Rather, I am saying that the various activities of the blues revivalists constituted a commodity called “blues” that came to be consumed as a popular music.⁵⁶

Central to most theories of revival is the notion that the music being recreated is of the past and is in danger of extinction.⁵⁷ The revival of 1920s New Orleans jazz, classic blues and rural blues aligns well with this conception. By this definition, however even the British interest in and recreation of the downhome electric R&B of 1950s’ Chicago is a form of revival when it is understood within a broad definition of folk expression.⁵⁸ At least some delay occurred in the transmission of these black musics to Britain so that by the time they arrived they were already at least nominally “of the past.” By even the early 1960s, however, technological advances, particularly in the fields of mass communication and transportation, facilitated the (near-) simultaneous global dissemination of sound and image. In this modern setting, through a hermeneutic filter inclined to cast black sound as folk sound, even contemporary iterations of

⁵⁴ See Ronstrom, “Traditional Music, Heritage Music.”

⁵⁵ Titon, “Reconstructing the Blues,” 226. From a postcolonial perspective, this form of constructing “the blues” is easily related to Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism through which colonial power forms and delimits its other through discourse. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

⁵⁶ Titon, “Reconstructing the Blues,” 222-3. One only needs to briefly peruse the work of Samuel Charters and Paul Oliver for evidence of this process at work.

⁵⁷ See Livingston’s theory of revival above. This statement particularly reflects the folklore movements of the early 20th century that attempted to capture “true” expressions of the folk before they were lost to modernity.

⁵⁸ As I address in chapters two, three and four.

other peoples' popular music could function as a revivalist alternative to the mainstream.⁵⁹ By ever-expanding their field of interest, participants in the British R&B revival "caught up" to the present in a way that challenges established theorizations of revival.

It is at the point of mass popularity, often brought about through the re-/de-contextualization process, that revivals are said to "break down." This is often found in narratives about British R&B that assert that revivalist impulses were left behind with the commercial success of the Rolling Stones and a turn toward contemporary iterations of American rhythm and blues. Proposed by Bithell and Hill, the concept of "post-revival," used to define the moment when the establishment of new subcultures and affinity groups via revival become part of the mainstream culture, is useful here. Such a concept "acknowledge[s] the significance of the original revival impulse and... identif[ies] a new musical or social culture as part of its legacy."⁶⁰

Music, Identity, and Genre

"Taking tentative steps" toward a reassessment of the British blues boom, Dave Allen has argued for a reconsideration of the inherited historical narrative of the British music scene of the early 1960s.⁶¹ Central to his discussion of the British interest in the blues is a recognition that "attention [must] also be given to the 'kids' who began buying Muddy Waters' records and who became the audience and fans whose broad interests made it possible."⁶² He cites the documentary film *Black, White and Blues* (2003) as an example of the type of performer-

⁵⁹ Caroline Bithell and Juniper Hill, "An Introduction to Music Revival as Concept, Cultural Process and Medium of Change," in *The Oxford Handbook of Music Revival*, 14.

⁶⁰ Bithell and Hill, "An Introduction to Music Revival as Concept, Cultural Process and Medium of Change," 29.

⁶¹ Allen, "Feelin' Bad this Morning: Why the British Blues?"

⁶² Ibid, 143.

informed narrative that prioritizes statements by popular musicians and dominates much mass-market histories of and previous scholarship on British blues. By paying heed to audience recollections—his own as well as published remembrances of musicians and other fans—Allen aims to present a more balanced and representative account of the blues boom phenomenon. Drawing on his own experience, Allen offers unique observations that many other studies cannot.⁶³ Furthermore he suggests that *Black, White and Blues*

begs further research into the reasons why individuals and sub-groups identified so strongly with the genre and period, and how that identification operated. Such research might develop the approach of the film in asking how particular individual recollections intersect with dominant accounts of particular events, issues and period.⁶⁴

Allen underscores one of the main themes of the film by noting that “the blues played a key role in the search for authenticity and the rejection of artifice, which were part of the development of identity—personal and collective.” In the case of the R&B revival, this search required “reaching back beyond the pretense of 1950s pop to another place and time, which offered the promise of expressive authenticity.”⁶⁵ Allen’s acknowledgement that the blues played a role in identity formation for British youth is a point that I believe warrants further exploration. Particularly revealing is his discussion of how he and his peers navigated back and forth between

⁶³ For example, Allen recalls that R&B was primarily performed in clubs and dancehalls where the music could be experienced viscerally and suggests that the spaces where R&B was experienced were an important factor in the popular rise of these genres; a point not often emphasized in the literature on the British blues. Allen suggests “there is a case for returning to the participants in the British blues scene, particularly the consumers, to seek accounts of why the blues did matter so much to some people for that brief moment” (Ibid, 151). This is not altogether unproblematic, considering he and other participants would be reflecting on a period close to fifty years prior and these recollections are undoubtedly shaped by the events of the intervening years, as well as by ideological forces.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 143.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 146.

contemporaneous mod and folk scenes that both employed the blues, despite the fact that these scenes offered “contradictory experience[s].”⁶⁶

Popular music studies in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century has increasingly moved toward a focus on the intersecting issues of identity formation, and the relationship between identity and genre.⁶⁷ Earlier scholarship on popular and folk music typically understood the relationship between identity and music as being homological. That is to say, it was dictated by a notion that music reflects existing cultural identities in a fixed, “natural” and “essential” relation. It is through reconceptualizing these relations as processual and contingent—although still formed through the specificities of cultural practice at historical moments—that these “compulsory” links between music and identity can be rethought.⁶⁸ This processual approach allows one to conceive of the connections formed between music and identity and the formation of identities through music as existing in the realm of the imaginary. This process is most commonly referred to as articulation, what Stuart Hall refers to as a “non-necessary link” between a cultural product and a sociocultural identity.⁶⁹

Unlike many scholars who have abandoned the concept of homology entirely, Georgina Born contends that both homology-based and processual/imaginary models can be valuable in

⁶⁶ Ibid, 151.

⁶⁷ See for examples Brackett, *Categorizing Sound*; Georgina Born, “Music and the Representation/Articulation of Sociocultural Identities,” and “Techniques of the Musical Imaginary,” in *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*, 31-47; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 72-110; Stuart Hall, “Introduction: Who Needs Identity?,” and Simon Frith “Music and Identity” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, eds. (London: SAGE Publications, 1996); Keith Negus, “Identities,” in *Popular Music in Theory* (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), 99-135.

⁶⁸ Negus, “Identities,” 134.

⁶⁹ Stuart Hall, “On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview with Stuart Hall,” in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues*, D. Morley & K.-H. Chen, eds. (London: Routledge, 1996), 144.

understanding relationships between musically-imagined communities and sociocultural identities. Regarding what are frequently seen as incompatible approaches, she states,

rather than seeing these explanatory schemes as mutually exclusive, it bears pointing out that each brings insights in relation to different sociomusical phenomena. There is a need to acknowledge that music can variably *both* construct new identities *and* reflect existing ones.⁷⁰

Born presents a typology of possible identifications with music that outlines four “structural” articulations: articulations that function *purely* in the imaginary; articulations that *prefigure emergent* sociocultural identities; articulations that *reproduce extant* identities in a homological manner; and *post facto* articulations of music and identity formed through “historical processes of reinterpretation.”⁷¹ As music revivals most commonly take shape as an alternative to and/or in opposition to homological articulations between class/race/culture and musical style, Born’s typology is particularly relevant to this study.

In the broadest terms, African American rhythm and blues, was and can be understood as a reflective genre category that represents a homological relationship between a musical style and a community. At the same time, the consumption and performance of R&B in Britain participated in the construction of new forms of musical and social being. As this dissertation’s analysis of the consumption, production and (*re*)presentation of R&B in Britain in the early 1960s explores, all four of these models of articulation were active during this period and all played an important role in the construction, reinforcement and reformation of sociocultural identities. Furthermore, the “work” done by a particular genre, artist or song in the formation of identities was often the result of many, if not all, of these modes of articulation functioning at once. Furthermore, such identity work was finely attuned to historical and local contingencies.

⁷⁰ Born, “Music and the Representation/Articulation of Sociocultural Identities,” 31-2. Emphasis in original.

⁷¹ Ibid, 35-6.

That is to say, the same musical example can and did serve very different functions in the December 1962 verses April 1964, or in London versus Chicago (or Liverpool, for that matter). For evidence of this point, we need look no further than the most ubiquitous point of articulation for British R&B revivalists, Muddy Waters' "I Got my Mojo Working."⁷²

While it is more common to speak of articulation in terms of genre, in this case even a single song can be representative of the processes and relations at work. The original recording of "Mojo Workin'" (1956) by Waters used an instrumentation of electric guitar, bass, drums, harmonica and voice and employed a variation on a 12-bar blues form and a blues tonal vocabulary. Just as importantly, if not more so, it was produced by an African-American musician and was initially intended to be consumed by a black American audience. For all these reasons the song can be understood as reproducing an extant relationship between electric blues/R&B and urban African Americans of the late 1950s. Within the British context of the early 1960s, "Mojo" was subject to a historical reinterpretation that positioned the song and its aural elements as connected to a *universalized* and *ahistorical* African American folk culture. Articulation to and reproduction of the song by British R&B revivalists, however, can be thought of as a purely imaginary identification through "a kind of psychic tourism through music."⁷³ It could also be considered as representing an emergent identity in its "*re-forming* [of] the boundaries between social categories," as "Mojo" was sort of an unofficial anthem of the nascent British R&B scene by early 1964.⁷⁴ Furthermore, by this time, articulation to "Mojo" by British R&B fans could also be considered as reinforcing an extant revivalist identity.

⁷² For a more detailed discussion of "Mojo" and the song's importance within the R&B revival, see chapter four.

⁷³ Born, "Music and the Representation/Articulation of Sociocultural Identities," 35.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

What becomes evident through even this cursory analysis is the temporally and spatially contingent nature of these structural articulations and of music/identity relationships more generally. Allen's assertion that blues-influenced identities such as "mod" and "folky/beatnik" could be interchangeably assumed, performed, or exchanged reinforces that a particular identity could be enacted on an evening-by-evening or even moment-by-moment basis. Returning once again to Born, this exemplifies that, "rather than musical subjectivity being fixed and unitary, several musical 'identities' may inhabit the same individual... producing a state of fragmentary and multiple imaginary musical identification."⁷⁵

As "Mojo" also suggests, a single work can be categorized in a variety of ways and through recourse to a variety of genre labels depending on its relation to sociocultural identities and the temporal/geographic specificity of its production and/or consumption. This is the case if we consider only the original recording [*urtext*] or if we understand "the work" as the combination of specific compositional and performance characteristics that make up the original and are reproduced in cover/revival versions. Based on his fieldwork among Chicago's African-American communities in 1963, Charles Keil labeled "Mojo" as "city blues," a category he places in opposition to urban blues (exemplified by B.B. King and Bobby "Blue" Bland) and soul (as represented by Ray Charles).⁷⁶ Around the same time (1963-4), the London popular music press considered both Muddy Waters' version and British versions to be contained within the category of R&B. One could argue that this category was further divided in the minds of British audiences depending on the performer, that is to say, "original Chicago" or "*real*" R&B to describe Waters, and "British" or "revivalist" R&B in reference to a Cyril Davies' rendition, for example.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 33.

⁷⁶ Charles Keil, *Urban Blues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 71-73.

In one of the earliest and most influential discussions of popular music genres, Franco Fabbri outlined five categories of “socially accepted rules” that govern the categorization of “musical events” into genres: “Formal and Technical, Semiotic, Behavior, Social and Ideological, Economic and Judicial.”⁷⁷ With these rules, Fabbri recognizes that genres must be considered not just in the traditional, musicological sense that divides musical production through attention to musical style characteristics, but also through the music’s real or imagined relation to social categories. Building from Fabbri’s theorization, David Brackett reminds us that genres are more than categories formed around texts with shared “musical-style features,” but also “hinge on elements of nation, class, race, gender, sexuality, and so on.”⁷⁸ He likewise notes that “genres are not defined by characteristics of musical style alone but also by performance rituals, visual appearance, the types of social and ideological connotations associated with them, and their relationships to the material conditions of production.”⁷⁹ This becomes even more apparent within revivalist genres like British R&B where texts and performance practices are transmitted across cultural, racial and even temporal boundaries. In the revivalist case, the source material that forms the basis of an emergent genre arrives with a pre-existing constellation of associations and connotations (both real and imagined) that are then re-purposed in a new setting and through a new set of interpretive filters setting in motion new generic types.

The most salient connotation sutured to rhythm and blues was American blackness. From the most obscure folk to the most commercial pop, iterations of R&B in Britain were received as “black music,” first and foremost. This, was, in effect what “R&B” meant at the time. But how

⁷⁷ Franco Fabbri, “A Theory of Musical Genres: Two Applications,” in *Popular Music Perspectives*, D. Horn and P. Tagg, eds. (Göteborg and London: IASPM, 1982), 52-81.

⁷⁸ Brackett, *Categorizing Sound*, 4.

⁷⁹ David Brackett, “(In Search of) Musical Meaning: Genres, Categories, and Crossover,” in *Popular Music Studies: International Perspectives*, David Hesmondhalgh and Keith Negus, eds. (London: Arnold Publishers, and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 66-67.

then do we classify the reproduction of African American sounds by white Britons? The broad designation “black music” typically denotes certain style characteristics as well as African American participation in the roles of producers and consumers. Furthermore, the term draws attention to the fact that these genres bear historical and sociological associations with black identity and reflect black popular music making practices of the African diaspora. However, as Paul Gilroy has argued,

The most important lesson music still has to teach us is that its inner secrets and its ethnic rules can be taught and learned. The spectral figures of half-known or half-remembered [white] musicians like Bobby Eli, Duck Dunn, Tim Drummond, Andy Nemark, Carol Kaye, John Robinson, and Rod Temperton appeared at my shoulder and nod their mute assent to this verdict.... Their exemplary contributions to rhythm and blues have left behind a whispered warning that black music cannot be reduced to a fixed dialogue between a thinking racial self and a stable racial community; we will have to remember that these communicative gestures are not expressive of an essence that exists outside of the acts which perform them and thereby transmit the structures of racial feeling to wider, as yet uncharted, worlds.⁸⁰

In other words, the “communicative gestures” of black music can be reproduced, modified or reiterated by non-black performers in a way that still refers to and invokes an association with African American identity. David Brackett has argued that the processes of citationality and iterability allow musical texts that may have divergent stylistic traits or social associations to be grouped as genres.⁸¹ It is not necessary, therefore, for a single to be recorded or a composition to be penned by an artist of the African diaspora for said record/song to be thought to participate in a black music genre, *per se*. Rather, the connections to and association with black culture and identity are much more complex, less clearly delineated and remain reverberant even when decontextualized.

Paying heed to Simon Frith’s observation that “music constructs our sense of identity through the direct experiences it offers of the body, time and sociability, experiences which

⁸⁰ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 109-110.

⁸¹ Brackett, *Categorizing Sound*, 11-15.

enable us to place ourselves in imaginative cultural narratives,” it is possible to understand how the experience of listening to commercial recordings of black music genres fostered a *sense* of communion with the peoples of the Black Atlantic, whether they be from Mississippi, New Orleans, Chicago, Kingston or Brixton for that matter.⁸² It is this type of imaginary identification—both with African-American musicians and (perceived) African-American culture—that is at the crux of the British R&B revival. Furthermore, it is in the discursive/expressive practices from which this identification arose, and which it in turn fostered, that we can read traces of the “actively political process” at work during this historical moment.⁸³

CHAPTER OUTLINE

This dissertation is comprised of a set of chronologically unfolding case studies that address key historical moments, social movements and musical artefacts related to the British R&B revival. Chapter two addresses representations of blackness in British media and the revival of traditional jazz, ballads and blues in the early 1950s to elucidate the cultural and musical context in which British rhythm and blues came into being. As such, it serves as a sort of pre-history to the primary scope of the project. Following a brief history of the representation of people of the African diaspora in British entertainment up to and during 1951, chapter two addresses the discursive strategies employed by leading proponents (Alan Lomax, Hughes Panassié) and performers (Big Bill Broonzy) of traditional African-American “folk” music. My analysis of this discourse explicates the transatlantic roots and ideological underpinnings of the rhetoric used to promote and justify British interest in black ballads and the blues. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the white revival of this tradition with a focus on some of the earliest and best-

⁸² Frith “Music and Identity,” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, 124.

⁸³ Negus, “Identities,” 122.

known examples of British skiffle: Lonnie Donegan and the Chris Barber Skiffle Group's recordings of 1954. I argue that the discursive and performative strategies employed by critics and musicians in the transatlantic importation and revival of "traditional" black sound presented these forms in a folklore-inspired, nostalgic, ahistorical, anti-modern, anti-commercial manner that would precondition the reception of R&B in the following decade.

Wikipedia's entry on "British rhythm and blues" attributes the birth of the genre to "the 1958 visit of Muddy Waters... [that] influenced key figures Cyril Davies and Alexis Korner to turn to electric blues and form [Britain's first R&B] band Blues Incorporated."⁸⁴ While Korner and Davies' pivotal roles in the formation of the British R&B scene are undeniable, drawing a neat and tidy line from Muddy Waters' 1958 tour to Blues Incorporated as a "clearing house for British rhythm and blues musicians" elides the contributions of one the nation's first R&B practitioners.⁸⁵ Chapter three offers a revision to this dominant origin story and associated evolutionary narrative by reinserting Otilie Patterson, Britain's most popular and accomplished blues singer of the 1950s and early 1960s, into the history of British R&B. A close examination of this "slim, lively Irish girl's" career facilitates such a historiographical challenge. The chapter focuses on Patterson's 1961 album *Chris Barber's Blues Book, Volume 1: Rhythm and Blues with Otilie Patterson and Chris Barber's Jazz Band*, the first record by a British artist to bear the designation "rhythm and blues." My analysis of this record's content and context draws from contemporaneous mass-media discourse (*Melody Maker*, *Jazz Journal*, etc.) as well as Patterson's own notebooks held at Britain's National Jazz Archive. Specifically, I address Patterson's original compositions "Bad Spell Blues" and "Tell Me Why" along with her interpretations of songs originally performed by Trixie Smith, Ruth Brown and Memphis

⁸⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_rhythm_and_blues, accessed June 7, 2017.

⁸⁵ I examine the roles played by Korner, Davies and Blues Incorporated in depth in chapter four.

Minnie. I suggest that, through exploring alternative notions of femininity found in black women's blues and by inverting the typically masculinist lyrical tropes of Chicago blues into feminist statements, Patterson's work challenges the assumptions that 1) revivalists were only concerned with "folk" forms of African-American expression; and 2) that the blues revival was exclusively motivated by the appropriation and vicarious expression of African-American hyper-masculinity.

Following this historiographical reconsideration, chapter four proceeds to unpack and interrogate the dominant British R&B narrative. This chapter details the formation of the London R&B scene, tracing the genealogy of British R&B between early 1962 and late 1963 with an eye toward how the sounds of rhythm and blues functioned in individual and group identity formation within an emerging musical community. I focus here on the role assigned to Muddy Waters within this scene as a sonic archetype and iterable model of black identity for white Britons. Specifically, I analyze three versions of "I Got My Mojo Workin'" performed by British artists—Blues Incorporated (July 1962), Cyril Davies' R&B All-Stars (summer 1963) and Long John Baldry (April 1964).⁸⁶ Drawing on theoretical frameworks forwarded by David Brackett, Georgina Born, and others, I assert that "Mojo" at once offered the visceral aesthetic pleasures of dance music and a locus to explore alternative identity positions associated with African American musical expression at that time—assertive masculinity, overt sexuality, and unmediated emotional access—while still largely functioning within mainstream sociocultural boundaries.

Similar to chapter three, chapter five calls for a broadening of the retrospective classification of British R&B, this time to incorporate the performance and consumption of the

⁸⁶ These are but three of the at least twelve British versions of the song recorded between mid-1962 and early 1965.

musical style now referred to as ska—more commonly referred to in the British context as “blue beat.” The popularity of blue beat in the UK during the first half of 1964 has been widely recognized within Anglo-Caribbean-American pop music histories. These histories, however, rarely if ever recognize the deep social and musical connections between blue beat and British R&B. Articles published in the *West Indian Gazette* in the early 1960s and in the popular music press during the second half of 1963 (*New Record Mirror* in particular) establish that this musical style was commonly referred to as “Jamaican rhythm and blues” (JA-R&B) and was closely associated with American and British versions of R&B.⁸⁷ Furthermore, as the recording and performance activities of Georgie Fame and others in 1963–64 indicate, this style was being re-created and consumed by white Britons alongside American R&B in the clubs of Soho. Following a discussion of the cultural roots of the genre and the diasporic routes through which it found its way onto British record labels, this chapter traces the brief historical trajectory of JA-R&B—from the virtual shadows of the underground Jamaican social scene, to the clubs of Soho, to British-made recordings, onto the pop charts, and finally back to relative obscurity.

The final chapter of this dissertation examines the commercial emergence of R&B in Britain over the course of 1964. The year 1964 offers a unique opportunity to interrogate the tensions between revivalist ideology and the pop culture industry’s commercial infrastructure; two forces that dictated the terms of an at times oppositional, at times reciprocal relationship. In chapter six I address the popularization and further diversification of British R&B through a dual focus on Britain’s most commercially-successful R&B group, the Rolling Stones, and the British media’s most visible vehicle for disseminating R&B, the television program *Ready, Steady, Go!* This case study approaches R&B revivalism in the popular sphere through discussion of

⁸⁷ The *West Indian Gazette* was the first and only newspaper catering to the African-Caribbean-born population of Britain between 1958-1965.

American and British R&B in the singles charts of London's pop-music weeklies and a detailed analysis of the November 20, 1964 episode of *Ready, Steady, Go!* on which the Rolling Stones appear alongside a number of R&B-associated acts including Marvin Gaye and the Northern Irish band Them. I argue that the roster of artists and musical material presented on this episode—particular the Rolling Stone's "Little Red Rooster" and "Off the Hook," a pair of songs released the week prior—functioned as a sort of swan song for British R&B as the genre approached "post revival" status.

* * *

At least since T.D. Rice first "Jump[ed], Jim Crow" in 1828, popular entertainers have been (*re*)presenting black song, black humour and black bodies. A thorough study of the early 1960s British revival of rhythm and blues, I believe, provides insight not only into a particular phenomenon at a particular time and place, but also helps us recognize the multivalenced motivations and meanings of cultural appropriation. It is easy and rather commonplace to deride these appropriations and revivals. They can seem, and often are, self-serving, commercially motivated, culturally insensitive and even—whether covertly or overtly, explicitly or structurally—racist. They have the potential to further marginalize and exploit peoples and types of music already at the periphery. From the perspective of those marginalized, it is not a stretch to consider the process of revival across racial lines as little more than a "great music robbery," to borrow a phrase from Amiri Baraka.⁸⁸ For those doing the reviving or appropriating, however, these processes often serve much different purposes and offer something beyond the

⁸⁸ Amiri Baraka and Amina Baraka, *The Music: REFLECTIONS ON JAZZ AND BLUES*, New York: Morrow Press, 1987).

reinforcement of racial difference and the promise of financial gain. As Eric Lott reminds us, it is invariably a matter of “love” as well as “theft.”⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, [1993]/2013).

2 - BLACK AND WHITE RAG:

THE MINSTREL MASK, MIGRATION, & “TRADITIONAL BLACK FOLK” IN THE EARLY 1950S



Figure 2.1 – Jazz Record Store Advertisement¹

Cradled in the soil of Dixieland, minstrelsy bloomed with the cotton and the corn.
-Mr. Interlocutor, The Kentucky Minstrels, BBC broadcast, January 20, 1941²

Traditional and modern. Folk and art. Black and white. In an ad that ran on the first page of each edition of Britain’s *Jazz Journal* for close to a year in the early 1950s a grinning black—or perhaps blackfaced?—figure, a cap emblazoned with the word “Dixie” atop his head and obscuring his eyes, is mirrored by a goateed white hipster in signature shades and beret. In its illustration of these oppositional figures, this advertisement for “Britain’s Premier Jazz Record Store” encapsulates the pivotal binaries that informed postwar discourses and debates about jazz

¹ *Jazz Journal*, September 1951, 1.

² Quoted in Michael Pickering, *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain* (Aldershot, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), 194-5.

in the UK.³ The right side of this duality is the devotee of bebop, cool and all things modernist. The left side of the pair stands in for the record collecting, hot jazz-blowing traditionalist, the face of a musical practice that was incontrovertibly understood by its fans and practitioners as part and parcel of the African American folk tradition.⁴

Rather inadvertently, the quote in the epigraph for this chapter from Mr. Interlocutor, that mainstay of the American and British minstrel show, makes a poignant observation about the present and future of “black” musical forms in Britain by bringing the term “Dixieland” into his brief origin story of minstrelsy. This statement informs us that black song, black humour, and black bodies—versions of which constitute the very foundational stuff of the minstrel show—were grown naturally from the “soil” of the American South just as effortlessly as the “cotton and the corn.” In a move that appears to speak to the ways that blackface was appreciated in Britain at the time, the proclamation is presented as factual, seemingly unaffected by an awareness that the blackness of minstrelsy was almost exclusively an artifice of grease paint and dialect speech, musical expropriation and cultural construction.⁵ Whereas blackface had substantially, if not quite entirely, receded from North American entertainment practices by the early twentieth century, minstrelsy remained a consistent, if diminished presence on London stages, in early television broadcasts and as the centerpiece of serial radio programs in Britain

³ For debates similar to those in the UK that occurred between modernist and traditionalist factions in the US a decade earlier, see Bernard Gendron, “Moldy Figs and Modernists, in *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 121-142.

⁴ Although the racial/cultural roots of the music has been hotly contested since its emergence on the international stage in 1917, the discourse of traditional or “hot” jazz in Britain at mid-century—as informed by imported American publications like Charles Edward Smith and Fredrick Ramsey’s *Jazzmen* (1939/1940 in UK) and Rudi Blesh’s *Shining Trumpets* (1946)—casts hot jazz and by extension, blues, as the people’s music of early twentieth-century black New Orleans.

⁵ Or the fact that the “cotton and the corn” of the South was grown with great effort by the very people minstrelsy is intended to represent.

through the 1950s and beyond.⁶ In 1950, just as the *Kentucky Minstrels* would end its run as the leading purveyor of this legacy, jazz, in particular *traditional* jazz, began a more than decade-long ascent from the obscure to the popular.⁷ In other forms, however, the tropes of minstrelsy remained as ubiquitous as ever, coexisting alongside—and within—the revival of traditional jazz in the 1950s, resulting in minstrelsy and trad jazz being two of the most pervasive forms of black representation in British popular entertainment.⁸

Robert Cantwell has demonstrated the close representational, musical and discursive connections between minstrelsy and folk revivals. Minstrelsy, he argues, provided “the earliest and certainly the broadest imaginative field in which America created its proto-discourse, not only of race and racial stereotype but of rustic and pastoral life: its folklife.”⁹ In other words, the very music associated with “the folk,” and black folk in particular, tends to be heard as linked to African American traditional culture because its imagery, accent and performance conventions resonate with the ways that minstrelsy inscribed national ideas about African American expressive practice. If we allow, as I will argue below, that the resonances between these two forms of black representation remained legible in the British context, then it would stand to reason that the contemporaneous ubiquity of minstrelsy directly and indirectly aided in the

⁶ At the time of the quote in question the *Kentucky Minstrels* were at the height their popularity, drawing average audience numbers that represented between 20-30% of the British population (Pickering, *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain*, 190). Further examples of these programs are discussed below.

⁷ And it was a long road, to be certain. It was 1954–5 before the time traditional jazz could be considered a widespread bohemian subcultural phenomenon. It would not become a truly popular, chart-topping genre until 1959, although records from its offshoot skiffle would chart in 1956.

⁸ The long history of minstrelsy as “family friendly” entertainment, with rare exception, is all too often and far too easily forgotten in discussions of the revival of black music in Britain. Notable exceptions include Simon Frith, *Music for Pleasure* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 47-50 and George McKay, *Circular Breathing: The Cultural Politics of Jazz in Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005) 109-114.

⁹ Robert Cantwell, *When We Were Good* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 24-5. For more see Cantwell, “The New Minstrelsy: Jim Crow and John Henry,” in *When We Were Good*, 49-80 and Robert Cantwell, “Tambo and Bones: Blackface Minstrelsy, the Opry and Bill Monroe,” in *Bluegrass Breakdown: The Making of the Old Southern Sound* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003 [1984]), 249-274.

countercultural—and later large scale—popular acceptance of black folk genres like traditional jazz and the blues. In its evocations of a pastoral, pre-modern, ahistorical American South, minstrelsy helped condition the folkloristic racial discourses that accompanied black musics to Britain.

In the 1950s, through the revival, folklorization and appropriation of African-American “folk” musical traditions, Britain appeared to follow the United States’ lead in broadly embracing the invention of a temporally and spatially distant black Other—in no small part delivered through the sonic and visual conventions of minstrelsy—as a means to negotiate the lived realities of an increasingly multicultural society. Cantwell, in his observations of an American folk revival that coincided with the Civil Rights Movement, provides insight into the ways that the “invention of a folk” can serve as a transatlantic means to “assign... the cultural indicators within which the black social being remains circumscribed and controlled.”¹⁰ It therefore seems no small coincidence that minstrelsy, hot jazz and blues, all of which were at least peripherally linked in the British imagination with notions of “traditional black folk” culture, would achieve ever-increasing national attention over the course of the 1950s, just as late-colonial black diasporic movement to London was reaching critical mass some ten years after a postwar national sense of “lost Empire” had begun to settle in.¹¹

The recognition of this relationship between revival, minstrelsy and migration supports Paul Gilroy’s argument in *Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack* that postwar/late-colonial Britain adopted “racial common sense” from an American style of racial discourse that relied on “simple

¹⁰ Cantwell, *When We Were Good*, 55.

¹¹ “Black” used here in the broadest British sense of peoples of African and South Asian descent. The history and social/musical impact of this late-colonial migration will be discussed in section one of this chapter.

racial truths” to account for broader political, social and class issues.¹² These inherited discourses of race and racial difference—even statements and ideas as well intentioned as those espoused by Britain’s jazz community or spoken by black artists themselves—are bound up in and reinforced through racialized musical genres. Furthermore, Gilroy’s suggestion that, for Britons, this sort of racial discourse provided a “sure way to keep their bearings in an increasingly confusing and vertiginous world” echoes the reasoning that music revivals function as an imaginary alternative to modernity.¹³

By focusing on the discourse and performance of black folk ballads and blues within the traditional jazz revival of the early 1950s, I hope to elucidate the processes by which American blackness was often represented in Britain at this time. I argue that the rhetorical and musical strategies employed by critics and musicians in the transatlantic importation and revival of these most *traditional* of black musics presented these forms above all in a folklore-inspired, nostalgic, ahistorical, anti-modern, and anti-commercial manner that reproduced and reinforced the then-common British representations of black bodies and black expressive practices; those derived from the minstrel show. As Robin Kelley has noted, “terms like ‘folk,’ ‘authentic,’ and ‘traditional’ are socially constructed categories that have something to do with the reproduction of race, class, and gender hierarchies and the policing of the boundaries of modernism.”¹⁴ In other words, these terms only have meaning within a particular social context, in response to

¹² Paul Gilroy, *Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack* (London: Routledge, 2002 [1987]), xxii.

¹³ Gilroy, *Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*, xxiii. See Livingston, Ronstrom, Titon, etc (as discussed and cited in the dissertation’s introduction).

¹⁴ Robin D.G. Kelley, “Notes on Deconstructing the ‘Folk,’” *The American Historical Review* 97/5 (Dec 1992), 1402. Guthrie Ramsey has offered a counterargument for “Reconstructing ‘the Folk’”; drawing attention to the positive work these terms can be employed to do. He notes in particular the “power [and pleasures] of in-group identity” associated with sense of belonging to a folk. Guthrie Ramsey, *Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip-hop* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 39-40. What I hope becomes abundantly clear in my analysis of the concept here is that my critique of “black folk,” revolves around the way it is appropriated and mobilized and is not intended to challenge the sense of community it can instill in other settings.

particular social conditions, and are defined in opposition to contemporaneous ideas about art, commerce, artifice and the modern.¹⁵ The revival of traditional jazz, blues and ballads—at a time when actual, lived blackness was arriving on British shores in ever increasing numbers—can be understood as conveying a sense that blackness could be contained, collected and mastered, further inscribing the idea that what constituted proper and worthwhile black expression could be circumscribed and codified. “The devotion of British jazz audiences to the supposedly ‘authentic’ sounds of New Orleans jazz,” Ashley Dawson recently noted in reference to British-based calypsonians in the 1950s, “largely prevented [this audience] from appreciating the black music being made in their midst.”¹⁶ The embrace of authentic African-American forms, as well as the continued employment of blackface in light entertainment, is understood in the pages that follow as at least partly driven by a growing national sense of racial anxiety due to the rapidly expanding migration of people of color from the Commonwealth and colonies to the United Kingdom.

I take a three-step approach in this chapter. The first section provides a background to the “arrival of the blues” in 1951. It begins with an overview of representations of blackness—those transmitted through blackface as well as those performed by actual black bodies—in British entertainment before 1950. I then discuss three instances of black British musical production and reception in the first years of the 1950s: calypsonian Lord Kitchener, “honky tonk”/concert pianist Winifred Atwell, and jazz modernist/entertainer Ray Ellington. These three performers, each active in London at the time, demonstrate contrasting examples of creative production by

¹⁵ I have placed the terms traditional, folk, authentic, pure, etc. in italics or scarequotes to emphasize this kind of contingent, socially, historically contextualized, ideologically-based usage and meanings attached to them as well as the “fuzziness” of the facts behind them. With the occasional exception where I intend to draw added emphasis to these terms, I will leave it to the reader moving forward to bear this in mind without these somewhat clumsy editorial reminders.

¹⁶ Ashley Dawson, “Calypso Circuits: Trans-Atlantic Popular Culture and the Gendering of Black Nationalism,” *Popular Music and Society* 34:3 (July 2011), 282.

musicians of the African diaspora and indicate ways people of color negotiated the world of British entertainment. The second section highlights the discursive strategies employed between fall 1951 and spring 1952 by leading proponents and performers of traditional African-American folk music, in particular American folklorist Alan Lomax and French critic Hugues Panassié. This roughly six-month span, which included the first performances by an “authentic Negro blues singer,” Big Bill Broonzy, on the British concert stage and saw an influx of recordings by more contemporary blues artists, was a pivotal moment in the importation of the blues to Britain.¹⁷ In my interpretation of this period, I hope to explicate the transatlantic roots and ideological underpinnings of the rhetoric used to promote and justify British interest in black ballads and the blues. I will give particular attention to positions that cast Big Bill Broonzy as the model for and living embodiment of the black folk blues tradition and its British offshoot, skiffle. This discourse—often in Broonzy’s own words—portrayed Big Bill as inheritor of, successor to and perhaps even more worthy representative of the authentic folk blues legacy previously assigned to Huddie “Leadbelly” Leadbetter.¹⁸ The final section shifts attention to the white revival of the black folk tradition with a focus on some of the earliest and best-known examples of British skiffle: revivals of spirituals, ballads and blues by Lonnie Donegan and the Chris Barber Skiffle Group recorded over the course of 1954. By tracing the genealogy of the material on these records as well as the emulative/adaptive performance strategies employed by this group, I hope to shed light on the ways these folksongs were understood as being among the most pure forms of black cultural expression.

¹⁷ Derrick Stewart-Baxter, “Preachin’ the Blues,” *Jazz Journal*, September 1951, 4. Josh White had performed in the UK earlier that year, but was generally considered a cabaret songster who sang the occasional blues, not a “bluesman.” This was distinction of the utmost importance, as we will see. See Schwartz, 35-39 for more about White’s position in the world of British blues.

¹⁸ In the mythology surrounding Broonzy in Britain, his Mississippi roots are emphasized while his participation in the urban Chicago blues scene of the 1930s and 1940s is expunged. This will be discussed in depth below.

It bears emphasizing that reviving and celebrating black folk music genres was not necessarily an act of racism. As Eric Lott reminds us, even in antebellum American blackface minstrelsy there was an ambivalence, a set of racial contradictions at work by which “whites racially gird[ed] themselves by way of rituals that mirror rather than distance the other.”¹⁹ In fact, most early revivalist musicians and ardent critical supporters of traditional jazz and blues vocally lamented the poor treatment of blacks in the American South and often declared themselves “colorblind.” Despite an earnest avowal to look beyond color, however, the discursive and musical forms that revivalists embraced relied on the kind of emphasis on culturally/ethnically-bound expressive difference that reproduces the racial logic of a black/white binary.²⁰

A BRIEF HISTORY OF “BLACK MUSIC” IN BRITAIN PRIOR TO 1950

Fresh on the heels of his recent success in the United States, T.D. Rice brought his “Jump, Jim Crow” routine to London in 1836, just three years after the abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire.²¹ By the time the Virginia Minstrels toured England in 1843, London had developed its own stable of minstrel delineators. In the decades that followed, the standard repertoire of the American minstrel stage, in particular the work of Stephen Foster, remained the most commonly performed material among local blackface troupes, although new compositions were penned in London as well.²² Despite the fact that minstrelsy’s direct connections to African American expressive culture are tenuous, contested and unclear, it was minstrelsy that provided

¹⁹ Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013 [1993]), 4.

²⁰ See Ronald Radano, *Lying Up a Nation: Race and Black Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) and Richard Middleton, *Voicing the Popular: On the Subjects of Popular Music* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

²¹ Pickering, *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain*, 7.

²² See Pickering, *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain*, 38-53 regarding Harry Hunter, Britain’s leading composer of minstrel song, for example.

one of the first, and certainly the most pervasive representations of blackness in Britain during the nineteenth century.²³ As in the United States, but even more so due to the relatively miniscule black population in UK, minstrelsy “popularized and amplified the historically limited knowledge of the ‘negro’ and in so doing helped to crystallize particular stunted characterizations and recognitions of black people and the cultural practices associated with them.”²⁴ As Michael Pickering notes, minstrelsy and its associated characterizations of people of color gained traction concurrent with a more generalized Victorian, post-abolition “matrix of ethnocentric assumptions and perceptions.”²⁵ These assumptions and characterizations were reinforced, rather than challenged or mitigated, by the initial visit of an all-black minstrel company, Sam Hague’s “Great American Slave Troupe,” to London in 1866.²⁶ By the 1880s minstrelsy became a cornerstone of British light entertainment, a number of British-based minstrel groups, black and white alike, having been established at this time alongside the burgeoning format of the music hall—which also occasionally featured blackface performances. In opposition to the genre’s working class roots, minstrel shows of this time were held in higher esteem than the more “lowbrow” music hall circuit, serving as the go-to format for wholesome family entertainment at the time.

Minstrel depictions of black culture and black expression, however, were not the only form of black representation in Britain during the nineteenth century. Following the light

²³ Earlier blackface characters appeared on the stages of London prior, particularly the part of Mungo in *The Padlock*. See Pickering *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain*, 6, and Middleton, *Voicing the Popular*, 13. See also Cantwell, *Bluegrass Breakdown*; Lott, *Love and Theft*; and Christopher J. Smith, *The Creolization of American Culture: William Sidney Mount and the Roots of Blackface Minstrelsy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013) for more about the hybridity and “blackness” of minstrel practice.

²⁴ Pickering, *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain*, 2-3.

²⁵ Michael Pickering, “‘A Jet Ornament to Society’: Black Music in Nineteenth Century Britain,” in *Black Music in Britain: Essays on the Afro-Asian Contribution to Popular Music*, Paul Oliver ed., (Milton Keynes and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1990), 22.

²⁶ Pickering, *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain*, 25.

classical concert model of Jenny Lind, the “Black Swan,” Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, demonstrated the oft-contested “capacity” of those of African descent to perform in the European concert tradition during her tour of the United Kingdom in 1853.²⁷ The much-celebrated 1873-74 and 1875-77 tours of the Fisk Jubilee Singers would likewise challenge the representation of black culture delivered through the minstrel mask, but not in a manner sufficient enough to truly diminish its potency. While widely embraced by the press and nobility alike, the Fisk Singers’ music was nonetheless depicted as “unconscious,” “pathetic,” “rude” and “wild.” These were the type of descriptors most commonly associated with the nineteenth century stereotype of black malehood.²⁸

The majority of representations of black culture in the UK prior to the twentieth century were crafted and delivered through these stylized and stereotyped impersonations and importations of African Americans. Even the most noted of black performers in England were more often than not American ex-pats who stayed on in London after visits with touring companies. This inclination toward American rather than other representations of blackness was, I think, predominantly due to a predilection for “Americanist,” exoticist novelty entertainment. It can also be attributed to the incredibly small percentage of peoples of color in Great Britain at the time. While no official statistics tracked race or ethnicity in the UK at the time (the first census to include a question about ethnicity was not until 1991), Paul Oliver’s research suggests that estimates of the black British population during the course of the nineteenth century held steady at around 15,000 and that population was primarily centered in London and other port

²⁷ That is to say, contested during the 19th century if not well beyond.

²⁸ Pickering, ““A Jet Ornament to Society,”” 31, and Radano, *Lying up a Nation*, 259-263.

cities such as Liverpool and Cardiff.²⁹ The first substantial increase in the flow of black settlers to the British Isles would not occur until the First World War. This would, on the grand scale, still amount to little more than a trickle, the total black population rising to only around 50,000 by 1919.³⁰ Despite this influx, however modest, of colonial Africans and Afro-Caribbeans drawn to the UK by wartime employment and military service, a distinctly black British form of musical expression would not follow. Instead, African American musical forms, most often performed by white entertainers, would continue to provide the closest thing to “real” black expression that most British citizens would encounter.

The minstrel show proper—performed in the traditional form of overture, comedy routine, olio, burlesque and walkaround, featuring the semi-circle arrangement of players including the interlocutor and endmen tambo and bones—was still a regular feature in London entertainment around the turn of the century, even as it was becoming a fading fashion in the US. One of the most popular of British minstrel organizations, the Moore and Burgess troupe, for example, staged between nine and twelve shows weekly around 1900 and had been doing so for the better part of forty years.³¹ Furthermore, by the late 1890s blackface acts and a small number of black entertainers enacting blackface stereotypes were commonplace on the variety stage and in the music hall. This was particularly evident with the importation of the American “coon song” craze associated with turn-of-the-century ragtime. As Pickering notes, one of the most popular British entertainers at the beginning of the twentieth century was Eugene Stratton, a

²⁹ Paul Oliver, *Black Music in Britain*, 13-14. By comparison, the total population of the United Kingdom and Ireland in 1900 was roughly 30,000,000.

http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10061325/cube/TOT_POP, accessed September 4, 2015.

³⁰ Moore, *Inside British Jazz*, 24.

³¹ Frith, *Music for Pleasure*, 48.

blackface coon song specialist active from 1880 until his death in 1918.³² African American variety musical theater arrived in London in the form of the James P. Johnson-led show, *The Rainbow*, in 1923 and the *Blackbirds of 1926* featuring Florence Mills—however both shows were anchored by plantation themes inherited from minstrelsy.³³

Although a handful of less celebrated acts would precede them, the arrival in London of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band in April 1919, and the Southern Syncopated Orchestra in June of the same year, are most commonly cited as the “official” introductions of African American dance music, or jazz, to the UK.³⁴ The Southern Syncopated Orchestra, a group of fifty African American performers, led by Will Marion Cook and clarinet soloist Sydney Bechet, began an extended engagement in London with a five-month run of concerts at the Philharmonic Hall.³⁵ Though many of the original members of the group returned to the US after the Philharmonic engagement, the Southern Syncopated Orchestra continued to perform in London for the next two years, drawing replacement musicians from the city’s Afro-Caribbean and African populations.³⁶ Primarily through this orchestra and its various offshoots, jazz—or syncopated dance music, as it was more commonly referred to—began to form the basis of a budding London nightlife scene. Despite the fact that many of the music’s original practitioners hailed

³² See Pickering, *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain*, 159-179 for more about Stratton and coon song in the UK.

³³ Howard Rye, “Fearsome Means of Discord: Early Encounters with Jazz,” in *Black Music in Britain*, 52-3.

³⁴ Examples of these predecessors include Joe Jordan’s group featuring “plantation songs and negro dances” in 1905, The Versatile Four in 1913, Dan Kildare’s Clef Club Orchestra in 1915. Rye, “Fearsome Means of Discord,” 45-6.

³⁵ Rye, “Fearsome Means of Discord,” 49.

³⁶ Lloyd Bradley, *Sounds Like London a Century of Black Music in the Capital* (London: Profile, 2013), 22.

from the African diaspora, by 1925 syncopated music in the UK was a white-dominated entertainment arena.³⁷

To help support this nascent scene and the growing number of affiliated clubs and orchestras, *Melody Maker*, “a Monthly Magazine for all who are directly or indirectly interested in the production of popular music,” launched in January of 1926 with an estimated readership of 20,000.³⁸ From the first issues of *Melody Maker*, widely held beliefs about and general attitudes toward the relation of syncopated dance music to race are evident. According to a feature on the Original Havana Band:

“Jazz” or syncopated dance [music] really originated in New Orleans by negroes... becoming increasing popular on account of the excellence of rhythm they produced, even though other qualities were lacking. But rhythm alone, as we all know, is insufficient to satisfy the educated ear, and the advent of the white man into Jazz marked the commencement of the struggle to perpetuate the spirit of the negro rhythm and at the same time introduce and maintain the many other qualities which the great classical masters have shown us to be music.”³⁹

In other words, while jazz may have been understood as born from the African American experience in New Orleans, white musicians were required to tame and refine this “insufficient” source material for British audiences. One needs look no further than the self-professed “King of Jazz,” Paul Whiteman to realize that this belief was held on both sides of the Atlantic. The “Gramophone Review,” in the same issue of *Melody Maker*, advises a neophyte British dance band musician how he could learn of and then go about “taming” this “Negro spirit” into actual “music” with the following introduction to the column: “There can be no doubt that the Gramophone, as well as being a constant source of amusement, is the finest tutor the present day

³⁷ Profiles and images in issues of *Melody Maker* from the 1920s make it abundantly clear that the vast majority of British dance bands musicians were white.

³⁸ *Melody Maker* masthead, February 1, 1926. See March 1, 1926 *Melody Maker* for subscription details.

³⁹ “The Original Havana Band,” *Melody Maker*, February 1, 1926, 29.

musician can have.”⁴⁰ The process of learning to play and appreciate black American music via record would prove to be one of great resilience.



Figure 2.2 – “Gramophone Review” Title Illustration (1926)⁴¹

Another media outlet would aid in the dissemination and popularization of syncopated dance music around this time. The BBC, initially launched as a private company in 1922 and incorporated as a public service in 1927, began broadcasting just as the vogue for syncopated dance orchestras was spreading throughout the country. In these early years of the Corporation, programming tracked very closely with the types of entertainment formats found in British theaters and ballrooms. As such, live relays of dance bands resident in London hotels featured prominently in nascent British radio. In 1928, the BBC founded its own in-house dance orchestra with prominent bandleader Jack Payne at the helm.⁴²

Much like the American divide between “hot” and “sweet” in the US, by the mid-1930s a schism in the British music world would begin to form between factions that supported the more

⁴⁰ “Gramophone Review,” *Melody Maker*, February 1, 1926, 34.

⁴¹ Note the blacked-up/black character in the middle of the procession from Gramophone to magazine here as well as what appear to be literal minstrel masks representing the Greek muses Thalia and Melpomene on the cover of the *Melody Maker* in the image (*Melody Maker*, February 1926).

⁴² Louis Barfe, *Turned Out Nice Again: The History of British Light Entertainment* (London: Atlantic Publishing, 2008), 22-23.

authentic African American exponents of jazz and the more recent British dance orchestra style. The BBC supported the British (read “white”) faction by banning hot music and scat singing from the airwaves in 1935.⁴³ *Melody Maker*, while still reporting all the latest activity in the popular music scene, seems to have aligned itself with those interested in American hot (i.e. “black”) jazz by supporting the “Hot Rhythm Club” movement that began in 1933. As a continuation of this support, *Melody Maker* established the “Collectors Corner” column in September 1941 as “a space in which [collectors] can air their queries about records which they would either like issued or of which they would like to know the personnels or other details.”⁴⁴ The earliest of these “Corners” demonstrates that a predilection for the hot sounds of the late 1920s and early 1930s remained strong among British jazz fans.

The British Musician’s Union would further the divide between these two factions when it imposed a ban on American musicians. At the Musicians’ Union’s request, the British Ministry of Labour ceased issuing work permits to US bands in 1935 and only began allowing American musicians to play in the UK again in 1955.⁴⁵ One of the by-products of this divide, and the actions of the BBC and the Musicians Union in particular, was to segregate African American jazz from the realm of popular, light entertainment and heighten its position as fetish object for a bohemian counterculture.⁴⁶ Limited access to more recent jazz—whether in live performance, on

⁴³ Frith, *Music for Pleasure*, 37.

⁴⁴ “Collectors Corner,” *Melody Maker*, September 27, 1941.

⁴⁵ Catherine Tackley, “Race Identity and the Meaning of Jazz in 1940s Britain,” in *Black Popular Music in Britain Since 1945*, John Stratton and Nabeel Zuberi, eds. (Aldershot, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), 13. This rule was worked around in the case of blues and “folk” singers as they were often not AFM members and therefore could be classed as “entertainers.” An exchange system was put in place in 1955 so that, in order for an American group to perform in the UK, a British band had to perform in the US at or around the same time.

⁴⁶ A position that would later form the basis for a revivalist movement centered around a desire to bring back the “original” sound of New Orleans jazz. Furthermore, by the early 1950s at least, it appears that dance band music was considered a category of music unrelated to what was housed under the “jazz” genre designation. This is quite evident in the discourse and format of popular music periodicals such as *Melody Maker* and *Musical Express*.

broadcast or record—meant that the object of the “Collector’s Corner” and “Rhythm Club” culture became increasingly focused on objects of the past, looking back further and further for in search of more original, more “authentic” versions of African-American expression. If the BBC was resistant to the relatively contemporaneous form of black musical representations heard on hot jazz records, it had no such reservations about the more codified and standardized representations of blackness found in the well-established format of the minstrel show. Preceded by 1930’s *White Coons Concert Party*, the *Kentucky Minstrels* debuted in 1933 and would be one of the Corporation’s most popular shows until the end of its run in 1950.⁴⁷ From its inception, the *Kentucky Minstrels* —which adapted the standard tropes of the minstrel stage to radio, from the comedic exchanges of Mr. Interlocutor and the end men to the singing of works by Stephen Foster—promised to “turn back the clock” through “old songs and melodies... [as] crooned by the plantation darkies.”⁴⁸

BLACK “BRITONS,” “BLACK” MUSIC

The late 1940s and early years of the 1950s witnessed the first substantive flow of black migration to the UK. With black settlement came the first waves of music created by black Britons accessible to a broad public. Although this chapter is primarily concerned with the importation and emulation of black musics of the United States in the early 1950s, a brief look at the careers of three black residents of Britain in the early years of this period provides an illustrative counternarrative, particularly in the ways that previous ideas about blackness and black music informed their reception and career trajectories. This section highlights the positions occupied by calypsonian Lord Kitchener, concert/boogie woogie pianist Winifred Atwell and

⁴⁷ Pickering, *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain*, 190.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 194.

modern jazz bandleader and all-around entertainer Ray Ellington in 1951. As I will show, enacting common tropes from minstrel performance practice traditions appears to have been a prerequisite for commercial acceptance in Britain at this time.

On June 21, 1948 nearly 500 West Indian subjects of the Crown arrived in Tillsbury, England aboard the *Empire Windrush*, gaining inexpensive passage to the “mother country” through a British government program aimed at attracting workers to fill a postwar labor shortage.⁴⁹ Among the hundreds of Afro-Caribbean skilled and unskilled workers aboard the *Windrush* were two of Trinidad’s most established calypso artists, Lord Kitchener and Lord Beginner.⁵⁰ Lord Kitchener and Lord Beginner were not the first calypsonians to call Britain home, but their arrival amongst this wave of black migration aided in bringing calypso to the attention of British broadcasters, record companies and the music press.⁵¹ A February 9, 1950 BBC radio broadcast on the Light Programme was one of the first-large scale opportunities for Britons to learn about the Trinidadian “folk” music style performed by Kitchener and Beginner, although not from these recently arrived artists. The broadcast, a history of calypso “from slave days to the present,” argued that “calypso is to the West Indian what the blues is to the American Negro.”⁵² Following the latest in folklore protocols, the program relied on field recordings made by a BBC producer in Trinidad the previous year for its musical examples. Just a little more than

⁴⁹ Although these 500 were not the first people of color to migrate from the British Caribbean colonies, the amount of migrants arriving at once and the trend their arrival set in motion marks this occasion in scholarship and popular memory as a narrative point of origin for large-scale black settlement in the UK. So much so that the post-1948 Afro-Caribbean generation is generally referred to as the *Windrush* generation.

⁵⁰ Joshua B. Guild, “‘Nobody in This World is Better Than Us’: Calypso in the Age of Decolonization and Civil Rights,” in *The Other Special Relationship: Race, Rights and Riots in Britain and the United States*, Robin D.G. Kelley and Stephen Tuck, eds. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 155-172.

⁵¹ See John Cowley, “London is the Place: Caribbean Music in the Context of Empire 1900-60,” in *Black Music in Britain*, 58-76 or Lloyd Bradley, *Sounds Like London*, 26-35 for more about calypso in the UK before 1948.

⁵² “On the Beat: West Indian ‘blues,’” *Melody Maker*, January 28, 1950, 6. (Hereafter *Melody Maker* will be abbreviated *MM*.)

a week before the program aired, however, Beginner and Kitchener were cutting commercial records of calypso in London. Organized by jazz producer and impresario “St.” Denis Preston for the Parlophone label, the first recording session in the UK of “genuine Calypso music played and sung by Trinidadians” was held at Abbey Road Studios on January 30. Open to the public, the event drew an audience that included many of London’s leading jazz supporters as well as jazz writers for *Melody Maker*, *Jazz Journal* and *Musical Express*.⁵³ The public recording session was only the first of a series of promotional events intended to generate interest in calypso and the records Preston had recently produced. The next day, both Kitchener and Beginner, backed by Cyril Blake’s Calypso Serenaders, performed a “recital of authentic calypso music” on BBC-TV’s *Picture Page*.⁵⁴ Another Preston promotion, a dance billed as “Mardi Gras—New Orleans to Port of Spain,” brought together the combination of Kitchener, Beginner and Blake’s Serenaders with Humphrey Lyttelton’s leading jazz revivalist group in an event that underscored the common ground between southern African American and Afro-Caribbean cultural practice.⁵⁵

If the bringing together of these genres for the Mardi Gras dance failed to draw the two musical styles together in the minds of music fans, Preston’s February 25th *Melody Maker* feature, “Calypso: the jazz of the West Indies,” drove the point home.⁵⁶ The article offers a laundry list of “parallels” that connect these two “folk musics,” noting that the biggest divergence between the two genres was the commercialization that jazz was subject to in the 1930s and beyond. In this regard, Trinidadian calypso—the product of a remote island with less exposure to the corrupting influence of capitalism—remained “much purer than Orleans jazz.” Preston then modifies his argument by stating that calypso is perhaps more closely aligned in

⁵³ “On the Beat: Calypso Clambake,” *MM*, February 4, 1950, 3.

⁵⁴ “Why Must it Always be a Lucky Dip?,” *MM*, February 11, 1950, 2.

⁵⁵ “Lyttelton and Blake Bands in Big Mardi Gras Celebration,” *MM*, February 11, 1950, 1.

⁵⁶ Denis Preston, “Calypso: the Jazz of the West Indies,” *MM*, February 25, 1950, 3. All the following quotes from this source.

form and practice with the blues, and describes the two as “probably the last *living* folk ballad forms in the English language.” Preston’s rhetoric effectively brought the music of recent settlers Lord Beginner and Lord Kitchener to the attention of the jazz world; however, his promotional barrage did little to sell calypso in Britain. Only one of the sides from the January 30th Abbey Road sessions, Lord Kitchener’s “Nora,” was much of a hit and it only sold particularly well in the colonial territories of the Caribbean and West Africa.⁵⁷

Kitchener’s output over the next few years, although “amusing and highly topical, [with a] rhythm... of the type that should appeal to [the] public,” failed to garner any great commercial success.⁵⁸ While his records were regularly reviewed in the less commercially minded *Jazz Journal* between 1950 and 1952, *Melody Maker* only reviewed one of Kitchener’s recordings during this period, 1951’s “Festival of Britain” backed with (b/w) “London is the Place for Me” (Melodisc 1163). *Melody Maker* seemed unsure of what to do with the record as the review was grouped neither with the modern jazz section or the “collector’s corner” write ups of recent traditional reissues, instead assigning it to the magazine’s pop music reviewer, Laurie Henshaw. The review itself is more descriptive than critical—perhaps for the better, as Henshaw admits that he finds calypso “the least palatable... [of] folk-music form[s].”⁵⁹ The inclusion of this record in this issue, particularly given the reviewer’s apathetic approach, most likely had more to do with the side’s connection to the 1951 Festival of Britain held on London’s South Bank than with any specific embrace of the music. *Melody Maker*’s uncertainly about and ambivalence toward Kitchener’s records, I believe, underscores a more general uneasiness on the part of the white British public towards Kitchener, his music and calypso more generally. The white record-

⁵⁷ Cowley, “London is the Place: Caribbean Music in the Context of Empire 1900-60,” 67. Dawson, “Calypso Circuits,” 282-3.

⁵⁸ Steve Race, “Why has the Calypso Not Yet Caught on with the General British Public,” *Musical Express*, August 18, 1950, 3.

⁵⁹ Laurie Henshaw, “Festival Calypso,” *MM*, May 12, 1951, 5.

buying set was less than enthusiastic about his records and his black Caribbean audience in the UK was either too small or too short on resources to make much of an impact.

Kitchener's songs were neither strictly commercial novelty dance numbers that appealed to a wide cross section of the population, nor anti-commercial "folk music," as some critics wished. "London is the Place for Me," for instance, may have been received as at once modern and anachronistic, as domestic in its assimilationist themes as it was exotic in its rhythms and in Kitchener's Trinidadian accent. Through certain interpretations, Kitchener's compositions could appear to have an alienating effect on white British listeners. There is abundant room to construe the *seemingly* laudatory lyrics of "London is the Place for Me" as sardonic and signifying, for example, rather than assimilationist. Kitchener's delivery of the line "to live in London you're really comfortable" (or is it perhaps "rarely?"), appears shaded with a certain degree of irony. Offering that he has taken up residence at the royal palace of Hampton Court is a significantly less subtle indication that Kitchener's lyric should not be taken at face value. Such an interpretation recasts "London is the Place for Me" as critical of the late-colonial situation of West Indians in the UK rather than a celebration of the new possibilities afforded by migration. Furthermore, as Dawson points out, "Nora's" popularity in the British colonies of the black Atlantic was most likely attributable to the song's veiled critique of colonialism and its "reversal of class and racial relations."⁶⁰ Certainly, Kitchener's calypsos of a few years later, such as "My Landlady" and "If You're Not White, You're Black," are overt critiques of the West Indian experience in London rather than optimistic anthems or even veiled, signifyin' commentaries. Such critiques, coupled with the topical nature of his songs, conflict with a popular

⁶⁰ Dawson, "Calypso Circuits," 283. In "Nora," Kitchener, "tired with London... homesick and sad," sings of his plans to return to Trinidad and pleads with his distraught, white, upper-class girlfriend to leave him be, instead of asking her to come with her. He goes on to reprimand her through an inversion of typical gender roles by asking her "darling what is your intention?"

understanding of his music as timeless folksong unaffected by modernity. That is to say, that we are forced to hear his songs as informed by the social reality of his surroundings. Kitchener's lack of "mainstream" appeal can thus be at least partially attributed to his lack of representational and musical adherence to the folkloristic, minstrel paradigm. In Kitchener and calypso we see a hesitation to fully embrace a version of blackness that is *of* Britain but seemingly "untamed" by its conventions and social expectations.

Arriving in London just two years prior to the *Windrush*, fellow Trinidadian Winifred Atwell's early career looked little like Kitchener's. A classically trained pianist who originally moved to London to study at the Royal Academy of Music in 1946, Atwell was also proficient in American boogie woogie and ragtime styles and had performed boogie woogie for US military personnel stationed in Trinidad during World War II.⁶¹ By 1947, with a more traditional concert career appearing out of reach, she began touring variety stages and music halls playing a mix of light classical, ragtime and boogie woogie.⁶² Although musicians of color had on occasion launched more "serious" concert careers in Britain before her, as Jeffery Greene notes,

Once the number of black people in Britain reached levels, in the 1950s, where African descent was no longer a novelty, the white audiences for concert presentations seemed to have disappeared. Promoters and the audiences wanted Blacks performing black music. And so it was that the schooled pianist from Trinidad, Winifred Atwell, earned a living in Britain in the early 1950s by playing a pastiche of ragtime.⁶³

⁶¹ George McKay, "Winifred Atwell and Her 'Other Piano,'" in *Black British Jazz: Routes, Ownership and Performance*, Jason Tonybee, Catherine Hackney and Mark Doffman, eds., (Aldershot, UK and Burlington VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), 153.

⁶² Stephen Bourne, *Black in the British Frame* (London and Washington: Cassell, 1998), 117-118.

⁶³ Jeffrey Green, "Afro-American Symphony: Popular Black Concert Hall Performers 1900-40," in *Black Music in Britain*, 42.

In 1951, after four relatively successful years on the light entertainment circuit of music hall, radio and television, Atwell secured a recording contract with Decca.⁶⁴ By the end of the year she would sell more than 150,000 copies of the single that would vault her to the ranks of British stardom and set the mould for the rest of her career.⁶⁵ The side, a rendition of the 1908 composition “Black and White Rag,” was her first ragtime record and the first time she recorded the sound of her “other” piano, a junk-shop upright that she used for performing “honky tonk” ragtime and boogie woogie numbers.⁶⁶ In her concert and television appearances, she would regularly make a show of walking across the stage from the grand piano, on which she would play works by the likes of Rachmaninoff and Chopin, to her trademark upright, an instrument that she kept strategically out of tune just enough to conjure the sound of an African-American honky tonk in the minds of her British listeners. As George McKay notes, it was the “self-othering” act of employing this other instrument for the performance of the “primitivized and atavized popular music of black America” that was crucial to her success.⁶⁷ Also notable is the fact that it was not only the sound of black America—rather than her native black Caribbean—that Atwell evoked for her commercial success, but the sound of a black American *past*.

Despite this apparent synergy with the proclivities and interests of the jazz press, Atwell was largely ignored by *Melody Maker*’s “Collector’s Corner” and, unlike Kitchener, only occasionally appears in *Jazz Journal*’s record reviews. In these, her records are generally disregarded as novelty, although in a review of the tellingly titled “Swanee River Boogie,” the reviewer noted Atwell’s ability to perform “fast intricate stuff, rather in the manner of Hazel

⁶⁴ “Entrancing Coloured Pianist Winifred Atwell, Concert, Variety and Recording Star,” *Musical Express*, July 13, 1951, 3.

⁶⁵ “Winifred Atwell to Star in New Delfont Revue,” *Musical Express*, February 1, 1952, 1. Future Atwell records would surpass the million sales mark and on two occasions would reach #1 on the popular charts (the chart had not been instituted yet so no chart info is available for “Black and White Rag”).

⁶⁶ McKay, “Winifred Atwell and Her ‘Other Piano,’” 159-160.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 163.

Scott, but without quite so much swing.”⁶⁸ The majority of the coverage dedicated to Atwell instead came from *Musical Express*, a periodical more generally interested in popular entertainment writ large and less invested in any form of anti-commercialism. Atwell’s reputation as a novelty ragtime and boogie pianist is an interesting contrast to the warm reception that American recordings of these genres, which sounded similar to hers, were privy to. It was through the novelty of this self-conscious and deliberate act of assuming an “other” voice—one that could not be considered authentically hers by training or birthright—that she both found commercial success and was excluded from the contemporary revivalist interest in African American jazz. Her “honky tonk” music, as perceived by jazz audiences and critics, was a calculation, not a genuine reflection of her musical heritage or the earnest revival of a folk form. As a Trinidadian woman primarily performing in overtly commercial entertainment settings, she could not be linked in the jazz world’s collective imagination with resonant folk models of black womanhood or manhood.

Frequently sharing the front page of *Musical Express* with Atwell in the fall of 1951 was black British drummer, singer and bandleader Ray Ellington. Unlike Atwell or Kitchener, Ellington was born in London, the son of an African-American father and a white Russian-Jewish mother.⁶⁹ A sideman for more than a decade prior, in late 1947 he formed the Ray Ellington Quartet by joining forces with the Jamaican-born bassist Coleridge Goode, electric guitarist Lauderic Caton (from Trinidad) and German-Jewish pianist Dick Katz, a group better known as the Caribbean Trio.⁷⁰ At a time when other black British jazz musicians were

⁶⁸ “Worth a Spin,” *Jazz Journal*, December 1952, 8.

⁶⁹ John Chilton, *Who’s Who in British Jazz* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 121.

⁷⁰ “New Quartet for Ray Ellington,” *Accordion Times and Musical Express*, November 7, 1947, 1. Gelly, *An Unholy Row*, 43.

struggling to find work, the Ellington Quartet was somewhat of an instant success.⁷¹ Despite forming just a month before the voting commenced, the group placed in the top ten in *Melody Maker's* "Small Combinations" section of its annual dance band poll, a position it was to retain for the next five years.⁷² Ray Ellington was dedicated to a particularly modern blend of jump blues, bebop and vocal features, modeling his quartet after Louis Jordan's Tympani Five and the Nat "King" Cole Trio. His dedication to the modern, or "progressive" as he referred to it, led Ellington to pen the 1948 *Melody Maker* editorial "The 'New Look' in Jazz has come to stay" and "The Truth about Bebop" for *Musical Express*.⁷³ In his "New Look" piece, Ellington stressed the importance of not only staying up to date with musical styles, but also the necessity of presenting the music in a well-rehearsed, professionally-produced stage show in order to appeal to the largest possible audience. It is clear from these words, as well as his numerous appearances on variety stages in England and continental Europe over the course of his career, that Ellington did not consider jazz incompatible with entertainment or commercial success. He demonstrated this in the late 1940s and early 1950s by pairing his expertly executed bebop numbers with no less modern, but infinitely more accessible selections borrowed from or inspired by Louis Jordan's repertoire.⁷⁴ In this regard, the Ray Ellington Quartet successfully brought instrumental prowess and light-hearted entertainment together in a way that few musicians on either side of the Atlantic, short of perhaps Dizzy Gillespie, would achieve.

Ellington's popularity and professionalism landed the Quartet the job of house band for the BBC radio comedy series *Crazy People*, later renamed the *Goon Show*, which debuted in

⁷¹ Hilary Moore, *Inside British Jazz*, 57.

⁷² "M.M. Dance Band Polls—Results," *MM*, December 27, 1947, 5.

⁷³ Ray Ellington, "The 'New Look' in jazz has come to stay," *MM*, 3 Apr 1948, 3 and "THE TRUTH ABOUT BEBOP!" *Musical Express*, September 10, 1948, 4.

⁷⁴ Jordan's "Three Guys Named Moe," "Beware" and "Let the Good Times Roll" were regular Ellington features, original numbers in the Jordan mold included the nursery-rhyme driven tunes "The Three Bears" and "Little Bo(P) Peep."

May of 1951. Featuring the talents of Spike Milligan, Harry Secombe and Peter Sellers, *The Goon Show* was one of the most popular BBC radio programs of the decade and its surrealist brand of humor influenced the Beatles and Monty Python's Flying Circus, among others.⁷⁵

Throughout the summer and fall of 1951 (and for the eight years following), Ellington performed inter-act musical numbers and often played bit parts in *Goon Show* radio plays, most commonly in the role of a servant or ethnic other. On more than one occasion, as demonstrated by his role of "O'Brian," in "The House of Teeth," he was assigned the role of African chieftain.⁷⁶ Such roles, it almost goes without saying, were quite reminiscent of stereotypical minstrel caricatures. Within the *Goon Show* broadcasts Ellington played to the most conservative of racial expectations in order to ensure that his progressive musical approach reached as many listeners as possible.

Regardless of the clear differences in their levels of commercial success, personal histories and approaches to music, Kitchener, Atwell and Ellington's professional activities in 1951 elucidate some clear patterns about what it meant to be a successful black musician performing in the UK in the early 1950s. Although Lord Kitchener didn't appear to cast *himself* as a folk artist, Denis Preston's promotional strategy for the calypsonian was to emphasize the folk-ness of the genre and its connections to traditional African American practice. Through this frame, Kitchener appeared to align with American norms of black folk musical production. Nonetheless, his association with a local immigrant population and the absence of the overtly minstrel-esque in his musical persona appeared to limit his appeal to all but the most committed of jazz audiences. Atwell demonstrated that popular success was not out of reach for an artist of colour in Britain. It was only through negotiating a complex routine of musical self-othering,

⁷⁵ The program ran from 1951-1960. Barfe, *Turned Out Nice Again*, 54-55.

⁷⁶ Spike Milligan, *The Goon Show Scripts* (London: The Woburn Press, 1972), 171-189.

however, via the adoption of an anachronistic black American style and *voice* that she achieved this level of commercial accomplishment. Although a talented musician, Ray Ellington's career success at this juncture, was dependent on an ability to navigate and conform to the expectations of the British light entertainment industry, which struggled to understand representations of blackness that did not resemble the minstrel mask.

Minstrelsy was not a distant memory, we should remember, but an active entertainment practice. *The Kentucky Minstrels* BBC radio program only ended its seventeen-year run in 1950 and, it could be argued, *the Goon Show* inherited not only the *Minstrels*' role as the leading comedy program on British airwaves, but also some of its conventions. Advertisements and reviews for albums of *Uncle Remus' Stories* and *Uncle Mac's Nursery Rhymes* in the 1951 Christmas issue of *Musical Express* show that old stories of the American antebellum South—including a children's tune titled "Ten Little Nigger Boys"⁷⁷—as well as the racial caricatures and dialect speech that accompanied them, were represented in entertainment practices for all ages.⁷⁸ Furthermore, as the following sections of this chapter will demonstrate, the almost exclusively white traditional jazz scene was no less, if quite differently entangled in the minstrel paradigm and its folkloristic, representational legacy.

TRADITION, BALLADS AND BLUES

The traditional jazz movement initiated in the mid-1930s was at first, as noted in section one, a record-collecting culture organized around hot clubs. In 1943, this movement took on a

⁷⁷ "Ten Little Nigger Boys" tells the tale of ten black boys meeting their dooms one by one through acts of carelessness or violence, the last one by hanging himself. See the following for more the minstrel origins of this song here: <http://folkloreforum.net/2009/05/01/%E2%80%9Cten-little-niggers%E2%80%9D-the-making-of-a-black-man%E2%80%99s-consciousness/>, accessed November 13, 2015.

⁷⁸ "HAPPY XMAS KIDS: Frenchy Sartell does a special Record Column for Children," and "Nyxa Record Company advertisement," *Musical Express*, December 21, 1951, 2.

revivalist, live performance dimension in a suburban pub in Barnehurst on the outskirts of London when George Webb's Dixielanders began reproducing recordings of African American, New Orleans-born jazz musicians like King Oliver, Louis Armstrong and Sydney Bechet. In the years following the war, traditional jazz would, albeit slowly, gain a larger audience.⁷⁹ The most public demonstration of this ascendance occurred on July 14, 1951 when traditional jazz appeared as part of the summer-long Festival of Britain, a national exposition intended to showcase the best the Kingdom had to offer. Organized by the recently founded National Federation of Jazz Organizations, held in the newly christened Royal Festival Hall, and attended by a crowd of 3,500, including none other than Crown Princess Elizabeth, the concert featured the best-known traditional jazz bands of the day.⁸⁰ These groups, following the model of the 1920s and early-1930s records they initially emulated, were predominately composed of one or two trumpets, clarinet, trombone, banjo, piano and either string bass or tuba. While these revivalists typically employed this instrumentation, by 1951 the music they performed was not strictly in the New Orleans mould, but rather represented a broad range of black musical genres they associated with the jazz tradition. Musical selections for the Royal Festival Hall concert, for example, included George Melly's idiosyncratic rendition of "Rock Island Line," a "folk" ballad often sung and recorded by Huddie Ledbetter; singer Neva Raphaello performing two signature Bessie Smith tunes, "St. Louis Blues," and "Cakewalkin' Babies"; three "Negro spiritual

⁷⁹ In an indication of traditional jazz's growing popularity and an apparent victory over modern jazz, the BBC radio program *Jazz Club* announced in early 1951 that it would adopt a "purist" policy, featuring exclusively revivalist bands and broadcasting on occasion from the staunchly traditionalist rhythm clubs around the country (James Asman, "Jazz Club Adopts 'Purist' Policy," *New Musical Express*, January 12, 1951, 1). By year's end leading popular music periodical *Melody Maker* officially recognized the traditional style within the jazz world by adding a "traditional small group" section to its annual dance band poll; a category won decisively that year by George Webb Dixielanders alumni Humphrey Lyttleton ("Melody Maker Dance Band Poll: 1951-52," *MM*, March 22, 1952, 3).

⁸⁰ The Saints Jazz Band, the Crane River Jazz Band and Mick Mulligan's Magnolia Jazz Band. To name just a few. Gelly, *An Unholy Row*, 33-34.

numbers” from the Crane River Jazz Band; and a “faithful reproduction” of Duke Ellington’s “Black and Tan Fantasy” performed by Graeme Bell’s Australian Jazz Band.⁸¹

The inclusion of “Rock Island Line,” “St. Louis Blues” and a selection of African-American religious anthems to the repertoire in the early 1950s suggests a growing interest in extending traditional/revivalist source material beyond early hot jazz recordings into the genre’s supposedly more “primitive,” more “pure” predecessors, song forms considered the most authentic cultural expressions of the traditional black folk. It was these folk music traditions that were considered the most archaic of black musics accessible to revivalists and were consequently the most valued. “Right away though until the middle ‘50s,” traditional jazz trumpeter and critic Humphrey Lyttleton noted in retrospect, “layers of the real thing kept coming out... everybody was searching for this, it was a bit like peeling an onion, you know, they were searching for this absolutely pure sound.”⁸² Just a few months later, jazz traditionalists would have a new wealth of pure black sound in which to invest themselves. In the fall of 1951, through the performances of Big Bill Broonzy and the rhetoric of some of its most highly regarded international supporters, the *real blues* arrived in the UK.

Critics and commentators in Britain during the early 1950s tended to rely on a common narrative about the real blues: The blues is an integral, perhaps *the* integral, facet of black American cultural practice; it is the result of the lived experience of the black man in the American South; and as such it is a folk art born from struggle and resiliency in the face of slavery and oppression, or, in other words, an inevitable response to white supremacy. As

⁸¹ Peter Tanner, “Traditional Jazz at the Royal Festival Hall,” *Jazz Journal*, July/August, 1951, 11. Recordings from this concert on the established jazz label Parlophone, as well as a number of other traditional/revivalist jazz records by British bands up-and-coming “private”—the term at the time for “indies”—labels like Melodisc and Esquire would be pressed over the course of the year.

⁸² Quoted in *Jazz Britannia, part 1- Stranger on the Shore*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OHfZ8KOI9QI>, accessed October 23, 2015.

folksong, it is at once historical music that evokes and draws upon imagery of a pre-modern rural American past and an ahistorical musical form that may be employed to commune with a sense of naturalness and emotional honesty that was increasingly perceived to be out of reach in a post-industrial, late-colonial, cosmopolitan surrounding. Furthermore, it is the wellspring from which traditional jazz draws its expressive force. Fundamentally then, neither jazz nor the blues should be subject to the commodifying forces of capitalist society. As early as 1934, in the first book on jazz published in the UK, Stanley Nelson argued for such a perspective, concluding that black musicians did “not seem to be influenced by any dictates of commercialism,” that hot jazz was “a natural and emotional expression... it was played for the love of the thing.”⁸³

It is all but undeniable that white supremacy greatly influenced almost all facets of black life in America for the better part of, if not the entire duration of, the twentieth century and beyond. In the following section, on the discourses surrounding the blues in the early 1950s, I argue that the transatlantic *mélange* of white blues commentators in Britain—Alan Lomax, Hugues Panassié, Derrick Stewart-Baxter and Max Jones, among others—were intent on reading white supremacy as the sole foundational influence on black American music and left little or no room for the professional and/or commercial actions and motivations of blues singers that might have contested their notion of the blues as pure folk.⁸⁴

⁸³ *All About Jazz*, quoted in Frith, *Music for Pleasure*, 57.

⁸⁴ As Paul Allen Anderson has noted, in the American context many of these same critics, “eager to credit African Americans with the creation and sustenance of jazz too often devolved into essentialist stereotypes.” Paul Allen Anderson, *Deep River: Music and Memory in Harlem Renaissance Thought* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), 243.

Enter Big Bill

Big Bill does not “sell” his music to the audience, he just naturally gives it away to human beings and puts them right into the heart of life... He is a plain blues singer always sticking to the pure idiom of the early blues: by this I mean the blues as they were sung and played before jazz music really started, and as they are still sung and played today way down in the State of Mississippi and in other States in the South of the USA.... Big Bill is giving us a down-to-the-heart feeling that we are now, for the first time, getting the real thing as far as the blues in concerned.... Big Bill gives, through his music, his total personality, his whole self... Every note of his guitar and his singing is closely combined, and what he tells is the story of his life... all the beauty he is giving away is made of so much sorrow and suffering, of having been “pushed around” so much. That is the blues.... Don’t miss his message.⁸⁵

It was with these words that Hugues Panassié, French critic, author of one of the first historical studies of jazz (*Le Jazz Hot*, 1934) and charter member of *Le Hot Club du France*, “sold” *Melody Maker* readers on Big Bill Broonzy. This statement initiated a rhetorical pattern that would be consistently invoked to speak of Broonzy and the blues for months and years to follow. Panassié had arranged for Broonzy’s visit to France during the summer of 1951 and with this story in the September 15th issue, he gave his endorsement of the blues singer in advance of Big Bill’s two concerts at London’s Kingsway Hall later that week. Panassié and fellow Broonzy supporter and chronicler Yannick Bruynoghe (whose profile “Meet Bill Broonzy” appeared a month earlier in *Melody Maker*) emphasize in their features on Broonzy the non-commercial nature of the singer’s visit by noting that his European performances, and even his very presence in France and England, was a “sort of vacation.”⁸⁶ Despite these statements, the schedule that Panassié organized for Broonzy’s European tour looked little like a holiday. After arriving in

⁸⁵ Hugues Panassié, “Big Bill Doesn’t Sell his Music—he Gives it Away,” *MM*, September 15, 1951, 9.

⁸⁶ Yannick Bruynoghe, “Meet Big Bill,” *Melody Maker*, August 11, 1951, 9. It is possible that this claim was made in the British press as a means to help circumvent the Ministry of Labour policy, in support of the British Musician’s Union, of not issuing permission for visiting American musicians. That said, as a solo singer, Broonzy would probably have been classed as an entertainer, not a musician anyway. Further research indicates that Broonzy did indeed have a day job that he left to embark on this tour and that he had plans to return to the job, so the classification of “vacation” is not entirely inappropriate.

Brussels in July, Broonzy set out on a thirty-nine-day, twenty-six city performance tour of France followed by four dates in Germany and a two-day recording session back in Paris for Vogue Records.⁸⁷

There is an inherent contradiction not only in the ways that Broonzy's trip was described in the press, but also in the very events of his visit. For Broonzy's live performances, Panassié had contracted a group of five musicians; a drummer, bassist, pianist, saxophonist and trumpet player. Although no recordings of Broonzy and this band exist, it is probably safe to assume that the group played in a style reminiscent of Broonzy's 1949 R&B-inflected combo records for the Mercury label and did not sound like the "pure idiom of the early blues" which Panassié insisted was the only way Big Bill ever played.⁸⁸ The Vogue sessions that Panassié supervised at the conclusion of the tour are quite a different story. The twenty-five sides that Broonzy recorded on September 20-21, 1951 in Paris feature only Broonzy's voice and acoustic guitar and are comprised of what would have been understood as folk blues and ballads, including re-recordings of Broonzy's first sides for Paramount ("House Rent Stomp," "Big Bill Blues," recorded in 1927-8) and the traditional songster standard "John Henry."⁸⁹ The four sides that Broonzy recorded for Melodisc in London just a few days later followed a similar format.⁹⁰ Despite two decades of keeping up with, and to some extent setting trends in, black Chicago's

⁸⁷ Bob Reisman, *I Feel Good: The Life and Times of Big Bill Broonzy* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 159-162.

⁸⁸ A detailed list of Big Bill Broonzy's recording sessions can be found in Roger House, *Blue Smoke* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 163-209.

⁸⁹ For information about Broonzy's first recording session see Dixon, Godrich and Rye, *Blues and Gospel Records 1890-1943*, 4th ed. (Oxford and London: Oxford University Press, 1997), 59.

⁹⁰ Recorded under the name Chicago Bill for contract reasons. Without Panassié's oversight, these sides do have a somewhat more "modern" feel to them and do not have any of the "folksy" spoken song intros found on the Vogue takes.

blues-oriented musical network, Broonzy was cast for British audiences—on record, in performance and in the press—as “one of the remaining links to the past.”⁹¹

Regardless of its inaccuracies and oversights, Big Bill himself had little issue with forwarding this narrative. In a discussion with Ernest Borneman during a rehearsal for the Kingsway Hall performances, Broonzy asserted that to play the blues “you got to be a Negro from Mississippi, and you got to grow up poor and on the land... that’s what’s wrong with them big city blues. They are all jazzed up and mean the way city folk themselves are.” He went on to underscore the point by exclaiming that “the real old time singers who worked in the fields, there’s almost none of them left now... except maybe Muddy Water [sic].”⁹² While it is true that both Broonzy and Waters had grown up “working the land” in Mississippi, by 1951 they had both been living and performing in the second largest city in the US, Waters for almost a decade and Broonzy for over three decades. By his own admission, Broonzy didn’t start playing the blues until after he had lived in Chicago for five years and he was first inspired to pick up the guitar as a result of a meeting with Texas bluesman Blind Lemon Jefferson, suggesting that Broonzy most likely understood the blues as a contemporary popular genre rather than a folk style tied to one’s place of birth and way of life.⁹³ Furthermore, while performing with Graeme Bell’s Australian Jazz Band in Düsseldorf just weeks before his London performances, Broonzy sounded quite like the “jazzed-up city blues” singers he seemed to be deriding in his interview

⁹¹ Derrick Stewart-Baxter, “A date with the blues,” *MM*, September 15, 1951, 9.

⁹² Ernest Borneman, “Big Bill Talkin’,” *MM*, September 21, 1951, 2.

⁹³ Kevin D. Greene, “‘Just a Dream’: Big Bill Broonzy, the Blues, and Chicago’s Black Metropolis,” *Journal of Urban History*, Vol 40.1 (2014), 121-2.

with Borneman.⁹⁴ Big Bill, however, was not unaccustomed to performing for white audiences and tailoring his performances to their expectations.

Broonzy claimed that his earliest musical experiences came as a fiddler for “white weekend parties in rural Arkansas” that took place before his WWI military service and subsequent move to Chicago in 1920.⁹⁵ After twenty years—ten of which he spent recording regularly for the Chicago race record industry—he would be presented with an opportunity to perform for primarily white audiences again, although in a much different setting. While organizing his first Carnegie Hall “From Spirituals to Swing” concert in the fall of 1938, John Hammond selected Broonzy to represent the “primitive blues singer” in his staged history of African American music.⁹⁶ This four-hour concert dramatized the historical/cultural-evolution narrative of black music from spirituals and field hollers, to rural blues, to New Orleans jazz, through to the latest sounds of Count Basie.⁹⁷ As such, it served as a sort of sonic embodiment of the kind of thinking about the relationship between jazz and the blues common among the jazz cognoscenti at the time and in the decades to follow. In representing these styles as linked to everyday folk practices like work and worship, Hammond, as a handful of likeminded jazz critics and folklorists before him had done, emphasized a genealogy of the blues and early jazz which positioned these genres, in their purest forms, as anti-commercial folk musics, a notion that would gain traction over the next decade or so.

⁹⁴ See in particular “Who’s Sorry Now” and “Mama Don’t Allow” on *Big Bill Broonzy, Complete recording works in chronological order, Vol. 13 (1949-1951)*, Document Records CD (DOCD-5696, 2013).

⁹⁵ Greene, ““Just a Dream,”” 119.

⁹⁶ Hammond had originally wanted Robert Johnson for the role, but finding that Johnson had passed away months earlier, settled on Broonzy, whose “records [he] loved.” Riesman, *I Feel So Good*, 91-2.

⁹⁷ See Anderson, *Deep River: Music and Memory in Harlem Renaissance*, 235-246, for more about this “virtual bonanza of black folk authenticity.”

The mindset that “From Spirituals to Swing” inspired, coupled with Broonzy’s successful performance during the 1938 concert, established Broonzy as a sought after representative of the folk blues. In his rather eager adoption of this role, Broonzy proved adept at adapting to shifting expectations. The assumption of a folk blues style was an example of Broonzy “discern[ing] what his audiences wanted and then deliver[ing] it,” just as he had when he first picked up a guitar in the 1920s, backed hokum bands in the early 1930s, and led jump blues outfits later on in the 1940s.⁹⁸ He seemed to do so quite effectively, having cultivated a distinct ability to deliver a Leadbelly-inspired repertoire of blues and narrative ballads via an easy going, if intentionally unrefined stage persona that resonated with white audiences.⁹⁹ From the end of World War II to shortly before his European tour of 1951, Broonzy would just as often perform for Pete Seeger’s “People’s Songs” folk gatherings in New York and Chicago and on the road as part of the Chicago-based “I Come for to Sing” interracial, four-man folk troupe, as often as he would in the black clubs of Chicago where he played jump-style ensemble blues.

It is hard to say which of these was Broonzy’s “true” musical identity, if such a thing could be said to exist. While his interviews tend to suggest that he considered more modern forms of the blues and jazz as deviations from the *real* blues, more often than not these interviews were conducted by white critics and fans that most likely wanted to be “sold” on the authenticity of Big Bill’s folksy sound. And even though it contradicts theories of mid-century Afro-Modernism, it is just as possible that he preferred the acoustic, folk approach—an “unchanging same” to paraphrase Amiri Baraka—and only reluctantly adapted to hokum and

⁹⁸ Reisman, *I Feel So Good*, 96.

⁹⁹ See a review of Broonzy’s 1945 appearance at the Apollo in New York which references Big Bill seeming an “apparent newcomer to professional showbusiness, carrying awkward stage mannerisms and wearing Sunday best of ancient design.” *Variety*, June 6, 1945, 46.

jump blues styles as they became popular over the course of the 1930s.¹⁰⁰ In a letter to Alan Lomax written in 1952, Broonzy registered reservations about the ensemble, jump blues direction he employed on more “commercial” recording sessions, usually at the encouragement of producers he believed were attempting to sell the blues to white audiences.¹⁰¹ Did he have similar concerns about recording “John Henry” for *Vogue*? Regardless of his true feelings about these rather antithetical positions, they are best read as “professional” identities that Broonzy enacted not only in different historical periods, but at times on a concert-by-concert basis.¹⁰²

Even if this chameleon-like aspect of Broonzy’s career was at least partially understood by the likes of Panassié, Hammond and Lomax, it was all but unknown to British audiences.¹⁰³ As Derrick Stewart-Baxter noted in his September 1951 *Melody Maker* article, “A date with the blues,” none of Big Bill’s records had been issued in the UK at this time, even if some of his sides were “fairly easy to obtain” from jazz shops that imported American records. Broonzy’s first recordings to be readily available in Britain would be the *Vogue* and *Melodisc* sides recorded in September and released later that fall. This was the Big Bill—the Big Bill telling the tale of “John Henry the steel driving man”—that Britons primarily had access to. Broonzy’s records did not sell particularly well initially, either by popular or jazz standards, and did not generate much interest in the blues beyond the jazz aficionado circles that would already have had an interest in this type of music. Nor was the Kingsway Hall concert, by all accounts, very well attended. The press coverage of Broonzy’s visit, in *Melody Maker*, *Musical Express* and *Jazz Journal* probably did more to firm up the British image of Big Bill Broonzy and to generate interest in the blues than did the music he performed.

¹⁰⁰ For more about Afro-Modernism, see Ramsey, *Race Music*, 27-30.

¹⁰¹ John Szwed, *Alan Lomax* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2010), 269.

¹⁰² Reisman, *I Feel So Good*, 138.

¹⁰³ Hammond was the record executive responsible for producing Broonzy’s 1949 Mercury sides and Lomax was the one who encouraged Hammond to sign Broonzy.

Derrick Stewart-Baxter's "Preachin' the Blues" column for *Jazz Journal* may have reached a smaller audience than those published in *Melody Maker* or *Musical Express*,¹⁰⁴ but his fervor for recent developments in the budding British blues world, and in particular for Big Bill Broonzy, was no less intense. In eight months of columns between September 1951 and April 1952 he never once failed to mention Broonzy, either as the feature of his column or in some ancillary manner. For the November issue, Stewart-Baxter offered a detailed review of the Kingsway Hall concerts declaring these performances the "most important and exciting event of the year."¹⁰⁵ The audience that day, Stewart-Baxter noted, was "transported from the dull, grey September day, to the Mississippi Delta" to glimpse the "sorrows, and a few of the joys which were, and still are, the lot of the coloured man 'way down South.'" Stewart-Baxter took pains to note that Broonzy, although he sang and talked of the prejudice he and other African Americans experienced, did so without any bitterness. Here was "a man who experienced all the horrors of racial discrimination, but had come through the ordeal with a smile, tinged with sadness perhaps, but never with resentment." Not surprisingly, his review echoed many of the rhetorical strategies deployed by Panassié, Bruynoghe, and Max Jones. Other than the small crowd, Stewart-Baxter voiced only one issue with Broonzy's concerts. Oddly enough, he took exception to Alan Lomax's role as compere. Lomax, who had known, worked with and kept in touch with the singer since the "Spirituals to Swing" concerts, accompanied Broonzy on stage for the second of two Kingsway Hall concerts. Lomax not only introduced Broonzy, but also lectured the audience

¹⁰⁴ Christian O'Connell estimates that *Jazz Journal* had a monthly readership of approximately 5,000 compared to *Melody Maker* whose readers numbered more than 100,000. Christian O'Connell, *Blues, How Do You Do? Paul Oliver and the Transatlantic Story of the Blues* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), 30. See Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues*, 25 for more about the importance of the "Preaching the Blues" column among blues fans in the 1950s.

¹⁰⁵ Derrick Stewart-Baxter, "Preaching the Blues," *Jazz Journal*, November, 1951, 13.

about American folk traditions, interviewed Big Bill, and even sang a few numbers with him.¹⁰⁶

As we shall see, for the first part of the decade, Lomax would play a pivotal role in creating an audience for, and formulating ideas about, the blues and folksong in Britain, perhaps with as much, if not more impact than the actual musicians he championed.

Lomax moved from New York to London in the fall of 1950, in part due to a hostile political climate in the US that placed him under FBI surveillance for his suspected communist sympathies, and in part to work on collecting folksong in Ireland, Scotland and England for the Columbia Records *World Library of Folk and Primitive Music* LP series.¹⁰⁷ Shortly after his arrival, Lomax established a series of contacts with the BBC and, by early 1951, began producing and hosting a few limited radio series for the Corporation. The first of these series, an autobiographical turn titled *Adventure in Folk Song*, recounted his work for the Library of Congress in the 1930s and early 1940s.¹⁰⁸ Titled *the Art of the Negro*, Lomax's second series aired in three parts—"Mr. Jelly Roll from New Orleans"; "Trumpets of the Lord," a gospel feature with musical examples from Sister Rosetta Tharpe; and "Blues in the Mississippi Night"—on the BBC's Third Programme, its network dedicated to education, culture and the arts.¹⁰⁹ In Lomax's own words, *The Art of the Negro* would feature "a washerwoman, blues singers, preachers, mule-skinners, railroad workers, convicts... all singers, all artists, who have sat for hours and poured out in unforgettable language their story of the Southern United States."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Borneman, "Big Bill Talkin,'" House, *Blue Smoke*, 139-143.

¹⁰⁷ E. David Gregory, "Lomax in London," *Folk Music Journal*, Vol. 8/2 (2002), 136-38.

¹⁰⁸ Gregory, "Lomax in London," 140.

¹⁰⁹ The other two national BBC radio networks at the time were the Home Service dedicated to news and speech-based programing, and the Light Programme, which specialized in non-classical music and other light entertainment. See Michael Brocken, *The British Folk Revival 1944-2002* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2003), 21 and Barfe, *Turned Out Good Again*, 50-51.

¹¹⁰ Quoted in Gregory, "Lomax in London," 140.

Melody Maker's lead jazz critic Max Jones declared the first instalment of the series no less than a “revolution,” and a “cultural *coup d'état*,” referring to Lomax as “the ideal jazz broadcaster—friendly, relaxed, enthusiastic, informed, but never pretentious,” if “somewhat of a romantic.”¹¹¹ The broadcast, “Mr. Jelly Roll from New Orleans,” drew heavily on the interviews and recordings Lomax made of Morton for the Library of Congress and in doing so served as an ideal introduction to Lomax and his thoughts about jazz, blues and American folk music.

Lomax's program highlighted the roots of jazz in African American community practice in New Orleans around the turn of the century as well as the struggles of the African Americans and Creoles that “invented” the music.¹¹² Thanks to the fact that it was aired on the not usually jazz-friendly Third Programme, “Mr. Jelly Roll from New Orleans” was well received—at least in jazz circles, and perhaps well beyond them—with at least one commenter referring to it as the “most compelling and important jazz documentary ever put out by the BBC.”¹¹³

“Blues in the Mississippi Night,” was perhaps the timeliest segment of the series and the most influential. To tell his version of the story of the blues, Lomax drew upon commercially-released 78s, including Bessie Smith's “St. Louis Blues” and Robert Johnson's “Hell Hound on my Trail”; Library of Congress field recordings, including penitentiary work songs and McKinley Morganfield's (Muddy Waters) “I Be's Troubled”; and an interview from Lomax's private collection with three anonymous bluesmen, ostensibly collected “late at night in a dance place.” Although quite intrigued by the “blues sung while the men worked on a plantation [and] the macabre singing of convicts engaged in chopping wood,” *Melody Maker's* radio critic, Maurice Burman, was most captivated by “what these [bluesmen] said, and how they described

¹¹¹ Max Jones, *MM*, October 13, 1951, 2, 9. It is clear from the context that Jones meant the later comment as a compliment.

¹¹² Szwed, *Alan Lomax*, 257. These positions are similarly espoused in Lomax's 1950 book, *Mister Jelly Roll*, which was based in part on these interviews.

¹¹³ Les Phythian, “Mainly in Retrospect,” *MM*, May 5, 1952, 9.

their feeling towards the blues.” The program was, according to Burman, “an indictment and exposure of the utterly dreadful treatment of the Negroes of the American South by whites,” and “the most enlightening ever to have appeared on the BBC.”¹¹⁴

The uncredited interviews that made up a good portion of the broadcast featured none other than Big Bill Broonzy along with Memphis Slim and Sonny Boy Williamson and were, in fact, captured in Decca Studios the day after a performance of the trio at a Lomax-organized folk music concert at New York’s Town Hall in March of 1947.¹¹⁵ Lomax framed the recording as an opportunity to learn from the musicians “what the blues were” from their perspectives and mostly let them dictate the direction of the conversation. Although the trio did discuss and play music at some length, the conversation often veered toward tales of oppression and brutalization that they themselves had either experienced or heard of. Lomax appeared, for the most part, content to let the session take its own natural course and allow the three singers to dictate the topics of conversation; however, at one particularly telling moment he encouraged them at one point to “not change the subject” so that a story about a benevolent white employer who had a reputation for protecting his black workers could be told in full. Lomax’s recording equipment and very presence must have also, less overtly, steered the flow of the conversation as one can assume that Broonzy, Slim and Williamson had a sense of what Lomax wanted to hear and were happy to deliver it to him. This is not to say that the stories they told were fabrications (although some of them most certainly were—take, for example, the story about a farmer who painted everything on his farm including his cows white because he liked the color so much), but rather that the topics they addressed and the overt connections they made between white supremacy and

¹¹⁴ Maurice Burman, *MM*, December 8, 1951, 2. See also “This is What Lomax Played,” 9 in the same issue for a list of the songs Lomax featured. Coincidentally, Burman’s other review on this page is a lambasting of the “dismal strains” of an early version of the Chris Barber band heard on the BBC’s “Jazz Club” program.

¹¹⁵ For details of about this recording, see Reisman, *I Feel So Good*, 128-132.

the blues must have been, in at least some small way, inspired by Lomax's well-known theories about black music. The airing of this conversation on BBC radio clearly made an impression among jazz fans as the Melodisc label was said to have commissioned fifty minutes of the interview session from Lomax for release as an LP.¹¹⁶

Not long after *The Art of the Negro* aired, *Musical Express* jazz columnist and NJFO President James Asman praised Lomax for his "brilliant broadcasts of jazz and Afro-American folk music" and encouraged jazz fans to visit the American Embassy where they could borrow, free of charge, albums of Lomax's Library of Congress recordings. He assured his readers that they would learn from these records that the likes of "Paul Robeson and Marian Anderson never sang this great music [spirituals] as it should be sung," anticipating that "you'll probably leave [the Embassy] with a large album and dreams of cattle strewn prairies, Mexican adobe huts, feather bedecked warriors and sad-eyed Negro prisoners all making simple music which needs no smart introduction, no polished announcement and no technique beyond that which their own lives offer to them."¹¹⁷

The type of "Lomaxian" thought active during this period originates from a series of assumptions, what Bruno Latour might label "certainties," about the nature of the cultural expression and about the social.¹¹⁸ These certainties reflected inherited ideologies from nationalism, cultural evolution and Marxist notions about the corrupting influence of capital, and, whether consciously or not, were tinged with and influenced by everyday entertainment

¹¹⁶ "Lomax 'Art of the Negro' to return to Third," *MM*, January 5, 1952, 7. The session was not actually released until 1957 on the Nyxa label as *Blues in the Mississippi Night*, see Reisman, *I Feel So Good*, 130.

¹¹⁷ James Asman, "Looking About Me," *Musical Express*, December 28, 1951, 2, and "When they Recorded a 'Sinful' Song," *Musical Express*, February 22, 1951, 2.

¹¹⁸ See Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: an Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford and New York : Oxford University Press, 2005).

practices derived from minstrelsy and the “common sense”—to return to Gilroy’s term—about race that accompanied these practices. The arguments of Lomax and others at this time proceed from the ideological certainty that the blues was formed by the structural pressures of white supremacy, not by the individual agency of black people attempting to navigate this system of oppression. This type of thinking erases the possibility that a singer like Broonzy may make a series of strategic discursive, aesthetic and professional choices in response to a white supremacist society and the commercial forces present within such a society. To a considerable degree, the understanding of authentic jazz and blues as natural, black folk expression is inextricable from ideas that African Americans could be capable of nothing more. Such assumptions were part and parcel of the stereotype of the “primitive Negro” figure learned from and informed by from the minstrel stage.

The Blues en Vogue

This type of “Lomaxian” discourse was not reserved solely for Big Bill Broonzy. Shortly after his September 1951 concert, it was being applied just as frequently to the small but steadily growing number of British-release blues 78s available to the record-buying public. Prior to this point, blues records in the UK were exceedingly rare, typically only available through the occasional import and, by 1949, increasingly through the licensing of American releases by smaller, “private” labels like Melodisc, Tempo and Vogue.¹¹⁹ The earliest records released in Britain to be categorized as blues were actually those of Huddie “Leadbelly” Ledbetter—although Max Jones contended that Leadbelly “could never be classed as just a blues man.”¹²⁰ Leadbelly, who was known among devout jazz aficionados in the UK as early as the mid-1940s

¹¹⁹ Melodisc, in particular was quite aggressive in pursuing licensing arrangements and, as we have seen in the case of Big Bill Broonzy and Lord Kitchener, in recording black artists on British soil.

¹²⁰ Max Jones, “Unconventional music by Huddie and Sonny,” *MM*, April 21, 1951, 1.

through American imports records and via the Library of Congress folksong collections, was an early beneficiary of these arrangements.¹²¹ Starting in 1949, Tempo and Melodisc began reissuing 78s of Leadbelly's American Folkways recordings including "Good Morning Blues," "How Long," "John Henry" and "Goodnight Irene," thus making these records far more accessible to jazz fans, although, given the limited resources of these smaller labels, they still did not circulate very widely.¹²²

Broonzy's version of "John Henry" b/w "Blues in 1890" (Vogue V2073) as well as his Melodisc sides as "Chicago Bill"—hitting the British market between October and December of 1951—were the beginning of a more steady flow of blues and blues-related releases on British labels.¹²³ In a departure from the usual practice of reissuing clearly non-commercial recordings (older records or those incontrovertibly understood and classed as folk in the US), Vogue released a pair of 78s recently recorded by Muddy Waters and John Lee Hooker in February 1952. It appears that Broonzy and Lomax's blues advocacy in the fall of 1951 may have been a factor Vogue's decision to issue these atypical sides. In fact, Vogue's Doug Whitton indicated

¹²¹ He was also scheduled to appear in Britain in 1949, but had to cancel due to poor health. This *might* have been a very different story I am telling/analyzing if he was able to make the trip ("No Visit for Leadbelly," *MM*, June 18, 1949).

¹²² Among these releases, "Goodnight Irene" (most likely due to the success of the Weavers version earlier in 1950) and "John Henry" (Melodisc 1167) both received honorable mention in the National Federation of Jazz Organizations 1950 Private Label Record Poll, finishing behind a slew of Kid Rena, Kid Ory and Bunk Johnson discs ("The Kids (Ory and Rena) win NFJO Poll," *MM*, January 13, 1951, 9). Even leading blues critic Derrick Stewart-Baxter lamented in the fall of 1951 that he was not able to review many recent blues releases simply because he could not afford to purchase them or otherwise have access to them through a friend or colleague. It was "financial considerations, not favouritism" that was responsible for this situation, he noted (Derrick Stewart-Baxter, "Preaching the Blues," *Jazz Journal*, September, 1951, 4). As the interest in early jazz and blues grew over the course of 1951, larger labels like Decca would enter the fold in this arena as well, but at an even higher cost per record than privates were charging (Derrick Stewart-Baxter, "Preaching the Blues," *Jazz Journal*, October, 1951, 3).

¹²³ In addition to a number of further sides from Broonzy's Vogue session and other selections from Melodisc, Tempo reissued Blind Lemon Jefferson's 1928 "Rabbit Foot Blues" b/w "Shuckin' Sugar Blues" (Tempo R46) that December. Max Jones' *MM* review of these sides ("Texas Blues" *MM*, December 22, 1951) points out that Blind Lemon Jefferson was a peer of Leadbelly and "helped mould the playing of Robert Johnson and Muddy Waters."

that it was Broonzy who made him aware that McKinley Morganfield—a singer known to British and French jazz connoisseurs through his Library of Congress recordings—was the same person as Muddy Waters—whose records “Rollin’ Stone Blues” and “Walkin’ Blues” Vogue had European release rights to.¹²⁴ Furthermore, Hooker’s “Whistlin’ and Moanin’ Blues” and “Hoogie Boogie” may have been brought to Vogue’s attention through their inclusion in Lomax’s “Blues in the Mississippi Night” radio program.¹²⁵ These releases were quickly followed by a number of articles intended to further promote the blues in the UK, most notably a four-part series by Hugues Panassié in May issues of *Melody Maker* titled “The Blues Singers.”

Panassié’s tutorial on the blues, as might be expected, asserts that “real blues singers,” as opposed to blues shouters like Eddie Vinson or Joe Turner “are those born or raised in certain of the Southern States, who heard the blues in the country when they were young, and learned to sing and play the music by themselves without knowing anything about music.”¹²⁶ Of the blues singers on record, it is Blind Lemon Jefferson, he tells *Melody Maker* readers, who “represents the oldest type,” a singer who recorded in the “early days” when “there was entire freedom of expression,” although, as Big Bill informs him, the blues of Mississippi and Arkansas (where Big Bill was originally from) is “the purest and most impressive kind.” Singers from this area, he notes, “do not pronounce the words according to the academic rules, but their delivery exactly fits the music and lyric of the blues.”¹²⁷ In particular, Panassié cites Muddy Waters as one of the few bluesmen on the market—along with Big Bill, of course—at the time whose singing “is as pure and unaffected as that of Blind Lemon Jefferson,” although he makes no reference

¹²⁴ Quoted in Derrick Stewart-Baxter, “Preaching the Blues,” *Jazz Journal*, November, 1951, 14.

¹²⁵ “Lomax played these,” *Melody Maker*, December 8, 1951, 9.

¹²⁶ Hugues Panassié, “The Blues Singers,” *MM*, May 10, 1952, 9.

¹²⁷ Hugues Panassié, “The Blues Singers, pt II” *MM*, May 17, 1952, 9

whatsoever to the fact that Waters recent records were performed on electric guitar with accompaniment.¹²⁸

Preoccupied as he was with music of the Delta, Panassié only mentions the recent John Lee Hooker sides briefly in the May 31st installment of “the Blues Singers.” On May 24th, however, Hooker’s records were reviewed by both Claude Lipscombe and Max Jones. Lipscombe’s discussion of Hooker’s most recently-released sides assures us that “Hooker’s style is traditional, and though put across in this instance via modern instrumental delivery and recording, does, in fact, belong to the golden era of blues playing”; beseeching us not to be “prejudiced by the amplification of his guitar.”¹²⁹ To further “traditionalize” these sides, he informs us that “‘Hoochie Boogie’ is the old-time Geechie dance rhythm.... This dates back to beginning of blues dancing on the Savannahs of the deep South” and we should understand that “‘Whistlin’ and Moanin’ Blues’ goes right back to West Africa in its primitive, almost chanting, ultra rhythmic accompaniment.” In his attempt to link this record to the “primitive” roots of the blues, Lipscombe seems to be conflating (or perhaps confusing) the Georgia Sea Islands, the city of Savannah and the grasslands of Africa into one. Max Jones goes to similar, if less extreme measures to assuage the readers’ concerns about the modern sound of these records. He reminds us that “Whistlin’ and Moanin’” is a train blues after all, one of the oldest themes in black folk music.¹³⁰ Despite the more up-to-date nature of these recent releases and the sonic evidence to the contrary that they contained, British critics stuck firmly to their conviction that the blues was an unchanging tradition.

¹²⁸ Max Jones reviews “Rollin’ Stone” b/w “Walkin’ Blues” on the same page as the first of these columns.

¹²⁹ Claude Lipscombe, “John Lee Hooker,” *MM*, May 24, 1952, 9.

¹³⁰ *MM*, May 24, 1952, 9.

REVIVING THE TRADITION

At first it seemed very strange to me to hear these songs, which I recorded from convicts in the prisons of the South, coming out of the mouths of young men who had suffered, comparatively speaking, so little.

-Alan Lomax¹³¹

The skiffle bands are attempting a difficult undertaking in trying to create a folk music divorced from a folk tradition. In doing so they have inspired in many jazz enthusiasts an interest and an appetite for the more primitive but most authentic of American musical forms.

-Paul Oliver¹³²

On October 30, 1954, traditional jazz returned to Royal Festival Hall with a line up featuring the latest set of big names in jazz revivalism, notably Alex Welsh's Dixielanders, Ken Colyer's Jazzmen and Chris Barber's Jazz Band. Although a changing of the guard of sorts had occurred in the three years since the Festival of Britain concert, the approach to traditional jazz performance had changed little, with one notable exception; the inclusion of "skiffle." "A new addition to the Back-to-the-Delta movement" at the time,¹³³ skiffle entered the British traditional jazz scene through the Colyer and Barber bands.

Before proceeding to an explanation of skiffle, it is worth pausing for a moment to note that 1954 was an important year for traditional jazz. Although still far from the international chart-topping phenomenon it would become in 1959, by 1954 traditional jazz had emerged from its position as an object of obsession for bohemian cognoscenti to become the soundtrack to a

¹³¹ Alan Lomax, "Skiffle: Why is it so popular" and "Where is it going?," published in *MM*, August 31 & September 7, 1957, respectively.

¹³² Quoted in Cohen, *Roots of Revival*, 63.

¹³³ Sinclair Traill, "RECORD REVIEWS: KEN COLYER'S JAZZMEN and SKIFFLE GROUP (LP)." *MM*, January 29, 1955, 12.

budding, counterculture youth movement.¹³⁴ One response to this relative popularity surge was investment in the genre, once the almost exclusive domain of private labels, by major record companies. Once these smaller labels had demonstrated the commercial viability of the revivalists, Decca signed traditional artists like Colyer and Barber, sought new licencing arrangements with American labels and by purchased smaller private labels that had previously filled this need.¹³⁵

Decca released its first revivalist jazz LP, Ken Colyer's Jazzmen's *New Orleans to London*, in February 1954. Colyer and his bandmate on *New Orleans to London*, Chris Barber, had parted ways in the spring of 1954 due to creative differences. By the summer, however, both were back recording for Decca, Barber with the original Colyer Jazzmen minus Colyer himself, and Colyer with a new group. The resulting records, Colyer's *Back to the Delta* (LF1196) and Barber's *New Orleans Joys* (LF 1198), would become two of the most enduring statements of traditional jazz during the mid-1950s.¹³⁶ Perhaps the more popular of the two LPs, *New Orleans Joys* sold 60,000 copies in its first year, even at the relatively steep price of £1.02; thus proving that the group's "following had now spread far beyond the grammar-school, art-school crowd to take in young people of all classes."¹³⁷ On both records, as well as on Decca's live recording of the October 30th Royal Festival Hall concert—released on the LP *Traditional Jazz at the Royal Festival Hall* (LK 4088)—Barber and Colyer featured their respective "skiffle" groups in addition to their full bands.

¹³⁴ The short film *Momma Don't Allow* (1954) featuring the Chris Barber band demonstrates the attraction of the music to a subset of the youth of Britain as pub/club music for dancing.

¹³⁵ The small Tempo label, for example, was purchased by Vogue in 1953 and Vogue was then swallowed up by Decca in 1954. <https://londonjazzcollector.wordpress.com/record-labels-guide/9-tempo-and-vogue/> accessed November 2, 2015.

¹³⁶ They also represented conflicting notions about how traditional jazz should be played and were emblematic of the "traditionalist" vs. "revivalist" approaches that would be the site of much debate around this time. This is a debate that will be left unattended to in this chapter.

¹³⁷ Gelly, *An Unholy Row*, 62-64.

First used in Britain by Ken Colyer's brother, promoter and sometime bandmate Bill Colyer around 1953, the term "skiffle" was originally employed to refer to a small group within a group, or "breakdown" group from a larger traditional jazz band that would give horn players a brief rest during a set or between sets.¹³⁸ As Michael Brocken notes, the African-American term skiffle, appropriated by Colyer, did not refer to an extant black music genre but instead was most commonly used to describe any "ad hoc" performances such as those that featured improvised instruments.¹³⁹ By the time the term became part of the British traditional jazz vernacular in 1954, a somewhat standardized instrumentation of vocal, guitar(s), bass, washboard (and occasionally mandolin, piano or banjo) had taken shape for skiffle bands; a lineup inspired by the "washboard, jug and spasm bands of the late 1920s and early 1930s."¹⁴⁰ The material that Colyer and Barber choose for their respective skiffle groups did not derive from the records of these relatively commercial spasm bands, however. Instead, the songs they performed were among the ones they had only recently come to understand as representative of the most true and timeless black folk traditions.

Even a cursory examination of the early skiffle repertoire demonstrates that the pre- or proto-jazz traditional black "folksongs"—whether worksong or ballad, spiritual or blues—which these groups performed were often first recorded and popularized by John and Alan Lomax

¹³⁸ Bob Groom, "Whose 'Rock Island Line?,'" in *Cross the Water Blues*, Neil A. Wynn, ed. (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2007), 172. The term "breakdown group" was commonly used at this time as well.

¹³⁹ Brocken, *British Folk Revival*, 68-69.

¹⁴⁰ Gregory, "Lomax in London," 150. Prior to this—during the first substantive wave of British traditional jazz recordings in the summer and fall of 1951—revivalists released a number of records of breakdown groups with washboard, although featuring instrumental instead of vocal leads. Most notable among these breakdown group releases were the Christie Brother's Stompers "Heebie Jeebies"/"Creole Song" (Melodisc 1173), the Cy Laurie Four "Jelly Roll Blues"/"Flat Foot" (Esquire 10-190) and Chris Barber's Washboard Wonders' versions of the Clarence Williams' tunes "Everybody Loves My Baby" and "Whoop it Up" (Esquire 10-180). See Sinclair Traill, "Ensemble Jazz and Blues from Britain," *MM*, November 17, 1951, 9, and "From the Resident Revivalists," *MM*, January 5, 1952, 9.

during their collecting trips of the 1930s for the Library of Congress.¹⁴¹ As Benjamin Filene has discussed in detail, the Lomaxes initiated a “cult of authenticity” through their field recording efforts of the 1930s, a cult that placed Huddie Leadbetter at its center. “Eager to promote their vision of America’s musical past,” Filene notes, “they recognized early on the power of enlisting living vernacular musicians—‘actual folk’—to aid their mission.... In doing so they produced a web of criteria for determining what a ‘true’ folk singer looked and sounded like.”¹⁴² Shortly after their “discovery” of Leadbelly in 1934, the Lomaxes brought the folksinger to New York City as part of a promotional effort to raise interest in the Library of Congress Archive of American Folk-Song. The eventual result of these efforts, coupled with promotional concerts like “From Spirituals to Swing” and support from the leftist Popular Front, was the birth of an urban folk revival articulated in New York City’s network of theaters and nightclubs.¹⁴³ By 1954, thanks to the discursive work done earlier in the decade, the music considered to represent the most authentic form of black folk expression was, in truth, the repertoire of an urban, mostly white, revivalist scene. The following discussion of the genealogy and aurality of four recordings of the Chris Barber Skiffle Group featuring Lonnie Donegan—highlighting the path these songs took from their “origins” to their recognition by the New York folk revival community; through what contexts Donegan and Barber might have come to know these songs; and the performance choices these musicians made when reproducing these songs—demonstrates the power of folkloristic discourse and revival to regulate a wide variety of black songs into an international category of folk.

¹⁴¹ See Gregory, “Alan Lomax in London,” 150, and Brocken, *The British Folk Revival*, 70-72. Colyer’s earliest skiffle releases were “K.C. Moan,” “Midnight Special,” “Casey Jones,” and “Go Down Old Hannah.” The Barber/Donegan sides will be discussed below.

¹⁴² Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 49.

¹⁴³ See Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, 58-75.

Featuring tracks recorded when Donegan was a member of Chris Barber's Jazz Band in 1954, *The Lonnie Donegan Skiffle Group* EP (Decca DFE 6345) was released in 1956, shortly after Donegan ignited the skiffle craze of 1956-1958. Made up of excerpts from the LPs *New Orleans Joys* and *Traditional Jazz at the Royal Festival Hall*, *The Lonnie Donegan Skiffle Group* EP features all four skiffle tracks that Donegan recorded while a member of the Barber band. Of these four, none are jazz by any "proper" definition. Rather, all represent the black folk tradition espoused by Lomax, with three of the tunes being closely associated with Huddie "Leadbelly" Ledbetter. These links to this tradition were not only musically highlighted, but were underscored in the musicians statements about the records as well. Chris Barber was quoted in 1957 as saying that "today the word [skiffle] means anything or nothing, according to your taste. To me, it is the vocal and guitar music of Big Bill Broonzy and Leadbelly."¹⁴⁴ For his part, Donegan claimed to be "merely attempting to recreate the work of 'authentic' folk singers like Lonnie Johnson, 'Leadbelly' and Muddy Waters."¹⁴⁵ I will address these recordings: "John Henry," "Rock Island Line," "Diggin' my Potatoes," "Bury My Body" in the order of most widely disseminated to the most obscure with a focus on the later two, as "John Henry" and "Rock Island Line" have been addressed in detail by other scholars.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ "Skiffle on Trial," *MM*, March 9, 1957, 2-3.

¹⁴⁵ "Trad Man in the Top Twenty," *New Musical Express*, January 27, 1956, 3.

¹⁴⁶ See Groom, "Who's 'Rock Island Line'" for just one such example.

Table 2.1 – *The Lonnie Donegan Skiffle Group* (EP 1956), Track Listing

Track	Likely Source Performer/Record	First Known Recording
“John Henry”	Huddie Ledbetter (Melodisc 1187, rec. 1947) <i>or</i> Big Bill Broonzy (Vogue V2073, rec. 1951)	American Folklife Collection, Library of Congress (John and Alan Lomax), 1933 (<i>see footnote 148</i>)
“Rock Island Line”	Huddie Ledbetter, <i>The History of Jazz</i> (Capitol LP, H-239, rec. 1944)	American Folklife Collection, Library of Congress (John and Alan Lomax), 1934
“Diggin’ My Potatoes”	Huddie Ledbetter (Tempo A.16, rec. 1946)	Washboard Sam (Bluebird B8211), 1939
“Bury My Body”	Josh White (Harmony 1006, rec. 1940)	American Folklife Collection, Library of Congress (John and Alan Lomax), 1934

“The title of this number I’m gonna play now is, uh, one of those old [pause] Negro [pause] folksongs. And this is the way I play it. There’s a gang of the boys that play it different ways, but this is my way. John Henry!”¹⁴⁷ This is how Big Bill introduced “John Henry” during at least one concert on his 1951 European tour. This “old Negro folksong” was about as ubiquitous an African-American traditional ballad as one could possibly find in Britain in the early 1950s. Separate versions by each of a triumvirate of transatlantic black ballad and blues singers were released on UK labels: Leadbelly and Broonzy versions in late 1951 followed by a Josh White rendition in 1953.¹⁴⁸ Prior to all these versions, the Lomaxes recorded “John Henry” among the many folk tunes they documented on their first field-recording expedition of 1933. It should be noted, however, that the ballad of John Henry was so common a part of the “folklore” of the United States that the Lomaxes could hardly be considered *discoverers* or *recoverers* of

¹⁴⁷ From the version on *Big Bill Broonzy, Complete Recorded Works in Chronological Order, Volume 13 (1949-1951)* recorded in Düsseldorf. The stilted manner in which he refers to the song as an “old Negro folksong” and his reference to the other “boys” who sang “John Henry” seems telling.

¹⁴⁸ Leadbelly’s on Melodisc 1187, recorded on NYC in 1947 and Broonzy’s as discussed earlier, for Vogue in Paris, 1951. 1953 White’s version, originally recorded in 1944, was on the Brunswick LP, *Ballads and Blues* (LA8562).

this song.¹⁴⁹ In his review of the Leadbelly version, Max Jones notes that “John Henry” was not among Ledbetter’s early repertoire and was “probably picked up by him in New York” when he was playing the urban folk circuit along with the likes of White and Broonzy.¹⁵⁰

“Rock Island Line”—the song that would put skiffle on the map, as it were—also first appeared on record for the Library of Congress; twice as field recordings made by John Lomax of inmates at prison farms in Arkansas in 1934, and three years later sung as a solo worksong by Leadbelly.¹⁵¹ Ledbetter would end up recording the song more than twelve times over the course of his career. “Rock Island Line” became so inextricably associated with Leadbelly and the black folk ballad tradition he represented that his 1944 version, now with 12-string guitar and zither accompaniment, came to be placed as the lead cut on “The Solid South,” the first of a four-album set titled *The History of Jazz* released by Capitol Records in 1945. So noteworthy was this album for jazz aficionados in Britain, that, although it was only released in the US, the complete discographical details of *The History of Jazz* were published in the September 8, 1945 “Collector’s Corner” column of *Melody Maker*.¹⁵² The 1944 take of “Rock Island Line” once

¹⁴⁹ By the year they recorded the song, two books—Louis W. Chappell’s *John Henry: A Folk-Lore Study* (Kennikat Press, 1933) and Guy B. Johnson’s *John Henry: Tracking Down a Negro Legend* (University of North Carolina Press, 1929)—had already been published on the subject.

<http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/ihas/loc.natlib.ihas.200196572/default.html>, accessed November 11, 2015.

¹⁵⁰ Max Jones, “Texas Blues,” *MM*, December 22, 1951, 9.

¹⁵¹ Groom, “Whose ‘Rock Island Line?’,” 169-173. See also <http://lccn.loc.gov/2011655312>, accessed November 11, 2015.

¹⁵² Capitol consequently rereleased the album set on ten-inch, long playing records (H-239) in September of 1950. “Music: Record Reviews Album and LP,” *The Billboard*, September 16, 1950, 44. This was one of many “History of Jazz” album projects available around this time. The same *Billboard* record review column also features just one of these examples, a Folkways LP titled *Jazz Vol. One (The South)* (FP-53) which included a Leadbelly version of “John Henry” backed by Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee. In the UK a different sort of jazz history records were being produced in the early 1950s. Tempo Records released *The History of Jazz* in spring of 1951 featuring narration by critic Rex Harris and musical examples pulled from the Tempo archives or specially recorded by Mick Mulligan and his Magnolia Jazz Band. This collection was reportedly a recorded version of Harris’ standard lecture on the subject. Esquire also released recordings from the March 19, 1951 NFJO Hammersmith Palais Jazz Band Ball “History of Jazz” set that included the Chris Barber Band version of “Oh, Didn’t He Ramble.” (“Histories of Jazz on record,” *MM*, March 31, 1951, 6.)

again surfaced on record and in the pages of *Melody Maker* in 1951 as the title track for a US-release Folkways Records Leadbelly memorial LP (FP14) annotated by Alan Lomax.¹⁵³ Despite this seemingly most exalted of folk pedigrees, Stephen Wade has recently traced the origins of “Rock Island Line” to one Clarence Wilson, an employee of the Rock Island Railway. A member of the Rock Island Colored Booster Quartet, Wilson originally composed the song as “Buy Your Ticket over Rock Island Line” in 1929 as a sort of company jingle that spread through performances by the quartet and in printed promotional materials for the railway. Although the song was a regionally well-known anthem for the railroad, it was not recorded before the 1934 LoC sessions.¹⁵⁴

“Diggin’ My Potatoes” was the only one of the four songs on the *Lonnie Donegan Skiffle* EP that was originally recorded for a commercial label and was assigned a composer credit at the time of its release.¹⁵⁵ Recorded in Chicago on May 15, 1939 by Washboard Sam and His Washboard Band—a group that included Big Bill Broonzy on guitar— “Diggin’ My Potatoes” was originally released on Bluebird that year and was reissued by RCA-Victor in May, 1947 (20-2162).¹⁵⁶ “Perhaps the most popular blues singer of the late 1930s,” discographers Dixon and Godrich contend, Washboard Sam was under exclusive contract with Bluebird for the better part of the decade with a guarantee of one release per month.¹⁵⁷ Further reinforcing this claim, they note that, by 1943, “Diggin’ My Potatoes” was one of only two records issued before 1940 that

¹⁵³ “Lead Belly on LP,” *MM*, July 14, 1951, 9.

¹⁵⁴ Stephen Wade, *The Beautiful Music All Around Us: Field Recordings and the American Experience* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 49-55.

¹⁵⁵ Attributed to Robert Brown, aka Washboard Sam. Curiously, this version was preceded by a side recorded by Little Son Joe with Memphis Minnie on guitar, recorded on February 3, 1939, also in Chicago, for Vocalion. See Dixon, Godrich and Rye, *Blues and Gospel Records, 1890-1943*, 549.

¹⁵⁶ “RCA VICTOR RECORDS,” *The Billboard*, May 10, 1947, 25.

¹⁵⁷ Robert M.W. Dixon and Robert Godrich, *Recording the Blues*, in *Yonder Come the Blues* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001 [1970]), 317-318.

was still listed in Victor's race catalogue.¹⁵⁸ Despite his widespread popularity among African American audiences, Washboard Sam records were quite rare in the UK and, through the mid-1950s, were not licensed by any British label.¹⁵⁹

It was, perhaps paradoxically, perhaps unsurprisingly, through Leadbelly that British revivalists like Donegan would have the most direct access to the unquestionably *popular* "Diggin' My Potatoes." It was Leadbelly's version, recorded in June of 1946 and released as the B-side to "Defense Blues" that was first released on a UK label, not Washboard Sam's.¹⁶⁰ In a *Musical Express* review of the 1949 UK reissue, pianist, critic and, ironically, modernist bop supporter, Steve Race notes that

Whatever it does to you, the name of Leadbetter strikes awe into the hearts of the purists. If you are sufficiently broadminded to give this record a trial, I think you will find out why. For Huddie Leadbetter is a guitarist and vocalist who could have taught—and maybe did, through his records—almost every male blues singer from Josh White to Vic Lewis....Tempo should be congratulated for making it available to the British public, and I hope there will be more.¹⁶¹

Recorded in New York for a label with a decidedly folk orientation—Moses Asch was, after all the head of Folkways Records as well, Leadbelly's "Diggin' My Potatoes," features New Orleans bassist Pops Foster and New York stride piano legend Willie "the Lion" Smith, two

¹⁵⁸ The other being Sam's "Back Door" from 1937. Dixon and Godrich, *Recording the Blues*, 323.

¹⁵⁹ Washboard Sam is mentioned only sparingly in *Melody Maker* in the 1940s and early 1950s. A 1944 "Collectors Corner" Buy and Swap section is the first mention of him, where one enthusiast indicates that he was in possession of a Washboard Sam record, stating he has "Rare American and English cutouts for auction... Washboard Sam... included" available for sale (*MM*, November 22, 1944, 5). In 1946, one Norman Evans, writes in to "Collector's Corner" looking for information on the personnel of Washboard Sam's "Second Story Man" (*MM*, June 15, 1946, 4). "Collector's Corner" ran a "rare" picture of Washboard Sam, let to the magazine by regular "Collector" correspondent, Vic Schuler, in 1951. The photo was attached to the announcement that Big Big Broonzy would be touring in Europe shortly and any promoter interested in booking Broonzy for UK dates should contact the Hot Club of France. ("Sam's Song, With Washboard!" *MM*, July 14, 1951, 9).

¹⁶⁰ Recorded for Moses Asch's Disc label (5085) and first released in the US in early 1948, reissued in Britain as Tempo A.16 in mid 1949. "Music: Advance Information - ADVANCE RECORD RELEASES," *The Billboard*, February 14, 1948, 32-32, 123.

¹⁶¹ Steve Race, "TASTE AND TEMPO" *Musical Express*, August 19, 1949, 3-4.

other important figures of the American jazz and black folk revival of the 1940s.¹⁶² “Diggin’ My Potatoes” was perhaps the only tune recorded by Donegan for which the expected skiffle line up would have been historically appropriate; however, for the *Royal Festival Hall* version Donegan and Barber are joined by Pat Halcox on piano rather than their regular washboard player, Beryl Bryden.¹⁶³ The Donegan version starts with an extended turnaround with the refrain “somebody’s diggin’ my potatoes, trampling on my vine, I had a worried feeling resting on my mind.” In these regard to instrumentation and form, Donegan’s record is in line with the Leadbelly version rather than Washboard Sam’s. The most notable difference between the two versions is that Leadbelly, Foster and Smith rather artfully and expressively manipulate the typical 12-bar blues form to choruses of eleven, eleven and a half, eleven-plus-one, twelve and thirteen bars while Donegan, Barber and Halcox normalize these hypermetric modulations to a standardized 12-bar form.¹⁶⁴

Although most likely unbeknownst to Donegan and Barber, two of the traditional folksongs they chose to perform in 1954 were linked through a Broadway musical, of all things. The show, a 1940 production titled *John Henry*, was a short-lived “coloured musical drama” that ran for five performances at the 44th Street Theater in January of that year. Starring Paul Robeson in the title role and featuring Josh White as “Blind Lemon,” a guitar-wielding singing narrator of sorts, the show drew its musical numbers primarily, if not exclusively, from the repertoire of

¹⁶² Charles K. Wolfe and Kip Lornell, *The Life and Legend of Leadbelly* (New York, N.Y.: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), 312.

¹⁶³ Bryden, one of the earliest blues singers in Britain as well as a bandleader in her own right, was the washboard player on “Rock Island Line” and “John Henry.” She and Neva Raphello were important, unsung early women blues singers of the British traditional blues and jazz revival. See chapter three for more about the role of women singers in 1950s British blues.

¹⁶⁴ Oddly, this is the only one of these four tunes that Donegan plays slower than the original. It is perhaps peripherally relevant that Big Bill recorded the tune four times under his own name in 1956, *after* the Donegan version was widely circulated. The first was in Paris in February followed by two live versions recorded on consecutive nights in Copenhagen (May 4-6), and once again on a session with Peter Seeger recorded in Chicago. See House, *Blue Smoke*, 183-4.

traditional black folksongs as it was understood in urban circles at the time, including the eponymous “John Henry” and the gospel/spiritual “I Don’t Care Where They Bury My Body.”¹⁶⁵

The Dixon, Godrich and Rye discography, *Blues & Gospel Records, 1890-1943*, 4th ed., lists six different recordings in what I will refer to as the “Bury My Body” variant series. The first of these, a version by a “group of Negro convicts” titled “I Don’t Care Where They Carry My Body,” was recorded for the Library of Congress by John and Alan Lomax in a state penitentiary in Huntsville, Texas in November 1934.

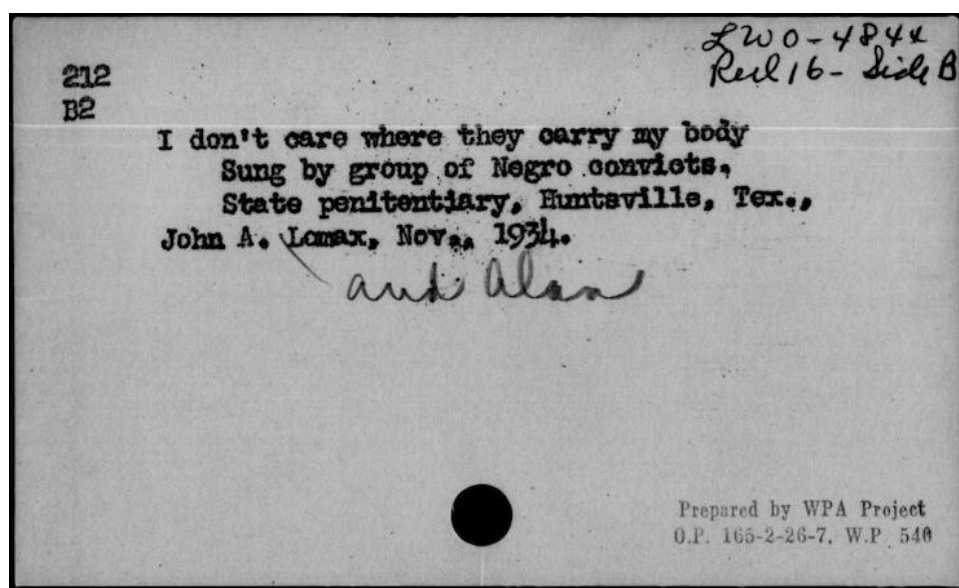


Figure 2.3 – Library of Congress Audio Recording Indexing Card, “I Don’t Care Where They Carry My Body”¹⁶⁶

This first variant was followed later in the decade by two commercially recorded versions, “I Don’t Care Where *You* Bury My Body” by the Mitchell Christian Singers in 1937 and a 1938

¹⁶⁵ Ibee, “Legitimate: JOHN HENRY,” *Variety*, January 17, 1940, 50.

¹⁶⁶ <http://www.loc.gov/item/afc9999005.692#about-this-item>, accessed November 11, 2015

variant by the Eagle Jubilee Four titled “Bury My Body Anywhere.”¹⁶⁷ Following the Broadway run of *John Henry*, two more New York-recorded versions were committed to wax in quick succession; the first by the Alphabetical Four, as “I Don’t Care Where They Bury My Body” (recorded April 19, 1940) and the second by *John Henry* star and regular of the burgeoning New York folk scene, Josh White with His Carolinians as “I Don’t Care Where *Dey* Bury My Body” (recorded August 6, 1940, although unreleased until 1949).¹⁶⁸ This Josh White side, with the word “they” replaced by the dialect “dey,” was backed with the similarly dialect-translated title “Moan, Chillun, Moan” (Harmony HA 1006) and alongside two other recordings from the same session, “I Wonder Will My Mother Be On *Dat* Train” b/w “Soon In *De* Mornin’” (HA 1013).¹⁶⁹ Recorded for the Coahoma County, Mississippi, Field Project, 1941-1942, the last of this variant series was again collected by Alan Lomax for the Library of Congress. On this July 26, 1942 recording of “I Don’t Care Where You Bury My Body”, Lomax captured seventy-four year-old Annie Williams singing the song in her Frairs Point, Mississippi home.¹⁷⁰

As I have addressed Broonzy in depth and alluded to Huddie Ledbetter’s well-documented position in the folk revival of the 1930s and 1940s, a few words about Josh White are perhaps in order at this juncture. As noted earlier, White had toured the UK in 1950 and 1951 and had a number of records released on British labels concurrent with Leadbelly and Broonzy. Whereas Ledbetter was considered the unquestioned archetype of back folk authenticity and Broonzy was recognized as the truest of pure blue singers Britain had ever seen, White was on more than one occasion derided for being more of a cabaret singer who featured folksongs in his

¹⁶⁷ The Mitchell Singers version was cut on August 11, 1937 in New York City for the American Recording Company, the Eagle Jubilee Four version on November 4, 1938 for the American Recording Company in Columbia, South Carolina. The second of these recordings was never issued.

¹⁶⁸ See advertisement in *Billboard*, July 2, 1949, 33.

¹⁶⁹ Emphasis added.

¹⁷⁰ <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/ihas/loc.afc.afc9999005.19014/default.html> accessed November 11, 2015. See also Godrich, Dixon and Rye, *Blues & Gospel Records 1890-1943*.

repertoire and occasionally played the blues, than an authentic folk singer. This was not a universal opinion, however, and White was still generally well received by the jazz community of Britain. Comparison between White and Broonzy—they were both commercial blues artists in the 1920s and 1930s, both shifted gears, at least partially, to appeal to a white folk scene audience in the early 1940s—reveals that the most important difference between Broonzy and White was the ways in which they presented themselves and the ways they were promoted.

A number of factors indicate that Donegan derived his version of “Bury My Body” from White, either directly or indirectly. The fact that Donegan’s chorus was “I don’t care where they bury my body” rules out most of the other recorded versions as inspiration, especially considering that most British revival versions of black folksong were as true to the original as possible. Furthermore, White’s version is the only one of the six with guitar accompaniment and three- to four-part vocal harmony; a feature that Donegan and Barber emulated for their rendition. Donegan also uses a remarkably similar introductory guitar figure to the one employed by White on his recording—a bending, four-note motif that anticipates the initial vocal melody. There is no evidence that White’s recording—or any of the other variants on the tune—was ever released in or imported to Britain, although if it had been available, Donegan would have most likely been well connected enough in collectors’ circles to have heard it. Considering a number of marked differences between Donegan’s and White’s versions, it is just as possible, and perhaps more likely, that Donegan heard White perform the tune live in one of his London appearances in 1950 or 1951. Notably, while White’s recorded version features vocable background harmonies that are foregrounded to the point where the guitar is all but inaudible

during the verses, Donegan's group only sings in harmony during the chorus.¹⁷¹ Other than this, form is the other major difference. On the Josh White recording the chorus only appears at the start and the end with the two verses sung back-to-back, possibly a result of the version's slower tempo and a concession to the time limitations of the 10" 78-rpm format. By contrast, Donegan's group performs the chorus at the top of the number and repeats it after each verse for a total of three appearances. These differences, while subtle, suggest that Donegan was quite possibly emulating White's live performance rather than the 1940 record.

The case of "Bury My Body" is perhaps the most complicated and most instructive example of the journey a black vernacular song could be subject to in becoming part of the British traditional jazz revival. As noted, the tune was initially "discovered" by the Lomaxes as part of their field recording activities and was therefore classed and catalogued as part of the American folksong tradition. Its next emergence of note was as a commercially recorded spiritual by the Mitchell's Christian Singers, a group that John Hammond, just a year later, would feature in "From Spirituals to Swing" as part of his demonstration of the "cultural evolution" of jazz. From there it would reappear *on Broadway* in a musical based on a novel by Roark Bradford, a white Southern writer known for his paternalistic and demeaning portrayals of African Americans. The show, set by an imaginary "Black River" located in the lower Mississippi Delta, was populated by African Americans described in a 1940 review as "shiftless men of the land... hounded to load boats, that they may earn a 'dollar and a dime a day,'" ¹⁷² Reflecting this minstrelsy turn, the song's lyric is then subject to dialect reinterpretation for a commercial record release in a potential attempt to associate it with the nostalgic, pathetic,

¹⁷¹ The first line of the song also employs slightly different lyrics from version to version. Donegan and crew (Barber, Halcox and possibly another singer) sing "*God knows* I don't care..." while White and the Carolinian's sing "*Great God* I don't care...."

¹⁷² Ibee, "Legitimate: JOHN HENRY," *Variety*, January 17, 1940, 50.

plantation song tradition of Stephen Foster. It is brought, ten years later, to Britain by Josh White, a singer as closely associated with New York's Café Society as he was with Chicago's South Side. It is finally, for our purposes, reinterpreted by an avid traditionalist who performs it for a crowd of 5,000, a performance that is recorded and released by one Britain's biggest record labels, Decca. Despite or perhaps because of "Bury My Body's" folk pedigree, it is described by Decca as "a mournful dirge in the Kentucky Minstrel style."¹⁷³

These songs, whether British revivalists realized it or not, were transmitted through the intersection of the Lomaxes' judgments about black folk and an urban folk revival that fostered and promoted an anointed group of black ballad and blues singers, most notably Josh White, Leadbelly and Big Bill Broonzy. This matrix of academic authority and implicit authenticity facilitated the importation—and imagining—of a transatlantic black traditional folk canon for British revivalists. Through this matrix Leadbelly's reinterpretation of a well-selling double-entendre race record could relocate "Diggin' My Potatoes" up from the dreaded category of the popular to the revered classification of traditional folk; and an *actual commercial* was able to be transformed into a folksong. It would take the arrival of White, Broonzy and Lomax and the discourses that accompanied them, and that they themselves fostered, for traditionalists to begin to emphasize and reiterate this music of the black folk; and to provide the revival with material considered worthy of emulating in the intimate skiffle setting that appeared to be reserved, at least through 1954, as the locus for the most authentic in African American expression.

¹⁷³ liner notes to the LP *Traditional Jazz at the Royal Festival Hall* (Decca, LK 4088, 1955)

* * *

*At a time when reason has given way to violence in parts of Britain, we, people of all races in the world of entertainment, appeal to the public to reject racial discrimination in any shape or form. Violence will settle nothing; it will only cause suffering to innocent people and create fresh grievances. We appeal to our audiences everywhere to join us in opposing any and every aspect of colour prejudice wherever it may appear.*¹⁷⁴

Issued by “twenty-seven prominent members” of Britain’s entertainment community, mostly jazz musicians including Chris Barber and Lonnie Donegan, the above plea from the front page of *Melody Maker* was in response to a week of racial conflict that began on August 30, 1958 between predominantly working-class whites and African-Caribbeans in the London neighborhood of Notting Hill.¹⁷⁵ The day after this statement was issued the riots had finally ceased, but not before numerous injuries and extensive property damage was inflicted and 108 people were arrested—seventy-two white and thirty-six black—for “offences ranging from grievous bodily harm to affray and riot and possessing offensive weapons.”¹⁷⁶

That same year, on any given Saturday, BBC-TV broadcast throughout the nation *The 6.5 Special*, forty-five minutes of skiffle and trad jazz—white British recreations of black American folksong—followed later that evening by *The Black and White Minstrel Show*; an hour of

¹⁷⁴ *Melody Maker*, September 6, 1958, 1.

¹⁷⁵ Next to this appeal is an image of American jazz trombonists J.J. Johnson and Kai Winding, the former black and the latter white. The placement of this image seems to be a strategic choice on the part of *Melody Maker*’s editors, both as a visual representation of racial harmony and to reinforce that the appeal for peace was from entertainers of “all races”—in fact, only two of the twenty-seven signees, Ray Ellington and Cleo Laine, were people of color. This statement was also reported in *Variety*, September, 10, 1958, 1.

¹⁷⁶ Alan Travis, “After 44 years secret papers reveal truth about five nights of violence in Notting Hill,” *The Guardian* August 24, 2002, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2002/aug/24/artsandhumanities.nottinghillcarnival2002>, accessed September 9, 2015.

musical variety entertainment that “evok[ed] a nostalgia of unusual dimension.”¹⁷⁷ In this programming block, under the guise of BBC-approved “light entertainment,” white musicians strummed banjos and guitars, blew hot trumpets and trombones, and sang about the “Rock Island Line” and “ol’ Dixieland”; the former emulating the black voice, the later through the blackface mask. Just as Britain was experiencing its first substantial domestic racial crisis—an event Paul Gilroy and others have dubbed the “birth of modern British racism”—a large portion of its population were escaping into a world of black folk song and plantation nostalgia each and every Saturday night.¹⁷⁸

Eric Lott has concluded that one of the primary functions of minstrelsy for white American, antebellum audiences was to reassure them that all was well down on the plantation.¹⁷⁹ In other words, that the racial status quo was being maintained despite political, social and economic upheaval. In the context of mid-twentieth century Britain, as the growing presence of colonial subjects of color in the “mother country” presented a direct challenge to the racial hegemony of the nation, this formulation could be thought to serve the same type of psychological function. Cantwell has demonstrated that “what ties a man like T.D. Rice ... to twentieth-century musicians like Bix Beiderbecke or Benny Goodman studying the records of King Oliver and Louis Armstrong... is the power of racial mimesis to deliver up for significations and enactment the cultural, social, personal, and sexual meanings otherwise secreted away in the all-devouring idea of race.”¹⁸⁰ What I have hoped to explicate in this chapter is the means by which British revivalists and critics of the early 1950s—Chris Barber, Ken Colyer, Lonnie Donegan; Derrick Stewart-Baxter, Max Jones, etc.—intentionally or not,

¹⁷⁷ Wilfred Altman, “In Our View... The Black and White Minstrel Show,” *The Stage*, August 21, 1958, 5.

¹⁷⁸ See Gilroy, *Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*, 98, and Dawson, “Calypso Circuits,” 286.

¹⁷⁹ Lott, *Love and Theft*, 61.

¹⁸⁰ Cantwell, *When We Were Good*, 56.

mobilized racial mimesis and discourses of racialized music to reinforce a racial “common sense.” These notions about traditional black folk, brought to the UK through the transatlantic flow of recorded sound and thought, served as both a progressive challenge to blackface representation and colonial racism and a conservative reinscribing of the very notions of racial difference the minstrel show instilled. By the late 1950s, when trad and skiffle had assumed positions as mass-popular entertainment, I believe it was the later, conservative position that resonated more strongly. Embracing folkloristic, minstrel-esque forms of racial representation at this historical moment could very well have offered white Britons similar assurances that all was well.

But what of the seemingly quite valid argument, as demonstrated in the *Melody Maker* statement above, that revivalists represented some of the most liberally-minded, most outspoken proponents of racial equality? As George McKay has discussed and as I noted earlier, this type of progressiveness, and in particular, the racialized ideology of colorblindness was a trait often invoked by left-leaning, white British jazz musicians in the 1950s.¹⁸¹ Chris Barber, occupied this position in a reflective interview in 2006. “I’m totally colour-blind,” he claimed, “I didn’t even think of about religion and colour [when he first took an interest in jazz in the late 1940s and early 1950s].... The colour issue hadn’t arisen in Britain at that point. It became more difficult much later. Jazz was an important music because it was something that said something, that transcended it all, I suppose.”¹⁸² What Barber is perhaps naively missing here is that the colorblindness he is claiming, as well as his belief in the power of jazz to “transcend” race are

¹⁸¹ Recognizing Ingrid Monson’s argument that in the American context “colourblind rhetoric” can act as a “power play” by white musicians looking to negate the perceived “cultural advantage” of black musicians, McKay contends that in the British context, this rhetorical strategy is perhaps more akin to “refusing to see [race] in an American way.” George McKay, *Circular Breathing: The Cultural Politics of Jazz in Britain* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 116-119.

¹⁸² Hillary Moore, *Inside British Jazz* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 51.

privileges of his subject position as a white, middle-class Briton.¹⁸³ To be colorblind is to not see race; however, it is easy not to see blackness when an overwhelmingly white majority surrounds you. Not seeing blackness, whether by its physical absence or by not recognizing it in your midst, reinforces its marginality and the sense that it should be unseen, voiceless. Black Briton Robert Adams' "Expose of Britain and its Color Problem," written in early 1950 for the *New York Amsterdam News*, contradicts Barber's rather cheery assessment of British race relations at the twentieth century's mid-point. "Color discrimination remains as firmly entrenched as ever," he noted, "the idea here is still that the only part for the Negro is the stereotype... Mr. Interlocutor and Mr. Bones... they really believe and argue that this is typical of the Negro today."¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ Few black Britons would, I think, agree that there was no "colour issue" at the time.

¹⁸⁴ Robert Adams, "Inside Story of Britain's Race Problems," *The New York Amsterdam News*, January 21, 1950, 1.

3 - “MAMA, HE TREATS YOUR DAUGHTER MEAN”: OTILIE PATTERSON & PRE-BOOM R&B REVIVALISM

“British rhythm-and-blues may sound as anomalous as British sherry,” prominent English jazz critic Philip Larkin opined in December 1962.¹ It was with these words that he began his review of the recently released LP, *R&B from the Marquee*, by the London-based Alexis Korner’s Blues Incorporated. A commentary about national proclivities and capacities, this statement lays bare a commonly held belief in the UK at the time: in order for a record to bear the designation “rhythm and blues,” it necessarily had to be the product of African Americans—preferably those that resided and recorded in Chicago. Although Larkin notes that Korner had amassed a “large following,” his review proceeds to express his own relative surprise and ambivalence about *R&B from the Marquee*. Toward this end, he refers to the songs on the album as “hearty derivatives.... The singing is not always on pitch, but Cyril Davie’s [*sic*] harmonica and Korner’s electric guitar blow up a fine storm if you like this flamboyant Negro mode.” What Larkin could not have predicted at the time was that less than two years later, quite a few among the British masses would develop a taste for just such “flamboyant derivatives” in the “Negro mode” and that rhythm and blues as performed by white Britons would be about as ubiquitous in and seemingly indigenous to England as London dry gin.

The “large following” Larkin mentions in his review was still relatively modest in the last months of 1962, but was nonetheless indicative of the nascent London rhythm and blues scene which had been building over the course of the year. For its part, the *R&B from the Marquee*

¹ An allusion to Spanish *Denominación de Origen* classification regulations which dictate that, in order for a fortified wine to be considered Sherry, it must be produced in a specific area of Spain using indigenous grapes. Philip Larkin, *All What Jazz* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985), 77. Originally published in *The Daily Telegraph*, December 15, 1962.

album was but the most visible, tangible representation of its emergence.² In retrospective accounts, *R&B from the Marquee*—both the album and the live performances the record was meant to recreate—is oft credited as the original British expression of rhythm and blues. By extension, Alexis Korner’s Blues Incorporated (with an assist from Chris Barber) is understood to be all but single handedly responsible for the birth of British R&B. Roberta Schwartz, for example, notes that “Korner is widely, if not universally acknowledged as the patron saint of British blues,” and that “Blues Incorporated was a nursery for the first generation of British blues and R&B artists.”³ Bob Brunning’s *Blues in Britain* opens with a chapter titled “Roots – Alexis, Cyril and the Stones” that similarly celebrates Blues Incorporated’s 1962 performances as the earliest attempt at rhythm and blues in the country.⁴ This narrative extends to discographies of the period as well, as evidenced by Leslie Fancourt’s *British Blues on Record 1957-1970* in which the only entries for the years 1957-1962 are records by Korner.⁵ This type of curation insinuates that these are the only legitimate predecessors to the December 1962 release of *R&B from the Marquee*, the record that “officially” ushered in the phenomenon of British rhythm and blues.⁶

² Chapter four discusses the liminal London R&B scene of 1962 in greater depth including the roles of the Marquee Club and Blues Incorporated in its emergence.

³ Roberta Freund Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues: The Transmission and Reception of American Blues Style in the United Kingdom* (Aldershot, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 122, 128.

⁴ Bob Brunning, *British Blues: The History 1950s to Present* (London: Blandford, 1995), 12-14. Both Schwartz and Brunning acknowledge that Chris Barber helped Korner’s Blues Incorporated get off the ground; however, they both also make the claim that parting company with Barber was the only way Korner and Davies could truly pursue rhythm and blues.

⁵ Leslie Fancourt, *British Blues on Record 1957-1970* (Faversham, England: Retrack Books, 1992).

⁶ Such assessments are not without some a degree of merit. By all accounts, Blues Incorporated *was* the first dedicated R&B band in the UK and their performances at the Ealing Blues Club and Marquee Jazz Club inspired other like-minded musicians to follow suit. In the months following the release of the album the audience for R&B would grow exponentially. Furthermore, many of the musicians that would form the core of the rhythm and blues boom that was to follow over the course of 1963 and 1964 either performed with or were inspired by Blues Incorporated. The concern of this chapter is what uncritical overemphasis on this narrative leaves out.

More than two years prior to the release of *R&B from the Marquee* however, blues singer Otilie Patterson entered the studio to record a “*tour-de-force* on a range of blues and rhythm-and-blues,” the likes of which had not been attempted in the UK prior.⁷ The July 1960 “*tour-de-force*” recording sessions resulted in the rather extravagantly titled *Chris Barber’s Blues Book, Volume 1: Rhythm and Blues with Otilie Patterson and Chris Barber’s Jazz Band (R&B with Otilie*, released July 1961).⁸ Contrary to conventional historical claims, *this* album was the first recording of British musicians bearing the designation “rhythm and blues” and it is this album that represents the first concerted effort to revive American R&B in the British setting.⁹ Despite the fact that it substantially predates the Blues Incorporated record, histories of British blues have broadly ignored *R&B with Otilie* in favor of Korner’s effort. In the rare instance when it is mentioned at all, it is misunderstood.¹⁰

So why have historians all but forsaken *R&B with Otilie* while canonizing *R&B From the Marquee*? This question cannot be succinctly and definitely answered; however, what is clear is that it has much to do with how the story of British blues, and in particular, British R&B, is typically told. As noted above, many versions of this narrative situate Alexis Korner as the originator of an R&B scene that sprung forth—all but fully formed, one is led to believe—in the months leading up to 1963. Other origin stories recognize the importance of Blues Incorporated’s

⁷ “Otilie and Barber make a blue mood,” *Melody Maker*, June 10, 1961, 3.

⁸ That this album was the product of a trad jazz band with vocalist may seem strange in retrospect. Nonetheless, this setting was perhaps the most likely for such an endeavour at the time. There were, after all, no dedicated blues bands in 1960 Britain, certainly none that featured material that could be classed as rhythm and blues. Even Alexis Korner’s and Cyril Davies’ pre-1961 collaborations cited in Fancourt’s discography demonstrate little evidence of interest in R&B. These records exclusively represent acoustic “folk” styles similar to skiffle, including an EP of jug band music.

⁹ Despite the implication of “volume one” in the album’s title, there would no future “volumes” of *Chris Barber’s Blues Book* issued.

¹⁰ Schwartz only mentions this record once in a single sentence, incorrectly suggesting that it features Alexis Korner on electric guitar and Cyril Davies on harmonica. Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues*, 125.

renditions of 1950s Chicago electric and 1930s rural blues as the initial expression of British R&B, while noting Muddy Waters' 1958 tour of the UK as the moment when the seeds of a British rhythm and blues scene were planted. At both of these points of origin, Chris Barber is an important facilitator: hiring Korner to accompany his band in the first instance, inviting Waters to England and backing him while on tour in the latter. Almost entirely omitted from these narratives are the women musicians and fans who participated in this story. Particularly notable in her absence is Otilie Patterson. Rarely acknowledged is the fact that, when Muddy Waters took the stage in Britain on his 1958 tour, he shared a microphone with Patterson, just as Sister Rosetta Tharpe had done the year before. Absent is the fact that it was Patterson, not Korner, who was the first to perform, much less record rhythm and blues, in Britain.¹¹



Figure 3.1 – Otilie Patterson and Muddy Waters in the UK, 1958¹²

¹¹ As will be discussed in chapter four, Korner only formed Blues Incorporated after being hired to back Patterson for R&B sets in 1961.

¹² Photo by Terry Cryer. Used with the kind permission of the Terry Cryer Estate.

Without the presence of Patterson, and the numerous other women who sang and played the blues in the 1950s, this history would lead one to believe that British blues revivalists were exclusively male and were only concerned with “folk” and “downhome” forms of the black cultural expression as performed by men of Southern US origin. Scholars relying on this narrative have argued that the articulation to the blues by white male Britons represented a desire to identify with and vicariously embody a romanticized representation of black masculinity—quite often, through the electrified sound and sexually assertive lyrics of Muddy Waters. Susan McClary, to quote just one example, contends that,

It is significant that it was the music of black males that they idolized, for African Americans were thought to have access to real (i.e. preindustrialized) feelings and community—qualities hard to find in a society that had so long stressed individuality and the mind/body split. Moreover, in contrast to what politicized art students regarded as the feminized sentimentality of pop music, blues seemed to offer an experience of sexuality that was unambiguously masculine.¹³

This chapter offers a corrective to the dominant historical narrative of British R&B revivalism by reinserting Otilie Patterson, Britain’s most popular and accomplished blues singer before 1963. Patterson’s record *R&B with Otilie*, in particular, allows for just such a reappraisal. Analysis of Patterson’s performances in this record—original blues compositions and reworkings of existing blues lyrics alike—demonstrate how R&B was first presented and understood from within the British revivalist world; not only from a female singer, but from a woman’s perspective. In addition to a close examination of musical excerpts from *R&B with Otilie*, this analysis draws upon Patterson’s notebooks held at Britain’s National Jazz Archive. The reflections, lyric sheets and performance notes contained within these notebooks provide a

¹³ Susan McClary, “Thinking Blues,” in *Conventional Wisdom* (Ewing, NJ: University of California Press, 2001), 53.

personal perspective on R&B in Britain from a fan who consumed the music and a musician who played an active role in shaping perceptions about genre.

Through the following detailed investigation of the content and context of *R&B with Otilie*, a more complex British R&B history emerges. In all its complexity—as disregarded artefact filled with reproductions of canonical material; as a product associated with Chris Barber, the widely accepted “Godfather of British Blues”; as a woman’s manifesto on the blues amongst a sea of masculinist representations; and as a premonition of a musical revolution—*R&B with Otilie* serves as a uniquely positioned object of inquiry and point of departure to bridge the historical gap from the early 1950s, when R&B first became a part of the British musical landscape, to the early 1960s when it came to dominate the UK mainstream.

R&B RECORDS IN THE UK, PRE-1960¹⁴

Before proceeding to a detailed discussion of *R&B with Otilie* specifically, and Patterson more generally, it is useful to establish some sense of what constituted the category “R&B” in Britain during the 1950s and how ideas about R&B changed leading up to the album’s release. Rhythm

¹⁴ This section combines discographical detail with discourse analysis to provide a representative picture of what forms of rhythm and blues were available to a British audience, through what commercial channels these were released, and by what means they were marketed. My discographical approach relies on existing discographies (often “select” blues discographies, cited throughout) and scholarly work as well as primary source research. Just as valuable, and perhaps even more insightful, are online, often crowd-sourced discographies like 45cat.com and discogs.org that often provide much more information—cover images and links to YouTube uploads of tracks, for example—than a traditional list of names, dates and titles ever could. These online resources are also free from the sort of boundary “policing” work done by “blues” and “jazz” discographies that go to great lengths to include or exclude based on a set of (often less than objective) criteria. It is worth noting that in some regards this section overlaps with parts of with Roberta Schwartz’s chapter “The Problem of the New” in *How Britain Got the Blues*. The time period, many of the records discussed and even many of the sources referenced in this chapter coincide. While I’ll admit that this gave me pause while I was planning, researching and writing this section, I believe I bring a different perspective to the subject and address a number of issues that she leaves under- or unexplored. I recommend “The Problem of the New” for her discussions of the positions occupied by skiffle and rock ‘n’ roll in the British popular sphere during this period for a more complete representation of the backdrop against which blues and R&B revivalism occurred.

and blues was introduced into Britain's musical taxonomy by an influential October 1952 article in *Jazz Journal* written by columnist and Vogue Records executive Doug Whitton.¹⁵ Featuring Wynonie "Mr. Blues" Harris on the cover, this issue of *Jazz Journal* included Whitton's "Inside Rhythm and Blues," the premier feature about R&B in the British music press and the first to use the term "rhythm and blues" to encapsulate this new form of "race record." A discussion of the connection between the race records of the 1920s through the 1940s and the rhythm and blues of the 1950s opens the piece with the apparent intention of suggesting a continuous tradition that encapsulated Big Maceo and Tiny Bradshaw as well as Bessie Smith and Ruth Brown. This article was published not long after the re-branding of *Billboard's* "Race Record" chart to "Rhythm and Blues," it should be noted. It appears that whatever variations of black music-making emerged on the chart were necessarily considered to be part of the emerging British understanding of this new "type" of record. Underscoring this, Doug Whitton's look "inside rhythm and blues" emphasizes that these are but the latest iteration of records "produced for sale more or less exclusively in coloured areas, to coloured people."¹⁶ Which is not to say that the differences between eras and styles are not highlighted. The new stars of rhythm and blues, Whitton notes, so often featured "broad humour, powerful brass, a honking tenor and that rocking, rolling beat which only a coloured band can generate." He counters this generalization

¹⁵ Vogue was the first UK label to reissue singles unequivocally contained within the category of rhythm and blues. The Wynonie Harris 78 "All She Wants to Do is Rock" b/w "Drinkin' Wine, Spo-Dee-O-Dee" (V2006) was released in May 1951 immediately following the release of the Muddy Waters ("Rollin' Stone Blues" b/w "Walkin' Blues") and John Lee Hooker ("Whistlin' and Moanin' Blues" b/w "Hoogie Boogie") singles discussed in chapter two (Paul M. Pelletier, "Vogue V 2000 78/45 Series Discography" *Record Information Service*, n.d.). Although recognized for "sell[ing] like hot cakes in the jukeboxes of Harlem and the South," and as "worth a spin," Harris' sides received a lukewarm review in the *Jazz Journal*. "All She Want's to Do is Rock" and "Drink Wine" were "very commercial, in so far as Negro popular music goes, being repetitious jump tunes"; however "race records being sufficiently few and far between in this country to warrant these Harris's [sic] some appeal." (Peter Tanner, "Worth a Spin," *Jazz Journal*, July/August 1951 (4:8/9), 17).

¹⁶ Doug Whitton, "Inside Rhythm and Blues," *Jazz Journal*, October 1952 (5:10), 1-2.

by hinting at the relatively heterogeneous nature of R&B, mentioning that the likes of Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf and John Lee Hooker contributed a "more primitive type" of offering to the burgeoning field.¹⁷ The ties to the race record market of the 1920s made here, particularly an invocation of Bessie Smith in the first sentence of the article, serve as a reminder that the race record field and the blues field contained therein was by no means understood as strictly gendered male at this time. To the contrary, Whitton's report on the R&B of the early 1950s implies that a healthy gender balance existed. Early in the piece he notes, for example, six "new stars" with "very real talent," three of which are male (Wynonie Harris, Eddie Vinson and Sonny Thompson) and three female (Ruth Brown, Dinah Washington and Sarah McLawler).

In January of 1954, Doug Whitton would again "put the spotlight on R. and B.," this time writing for *Melody Maker*.¹⁸ An early effort to define the genre to a broader audience, the article echoes the main points of the *Jazz Journal* "Inside Rhythm and Blues" piece.¹⁹ The article opens by referring to R&B as a "new category of record.... Previously in the jazz field, there was just Traditional or Modern—now there is a third which is neither, and which sometimes isn't like jazz at all."²⁰ Whitton's positioning of "R. and B." as neither trad nor modern is informative of the ways in which rhythm and blues was first received and reproduced in the UK. One of

¹⁷ What Whitton fails to note in his introduction to rhythm and blues is that the leading, if not only, producer of R&B discs in Britain at the time was his own Vogue label which was responsible for the recent British releases by Harris and Bradshaw, as well as the Waters and Hooker releases discussed in chapter two. All the images used in the piece and for the cover were courtesy of Vogue Records as well. As such, it serves as much as a promotional vehicle for recent and upcoming Vogue releases as it does as a piece of journalism. It may have been rather common knowledge that Whitton was associated with Vogue, however, as he is recognized as the "Vogue record chief" in other early 1950s press writeups ("The Jazz Scene," *New Musical Express*, April 3, 1953, 10).

¹⁸ Doug Whitton, "Will the '53 Bubble become the '54 Boiler," *Melody Maker*, January 2, 1954, 3.

¹⁹ As mentioned in chapter two, *Jazz Journal's* readership was in the ballpark of 5,000 whereas *Melody Maker* sold as many as 100,000 or more copies per issue.

²⁰ Whitton reiterates for *Melody Maker* readers that R&B is "the type of record which the *present-day* Negro population of the U.S. likes and buys." The same host of singers discussed in late 1952 are again cited here as the leading exponents of the genre, as is the distinction between more up-to-date "sophisticated" jump blues and the "old style" of "Southern" blues as represented by Wynonie Harris and Muddy Waters respectively.

Vogue's 1952 releases, Earl Bostic's "Flamingo" (V2145), proved the commercial potential of rhythm and blues records among jazz modernists in Britain.²¹ Although specific sales numbers are not available and no charts tracking jazz record popularity existed at the time, "Flamingo" was cited as one of the top selling *modern* jazz discs of 1953 in *New Musical Express* (NME) and referred to as the "biggest selling jazz record in Britain" in mid-1954.²² NME's association between Bostic's sound and modern jazz is reinforced by *Melody Maker* (MM) in its review of the record that was tellingly listed in the "for Modernists" section of the January 1953 issue.²³

The same January 1954 MM issue that contained Whitton's R&B spotlight also reported on an early effort by British musicians to record R&B.²⁴ The yet-to-be formed group was to feature singers Art Baxter and Annie Ross backed by an assemblage of modernist musicians led by drummer Tony Crombie. Crombie's new band would go on to record a handful of numbers pulled from *Billboard*'s R&B charts between 1954 and 1955 while primarily focusing his live performances on bebop and cool jazz. A self-professed opportunist, Crombie has since suggested that, like his short-lived and quite successful rock 'n' roll group of 1956, recording R&B was an effort to capitalize on an emerging genre's sales potential and had little to do with his regard for the genre.²⁵ In other words, rhythm and blues was first covered in the UK strictly for its commercial prospects.

²¹ Pelletier, *Vogue V 2000 78/45 Series Discography*. "Flamingo" is an instrumental, alto sax feature, highlighting Bostic's big, blaring, honk-like sound that was closely associated with R&B of the era. It unfolds in a 32-bar AABA form loaded with bluesy inflection and a fairly strong backbeat.

²² Tony Hall, "Hallmarks," NME, June 5, 1953, 10; "Family Favourites," MM September 4, 1954, 13. These comments, some nine months apart, indicate that "Flamingo" had a long run amongst the top-selling jazz records of the day.

²³ Review of "Flamingo," MM, January 31, 1953.

²⁴ "Crombie to lead first R&B band," MM, January 23, 1954, 1.

²⁵ An interview Crombie gave as part of the British Library's Oral History of Jazz in Britain (Shelfmark C122/127-C122/259) indicates that his disdain for R&B was less explicit than for rock 'n' roll, although he clearly was not invested in the genre as evidenced by the following excerpts:

Interviewer Tony Middleton (TM): In August of 1956 you decided to form a rock 'n' roll band. Could you tell me about the thoughts behind that?

In acknowledgment of this aspect of Britain's nascent interest in the genre, Whitton's *MM* "spotlight" recognized that over the past year or so "pop-market" remakes of R&B hits were being released to great success in the US and the UK.²⁶ This extra-musical factor of crossover success marked rhythm and blues as suspect for many jazz connoisseurs at the time. Critics in the mid-1950s such as Derrick Stewart-Baxter and Albert McCarthy, for example, consistently discredited this form of black music making through allusions to its commerciality, while also deriding its banality, vulgarity, gimmickry and lack of subtlety.²⁷ That R&B was also being co-opted by white artists and major record labels for financial gain could only have reinforced this argument. For critics that were positively inclined toward R&B, however, it was most often its popularity amongst African American audiences that was held up as evidence of the genre's value. Because (or in spite) of its popularity with contemporary black American listeners, R&B was often understood in critical circles as a commercialized, somewhat bastardized iteration of a more "pure" and elegant form of black expression. Subsequently, some iterations of the genre would come to be more highly regarded than others in Britain over the course of the 1950s.

London-American

A sufficient market for rhythm and blues records in Britain took shape in the middle of the decade, conceivably fuelled by less conservative jazz fans and early adopters of rock 'n' roll

Tony Crombie (TC): It was money. Yeah. I had been a long time in the business and I hadn't earned anything so far.

TC: [In reference to his 1955 recording of "I Want You To be My Baby"] It was from one of those black labels that came over from America, one of those black artists. It was previously recorded by some woman, Ruth somebody, I think. A coloured artist. **(TM: Brown?)** Yeah, Ruth Brown. And our agent heard it and he figured it might be a good cover for Annie so... I wrote the arrangement for that.

²⁶ Buddy Morrow's version of "Night Train," for example, was a hit in Britain's pop chart in 1953. Morrow, as Whitton explains, was employed by the RCA Victor label "almost exclusively for the purpose of making pop market versions of [R&B] successes."

²⁷ Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues*, 50-54. For his part, Stewart-Baxter would soften his position in later years.

alike. Following the model established by Vogue Records, many small, jazz-oriented British labels such as Oriole, Melodisc, Esquire and Lyragon began licensing rhythm and blues masters from a host of American independent record labels.²⁸ Major label Decca entered the British R&B market in earnest through its London-American label shortly thereafter. London-American Records was founded by Decca in 1947 with the intent of signing American recording artists for both the UK and US markets.²⁹ In practice, however, London served primarily as a vehicle for Decca to release their most popular records in the United States, placing a handful of singles in the *Billboard* charts between 1948 and 1956.³⁰ By the mid-1950s, London's business practices in the US would shift from signing and recording artists to licensing masters of American records for British release.

From London-American's New York office, head of foreign distribution Mimi Trempe monitored the *Cashbox* and *Billboard* charts in search of potential material for British release while at the same time setting up standing distribution arrangements with independent labels such as Atlantic, Chess and Imperial.³¹ The first wave of these "London-American" records—including the Orioles "In the Mission of St. Augustine," Fats Domino's "Rose Mary," Jim Reeves "Bimbo" and Slim Whitman's "Stairway to Heaven"—were released in Britain between February and March 1954. As this brief list of some of its initial issues suggests, London was not strictly a rhythm and blues label and many of its greatest successes in the 1950s were by country and western (the aforementioned Slim Whitman), rock 'n' roll (Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis)

²⁸ Whitton, "Will the '53 Bubble Become the '54 Boiler."

²⁹ Paul M. Pelletier, "Introduction," in *The London-American Legend, Vol 1: A History of the Label* (London: Althena Press, 2004), xiii-xiv.

³⁰ John Broven, "The London American Group: Rockin' Around the World," in *Record Makers and Breakers: Voices of the Independent Rock 'n' Roll Pioneers* (Chicago and Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 400. Most notable were Gracie Field's "Now is the Hour" (#3, 1948), Vera Lynn's "Auf Weidershen, Sweetheart" (#1, 1952) and Lonnie Donegan's "Rock Island Line" (#8, 1956).

³¹ Broven, "The London American Group," 401-405.

and near-rock ‘n’ roll artists (Pat Boone, Duane Eddy).³² London’s relationships with the type of small American labels that either dabbled or specialized in black music genres, however, afforded the company access to a wealth of rhythm and blues masters. London’s position in this field was further strengthened when it acquired at least some of Vogue Records’ catalogue and distribution agreements over the course of 1953 and 1954.³³ Chess masters, for example, began appearing on London-American in 1955 rather than on Vogue as they had prior. Following this acquisition, London-American would maintain its position as the leading provider of rhythm and blues records to the UK market for the remainder of the decade.

Extended Play

Although London included many R&B sides among their singles releases in 1954 and 1955 (including six from Fats Domino, the most by any one artist), the Extended Play (EP), 7-inch, 45-RPM disc quickly became an important medium for delivering rhythm and blues to British audiences.³⁴ Containing twice the content of a standard single and at a substantially lower price than an LP, the EP provided an “economical middleground for record buyers,” particularly those interested in jazz.³⁵ London and its parent company Decca began producing EPs for the British

³² Pelletier, “Introduction,” xxiii.

³³ A November 1953 report in *NME* indicates that Vogue sold at least part of its catalogue to Decca in mid-1953 while still remaining in business as a separate, independent entity (“Vogue Records Active Again,” *NME*, November 13, 1953, 6). The following from the *London Jazz Collector* blog offers that the Decca takeover of Vogue was complete by sometime in 1954: “In 1953 British *Vogue* acquired the Tempo catalogue and the following year (1954) *Vogue* was acquired by *Decca* under Tony Hall.” <https://londonjazzcollector.wordpress.com/record-labels-guide/9-tempo-and-vogue/>, accessed July 18, 2016.

³⁴ The EP format, introduced by RCA Victor in late 1951, was capable of holding seven and a half minutes of music per side (typically four songs total) as opposed to the standard 45 “single” record which had the same three-minute capacity as the 78. See Dawson and Propes, “The EP,” in *45 RPM: The History, Heroes and Villains of a Pop Music Revolution* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2003), 46-56 for more about the EP format. A number of record labels in the mid-1950s released singles in both 78 and 45 formats simultaneously as many consumers were still transitioning to the relatively new 45 at the time.

³⁵ Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues*, 91.

market in November 1954.³⁶ Shortly after, London began releasing R&B EPs, with nine such records released between February 1955 and February 1957.³⁷

Table 3.1 – London-American R&B EPs (February 1955-February 1957)

Date	Artist	Title
Feb. 1955	Fats Domino	<i>Blues for Love</i> (REP-1022)
Dec. 1955	Ruth Brown	<i>The Queen of Rhythm and Blues</i> (REE-1038)
Jan. 1956	Joe Turner & Ruth Brown	<i>King & Queen of Rhythm & Blues</i> (REE-1047)
Jun. 1956	Chuck Berry	<i>Rhythm and Blues with Chuck Berry</i> (REU-1053)
Jun. 1956	Bo Diddley	<i>Rhythm and Blues with Bo Diddley</i> (REU-1054)
Oct. 1956	Muddy Waters & His Guitar	<i>Mississippi Blues</i> (REU-1060)
Oct. 1956	Little Walter	<i>Little Walter and his Jukes</i> (REU-1061)
Oct. 1956	Fats Domino	<i>Blues for Love, vol. 2</i> (REU-1062)
Feb. 1957	Howlin' Wolf	<i>Rhythm and Blues with Howlin' Wolf</i> (REU-1072)

The first of the R&B artists to feature in London's EP catalogue was Fats Domino, a singer whose frequent crossover success in the US must have suggested strong sales potential in the UK.³⁸ Domino's popularity among white American audiences only slightly eclipsed that of Ruth Brown, whose EP the *Queen of Rhythm and Blues* would follow Domino's later that year.³⁹

As a review of the list above indicates, only five of these releases explicitly include the term

"rhythm and blues" in their titles. The first of these, *The Queen of Rhythm and Blues*, features

³⁶ "More EP Discs," *NME*, November 5, 1954, 9. London entered the EP market with Woody Herman's *Herd from Mars, vol. 1* (REP 1001), Decca with *Montovani Plays Strauss Waltzes* (DFE 6001).

³⁷ See the 45cat.com London EPs 1000 series for details about the label's releases including these eight (<http://www.45cat.com/label/london&jr=24479&jd=51#d51> accessed July 19, 2016). These EPs contained material initially recorded for release as singles but repackaged in mini-album format. Note that the last letter of the matrix number indicates the label of origin, for example "REE" for Atlantic and "REU" for Chess. Three volumes of Bill Haley—*Live it Up v 1 & 2* (Feb 56), and *v 3* (Oct 56)—were released during this period as well with the following statement opening the sleeve notes for each: "This isn't quite rhythm and blues, not quite hill-billy, not quite Tin Pan Alley, not quite anything for which there is a standard definition." In early 1957 three volumes of Little Richard would follow (bearing no mention of R&B, instead referring to him as the "Dean of Rock 'n' Roll").

³⁸ The Fats Domino *Blues for Love* EP series has original text that provides a bit of biographical information about Domino, "one of the best selling Rhythm and Blues [sic] singers in the United States." Still emphasized is the fact that the R&B style was "largely popularized by singers like Jimmy Rushing and Joe Turner," and that the records always contain "that rich, riding beat."

³⁹ Brown would not catch on in Britain as Domino did, however. Of the nine artists featured on these releases, only Fats Domino and Chuck Berry achieved substantial commercial success in the UK.

Ruth Brown, one of the many female R&B artists promoted in the UK between Whitton's 1952 *Jazz Journal* article, "Inside Rhythm and Blues," and this record's late-1955 release. London's decision to assign the moniker "Queen" to Brown can be interpreted as an effort to establish her pre-eminence among exponents of the genre. By following her release with R&B records exclusively by men, however, such a distinction may have given the impression that Brown was the rare "exceptional woman" while recasting rhythm and blues as a male-dominated field.

Unlike the 78 or 45 rpm single—mediums that were, in almost all cases, unmarked at the time except for the name of the song, artist, composer and possibly a note about the instrumentation and genre found on the record label—it was common practice to include some sort of text on the back of EP sleeves. In a reflection of London-American's overarching concept of R&B, the four "rhythm and blues" EPs released between December 1955 and June 1956 each used the same text for their cover notes followed by a single line about the specific artist or artists featured. As much of this text echoes, word for word, Doug Whitton's "Inside Rhythm and Blues" as well as Whitton's main points in his 1954 article for *Melody Maker* on the subject, it is likely that this text was either "cribbed" from the earlier articles or written by Whitton himself. Considering that Vogue was an imprint of London/Decca by this point, and Whitton was probably still working for the Decca Group, it is reasonable to assume that Whitton was responsible for these standardized rhythm and blues notes and that these represented a more up-to-date version of his R&B "stump speech":

There are many collectors in this country of songs and folk music by Negro artists. These records, however, as most people know, are scarce because they were originally *produced for sale more or less exclusively to coloured areas and coloured people. The artists were often poorly paid—sometimes not paid at all—the recordings were often primitive, and musical worth* was sometimes superb, sometimes doubtful.

The war years, however, brought great changes in the life of Negroes in America. Many found lucrative work in munitions, many more made frequent trips to Europe with the American forces, and in general new horizons were opened, their economic status being improved and their tastes altered.

The colour bar was considerably lessened and the recordings of the Negro jazz musicians and singers began to flood through to a much wider market. “Rhythm and Blues” or “R. and B.” grew largely from this renewed interest in the rhythmic impact of Negro music. The origins of the style may be traced to blues shouters like Jimmy Rushing and Joe Turner who in the swing age of the 1930s began to convert the blues from a slow dirge or lament into a jumping, rhythmic musical style of singing, usually rendered with the support of a jazz group playing unison riffs to emphasize the forceful nature of the voice.

In recent years this style has developed into a tremendous favourite with audiences both coloured and white, a popular attraction of the juke-boxes and the radio. The style is always distinguished by *broad humour, honking tenor-saxophones* behind the voice, *and that rocking, rolling beat which only a coloured band can generate, and which hasn’t changed much during the years except to become more frantic.*⁴⁰

While this text suggests that “R&B” is related to the “folk music of the Negro,” it locates the “origins of the style” in the swing-era practices of jazz groups and blues shouters. The shift in aesthetic preference from the “slow dirge or lament” to the “jumping rhythmic musical style” of contemporary R&B, Whitton concludes, is the byproduct, if not culmination, of various wartime realities (increased access to “lucrative work,” “frequent trips to Europe with the American forces,” elevated “economic status”) and seems to reposition this form of blues expression outside the purview of “the folk.” Furthermore, the frantic, rocking, humorous character of R&B has made it a “tremendous favourite with audiences both coloured and white.” In other words, Whitton’s notes indicate that while rhythm and blues has a relation to the folk blues from which it appears to have descended, it has become a musical genre in its own right; a genre capable of commercial and crossover appeal.

⁴⁰ Whitton’s 1952 text opens with the similar line “There must be many readers of *Jazz Journal* who collect race records...” Other direct overlap is indicated above in *italic and bold*. The latter Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley EPs which bear this text were not truly consistent with the stylistic markers that Whitton ascribes to R&B.

A new and contrasting text appears on the February 1957 EP *Rhythm and Blues with Howlin' Wolf*. Written by Paul Oliver, at the time a record collector and regular contributor to *Jazz Journal*, *Musical Mirror* and *Jazz Monthly*, these sleeve notes define R&B in terms very different from Whitton's. Oliver opens by mentioning that the category of "rhythm and blues" is a rebranding of "race music," a term that "hitherto described Negro folk musical forms."⁴¹ Unlike Whitton's understanding of the genre as a popular reinvention of a traditional form, R&B here is defined as "contemporary Negro folk music." "Gramophone records, intricate radio networks and the spread of Negro labour," Oliver advises, "have compressed the characteristics of country and city blues into one music." Following specific references to Howlin' Wolf's "tough, aggressive... rough-textured voice" and comparisons to a host of male singers, the sleeve notes offer that,

The greatest influence on R. & B. has been exerted by the urban blues of the Chicago singers of the 'Forties and their accompaniments. Many of these men were Southern musicians whose music hardened under the pressure of Chicago life.

In both Whitton and Oliver's accounts, the folk roots of R&B are subject to the forces of modernity, although with different results. Whereas Whitton views modernity as a transformative force capable of reorienting black musical production towards a popular orbit, Oliver sees modernity as only serving to "harden" the "traditional twelve-bar blues" into a form better suited to the "pressure[s] of Chicago life." Oliver's R&B definition similarly leaves no room for the women singers that Whitton celebrated in his earlier articles. While Bessie Smith and Ruth Brown exist in a lineage alongside Wynonie Harris and John Lee Hooker in Whitton's account, only Tommy McClennan, Big Maceo and Muddy Waters remain in Oliver's.

⁴¹ Paul Oliver, *Rhythm and Blues with Howlin' Wolf* (REU-1072) sleeve notes, February 1957.

The advent of the EP and the marketing strategies associated with it also placed a new level of import on cover art.⁴² Like most records in Long Play and Extended Play formats, London's EPs were typically distributed in sleeves that featured some form of cover design on the front and, as previously noted, sleeve notes on the back. I don't believe the potential discursive force of sleeve art and notes like this can be overstated. For every London R&B EP that made its way home with a buyer, it is likely that handfuls if not hundreds of other prospective consumers saw the imagery on the front and read the text on back of these sleeves while browsing in their local record shop. Those copies that became part of personal collections would have been read and viewed again and again by both the owner of the EP and those (s)he might proudly share his/her "discoveries" with. For the ideological influence that reviews, features and commentary in the pages of the jazz and popular music press may have asserted, as often as not, these words may well have ended up in the rubbish bin by week's end.

All London EPs adhered to one of two standardized templates until December 1955 when specially designed sleeves—typically some likeness of the artist or other related imagery—were debuted.⁴³ These images form an important facet of the discourse surrounding black-affiliated genres at the time, particularly rhythm and blues. The representations chosen for these album covers speaks to the ways that these musics were perceived by record companies and how these companies intended for them to be received. The cover sleeves of blues-oriented albums—whether for black artists like Muddy Waters or for white British revival versions of the blues by the likes of Otilie Patterson—were particularly revelatory in the ways that their imagery tended to invoke a romanticized, pre-modern conception of the American South.

⁴² Dawson and Propes, *45 RPM*, 57.

⁴³ The pre-December 1955 standard designs were drawings of either a music stand and a hand(?)bag or a drumset with the name of the artist and track listings printed on the bag or bass drum respectively.



Figures 3.2.a & 3.2.b – Otilie Patterson’s *Blues* & Muddy Waters’ *Mississippi Blues*

Both of the above EPs were released in 1956 on the Decca and London labels respectively.

These and many other record covers like them were the work of Paul Oliver, future blues scholar and author of the *Howlin’ Wolf* EP sleeve text discussed above.⁴⁴ It can be argued that the steamboat on the cover of the Otilie Patterson EP is at least somewhat consistent with the tenor of the songs contained on the disc—a cover of Bessie Smith’s 1924 “Weeping Willow Blues” and Jelly Roll Morton’s “I Hate a Man,” for example—and with the revivalist nostalgia for 1920s New Orleans that Patterson and Barber strove for at the time.

The cover of *Mississippi Blues* was less consistent with the content or source of the music contained within. This image, ostensibly of Waters wearing a straw hat and overalls while strumming an acoustic guitar, aligned with the stylized, fantasied sharecropper image of black

⁴⁴ Between 1953 and 1957, Oliver’s artwork appears on a number of Decca and Decca-subsidary releases (London, Tempo and Vogue). I’d like to offer my thanks to Jim Clay of the Facebook “Real Blues Forum” group for pointing out that Oliver usually incorporated his moniker “P.H.O.” into his illustrations. In these examples it can be seen on the middle of the steamship, close to the water, and on the “sharecropper’s” overalls, just beneath the neck of his guitar. Oliver apparently created cover illustrations and sleeve notes for additional income during the 1950s. O’Connell, *Blues, How Do You Do?*, 29-30.

“folk” that was common currency.⁴⁵ This fantasied image, of course, in no way represented the lived experience of a *Chicago* blues musician in 1956, although as one review noted “the cover alone could lead one to this magnificent record, for the representation of the pudgy figure beneath the unfashionable straw hat is very compelling”; an apparent indication that this sort of imagined character was the type that fans of the “old style” rhythm and blues might have been drawn to.⁴⁶ The dissonance of the image with the aural reality of this set of songs, on which Waters plays electric guitar and is backed by amplified harmonica, bass and drums, is even more striking. The overdriven sounds of the guitar and harmonica in particular suggest, if not insist on, the modernity of these tracks; even as the above-cited reviewer offers that Waters “has his ways and will never change” and celebrates the “real chain-gang holler” that opens “Mannish Boy” as the highlight of the EP.

A further dissonance, then, exists between the notion that rhythm and blues was music for the “*present-day*” African American and the ways that some of its producers were represented in British blues discourse. Waters in particular was consistently associated with an older type of blues by critics while simultaneously being contained within the broader R&B category. Waters regularly placed records in the *Billboard* R&B charts between 1951 and 1956, just as his music was coming to be known in the UK. As such his status as a *popular* African American musician could not be so easily be ignored. This status had to squared in some way, however, with the folkloristic terms in which Waters was first introduced to Britain. A standard Muddy Waters narrative took shape through the repeated assertion that Waters was the last of the “real”

⁴⁵ A similar representation graced the cover of *Rhythm and Blues with Howlin' Wolf* (although not a Paul Oliver image). The figure on the Wolf EP, wearing a similar hat, blowing a harmonica and sporting a long beard, seems as indebted to hillbilly stereotypes as it is to those of rural African Americans. In fact, the image of “Howlin' Wolf” is actually more reminiscent of the cover for the 1957 London-American EP Roy Orbison, *Hillbilly Rock* (RE-S 1089).

⁴⁶ G.B. Review of “Muddy Water EP” [sic], *Jazz Journal*, December 1956.

bluesmen to come out of the Mississippi delta tradition. This narrative was underpinned by an ideology that suggests that most if not all “true” black music was in some regard a form of “folk.” The means by which Waters—or Howlin’ Wolf for that matter—was reconciled with the broader category of “rhythm and blues,” then, was to insist that his was the most authentic form of R&B.

Although a shift toward a more masculine, “downhome” understanding was already underway, rhythm and blues was represented as a distinctly more heterogeneous musical category in Britain during the mid-1950s. As the preceding discussion indicates, R&B was associated with modernism and commercialism as well as traditionalism at this time, even if the genre was increasingly associated with the latter as the decade unfolded. Above all, it was linked with a long history of black music making for black audiences that contained male singers as well as female, and commercial concessions as well as “authentic” folk expressions.

“BRITAIN’S NUMBER ONE BLUES SINGER”

Ottillie Patterson’s interest in the blues began as a student at the Belfast College of Art. A notebook Patterson maintained between 1951-1952 reveals that a fellow student not only taught her the basics of jazz and boogie-woogie piano playing, but loaned her records as well.⁴⁷ Under the heading “How Derek (Haggis) Martin introduced me to Jazz - 1950,” Patterson affixed four sheets of annotations that most likely accompanied the records Martin apparently lent her.⁴⁸ The most intriguing of these pages reads as follows:

⁴⁷ “Ottillie Patterson Collection,” National Jazz Archive. Loughton (Essex), England

⁴⁸ The first of these are in reference to Jelly Roll Morton’s “Oh Didn’t He Ramble” b/w “Whine Boy Blues.” (Recorded in 1939 for Bluebird and for LoC sessions with Alan Lomax. Released in UK 1941/43 HMV <https://www.discogs.com/Jelly-Roll-Mortons-New-Orleans-Jazzmen-Winin-Boy-Blues-Oh-Didnt-He-Ramble/release/6516617>) In his note, Martin makes a point to provide Patterson with “historical” context for the recordings (“Jelly Roll Morton was an old Negro pianist who spent most of his life in jail

Bessie's Disco

The greatest blues singer of all time. Remember how she was killed?

Note 1.) Bessie just doesn't sing, but lives every sound that comes out of her.

Note 2) Recorded a long time ago.

Note 3) Louis's Horn in (St. Louis) and on the other side where he answers everything she says as if to say "I know what you mean Bessie."

Note 4) Two Geniuses [sic] on one record.

In these few lines Martin communicates the kind of high esteem with which revivalists regarded Bessie Smith. She is "the greatest blues singer of all time," Martin unequivocally explains. Perhaps more importantly, she is placed on the same "genius" level as the one and only Louis Armstrong, a male instrumentalist.⁴⁹ Martin's question, "remember how she was killed?," suggests that early jazz revivalists were not only cognizant of Smith's life experiences, but that they also brought an awareness of how Jim Crow shaped her life and death to their interpretations of her music.⁵⁰ In other words, Martin and Patterson appeared to have felt a sort of personal (if imaginary) connection to Bessie Smith, rather than just perceiving the singer as a disembodied voice on record.

In another section of the notebook, Patterson had transcribed the lyrics to eight early blues and jazz recordings, including four associated with Smith—"Backwater Blues," "St. Louis

or in brothels") and suggestions of what to listen for ("Note 1) Jelly Roll's vocal on Whinin' boy Blues, Note 2) Typical New 'O' ensemble playing in 'Oh Didn't he Ramble'"). In other notes, Martin indicates that he has also provided Patterson with a reading list to accompany her listening. Take for example, the page that discusses a pair of Mezzrow-Ladnier 78s that he mentions "are the discs Mezz talks about in the back of his book."

⁴⁹ In a January 1960 interview she indicates that the "friend's collection" of records by which she was first exposed to jazz "consisted mainly of Bessie discs." I believe it is safe to assume that the friend in question was Martin (Brian Harvey, "The Proudest Moment of Otilie's Career," *Jazz News*, January 29, 1960, 4).

⁵⁰ Bessie Smith died from injuries sustained in a car accident on September 26, 1937. It is widely believed that Smith would most likely have survived if it were not for the extended delay between the time of the accident and when she finally arrived at a black hospital that would accept her.

Blues,” “Nobody Knows You When You are Down and Out,” and “Careless Love Blues”—written in an ornate calligraphic hand reminiscent of a 16th-century manuscript of motets.⁵¹

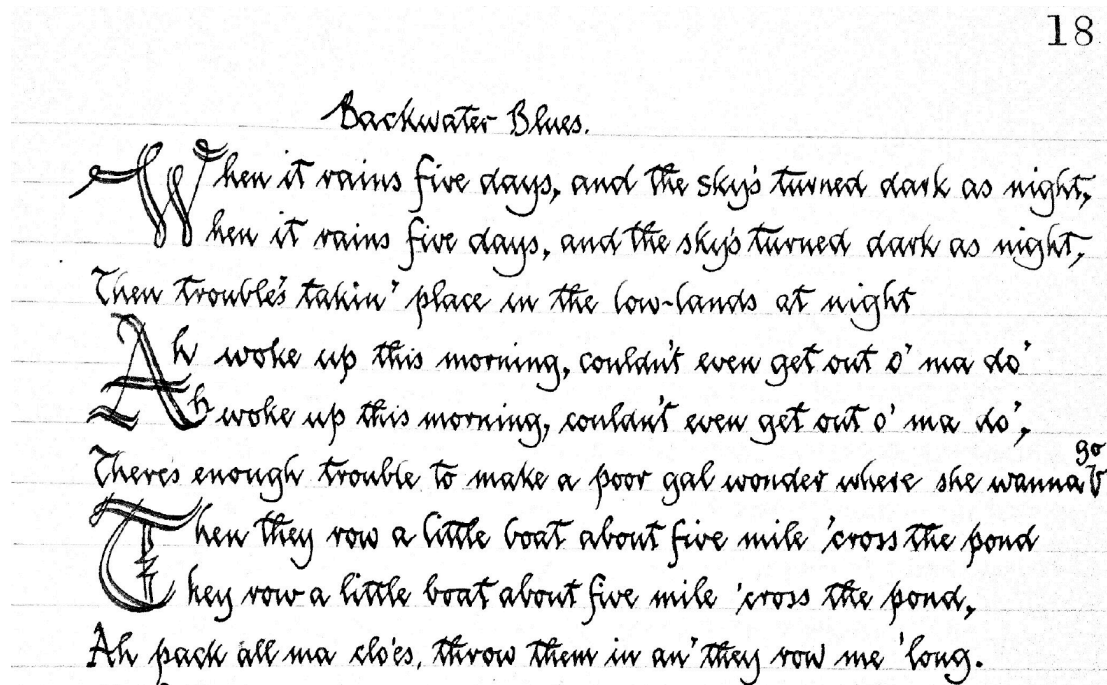


Figure 3.3 – Otilie Patterson Lyric Transcription of “Backwater Blues”⁵²

In other words, Patterson’s formative jazz and blues education followed a pattern common amongst record-collecting art school students at the time. As Will Straw notes, record collecting has historically been the almost exclusive domain of men, although the act of collecting “stands in an uncertain relationship to masculinity.”⁵³ Record collections, he argues, can serve as “both public displays of power/knowledge and private refuges from the sexual or social world,”

⁵¹ The other four lyrics recorded here are “I Thought I Heard Buddy Bolden Say” (Jelly Roll Morton), “Trouble in Mind,” and two additional songs I have not been able to identify with the headers “Gut Blues...” and “Blues... Blues... Blues... Nothin’ but Blues.”

⁵² Otilie Patterson Collection, Scrapbook 1, NJA.

⁵³ Will Straw, “Sizing Up Record Collections: Gender and Connoisseurship in Rock Music Culture,” in *Sexing the Groove*, Sheila Whiteley, ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 4.

functions that neither strictly conform to nor explicitly challenge stereotypical gender roles.⁵⁴

What sets Patterson's formative jazz listening experiences apart from the stereotypical collector, therefore, was that she was a woman operating in connoisseur circles most often associated with male, homosocial interaction. This foray into a male-dominated, yet not quite masculinist arena set in motion and presaged Patterson's performance career that was to follow.

Following a short stint with a group called the Jimmy Compton Band in 1951, Patterson's most formative early performance experience came alongside Martin in a group that called themselves the Muskrat Ramblers. According to Patterson's '51-52 notebook, the group debuted at the Ulster Rhythm Club on August 26th, 1952.⁵⁵ Although there are no extant set lists or recordings from Patterson's performances with the Muskat Ramblers, the lyric transcriptions contained in her notebooks indicate that she was almost exclusively performing blues numbers from the start of her career. After a few years working as a schoolteacher, with the occasional amateur performance opportunity, a holiday visit to London during the summer of 1954 resulted in Patterson's elevation to the professional stage.

Ottile Patterson's January 1955 professional singing debut occurred at a no less hallowed setting than London's Royal Festival Hall. Chris Barber had hired Patterson just eight days prior to the National Jazz Federation annual concert, having been introduced to the 23-year old Irish singer by London vocalist and trad scene fixture Beryl Bryden not long before the concert.⁵⁶ Despite the all-star line-up of Britain's most accomplished traditional jazz bands and the presence of established British jazz singers Bryden and George Melly on the bill, it was Ottile Patterson who was widely hailed as the highlight of the evening. Melly himself referred to

⁵⁴ Straw, "Sizing Up Record Collections," 3-16.

⁵⁵ Patterson pasted a flier from this performance into the notebook followed by a page listing the band's personnel. Derek "Haggis" Martin is listed as clarinetist and leader.

⁵⁶ "Profile: Ulster Enigma," *Melody Maker*, March 26, 1955, 2.

Patterson as no less than a “phenomenon,” her performance that of “an authentic blues singer hard at work.”⁵⁷ “Unknown blues singer triumphs at Festival Hall,” read the headline for the *New Musical Express* review of the concert.⁵⁸

Although the other two numbers performed that evening are lost to posterity, her rendition of “St. Louis Blues” was captured on vinyl and released in April of that year on an LP collection titled *The Traditional Jazz Scene* (Decca, LK4100). Introduced by Barber as “the oldest and perhaps most famous blues of all,” “St. Louis Blues” was an apt introduction to a singer who would be so closely associated with the blues throughout her career. This association is all the more strongly reinforced as Patterson and the Barber band clearly emulate the Bessie Smith 1925 recording of the song. As Dave Gelly notes, the almost dirge-like tempo of the Patterson/Barber version is nearly identical to Smith’s and the limited backing of trumpet, trombone, banjo and bowed bass during the first two verses of the performance is employed in a manner evocative of the harmonium that accompanied Smith.⁵⁹ Barber’s responsorial phrases to Patterson’s vocal lines in verses three and four are similarly reminiscent of the exchanges between Smith and Louis Armstrong in the 1925 version. Such evocations of a recording so enshrined in the traditional jazz canon as the Smith/Armstrong “St. Louis Blues” paired with Patterson’s uncanny ability to match Bessie Smith’s timbres and phrasing offer ample cause for such positive reception.

⁵⁷ George Melly, “This girl Otilie,” *Melody Maker*, January 15, 1955, 8. Melly was perhaps the most popular British blues singer prior to Patterson’s debut and one of the few male blues singers at that. Although a talented vocalist, “authenticity” was not a quality often associated with his performances. He was known to often perform Bessie Smith numbers in drag with beer mugs under his shirt while singing in a falsetto voice.

⁵⁸ *New Musical Express*, January 14, 1955, 5.

⁵⁹ Gelly’s discussion of this performance suggests that the entire tune is carried out in this manner, when, in fact, it is only prior to the “tango” bridge that this arrangement is employed. Gelly’s mention of Patterson is used as an example of Barber’s ingenuity and ability “to spring surprises.” Dave Gelly, *An Unholy Row: Jazz in Britain and its Audience 1945-1960* (Sheffield UK and Bristol, CT: Equinox, 2014), 66.

While generally complimentary of the rest of the performances that evening, *New Musical Express*' praise of the newest addition to the British trad scene was unequivocal:

Fair-haired and rather frail looking... [Patterson] stopped the show with three numbers, sung with all the power and feeling of the great blues singers.... The inclusion of Otilie Patterson lifted [Chris Barber's portion of the concert] to the superlative. If you weren't at the concert and think I rave too much, go and hear this girl.⁶⁰

From the point of her debut onward Patterson continually presented the British jazz world with a “descriptive problem,” as a November 1955 bio would so succinctly and eloquently state.⁶¹ Patterson was consistently referred to as “fair” and “slim” with the occasional “slight” or “frail” thrown in for good measure.⁶² This stood in stark juxtaposition to the image of the “red hot mama” associated with Bessie Smith and other African-American women singers of the classic blues era. It was also in direct contrast with her British blues-singing contemporaries like Beryl Bryden whose physique was reminiscent of the blues queens of the 1920s. The incongruity of her physical stature to the unquestionable depth and power of her voice were a repeating *motif* in just about any discussion of Patterson, not to mention the perceived incompatibility of being an *Irish* blues singer. *Melody Maker* dubbed Patterson the “Ulster Enigma” in its first dedicated piece on the singer. “To look at her, you wouldn't take her for a blues singer,” the article explains, “but then, you wouldn't take any native of these islands for one—not if you were up on the story of jazz.”⁶³ It was along this latter line of logic that much of the early criticism of

⁶⁰ “Unknown Blues Singer Triumphs at Festival Hall.” Curiously, the author does not mention what songs Patterson performed.

⁶¹ National Jazz Federation Concert Programme, Royal Festival Hall, November 5, 1955, 13. <http://archive.nationaljazzarchive.co.uk/archive/programmes/national-jazz-federation-royal-festival-hall-1955/142326> accessed May 19, 2016.

⁶² Patterson's frequent ill health and “nervous” conditions c. 1963/64 were well reported by *Melody Maker* and other outlets. She took extended leaves from the band around this time and, by 1968, retired from touring entirely. Her 1959/60 notebook contains numerous references to her exhaustion including a poem titled “Fatigue.”

⁶³ “Profile: Ulster Enigma,” *Melody Maker*, March 26, 1955, 2.

Patterson was levied. “Yet another singer attempting to copy Bessie Smith,” a rather pointed letter to *Melody Maker*’s editor in the same issue as her first profile suggested, “the forced voice, the fake American accent and the pathetic attempt to convince. Let’s face it—only the Negro can sing the blues.”⁶⁴ The voice she sang in was “not her own,” so many critics claimed; she “gives the impression of a spiritualist, with the voices of singers long dead coming from her mouth. Otilie must learn to project *herself*.”⁶⁵

Despite the occasional critical ambivalence directed toward Patterson—which would follow her for most of her career—she was widely acknowledged to have achieved a level of mastery over the blues idiom that few other British singers could claim. “In the opinion of many who should know,” long time jazz critic and blues fan Max Jones noted on the sleeve notes for her debut EP, *That Patterson Girl* (1955), “she succeeds in communicating the blues feeling to a greater degree than any British singer we have heard on records.”⁶⁶ Furthermore, sleeve notes for her 1956 EP, *Blues*, claimed that her singing “is proof that jazz can be universal music; it only needs deep love and understanding of the Negro and his music; there are no material grounds for supposing that Europeans are physically incapable of producing real jazz [sic].” By 1958, she could incontrovertibly be considered “Britain’s number one blues singer.”⁶⁷

⁶⁴ D.J. Payne, in “mail bag,” *Melody Maker*, March 26, 1955, 6.

⁶⁵ Ken Lindsay, “Traditionally Speaking,” *Melody Maker*, June 18, 1955, 2.

⁶⁶ *Blues*, Otilie Patterson with Chris Barber’s Jazz Band, EP sleeve notes (DFE 6303, 1956).

⁶⁷ As casually noted on the cover of *Melody Maker*, February 8, 1958. This is just one example of many statements in the press about her primacy among blues singers during the second half of the 1950s. Other instances of such high praise include the following quotes from press clippings collected by Patterson during the mid-1950s: “How can there be so much to be said for Miss Otilie Patterson, whose blues singing ought not to rival that of the best American equivalents, but which does?” (Kingsley Amis, “The World of Jazz: ‘It Can’t Be Any Good’,” *The Observer*, June 17, 1956); “Otilie Patterson. Irish blues singer who puts over her numbers in the way that was hitherto thought exclusive to coloured American artists, has risen to the top since her earliest London dates with Chris Barber’s band.” *The Stage*, May 17, 1956, 7. “Acclaimed as the greatest blues singer this side of the Atlantic” (*Evening News*, May 2, 1956); “Britain’s only true begetter of the blues,” Kenneth Alsop, “Sometimes I Feel Sinful,” *Daily Mail*, August 5, 1957; “Now regarded as Britain’s finest singer of the Blues” (letter to the editor, source unknown).

As featured vocalist for Barber's band, Patterson was afforded the opportunity to work directly with numerous African-American singers. Over the course of the late 1950s and early 1960s, Barber took a leading role in organizing transatlantic visits by African-American blues-oriented musicians. The first of these opportunities occurred in 1955 when the Barber band accompanied Big Bill Broonzy on the bluesman's third tour of the UK. This would be only the first of many such collaborations in which Patterson gained first hand exposure to visiting blues vocalists. In 1957 alone the group toured with Broonzy again, gospel/jazz singer/guitarist Sister Rosetta Tharpe, and the folk blues duo Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee. As noted prior, Muddy Waters toured with the Patterson and Barber band in 1958.⁶⁸ British tours with harmonica player James Cotton and jump blues pioneer Louis Jordan would follow in 1961 and 1962, respectively.

For the second half of the 1950s, Barber, his band, and Otilie Patterson consistently finished in the top five of their relative polls in *New Musical Express's* and *Melody Maker's* year-end wrap-ups. *Melody Maker's* 1958-59 results, for example, included a third place finish for Barber among British trombonists, second place for clarinettist Monty Sunshine and third place for the band in the Small Combo category. For her part, between 1957-1960 Patterson finished second in the Female Singer section behind Cleo Laine.⁶⁹ As these results indicate, the Barber group was well respected and quite popular among the British jazz world. They had not,

⁶⁸ Barber claims that, at least in the case of Tharpe, Terry and McGhee, he sought out black performers who had experience performing for white audiences so they would be relatively at ease performing before British audiences. See Chris Barber and Alan Shipton, *Jazz Me Blues: The Autobiography of Chris Barber* (London: Equinox, 2014), 51-56 for retrospective accounts of these tours and how Barber went about selecting artists to invite.

⁶⁹ "Britain's Best," *Melody Maker*, January 3, 1959, 3. Patterson gathered the four annual *Melody Maker* "Female Singer" results in her scrapbook of press clippings, 1958-60 on the same page. In each year of these three years Laine—a singer popular among jazz modernists and popular audiences—received more than 50% of the votes with Patterson the only other singer to amass more than 10% of ballots (Otilie Patterson Collection, National Jazz Archive, Loughton, Essex, UK).

however, crossed over to the broader popular market, something that no traditional jazz musicians had done up to this point, with the exception of the skiffle offshoot of the trad scene lead by Barber alumnus Lonnie Donegan.⁷⁰ In February of 1959, Barber's band would be the first to bring trad to the popular charts of Britain with the Monty Sunshine clarinet feature "Petite Fleur." This cover of Sydney Bechet's 1952 composition sold over one million copies that year, peaked at number three on the *NME* chart and reached number two on *Melody Maker's* Top Twenty. "Petite Fleur" not only brought Barber's band to a wider home audience, but also introduced American audiences to Britain's version of New Orleans-style jazz when the record unexpectedly reached number five on *Billboard's* Hot 100.

Thanks to "Petite Fleur's" success, for the first time since the group's debut earlier in the decade the Chris Barber Jazz Band, and Otilie Patterson, was in demand in the US. As a result Barber, Patterson and company toured the States twice in 1959, in the spring—with appearances on *American Bandstand* and *the Ed Sullivan Show*—and again in the fall.⁷¹ During the spring tour the band paid an unscheduled visit to Smitty's Corner in Chicago in hopes of meeting up with Muddy Waters with whom they had just performed in the UK some four months before. By Barber's account, Waters was indeed at the club and welcomed Barber, Patterson and the rest of the band with open arms. At Waters' request, Patterson sang a number or two with the house band, which included Otis Spann.⁷² On their return tour later that year, Waters arranged for the

⁷⁰ The close connection between skiffle and trad did offer the latter genre a broader platform, particularly in its inclusion in the teen-oriented BBC television program *6.5 Special* that ran from 1957-1958.

⁷¹ Barber is of the understanding that Laurie, the US label that licensed "Petite Fleur" for American release, was "masterminded" behind the scenes by Dick Clark who, in turn, arranged for the band to appear on *Bandstand*. The *Ed Sullivan* appearance was apparently the result of a complex web of negotiations that circuitously involved Woody Herman threatening to leave the AFM if Barber was not offered a spot on the *Sullivan Show*. Barber, *Jazz Me Blues*, 64.

⁷² Barber, *Jazz Me Blues*, 66. Barber's account is supported by a 1959 interview for *Billboard*. Ren Gravatt, "On the Beat," *Billboard*, March 30, 1959, 16. The *Billboard* story places the Smitty's Corner visit some time in mid-March.

Barber band to play a set at Smitty's in full force.⁷³ Bearing in mind that their only prior exposure to the genre was as backing band for Waters during his October 1958 UK tour, these evenings at Smitty's Corner were Barber and Patterson's first opportunity to experience Chicago-style R&B in its "native" setting. Patterson discussed the impact these visits had on the band in an interview with *Jazz News*, noting that hearing Waters with his band at Smitty's Corner helped the band improve their sound.⁷⁴ In the same interview she states that the proudest moment of her career was at Smitty's Corner when an African-American waitress asked her "How come you sing like coloured folk?" In another article published around this time a member of the audience who heard Patterson sing at Smitty's reportedly pronounced, "Youse ain't nothing but a white nigger," which was apparently meant (and taken) as a compliment.⁷⁵

Recorded not long after the band's return to England, the *R&B with Otilie* project discussed below may have been conceived as a direct result of hearing Chicago-style R&B in person as performed by Waters, Little Walter, St. Louis Jimmy Oden and others. Furthermore, that St. Louis Jimmy gave Patterson a song to perform and/or record while she was in Chicago suggests that the concept for the album could have taken shape while the group was at Smitty's Corner itself.⁷⁶ It is important to recognize that Patterson and Barber's vision of R&B, at least as it appears on *R&B with Otilie*, is not restricted to the Chicago urban blues idiom, however.

⁷³ October 18, 1959. Barber, *Jazz Me Blues*, 76.

⁷⁴ For example, she states that "After visiting America twice and hearing Muddy Waters in his Chicago club we learned to get the effect of a piano without actually having one." Harvey, "The Proudest Moment of Otilie's Career."

⁷⁵ "'It's Gotta Be Otilie' yell the fans," *Sunday Pictorial*, June 18, 1961, 7.

⁷⁶ Lawrence Davies has concluded that St. Louis Jimmy must have given the lyric sheet for "Four Points Blues" that he prepared for Patterson to her during one of the two 1959 Chicago visits. Lawrence Davies, "'She Was Mine First / She Still Belongs To Me': A previously unknown Chicago blues composition by St. Louis Jimmy Oden", unpublished report, *allthirteenkeys.com*, URL:

<https://allthirteenkeys.files.wordpress.com/2017/06/davies-oden-report.pdf>, accessed June 20, 2017.

Davies further notes that the Barber band's interaction with Muddy Waters was not restricted to Smitty's Corner alone, but may have also occurred at other clubs in the region.

Although motivated in part by this experience, theirs was a broader notion informed by various iterations of rhythm and blues available on record in Britain during the 1950s as well as the genre's historical connections to the race records of the less recent past, which writers like Doug Whitton went to great lengths to demonstrate.

RHYTHM AND BLUES WITH OTTILIE PATTERSON

Ottilie Patterson has come a long way from the days of 1955, when she seemed to be setting out to re-make the Bessie Smith repertoire. On this disc she explores all the facets of blues singing, from the embittered, strident shouting of *Mama* to the more introspective and mellow style of *Blues Before Sunrise* and *Backwater Blues*... The near-rock rhythm-and-blues numbers are, in my opinion, better in the hands of the Barber band than in those groups which feature grinding tenor saxes and hollow-toned electric guitars, but I still prefer to hear this band playing blues in the old slow way.⁷⁷

Referred to by *Melody Maker* as a “very credible Ottilie Patterson essay in the blues and allied song forms,” *R&B with Ottilie* featured material ranging from the classic blues staples Patterson was previously known for (Bessie Smith’s “Backwater Blues,” 1927) to recent crossover R&B hits from Ruth Brown (“Mama, He Treats Your Daughter Mean,” 1953); as well as a pair of newly-composed blues tunes written by Patterson.⁷⁸ These Patterson originals—“Bad Spell

⁷⁷ Brian Rust, review of “Ottilie Patterson with Chris Barber’s Band,” *The Gramophone*, August 1961, 132.

⁷⁸ “Chris Barber’s Blues Book,” LP Supplement - Vocal Jazz section, *Melody Maker*, July 8, 1961, iv. Although not arranged as such on the album, a chronological accounting of the range of source material begins with the classic blues as represented by pioneering blueswomen Trixie Smith (1922) and Bessie Smith (1927). Jim Jackson’s “Kansas City Blues” (1927) and Leroy Carr’s “Blues Before Sunrise” (1934) are from a similar timeframe. Big Maceo’s “Kid Man Blues” (1945) and two selections from “rural” blueswoman Memphis Minnie (“Me and My Chauffeur Blues” / “Can’t Afford to Lose my Man,” both 1941) represent 1940s Chicago race records. Barber and Patterson pay tribute to a more recent incarnation of the blues with versions of Ruth Brown’s 1953 recordings “Mama, He Treats Your Daughter Mean” and “R.B. Blues” (renamed here as “It’s All Over”).

Blues” and “Tell Me Why”—number among the first blues verses penned and recorded by a British artist and are the first known to be written by a British woman.⁷⁹

Table 3.2 – *Rhythm and Blues with Otilie Patterson* Track Listing

Track	Title	Original Artist (Date)
A1	“Bad Spell Blues”	<i>Composed by Otilie Patterson*</i>
A2	“Kid Man Blues”	Big Maceo Whittaker (1945)
A3	“Four Points Blues”	<i>Composed by St. Louis Jimmy Oden*</i>
A4	“Back Water Blues”	Bessie Smith (1927)
A5	“Kansas City Blues”	Jim Jackson (1927)
A6	“It’s All Over (Originally R.B. Blues)”	Ruth Brown (1953)
B1	“Mama, He Treats Your Daughter Mean”	Ruth Brown (1953)
B2	“Tell Me Why”	<i>Composed by Otilie Patterson*</i>
B3	“Can’t Afford to Do It”	Memphis Minnie (1941)
B4	“Blues Before Sunrise”	Leroy Carr (1934)
B5	“Me and My Chauffeur”	Memphis Minnie (1941)
B6	“Trixie’s Blues”	Trixie Smith (1922)

*debut recording on *R&B with Otilie*

As Brian Rust’s review quoted in the epigraph above suggests, *R&B with Otilie* bears none of the instrumental concessions that would associate the songs contained on the record with R&B as it was typically performed in the 1950s; this despite the designation *Rhythm and Blues* in the title. There is not an electric guitar or tenor saxophone to be heard, nor a harmonica for that matter. Instead Patterson is backed in usual Chris Barber trad jazz band fashion by an ensemble of drums, double bass, banjo, trumpet, trombone and clarinet. Although practical and commercial considerations must have played some role in this choice—this was the band Patterson and Barber had at their disposal and were known for, after all—I argue that by adapting a variety of approaches to R&B/blues/race music to their existing instrumentation and reworking some of these styles to fit their “sound,” Patterson and the Barber band are making an effort to consolidate “rhythm and blues” into a progressive revivalist statement about black

⁷⁹ My research indicates that these lyrics are only predated by Ken Colyer’s 1954 “Goin’ Home.”

sound. The simple act of reviving musical examples from a forty-year period of black music styles with trad instrumentation demonstrates a relative disregard for purism.

This flexible approach to historical fidelity can be read as constituent of Barber's progressive revivalism which was generally unbound by strict notions of performance practice. The revival setting allows for this sort of play with and intermixture of generic conventions. In this setting, such play often amounts to a flattening or, at the very least, a blurring of the associations produced by allusions to period and style. The use of a trad frontline to perform a "honking tenor" riff, for example, as is the case on "Mama, He Treats Your Daughter Mean," or a wide-vibratoed clarinet to emulate Little Walter's signature, amplified harmonica "shake" (see "Bad Spell Blues" and "Four Points Blues") may seem oddly anachronistic. By retaining these definitive elements of race music/R&B style, Barber and company can be understood as attempting to fold these generic elements into a broader revivalist palate. As may be clear by this point, from an instrumental perspective, *R&B with Otilie* is neither a strictly "trad" take on a wide array of compositions nor a purist R&B revival manifesto. These anachronistic sounds, however, have the capacity to underscore connotative connections between places and practices. Sonic intermix between 1920s New Orleans jazz instrumentation and stylistic markers of the 1950s R&B charts "makes sense" when heard through a narrative that views these styles as housed within a singular, timeless tradition of black sound.

As previously discussed, for many jazz enthusiasts in 1950's Britain like Patterson and Barber, the category "rhythm and blues" was an update and continuation of what was once known as "race music." This conception of R&B allowed for Ruth Brown and Muddy Waters to be mentioned in the same breath—and be contained on the same album—as Bessie Smith and Big Maceo. Furthermore, in its instrumentation and repertoire, *R&B with Otilie* communicates a

vision of rhythm and blues that was inclusive in terms of period, style and, perhaps most importantly, gender.

She Got the Blues

*When a woman gets the blues she goes to her room and hides.
When a man gets the blues he catch the freight train and rides.*
-“Freight Train Blues” as sung by Clara Smith (1924)⁸⁰

Lyric analysis has been a mainstay of blues scholarship at least since Paul Oliver published his influential *The Blues Fell This Morning* in 1960.⁸¹ To craft this study of the “meaning and content of the blues,” Oliver transcribed “several thousand blues records” before arriving at 350 representative examples that he felt sufficiently demonstrated the expressive potential of the genre. To justify how he arrived at his “representative” selection of verses, he explained to his readers that “the degree of blues quality tends to diminish as the music inclines to more sophisticated artistry... for this reason the examples quoted in the present work are drawn from the country and urban folk blues rather than... the classic blues...[for similar reasons] few examples have been taken of big band blues singers and jazz blues vocalists.”⁸² Considering this prejudice against “sophisticated” genres—genres which were more strongly associated with female singers than men—it is little surprise that only 51 of the 350 songs Oliver addresses were originally performed by women.” In this regard, *The Blues Fell This Morning* both reflected and played a role in shaping contemporary attitudes about blues-based forms in late-50s Britain.

⁸⁰ Quoted in Hazel Carby, “It Jus Be’s Dat Way Sometime: The Sexual Politics of Women’s Blues,” *Radical America* 20/4 (1986), 9–24.

⁸¹ Paul Oliver, *The Blues Fell this Morning: The Meaning of the Blues* (London: The Jazz Book Club/Cassell, 1963). This work was originally available only for Jazz Book Club members upon its 1960 publication.

⁸² Oliver, *The Blues Fell This Morning*, 8-9.

The bias found in Oliver's work underscores Angela Davis' assertion that scholars "tend to view women as marginal to the production of the blues."⁸³ A number of landmark critical interventions in the 1980s and 1990s have since worked to recuperate women's blues from the margins, however. Many of these, much like Oliver's work, employ the methodology of lyric analysis to illustrate the "collective feelings of the black community and... personal sentiments of the women performers" expressed in these verses.⁸⁴

As such, the analysis of lyrics has served numerous ends, ranging from Oliver's grand project of discerning the "meaning" of the genre, to the construction of performer biographies (Greil Marcus, 1975), to more recent attempts to locate black (proto-) feminist attitudes. Throughout, and especially in works like Davis' *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, distinctions have been made between the types of stances and themes common to women's and men's blues. While lyric analysis has yielded important interventions, critics of this approach have contended that interpreting blues verse from a purely literary perspective elides the connotative power that the performance of these words communicates. Through analysis of Patterson's covers of four songs originally performed by African-American women, the following discussion addresses the type of representational positions and attitudes Patterson valued within rhythm and blues (broadly conceived) and which she hoped to personify on *R&B with Otilie*. These songs demonstrate how progressive revivalist reproduction of extant lyrics—as well as performance practice—across historical and cultural lines creates the potential for

⁸³ Angela Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith and Billy Holiday* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), 9.

⁸⁴ Tammy Kernodle, "Having Her Say: The Blues as the Black Woman's Lament," in *Women's Voices Across Musical Worlds*, Jane A. Bernstein, ed., (Boston: Northeastern University Press 2004), 229. Other important examples of such studies include Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*; Sandra Lieb, *Mother of the Blues: A Study of Ma Rainey* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981); Carby, "It Jus Be's Dat Way Sometime: The Sexual Politics of Women's Blues"; Paul Garon and Beth Garon, *Woman with Guitar: Memphis Minnie's Blues, Revised and Expanded Edition* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2014 [1992]).

different attitudes and subject positions to be expressed through the same or similar verses. It is noteworthy that, with the exception of Ruth Brown's "Mama, He Treats Your Daughter Mean," each of the six women's blues covers on *R&B with Otilie* were composed by the song's original, female performer.⁸⁵ It seems little coincidence that Patterson overwhelmingly selected tunes—"Trixie's Blues," and "R.B. Blues," etc.—that were so thoroughly entangled with these singer's identities.

Amongst the scrapbooks, photos and programs contained in the Otilie Patterson Collection at Britain's National Jazz Archive is a notebook, an unused 1952 diary to be specific, containing lyrics, poems, notes and the occasional personal reflection.⁸⁶ Although a good many of the pages had been removed before the notebook was given to the National Jazz Archive (possibly by Patterson as she worked in the notebook, perhaps later), more than half of what remains are transcriptions of existing blues lyrics, drafts of original lyrics, notes about performance/arrangements and song lists. The opening page, embossed with the date Jan 2, 1952, for example, contains Patterson's transcription of the lyrics to "It's All Over (R.B. Blues)," while the final page of the notebook (December 31, 1952) contains a list of fourteen songs arranged in what could be the layout of a tracklist for an album—in fact, ten of fourteen songs here appear on *R&B with Otilie*.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ "Mama" was, however, one of if not *the* one song most closely associated with Ruth Brown. As I discuss above (and Tammy Kernodle notes), the performance of a song can serve as a means to claim ownership. I have chosen not to discuss "Backwater Blues" here as it does not present a gendered point of view. That "Backwater" is a song written by a woman, but presents a gender-neutral perspective may register it as a notable exception to the standards of the 1920s blues repertoire.

⁸⁶ As an aspect of its original form as a diary a date is printed on the top of each page, serving as prompts for the owner to keep a daily account of his/her year as it unfolds. I will refer to pages in the notebook by these dates.

⁸⁷ This first page also includes performance notes including an indication of the key (Bb) marked in the upper left hand of the page and a sort of arrangement shorthand "3 V -(1B)-1. V." at the bottom of the page (three vocal verses followed a verse of collective improvisation from the frontline and a final vocal verse). Lyrics and performance notes for ten of the songs on *R&B with Otilie* are present in the notebook.

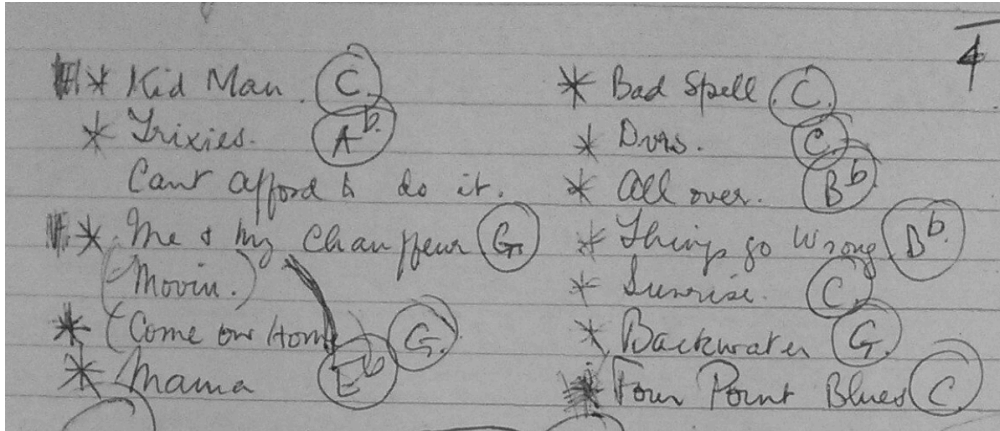


Figure 3.4 – List of Potential *R&B with Otilie* Tracks

Its contents suggest that Patterson maintained this notebook in the lead-up to and during the recording of *R&B with Otilie*. Within the pages of this document, traces of the development of the album's concept, scope and, eventually, near-final form can be read. While the following analyses primarily focus on Patterson's recordings themselves, I also draw on this notebook for the clues it provides about her artistic process, musical arrangements and lyrical inspiration.

Trixie's Blues

R&B with Otilie concludes with "Trixie's Blues," a song composed by a woman during the formative years of the classic blues boom. Recorded in late January 1922 for Black Swan, the original version of the song features the song's composer, Trixie Smith, backed by "James P. Johnson's Harmony Eight."⁸⁸ In its distinct two-beat feel and heavy reliance on frontline obbligatos and improvisation, the *R&B with Otilie* version of "Trixie's Blues" closely resembles the original performance and is the closest in form and performance practice to the 1920s New

⁸⁸ Smith recorded the song again in May of 1938 for Decca with a backing band that included Charlie Shavers and Sidney Bechet. Dixon, Godrich and Rye, *Blues and Gospel Records 1890-1943*, 4th ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 837-839.

Orleans jazz approach favored by the Barber band and trad musicians in general. Indeed, the Barber band arrangement is actually less formal than the James P. Johnson band version, a rendering in which many verses contain harmonized horn riffs and extended *tutti* unison passages.

As was common in many women's blues of the 1920s, "Trixie's Blues," addresses the subject of infidelity. Preceded by a verse in which the singer is awakened by a knocking on her door, Smith/Patterson asks her "pretty papa" to "tell mama where you stayed last night?" after he returns home when the "sun was shining bright." Without rebuke from the man nor any additional commentary, she calls off the relationship halfway through the song, quite simply, with the lines "ashes to ashes, sweet papa, dust to dust." Following a chorus of enthusiastic collective improvisation from the horn section, the penultimate verse laments the difficulty of finding a man who won't "make a fool out of you" by giving your money to another woman whom he is attempting to court.

Patterson's performance of "Trixie's Blues," up to the conclusion of this verse, is executed with an uncharacteristic reserve. Her delivery suggests that she is less than moved by the alibi of a cheating man coming home late and not particularly upset that her relationship has run its course. Patterson only seems to become truly animated on the final chorus where she expresses the lines about preference in men. This final chorus exclaims that a "black" or "brown" man will treat a woman better than will "high yellas" (or "high yellow," a term for a person of mixed-race descent often applied to creoles of color in New Orleans); a lyric that seems particularly out of place sung by Patterson. Nonetheless, she delivers this line with much greater conviction than the preceding four verses. What makes Patterson's emotive emphasis of this verse all the more compelling is that she saves these lines for the concluding chorus, whereas in

the Smith original the “high yellas” chorus is followed by the verse “I don’t want no man I’ve got to give my money to (x2), cause he’ll give it to another woman and make a darn fool of you.”⁸⁹ This verse contains the most distinct markers of difference in its expression of desire for an unambiguously African-American partner. As will be discussed throughout the analysis of *R&B with Otilie*, it appears that aligning herself with various forms of alterity and alternative expressive possibilities was important for Patterson and may have guided her selection of women’s blues to reproduce on this album.

Me and My Chauffeur

Of the blueswomen known to British audiences, Memphis Minnie was one of the few that did not easily fit into established models of “classic blues queen” or “big band thrush.” As a singer and guitarist performing in a rural-inflected “city blues” style during the 1930s and 1940s, Minnie embodied a representational ambiguity.⁹⁰ Hers was a blues delivered from a woman’s perspective, but through the generic conventions of an overwhelmingly masculine form. As Paul and Beth Garon note:

Minnie undermines the male standard of the country blues by the subversion and opposition inherent in her role...she challenged and weakened the patriarchal notion that blues women should sing on stage with male orchestral accompaniment. Her guitar proficiency... so completely upset the patriarchal apple cart that her admirers continually described her, with awe, as playing “as good as any man.”⁹¹

Minnie’s lack of conformity to traditional, gendered positions and representations extended to her lyrics as well. Her body of work often tracked with “typical” themes within the classic blues

⁸⁹ The order of these verses is reversed in Patterson’s performance.

⁹⁰ As part of the Chicago-based Lester Melrose stable of artists, she was similarly associated with the Chicago-Bluebird race record scene.

⁹¹ Garon and Garon, *Woman with Guitar*, 144. Both Garon and Garon and Kernodle speak of Minnie’s instrumental prowess.

canon while avoiding some of most common topics of women's blues and embracing many of those associated with the male-dominated country blues milieu. As Tammy Kernodle observed, Memphis Minnie and the small handful of other rural blueswomen "created music that was unaffected by the 'bourgeois' culture of middle-class blacks."⁹² A claim of this nature could not necessarily be made in reference to the blues queens who preceded her. For these reasons, Minnie has widely been regarded by blues aficionados and scholars alike as a "feminist symbol and female potentate in a man's world."⁹³ It is quite likely that Otilie Patterson would have been aware of Memphis Minnie's reputation. In his well-circulated *Big Bill's Blues*, Big Bill Broonzy writes of Minnie's abilities, noting that she bested both himself and Muddy Waters in guitar playing "cutting contests" on separate occasions. It is also quite likely that Patterson and Broonzy discussed Minnie's life and work directly while touring the UK in 1955 and in 1957. Patterson would have, at very least, had access to Minnie's most popular sides, "Me and My Chauffeur" b/w "Can't Afford to Loose My Man."⁹⁴ Such a reputation may very likely have been the cause of Minnie's appeal to Patterson and part of the reason she chose to sing these songs on *R&B with Otilie*.⁹⁵

Originally written and recorded by Memphis Minnie in 1941, "Me and My Chauffeur" is a witty, hokum-esque, double-entendre laden lyric about a woman wanting to buy her chauffeur a "brand new automobile" so that she can let him "drive me around the world."⁹⁶ "I want him to drive me," she implores, "I want him to drive me down town, for he drives me so easy, I can't

⁹² Kernodle, "Having Her Say," 217.

⁹³ Jim O'Neal, "Introduction," in *Woman with Guitar*, 13.

⁹⁴ Garon and Garon, *Woman with Guitar*, 74.

⁹⁵ Both songs are credited to Minnie's husband Ernest "Little Son Joe" Lawler, although Paul and Beth Garon suggest that Minnie was indeed the composer of these and almost all of the songs she performed, regardless of attribution. Garon and Garon, *Woman with Guitar*, 77-79.

⁹⁶ "Me and My Chauffeur" is cited in *The Blues Fell This Morning* and is discussed by Garon and Garon, *Woman with Guitar*, 150-153.

turn him down.” Among Minnie’s praise of her chauffeur, she also offers him some counsel in the form of a warning. If she were to catch him “riding his girls around,” she notes, she’d “steal a pistol” and “shoot [him] down.” The protagonist of this song, thus, is a woman with the desire, if not the means as well, to purchase new cars and hire a driver. Furthermore, she also possesses sexual desires and is not afraid to express them.

*Want to see my chauffeur, want to see my chauffeur
I want him to drive me, I want him to drive me downtown
For he drives me so easy, I can’t turn him down*

*No I don’t want him, no I don’t want him
To be riding his girls, to be riding his girls around,
Well, I’m gonna steal me a pistol, shot my shoot my chauffeur down⁹⁷*

Such an expression of sexual desire through double entendre was widespread in most pre-war blues-oriented genres; men’s and women’s alike. The evocation of sexuality in women’s blues, however, as Hazel Carby, Michelle Wallace and others have noted, stood as a means to shift black women from “sexual objects” to “sexual subjects.”⁹⁸ “Me and My Chauffeur” further asserts female sexual subjectivity by positioning the chauffeur and his “brand new automobile” as the objects to be desired.⁹⁹

Unlike the other eleven tracks on the album, “Me and My Chauffeur” doesn’t contain frontline horns. Which is to say that Patterson is backed only by a rhythm section on this

⁹⁷ Verses one & two. Patterson modifies these verses somewhat. For example, Patterson concludes verse two with “Well I’d steal me a pistol, and I’d shoot my baby down.”

⁹⁸ Wallace quoted in Garon and Garon, *Woman with Guitar*, 151.

⁹⁹ The other Memphis Minnie cover on *R&B with Otilie*, “Can’t Afford to Do It”/“Can’t Afford to Lose My Man,” offers a rather blatant contrast to the economic, if not sexual, power dynamic of “Me and My Chauffeur.” Contrary to “Chauffeur,” the lyric to “Can’t Afford” is about an emotional and material investment in a “man.” Although she does mention that she “take[s] his money,” she appears more concerned with avoiding behaviors that would cause them to split. The common trope of infidelity appears in two forms in “Can’t Afford”: Minnie first warns other women not to mess with her man and then rejects her desire to “go out and cheat a little bit.” Patterson tempers the latter sentiment in her version of the song by only mentioning her desire to “go out” rather than to cheat. The original version allows Minnie to retain the subjective desire and sense of agency that might accompany fulfilling her non-monogamous urges while recognizing that it is not in her best interest.

recording. In addition, the rhythm section's performance is particularly restrained. While the bass walks steadily throughout and the drum part is active (although played with brushes), the banjo's quarter-note comping is all but inaudible. Four turns through a 12-bar blues form and all of 1:29 seconds long, the focus of the recording remains squarely on Patterson's vocal throughout.¹⁰⁰ Patterson even fills in the final two bars of each 12-bar chorus (following the cadence between mm. 10 and 11) with a self-responsorial vocal tag in place of the more typical instrumental turnaround or fill. The bass and banjo remain on the I chord here, rather than the common practice of an additional turnaround V chord; an accompaniment that emphasizes a perception that Patterson's vocal dictated the terms of this arrangement.

Patterson's performance of "Me and My Chauffeur" is dynamic and aggressive throughout, delivered in a manner that suggests she is endeavoring to embody the attitude projected by the lyric.¹⁰¹ Patterson's singing here is primarily declarative and syllabic with the occasional two, or three-note prolongation added to certain words. In particular, she applies this effect to words that demand extra emphasis to convey meaning within the double-entendre setting; "*dr-ive* me *do-own-town*, well he drives me so easy I can't turn him *do-wn*" and "I want to buy him a brand new *a-u-o-to-mo-bi-ile*" for example. Moreover, her textual interpolations, what I refer to above as self-responsorial vocal tags, at the end of verses one and two—"whoa, oh no," in response to "I can't turn him down"; "oh yes I would" following "I'd shot my shoot my baby down"—reinforce the song's tenor while serving to further align Patterson's vocal with the conventions of black women's performance practice.¹⁰² These affirmations further cast

¹⁰⁰ This contrasts with the 1941 Memphis Minnie record, which runs more than a minute longer, is performed at a slower tempo, and features instrumental choruses at the start of the song and between verses three and four.

¹⁰¹ More colloquially, one could say that she is "owning it."

¹⁰² These self-responsorials are not present in Memphis Minnie's version of the song. Her only interpolation of this sort is a setup for the instrumental interlude between verses three and four.

Patterson as the sexual subject of “me and My Chauffeur” rather than the song’s object while expressing the apparent joy the position provides her.

R.B. Blues

Even before a single side of her music was released in the UK, Ruth Brown was the subject of R&B’s nascent discourse in Britain.¹⁰³ In an April 1953 piece for *Melody Maker*, Ernest Borneman noted the US crossover success of Brown’s “Mama, He Treats Your Daughter Mean” as a “breaking down of racial barriers” in the American music scene.¹⁰⁴ *Melody Maker* would again mention “Mama” in December of that year when it reported that *Down Beat* voters selected the song as the “R&B record of the year” for 1953.¹⁰⁵ Although not nearly as popular in the UK as she was in the US, Brown was one of the most well-regarded women performers of rhythm and blues in Britain during the 1950s.¹⁰⁶ In a telling indication of what Brown meant to Otilie Patterson, three of the first five songs transcribed in Patterson’s *R&B with Otilie*

¹⁰³ Prior to the release of the EP *The Queen of Rhythm and Blues*, London-American issued two Ruth Brown singles in 1955: “Mambo Baby” b/w “Mama (He Treats Your Daughter Mean)” (HL-8153, July 18, 1955) and “As Long as I’m Moving” b/w “R.B. Blues” (HLE-8210, November 28, 1955). <http://www.45cat.com/record/hl8153> and <http://www.45cat.com/record/hle8210> respectively (accessed September 23, 2016). The first of these releases does not align with the original single of “Mama,” which was backed with “R.B. Blues” for its January 1953 release (Atlantic 45-986/986 both 78 & 45). On the London single it is paired with “Mambo Baby” (originally released October 1954 (Atlantic 45-1044/1044 b/w “Somebody Touched Me”) as its A-side. Even before the London single was released, “Mama” was placed on the BBC’s “unsuitable for broadcasting” blacklist, perhaps leading to the decision to highlight “Mambo Baby” instead. The blacklisting appears to be associated with the two British cover versions of the song released earlier in 1955, Tony Crombie’s version featuring Annie Ross and a version by the Dinning Sisters, rather than the original.

¹⁰⁴ Ernest Borneman, “A Break in the Racial Barriers,” *MM*, April 4, 1953, 4. Borneman cites “Mama’s” 150,000 sales to-date as an indication of this trend. The American release of “Mama” topped the R&B chart for five weeks that year and registering at a peak of #23 on *Billboard’s* pop chart. As noted in Chip Deffaa, *Blue Rhythms*, (Champlain and Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 35.

¹⁰⁵ As reported in *MM*, December 19, 1953, 2.

¹⁰⁶ Brown was the top-selling female R&B artist from 1951-54. The rest of the 1950s was dominated by Dinah Washington (Deffaa, *Blue Rhythms*, 38). By contrast, in the UK none of her releases charted although her sales must have turned a sufficient profit since London-American continued to release singles and albums from her throughout the decade and into the early 1960s. As noted above, “Mama, He Treats Your Daughter Mean” was among the R&B numbers that Tony Crombie covered in 1955.

notebook are Ruth Brown numbers: “R.B. Blues (It’s All Over),” “Mama,” and “As Long as I am Moving.”¹⁰⁷ Of these, “It’s All Over,” or “R.B. Blues” as it was originally titled, was the only one of these song composed by Brown herself and was one of only three songs Brown wrote over the course of her career.¹⁰⁸

The Patterson/Barber arrangement of the song, under the title “It’s All Over,” is an eight-bar blues in compound duple (12/8) meter; a rather unambiguous departure from the typical two-beat, simple duple feel present in most trad jazz performances. Unlike the rather clear 12/8 feel of “It’s All Over,” the original version of the song does not communicate a consistent triplet-feel throughout, however, but rather morphs in and out of triplet-, heavy shuffle- and even duple-against-triple hemiola feels. Patterson and Barber reduce this complexity to a rather straightforward groove. Another stylistic aspect that sets “R.B. Blues” apart from typical trad fare is the melismatic phrasing used throughout the song’s original melodic lines, a stylistic approach absent from Patterson’s source material prior to *R&B with Otilie* and not found in the balance of the covers on the album. Following Brown’s model, Patterson makes the most of these opportunities to stretch out phrases. The use of melisma and a strong compound quadruple feel are a means by which this performance aurally evokes 1950s rhythm and blues. Drawn at least in part from performance practices found in black Southern churches, these stylistic elements were particularly evident in R&B records popularized by women.¹⁰⁹ At least one critic commented on these modernising aspects of the album while reviewing *R&B with Otilie*, noting

¹⁰⁷ There aren’t any performance markings on the “As Long as I’m Moving” page (key, arrangement) so most likely this song didn’t receive as serious consideration for inclusion on the album, but this doesn’t discount its potential as inspiration.

¹⁰⁸ Composition was never a focus of her professional activities. As she noted in her 1999 autobiography, “I was a singer, not a writer, I was only dabbling” at crafting music and lyrics (Ruth Brown with Andrew Yule, *Miss Rhythm: The Autobiography of Ruth Brown, Rhythm and Blues Legend* (New York: Da Capo Press 1996), 78).

¹⁰⁹ One could argue that these markers also connect these songs stylistically to gospel, perhaps influenced to some degree by Patterson’s interactions with Sister Rosetta on tour in 1957.

that “[Patterson] has moved over to the big blues sound of the city.... The band backs her with that heavy triplet beat, so much part and parcel of the less sophisticated big city blues.”¹¹⁰

As a song sung from the perspective of a woman who, after learning of her lover’s infidelity, ends a relationship with a man, “It’s All Over” addresses a fairly typical topic within the women’s blues *oeuvre*. “It’s All Over,” as the title suggests, speaks of a woman’s feelings of relief and joy following a breakup without even a suggestion of the lament so common in blues verses. The man’s infidelity is the cause of the split although no specifics are mentioned. Instead of dwelling on her mistreatment, Brown’s lyrics simply state that she is “glad as can be” that the “reason for [her] crying, is walking out the door.” Brown dismisses any attempt at apologies with the lines “just be sorry for yourself, all the things I’ve done for you, I’m going to do for somebody else.”

The other *R&B with Otilie* track originally popularized by Ruth Brown, the aforementioned “Mama, He Treats Your Daughter Mean,” offers a contrasting response to the situation described in “It’s All Over.” As was more typical at the time, “Mama, He Treats Your Daughter Mean” was composed by a professional songwriting team and suggested to Brown by Atlantic records A&R man Herb Abramson.¹¹¹ Unlike the public address to an unnamed audience so typical of the blues, the viewpoint of “Mama” is a private and intimate one: that of a daughter speaking directly to her mother about the ways in which she has been ill-used by her man. The first three lines of the first verse, what Patterson labels as the recitative, summarize her protests against the mistreater:

¹¹⁰ Owen Bryce, “Otilie’s sound has changed—and I’m all in favour of it!,” *Disc*, January 19, 1963, 10. The balance of the songs in triple meter with melismatic vocals are Patterson’s original compositions “Bad Spell Blues” and “Tell Me Why” which will be addressed shortly.

¹¹¹ Brown and Yule, *Miss Rhythm*, 78.

Friday, JANUARY 4th, 1952.

Mama, he treats your daughter mean. L. Brown.

(1)

Mama,
 He treats your daughter mean,
 mama,
 He treats your daughter mean,
 He's the meanest man I have ever seen.

} Refrain

Mama, he treats me badly,
 Makes me love him madly.
 Mama, he takes my money,
 Makes me call him honey.
 Mama, he can't be trusted,
 Makes me so disgusted;
 All of my friends say they don't understand
 What's the matter with this man.

} Recitative.

(Back to refrain)

(2)

Mama, that man is lazy,
 Almost drives me crazy.

Figure 3.5 – Patterson Lyric Transcription of “Mama, He Treats Your Daughter Mean”

These are followed by a second verse containing further allegations of the man's laziness and a line about how the singer's “heart is achin'” over her treatment. Absent from these lines are any definitive statements that the protagonist of “Mama” has any interest in or intention to call off the relationship. She has complained to her friends about the situation (“All my friends say they don't understand what's the matter with this man”) and now expresses her frustration to her mother, but at no point suggests that she should or would put an end to the treatment via a move to the city or by the pistol.

Taking into consideration the many models that came before it in which a mistreated lover leaves or takes revenge, one might be tempted to read “Mama” as a song devoid of agency.

In the words given to Brown to voice, the “man” of the song “makes” the singer do something no less than four times.¹¹² Twice this takes the form of actual actions where she is made to “call him honey” and “squeeze him.” The other two instances refer to emotions elicited from her in the form of “disgust” and “lov[ing] him madly.” Even when she acts or feels in these verses it is in direct response to the “man.” From this perspective, “Mama” *could* be understood as a less than assertive expression of femininity associated with submission and re-action. Analysis of similar litanies present in the classic blues repertoire suggest a more nuanced interpretation, however, one in which the recitation of a deeply personal exchange in the public sphere can be understood as an act of feminist affirmation.¹¹³ As Angela Davis points out, to “unabashedly *name the problem* of male violence... so directly and openly may itself have made misogynist violence available for criticism.”¹¹⁴ Although lacking the overtly empowered stance of “It’s All Over,” through this lens, “Mama” could nonetheless serve as a vehicle through which Patterson could express a position that was at once familiar and Other in 1960 Britain. In other words, even if a woman “treated badly” was relatively commonplace, so much as indirectly addressing such an issue was anything but common.

The sexual assertiveness and “empowered presence” resident in the black women’s blues verses above stood in contrast to the more staid representation of white middle-class femininity most often found on popular records at the time and which Patterson very likely would have been encouraged to strive for. The lyrics Otilie chose to reproduce expressed an alternative notion of

¹¹² Speaking to the issue of the “interpretation” of blues verse written by men for women, Tammy Kernodle suggests that, “though this raises questions of authenticity of the sentiments conveyed in these blues, it does not undermine their importance nor the function these songs had in chronicling the life experiences of certain segments of the black population” (Kernodle, “Having Her Say,” 217).

¹¹³ The notion that “Mama” is a statement of submissive femininity is further belied by Patterson’s forceful vocal performance delivered in rather close emulation of the Brown version she based her rendition upon.

¹¹⁴ Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, 29-31, emphasis added.

femininity that she may have hoped to embody despite her whiteness and Irishness. By embracing the alternate positions articulated in these songs, Patterson expressed, and offered to her listeners, what Angela Davis has referred to as “hints of feminist attitudes” present in women’s blues. Such vicarious exploration of black womanhood signified a way for the “slim Irish girl” to communicate the unconventional possibilities afforded in these verses.

Furthermore, Patterson’s (*re*)presentation of these songs operated as a challenge to an emerging blues/R&B canon that functioned to marginalize women’s blues. This canon—codified in the work of Paul Oliver and other late-1950s critics and reinforced by the performances of early-1960s British R&B revivalists—reflected an ideologically driven regulation of generic boundaries that worked to exclude these seemingly less “authentic” incarnations of the blues, incarnations that appeared to be “contaminated” by their proximity to commerce. In addition to serving as a means for Patterson to explore alternative femininities, her re-creation and celebration of these verses endeavored to bring these songs and performers in from beyond these generic boundaries and back toward the center of jazz and blues revivalism; just as Davis, Carby and Kernodle’s feminist interventions would later strive to bring such voices into the orbit of contemporary music scholarship.

Ottile’s Blues

Ottile Patterson’s notebook indicates that, in addition to the twelve tracks featured on *R&B with Ottile*, other R&B songs were also considered for the album, or at least among the Barber band’s repertoire at the time. Many of the songs Patterson transcribed, but did not record around this time were relatively recent, popular rhythm and blues records. Positioned between “R.B. Blues” and “Mama, He Treats Your Daughter Mean” in her notebook, for example, are the lyrics to

Little Walter's 1955 hit song "My Babe."¹¹⁵ "My Babe" is followed five pages later by the words to a 1956 single "Easy, Easy, Baby" by Anne Cole, a singer best remembered as the artist who recorded "I Got My Mojo Working" weeks before Muddy Waters. Another song, recorded less than two years before the *R&B with Otilie* sessions, "Nothing in the World"—a collaboration between Dinah Washington and Brook Benton—rounds out the selection of 1950s' R&B verses Patterson transcribed in her notebook.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, what appears to be a set list written in pencil in the margin of the "January 9, 1952" page includes the above-mentioned songs, the tunes contained on *R&B with Otilie*, and the Muddy Waters titles "Got My Mojo Working" and "Hoochie Coochie Man." That Patterson was performing, or at least listening to, a considerably varied array of rhythm and blues records helps inform the spheres of influence Patterson may have drawn from when crafting the two original compositions she recorded for *R&B with Otilie*.¹¹⁷

Tell Me Why

Of the two originals Patterson recorded in July 1960, "Tell Me Why" takes the more conventional lyric approach. The song's refrain of "tell me why, why you and I have got to part?" is a rather typical lament from the point of view of someone who has been left by a lover. Patterson explores many other lyric turns typical of such a song in the verses that follow. In the

¹¹⁵ "Baby, You're Gonna Miss Me When I'm Gone" credited to Little Walter is found later in the notebook as well.

¹¹⁶ The vocal parts to both "Easy, Easy, Baby" and "Nothing in the World" feature melismatic lines, reinforcing the fact that Patterson likely associated this performance practice with 1950s' women's R&B. Other "cover" lyrics in the diary include the 1856 composition "Darling Nelly Gray" about a black couple separated by slavery and Montana Taylor's 1946 "I Can't Sleep."

¹¹⁷ Alongside the covers Patterson transcribed in her notebook are what appear to be as many as nine original Otilie Patterson blues-oriented compositions. In addition to the two songs recorded on *R&B with Otilie* five uncredited songs appear in final form (with no edits) titled "Let my Man Alone," "Good Time Flat," "Who's Been Here," "I Got the Blues" and "Come Along Home With Me"; the last of which can be found on the Barber and Patterson album *Barber Back in Berlin 1960* (She introduces the song as a boogie blues number. The feel of the song is very close to the Barber band's performance of "Mama.") Internet searches turn up no matches to these lyrics by other artists. The two additional songs appear in draft form.

opening and closing verses, for instance, Patterson expresses her seemingly hopeless devotion to the now-absent man who caused her to change her “reckless,” fast-living ways, whom she loves “more and more... with each passing day.” While no reason for the lover’s leaving is given in the lyric and there is no allusion to infidelity, Patterson perhaps hints at the reason for the split with the lines “I ain’t good lookin’, and my clothes ain’t fine,” although she counters this bit of self deprecation with: “but I’ll feel your worries like they were mine.” Phrases like “you were troubled, and dissatisfied” as well as many of the lines quoted above seem to have been borrowed almost wholesale from existing blues songs circulating in the British trad jazz revival scene at the time. Patterson’s choice to leave out any sort of assertion of power or shift in tone seems somewhat unusual considering the songs she surrounds “Tell Me Why” with on *R&B with Otilie*. From a lyric perspective, the song is a rather straightforward expression of conventional white British femininity (c.1960) expressed through a blues vocabulary. It is in terms of vocal approach and rhythmic feel instead that “Tell Me Why” notably departs from the expressive expectations of trad jazz and British pop music more broadly.

Unlike the 12-bar blues numbers that make up the vast majority of *R&B with Otilie*, “Tell Me Why” employs an eight-bar blues form and a progression very similar to the one used in “R.B. Blues (It’s All Over).”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Of the other ten tracks only “Mama” diverts from a straight-ahead 12-bar form (in its use of a 16-bar verse alternating with the 12-bar blues chorus section).

Example 3.1 – Form/Harmonic Comparison of “Tell Me Why” and “R.B. Blues”**“Tell Me Why”**

Bb⁷ Bb⁷ Eb⁷ Eb⁷ Bb⁷ F⁷ Bb⁷ Bb⁷ F⁷
 /////|/////|/////|/////|/////|/////|/////|/////:||

“R.B. Blues (It’s All Over)”

Bb⁷ Bb⁷ Eb⁷ Eb⁷ Bb⁷ Gm⁷ C⁷ F⁷ Bb⁷ Bb⁷ F⁷
 /////|/////|/////|/////|/////|/////|/////|/////:||

Following a sparsely accompanied vocal introduction from Patterson, “Tell Me Why” is propelled by a slow (56 bpm), listing back beat and a heavily swung shuffle that hints alternately at duple and triple subdivisions.

Example 3.2 – “Tell Me Why” vocal line, verse one

The musical notation for the vocal line of "Tell Me Why" is presented in three staves, each with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats (Bb and Eb). The time signature is 12/8. The first staff begins with a 12/8 time signature and a common time signature. The second staff begins with a 12/8 time signature and a common time signature. The third staff begins with a 12/8 time signature and a common time signature. The lyrics are: "I'll tell you ba-by I told you be-fore With each day passing I love you more and more So tell me wh-y why you and I have got to part". The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and accidentals, as well as dynamic markings like \leq and \geq.

This metric ambiguity is alleviated at the start of the third verse when an eighth-note ride cymbal pattern, doubled by comping banjo, projects the clear, insistent 12/8 meter that is unmistakable for the remainder of the record. In regard to feel, as well as form, “Tell Me Why”

most closely resembles Ruth Brown’s “R.B. Blues.” This resemblance extends to Patterson’s vocal performance as well.

Throughout “Tell Me Why” Patterson alternates freely between syllabic and melismatic phrasing. This approach is on display in the transcription of verse one above; in particular when she follows the syllabic setting of “with each day” at the end of measure two with a five-note prolongation on the word “passing” in measure three. In addition, Patterson frequently uses melisma on seemingly improvised melodic embellishments. Take, for example, the words “why” and “I” in the song’s opening line:

Example 3.3 – “Tell Me Why,” opening vocal line



Patterson’s vocal lines on “Tell Me Why” align rather squarely within Patterson’s expected alto tessitura with her basic melodic contour mainly falling between the F above and the F below middle C, with the occasional Bb4 added for color. It is only when the climactic final verse arrives that she consistently occupies the upper edge of this range, basing her melodic variations on an alternation between Bb and Ab for the lines “I used to be reckless, always living fast, but loving you darling changed my ways at last, so tell me, tell me, tell me why, ohh, why you and I...”

“Tell Me Why’s” rather direct emulations of the stylistic conventions found on Ruth Brown’s relatively recent “R.B. Blues” seems to be an intentional retort by Patterson to critics who would brand her a Bessie Smith impersonator exclusively “conjuring” the voices of the

distant past.¹¹⁹ In her prior work—and on the Trixie Smith and Bessie Smith covers on *R&B from Otilie* for that matter—Patterson drew upon African-American performance conventions associated with the 1920s and 1930s to craft her revivalist sound. As Laurie Stras notes in regard to the Boswell Sister's 1930s recordings, “three factors of vocal production —tonal variety (leading to greater expressiveness), [low] tessitura, and regional accent—provided the technical basis for the Boswells’ new sound, the sound that would be identified by their audiences as “authentically” black.¹²⁰ These three elements were likewise integral to Patterson’s pre-*R&B* vocal approach. In “Tell Me Why” and the covers discussed above, however, Patterson expanded her expressive palate by embracing relatively new additions to women’s R&B vocal practice, elements that Annie J. Randall refers to as “gospelisms.”¹²¹ This term, Randall offers, encompasses a set of stylistic traits “hardly known outside the black church in the early 1960s” which include melismatic “improvised melodic flourishes or extended departures from the melody,” “text interpolation drawn from the black sermon tradition” and “expressive non-verbal sounds.”¹²² Moreover, Patterson’s choice of 12/8 time similarly works to associate her original work with the gospel tradition as well as the 1950’s popular R&B it inspired.¹²³ By implementing this updated set of expressive practices in her original compositions—both “Tell Me Why” and “Bad Spell Blues” discussed below—Patterson seems to insist upon a revaluation of her career and of blues revivalism more generally.

¹¹⁹ Conventions similarly employed by other women R&B performers of the 1950s as well.

¹²⁰ Laurie Stras, “White Face, Black Voice: Race, Gender, and Region in the Music of the Boswell Sisters,” *Journal of the Society for American Music*, 1:2 (2007), 207–255.

¹²¹ Annie J. Randall, *Dusty!: Queen of the Postmods* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 47.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ For an example of gospel vocal performance in compound-duple time featuring melismatic vocals which Otilie Patterson most certainly experienced first hand see Sister Rosetta Tharpe’s performance of “Peace in the Valley” with the Chris Barber band recorded in 1957, available on the Historical Concerts album *Chris Barber's Jazz Band 1957 (feat. Sister Rosetta Tharpe)* [available online at <https://itun.es/us/g1P7m>].

Bad Spell Blues

The “side A, track 1” selection on *R&B with Otilie*, “Bad Spell Blues” appears to be a song in which Patterson took a particular degree of satisfaction. Of the nine seemingly original songs and the six poems in her notebook, only “Bad Spell” bears any kind of composer credit. Unlike the other works, “Bad Spell” proudly displays “ME.” at the top of the page. Given the lack of attribution on other lyric sheets, this acknowledgement begs to be interpreted as an indication that Patterson looked to project herself through this composition and subsequent performance.

Wednesday, FEBRUARY 6th, 1952.

KEY C.Bad Spell Blues.

ME.

- (1) I believe somebody put a spell on me,
 I believe somebody put a spell on me,
 For I'm young + good looking,
 But my baby won't mess with me

BREAK: ——— (So can't you see)

- (2) // That's why I'm goin to some gypsy. //
 She'll tell me what I want to know //
 I'll ~~cross~~ cross her palm with silver,
 I'll even cross her palm with gold

BREAK: ——— (Whatever she can hold)

- (3) // For I know she's goin to tell me //
 The way that I can fix my man, //
 And if that woman don't help me,
 I'll find another one who can

BREAK: ——— (And ~~here's~~ my plan)

- (4) // I'm goin to make you new come running //
 And beggin for me round my door,
~~But~~ if my man don't suit me

BREAKS { I'll settle down
 ... Oh settle down,
 I'll settle down
 ... with 3 or four.

Straight Through

Figure 3.6 – “Bad Spell Blues” Lyrics and Performance Notes

From the song's opening *fortissimo* brass riff underneath a Little Walter-esque trill played on clarinet, "Bad Spell" announces itself as indebted to the Chicago R&B idiom.

Example 3.4 – "Bad Spell Blues" Opening Riff (Concert Pitch)

The musical score is for the opening riff of "Bad Spell Blues" in 12/8 time, spanning four measures. The instruments and their parts are as follows:

- Clarinet:** Plays a trill in the first measure (*ff*), followed by a sustained note in the second measure (*f*), and then rests in the third and fourth measures (*mp*).
- Trumpet:** Plays a melodic line in the first measure (*ff*), followed by a sustained note in the second measure (*mf*), and then rests in the third and fourth measures (*mp*).
- Trombone:** Plays a melodic line in the first measure (*ff*), followed by a sustained note in the second measure (*mf*), and then rests in the third and fourth measures (*mp*).
- Banjo:** Plays a simple accompaniment pattern in the first measure (*f*), followed by a sustained note in the second measure (*mf*), and then rests in the third and fourth measures.
- Double Bass:** Plays a simple accompaniment pattern in the first measure (*f*), followed by a sustained note in the second measure (*mf*), and then rests in the third and fourth measures (*mp*).
- Drum Set:** Plays a simple accompaniment pattern in the first measure (*f*), followed by a sustained note in the second measure (*mf*), and then rests in the third and fourth measures (*mp*).

Over the course of the four repetitions of the introductory riff transcribed above, the track's dynamic recedes to a *mezzo piano* before settling into a simple backing of drums, bass and banjo behind Patterson's first verse. This accompaniment consists of a persistent bass drum-snare backbeat, bass pedal-tone quarter notes, and three eighth-notes-to-the-beat comping from the banjo that confirms the 12/8 meter and outlines the 12-bar blues form of "Bad Spell." The horns return for the second and third verses after sitting out for the introductory stanza, performing only a subdued, unison version of the opening riff behind a slightly intensified rhythm section groove in which the bass folds in the occasional eighth-note fill. Only in verse four does the

accompaniment return to the dynamic level and intensity found in the opening figure. Even then, however, it is devoid of improvisational responses of any kind. As Patterson indicated with the “straight through” direction at the bottom of her lyric sheet, she intended for “Bad Spell Blues” to be played without any of the instrumental solo responses so common in the trad jazz idiom. This strategy of withholding the spotlight from her male accompanists—also employed in Patterson’s recording of “Me and My Chauffer” discussed above—allowed Patterson to foreground the words she composed for this song.¹²⁴

Lyrically, the song opens with Patterson’s suspicion that someone has put a spell on her. She then laments that, despite her obvious qualities, she is unable to attract the affections of the opposite sex. As a voodoo curse appears to be the cause of her troubles, she sets out to find a gypsy woman who will not only break the spell, but also imbue her with the power to have men come “begging ‘round her door.” “Bad Spell” closes with Patterson exclaiming that if she can’t get the man she wants, she’ll “settle down with three or four”; a gesture that seems to surpass even the “empowered” sexual subjectivity she expressed in her covers.¹²⁵

While many blues singers evoke voodoo, gypsy magic and mojo hands, no artist was more closely associated with such themes as Muddy Waters. It would appear that throughout “Bad Spell,” almost on a verse by verse basis, Patterson is making direct reference to Muddy Waters songs she not only heard him perform, but was known to sing herself. “I’m young and good looking, but my baby won’t mess with me,” for example, could very easily be a reinvention of “I got my mojo working, but it just don’t work on you.” “I’m going to some gypsy, she’ll tell

¹²⁴ This arrangement also contrasts with the approach found on “Tell Me Why” in which the more gender-conforming lyrics are accompanied by very active collective improvisation from clarinet, trumpet and trombone.

¹²⁵ Patterson’s vocal performance on “Bad Spell” is perhaps even more melismatic than on “Tell Me Why,” particularly in the first verse. She even alludes to this fact in her lyric sheet with ellipses following the word “believe”; a word she extends, through melisma and the interjection of “oh yeah,” over ten pitches.

me the way that I can fix those men,” tracks nicely with “I’m going down to New Orleans, get me a mojo hand, I’m gonna show all you good-looking women, just how to treat your man.” Furthermore, “I’m goin’ to make you men come running, and begging round my door,” echoes “I’m gonna make you girls, lead me by my hand, then the world will know, I’m the hoochie coochie man.” Although “Bad Spell” builds upon established women’s blues models in its assertive tone and expressive vocal performance, Patterson moves beyond these prototypes in a striking manner here. By adopting the sonic and lyric conventions of Muddy Waters, she inverts the typically masculinist lyrical tropes of Chicago blues into feminist statements.

* * *

In this chapter I argue that, through covering/emulating black women’s blues and by inverting the typically masculinist lyrical tropes of Chicago blues into feminine statements, Otilie Patterson’s performance and recording career challenges the assumptions that 1) revivalists were only concerned with “folk” forms of the blues and 2) that the blues revival was exclusively motivated by the appropriation and vicarious expression of African-American hyper-masculinity. *R&B with Otilie*, an album which includes a female singer performing a broad assortment of rhythm and blues numbers, undermines many of these standard tenants of the accepted British R&B revival narrative. It would be noteworthy enough if it were merely the first concerted effort to revive and rework rhythm and blues. That it contains a woman vicariously exploring assertive sexuality and alternative identities from both a masculine and feminine perspective—in the re-creation of black women’s blues and her own original compositions alike—challenges the notion that British blues was, from its point of origin, exclusively an appropriation of and articulation to

an idealized black masculinity by white men. Finally, as the first documented *original* British R&B from Britain's foremost blues performer of the day, it stands as a pivotal, if underappreciated landmark in the history of British R&B.

4 - GOT MY MOJO WORKING: MUDDY WATERS & THE LONDON SCENE

On June 13, 1962, *Jazz News* published Britain's first-ever ranking of the nation's blues artists. The magazine's 1962 British Poll Results featured, for the first time in any popular assessment of UK musicians, categories titled "Blues Singer" and "Blues Instrumentalist."¹ Setting these apart from the rest of the twenty-four categories in the poll—"Trumpet," "Female Singer," "Small Group," etc.—these two were the only to specify a particular genre or style of performance. Many of the top vote getters in these blues lists were, not surprisingly, leading names in trad jazz. Otilie Patterson was voted the best blues signer by an almost two-to-one margin over George Melly, for example, while Chris Barber and his trumpeter Pat Halcox were among the top blues instrumentalists. That names like Alexis Korner, Cyril Davies and Long John Baldry featured prominently among the more well-known traddlers was less expected for mid-1962.²

¹ "1962 British Poll Results," *Jazz News*, June 13, 1962, 8-9. Along with the common categories found in jazz polls at the time: small group, big band, trumpet, clarinet, arranger, etc.

² Alexis Korner was the undisputed winner in the instrumental category and Baldry finished (a quite distant) third behind vocalists Patterson and Melly. For his part, Cyril Davies finished sixth in the blues vocalist poll, third in blues instrumental and fifth in "Miscellaneous" for his harmonica playing.

Table 4.1 – Blues Categories in the *Jazz News* 1962 British Poll Results³

Blues Singer	[Votes]	Blues Instrumentalists	[Votes]
1. OTTILIE PATTERSON	803	1. ALEXIS KORNER	981
2. George Melly	416	2. Sandy Brown	493
3. Long John Baldry	165	3. Cyril Davies	356
4. Beryl Bryden	66	4. Long John Baldry	214
5. Cleo Laine	63	5. Chris Barber	105
6. Cyril Davies	37	6. Humphrey Lyttelton	97
7. Jeannie Lambe	28	7. Pat Halcox	35
8. Sandy Brown	22	8. Ian Wheeler	24
9. Johnny Silvo	17	9. Shake Keane	19
10. Patti Clarke	15	10. Stan Greig	17

Reflecting on the poll's outcome later in the issue, *Jazz News* editor Peter Clayton admitted that, while "British blues is always a dodgy subject," it was considered "the most fascinating part of jazz to many of us."⁴ What makes this poll particularly unusual is that up to this point, "British blues" was overwhelmingly performed and understood as an extension of the traditional jazz scene; in most instances an interval act diversion included in club dates to demonstrate the more "primitive" roots of jazz and/or to give horn players a brief break.⁵ Otilie Patterson's unquestioned dominance of the "trad" vocal field indicates that the blues was just as often considered but one of many elements that constituted revivalists' broad definition of jazz. As performed in the UK, rhythm and blues in particular was almost never considered an entity of its own.⁶ This situation would only begin to change when Blues Incorporated—Britain's first dedicated R&B band featuring the trio of Alexis Korner, Cyril Davies and Long John Baldry – launched in earnest during the spring of 1962. As *Jazz News*' British Poll Results indicate, the

³ Peter Clayton, "1962 British Poll Results," *Jazz News*, June 13, 1962. Clayton further offered that Cyril Davies really should have ranked substantially higher. "Viewed purely as a blues singer," Clayton notes, "[Davies] ought to be well above [jazz vocalist] Cleo Laine" who finished in the number five spot in the blues singer poll.

⁴ Peter Clayton, "British Polls –an afterthought," *Jazz News*, June 13, 1962, 17.

⁵ See chapter 2 for a discussion of the role of blues in skiffle/breakdown groups in the 1950s.

⁶ The *R&B with Otilie* album in the previous chapter stands as one of the few exceptions to this rule.

band's live performances almost immediately began to inform the London jazz scene's ideas about what British blues could, and perhaps should sound like.

This chapter sketches the emergence of the British rhythm and blues scene as detailed in the pages of London's major popular music and jazz periodicals. The discourse contained within these publications offers a tableau of a local scene in which R&B played multiple roles for its participants. It was at once music for dancing and attentive listening—music that was capable of simultaneously eliciting visceral, cerebral and emotional responses. But what needs (real or imaginary) did this music meet? How and why did a group of (mostly white, British) people assemble around a group of (mostly African-American) musical texts in sufficient numbers and with sufficient enthusiasm to foster a musical movement? Part of arriving at answers to these lines of inquiry requires that attention be paid not only to historical details about how the scene formed, expressed itself and was discussed in the press, but also what it sounded like. In this particularly complex transatlantic phenomenon, where the articulation to R&B by white Londoners functions in part as an act of revival and in part as contemporaneous co-option of popular musical currency, understanding what sounds and texts could be considered constitutive of the nascent genre “British R&B” is imperative. The variety of approaches employed by musicians and fans to decide what material should be valued and emulated will be discussed at length below.

Although I hope to have demonstrated in the previous chapter that *Blues Book vol. 1: Rhythm and Blues with Otilie Patterson* deserves to be repositioned within the history of British R&B, *R&B with Otilie* is also notable for what it didn't achieve and didn't represent. While this album was a bold recording experiment in new sounds and a personal essay exploring the expressive possibilities of rhythm and blues, what it failed to do in an immediate sense was

embody the interests and tastes of an emerging musical community.⁷ In contrast, Blues Incorporated's *R&B from the Marquee* documented the London R&B scene as it was taking shape. The songs Blues Incorporated recorded reflect, all evidence suggests, the type of music the band was performing live over the course of 1962 for ever-growing audiences. In a rather telling indication of what incarnations of R&B were valued by Korner, Davies and their fans at this liminal moment, four of the twelve tracks on *R&B from the Marquee* were covers of Muddy Waters records.⁸

While he was by no means the only model for British rhythm and blues enthusiasts, Muddy Waters—or at least his voice on record, his musical aesthetic and his historical position as iterable model of black identity for white Britons—served as a central inspiration for the British rhythm and blues scene that would emerge from within the jazz clubs of London between early 1962 and mid-1963. The reproduction and (*re*)presentation of performance practices (form, instrumentation, vocal technique, etc.) found in Waters' records—much less the songs themselves—would constitute the aesthetic foundation of much of the British R&B to follow. As such, this chapter addresses the position occupied by Muddy Waters and, in particular, his most well-known and most often-reproduced recording, “Got My Mojo Working.”⁹ While “Mojo's” omnipresence in the London R&B scene has been widely acknowledged, the scholarly and popular literature on the R&B/blues boom has very little to say about how British revivalists

⁷ I have and will argue that the album and Patterson's performances of R&B at the Marquee club set this possibility in motion and facilitated the community that was to follow.

⁸ The balance of the album's tracks is made up of Jimmy Witherspoon's “Rain is Such a Lonesome Sound” and Leroy Carr's “How Long, How Long Blues” sung by Long John Baldry; three instrumentals composed by Korner; an instrumental by Davies; “Keep Your Hand's Off” composed and sung by Davies; and “I Thought I Heard That Train Whistle Blow,” written and sung by Baldry.

⁹ There appears to be a lack of consensus about whether this song title should begin with “I've,” “I” or is just “Got my Mojo Working.” It is listed on the original 1956 Waters single as “Got my Mojo Working” and on a 1960 live album as “I've Got my Mojo Working.” Subsequent covers/revivals are just as inconsistent in name.

came to know the song, who performed it or how it was performed. Through close readings of multiple performances of this “rhythm and blues national anthem,” I will address the sonic and performative traces of Muddy Waters’ style in the cultural production of early British R&B to address how these expressive devices were used to meet the needs of this nascent scene.¹⁰ In addition to serving as a historicist scene study and a close reading of multiple versions of “Got My Mojo Working,” this chapter traces a genealogy of the short-lived genre of British R&B prior to its emergence into the broader British, and later international, realm of popular commodification and mediation. As David Brackett notes, casting the formation of genre in terms of genealogy allows for an emphasis on “*how* a particular idea of a category emerges and stabilizes momentarily (if at all) in the course of being accepted across a range of discourses and institutions.”¹¹

THE LONDON SCENE EMERGES¹²

It was from within the trad jazz scene that British R&B materialized. As detailed in the previous chapter, the first extended attempts to reproduce rhythm and blues in London featured Otilie Patterson. At the Marquee Club, in the wake of the *R&B with Otilie* sessions, Patterson and the Barber band performed interval sets presenting this musical style in between their usual trad fare. It was during these performances, as an invitee of Chris Barber and as supporting musician for Patterson, that Alexis Korner—the musician often credited as the Father of British Blues—was

¹⁰ “Got my Mojo Working” is referred to as a “national anthem” in many incidences. For one contemporaneous example, see Bob Dawbarn, “A Massive Swing Toward R&B,” *Melody Maker*, April 18, 1964, 8-9.

¹¹ David Brackett, *Categorizing Sound* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 6.

¹² Aspects of this historical moment are addressed in varying levels of detail and accuracy in Tony Bacon, *London Live* (San Francisco: Balafon, 1999), 46-77; Roberta Freund Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues: The Transmission and Reception of American Blues Style in the United Kingdom* (Aldershot, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 129-184; Bob Brunning, *Blues in Britain: The History 1950s to Present* (London: Blandford, 1995) 12-94; and other sources.

first afforded the opportunity to play in the Chicago-style R&B before a large audience.

Beginning in the summer of 1961, Korner regularly sat in with the Barber band at the Marquee “so, for three or four numbers an evening, a real R and B sound ha[d] been produced.”¹³ Not quite a year later Korner was joined by harmonica player Cyril Davies, making their first documented appearance together at the Marquee with the Barber band on April 6, 1962.¹⁴ The following month, the Marquee’s newsletter *Jazz Today* announced that Thursday nights at the club would be given over to a “new sound... at least... new on the British scene...Rhythm and Blues, the type of R and B you may know from the exciting Muddy Waters records.” “Britain’s **only** Rhythm and Blues group,” with Korner and Davies at the helm, promised attendees a night of “gutty, swinging music.” From May until the end of the year, Korner, Davies and the loose confederation of London musicians known as Blues Incorporated were a regular feature of the club’s weekly lineup.

Korner and Davies had a long history of collaborating on blues-oriented projects dating back to at least the mid-1950s. Their first documented partnership was in an outfit named Beryl Bryden’s Backroom Skiffle, a group that recorded four sides for Decca in late 1956.¹⁵ Although this was the first time they worked together, the two had been playing independently in various trad outfits prior to this moment: Korner with Ken Colyer’s Skiffle Group following the Barber-Colyer split in mid-1954; and Davies with Steve Lane’s Southern Stompers. Despite Korner and Davies’ formative experiences in the early skiffle scene, after Lonnie Donegan’s “Rock Island

¹³ *Jazz Today: Marquee Club Newsletter* (vol 10, no 5), May 1962. Barber and Korner’s professional relationship dates back to as early as 1949 when the pair played trad jazz and “race music” together.

¹⁴ Billed as “Alexis Korner, Cyril Davies, etc.” on April 6th and again on April 11th. *Jazz Today: Marquee Club Newsletter* (vol 10, no 4), April 1962. Just one day after this initial Marquee engagement, Korner introduced Mick Jagger to Brian Jones, the nucleus of the early Rollin’ Stones at the Ealing Club.

¹⁵ The Beryl Bryden’s Backroom Skiffle sides were “Kanas City Blues” b/w “Casey Jones” released as a single (Decca FJ 10823), “This Train” and “Rock Me” (unissued). Liner notes, *Preachin’ the Blues: the Cyril Davies Memorial Album* (CD, Great Voices of the Century [GVC2040] 2014).

Line” ignited a national craze, they became disillusioned with the increasingly-commercialized genre. On September 6, 1956 the pair debuted their own monthly “Skiffle and Blues” club sessions in an upstairs room above Soho’s Roundhouse pub as a way to have a space where they could emphasize the blues roots of the skiffle phenomenon.¹⁶ As of February 23, 1957, they dropped the designation “skiffle” entirely, renaming the organization the “blues and barrelhouse club.”¹⁷ The Korner and Davies LP *Blues from the Roundhouse*, issued on the boutique jazz/folk label 77 Records, documented the type of music the club was creating at the time.¹⁸

Recorded on February 13, 1957 in the very room where the club gathered, *Blues from the Roundhouse* contains the folk-oriented sounds of acoustic 12-string guitars, mandolins, washboards and harmonicas. Of the eight songs performed on the album, five are closely associated with Leadbelly, Davies’ primary inspiration at the time.¹⁹ As the liner notes for this record indicate, the Roundhouse was the “one place in Central London where blues are sung regularly and looked upon as an end in themselves,” rather than as an offshoot of or inspiration for traditional jazz/skiffle.²⁰ The liner notes go on to paint the scene for potential buyers of the album not familiar with the club: “on the first floor of a purple-brick Victorian public-house... in a room decorated with stags’ antlers and sentimental oleographs, Negro blues and spirituals soar

¹⁶ “Jazz Club Calendar,” *Melody Maker*, September 1, 1956, 12.

¹⁷ “Jazz Club Calendar,” *Melody Maker*, February 23, 1957, 16. The prior week still lists the Roundhouse sessions as “Blues and Skiffle.” The Blues and Barrelhouse Club met twice a week on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

¹⁸ This label was run by record storeowner Dave Dobell, who reportedly only pressed 99 copies of each record he made in order to avoid paying fees/taxes.

¹⁹ Three compositions credited to Huddie Ledbetter (“Leaving Blues,” “Alberta” and “Good Morning”) and two “traditional” songs (“Skip to my Lou” and “Ella Speed”). They would record two additional folk blues EPs for the Tempo label in 1957 and 1958 respectively as “Alexis Korner’s Skiffle Group” and as “Alexis Korner’s Blues Incorporated” including four additional tunes credited to Leadbelly. See <http://www.cyrildavies.com/LPandEP.html> for more about these records.

²⁰ While this statement is factually accurate, it discounts the work of Otilie Patterson and other trad jazz blues singers in a way that I think is a disservice to their contributions (see chapter 3).

above the cigarette-smoke.”²¹ The music on the record and at the club, we are informed, was performed primarily by amateurs—civil servants, printers and auto body mechanics by trade—who have “learnt to play Negro blues not merely with competence but also with sympathy and understanding.” A justification for the incongruity between setting and song is addressed in the closing paragraph of the album notes, returning again to this idea of “sympathy”:

At first sight the world which these songs inhabit seems far removed from the busy streets of Soho, yet its experiences and emotions are tangible and familiar. Admiring the tradition of Negro folk-song and recognizing the universality of its themes, these young British musicians seek with sympathy and humility to re-create many of those songs. In doing so they hope to achieve not only authenticity of feeling but to use the idiom in a personal way.

As this above demonstrates, the “universality” of generic themes, particularly relatable “emotions,” was considered an important bridge that permitted the re-creation of “Negro blues” historically and culturally removed from its source. This justification is followed in the liner notes by an exclamation of surprised support from Big Bill who visited the Roundhouse in early 1957: “Broonzy shook his head in surprise: [*sic*] ‘Man, but I like that!’ he cried.” In other words, Broonzy—one of the most ardent espousers of the rhetorical stance that the blues comes only from Southern, rural black musicians—seemed to appreciate British blues despite his own oft-repeated assertion that the blues could only be sung properly by people whose lived experiences were far removed from late-1950s London.

The following year, while still performing Leadbelly and Broonzy-inspired “folk” blues at the Roundhouse on a weekly basis, Alexis Korner was first introduced to Muddy Waters. It appears that, as an occasional contributor to the popular music and jazz press, Korner was afforded an opportunity to meet Waters during a press event tied to the October 1958 Barber-

²¹These liner notes are reproduced online at <http://www.cyrildavies.com/77LP2.html>, accessed October 24, 2016.

Waters tour. As Tony Standish recounted the meeting for *Jazz Journal*, when Waters heard that Korner was a guitarist he handed his Fender Telecaster to the British blues enthusiast and asked him to “play some for us man.”²² Sufficiently impressed with Korner’s ability, the Chicago singer responded by exclaiming: “Ahah... [Big] Bill learned you that.” Less than a week later Waters and his pianist Otis Spann performed an “unofficial” set at the Roundhouse.²³ Standish detailed the experience as follows:

The upstairs room at the roundhouse was hot, and filled to capacity with cigarette smoke and people... We arrived to the strains of Cyril [Davies]’s inevitable “Ella Speed.”... About nine o’clock Muddy and Otis were ushered in.... Muddy had his Fender along, Otis sat at the piano and Alex supported on that particular, steel-bodied guitar of his. Deeply moved from the first note, I forgot to list the tunes but remembered shouted, rocking versions of “Nineteen Years Old”, “Oo-ee” and “Turn Your Lamp Down.” After several tunes from Muddy, Beryl Bryden bounced in and romped expertly through a fast blues accompanied by Alex and Otis.... Muddy mopped his perspiring brow and laid aside his guitar. And suddenly there was another Muddy, a Muddy who sang as he must for his own people, in another world than ours.... He sang accompanied by Alex and Otis, and he sang with his whole body—gyrating, twisting, shouting—preaching the blues chorus upon hypnotic chorus.... “Mannish Boy” was the song and Muddy attacked it with almost frightening fervor.

As Standish describes this evening, Muddy Waters’ performance at the Roundhouse was a transformational event that bordered on the transcendent. Despite this exposure to such a profound musical force, *Melody Maker*’s “Focus on Folk” column indicates that Korner and Davies continued to perform exclusively in the folk/country blues milieu for the next three years. It was only following Korner’s experiences backing Otilie Patterson’s R&B interval sets at the Marquee in mid-1961 that the pair turned their attention to rhythm and blues. In the three-month period between December 1961 and February 1962, Korner and Davies formed Blues Incorporated to focus on a Muddy Waters-inspired, Chicago R&B sound; appearing in support of

²² Tony Standish, “Muddy Waters in London,” *Jazz Journal* (12/1), January 1959, 2-4.

²³ As per the terms of their contract, Waters and Spann were only permitted to play the Leeds Jazz Festival and the National Jazz Federation concerts with the Barber band.

Acker Bilk's trad jazz band, as an interval band for Barber at the Marquee and in an audition for BBC radio.²⁴ On March 17, 1962 Alexis Korner and Cyril Davies opened a rhythm and blues club of their own in the London suburb of Ealing, the first devoted R&B club of its kind. A month later the Blues and Barrelhouse club meetings were halted. A few weeks after that Blues Incorporated became the Marquee's regular Thursday night attraction.²⁵

Blues Incorporated's May 6th Marquee Club debut was reviewed by former *6-5 Special* and *Oh, Boy!* television producer/host Jack Good for the pop-oriented music weekly *Disc*.²⁶ Good portrayed the evening's performers and spectators alike in rather primitivized, ritualistic terms. "On the floor there was a crowd of twisters in a frenzy of activity," he notes of the audience, "mesmerizing each other by the piston-rod motion of their arms and the swing of their hips." The band was "gone to the world... seven private mystical raptures," who collectively created "one solid chunk of bouncing blues." Speaking of the individual musicians, Good offered that Korner "bounced back and forth so vigorously, stamping on the floor"; Baldry, "that slim pillar of bohemian society," sounded like "a bull-throated coloured blues shouter"; whilst Davies "in white shirtsleeves, looking very unjazzy... played as if in a trance." Despite this very colorful depiction of the evening, Good spent little-to-no time discussing the music created by the band.

²⁴ The BBC audition is mentioned at <http://www.cyrildavies.com/bluesinc.html>, accessed October 24, 2016.

²⁵ "Folk Forum," *Melody Maker*, April 21, 1962, 12. "Blues and Barrelhouse... Closing down until September. Many thanks to everyone." It would appear that the success of their R&B activities precluded Korner and Davies from reopening the Blues and Barrelhouse club. Bob Brunning suggests that the club was kicked out of the Roundhouse pub for using amplification (Brunning, *Blues in Britain*, 13). I haven't seen any evidence to that effect. It seems, from reviewing club listings and press reports, that Davies and Korner transitioned rather smoothly into a different milieu performed in different locations. The fact that the Blues and Barrelhouse evenings were listed in the "Folk Forum" section of the Club Diary page suggests that they were still playing acoustic, "folk" blues in this setting.

²⁶ Jack Good, "R and B Night was Fantastic," *Disc*, May 12, 1962, 5. Good would go on to create and host the American program *Shindig* in 1965.

Beyond the article's title and the occasional employment of the word "blues," readers are left to conjure for themselves just what sounds created such a kinetic scene.

As *Melody Maker's* Max Jones suggested in late August, the success of Blues Incorporated's "R&B Nights" could be at least partially attributed to the band's appeal to the existing "jazz-for-dancing" audience.²⁷ Recognition of this audience is of no small importance. Although many British teens developed an infatuation with rock 'n' roll starting in 1956, it was primarily through film, television and package theater tours rather than in a club environment that this music was accessible.²⁸ Instead, the kind of all-night, rave-up dance club events that would later turn to R&B and beat for their soundtracks primarily featured trad jazz.²⁹ Interviewed by Jones, Korner commented on the jazz-first-yet-diverse crowd that the band was attracting: "the audience we get is trad fans, modern fans, beat fans, R&B fans and folk-music fans and [come from] most age groups," he observed. "All of them dance... whatever else we try do, we are a dance band. We WANT to play for dancing." Again, the physicality of rhythm and blues performance is noted by Jones. "Their wild music seems even better," Jones comments, "when one can see the frantic musicians and singers doing a workout on the numbers." Questioned whether his move from trad and country blues to R&B could be considered commercially motivated, Korner responded in the following manner:

Yes, I'm going commercial in [the sense that] Blind Lemon was commercial, that Muddy Waters IS commercial, I think Chuck Berry is commercial. But it has not been necessary to make commercial concessions in order to make a living. We are lucky in [this] because

²⁷ Max Jones, "R&B Boom Hits London Clubs," *Melody Maker*, August 25th, 1962, 8-9.

²⁸ Interest in rock 'n' roll was reportedly initiated through screenings of the film *Blackboard Jungle*. One London club, Club Haley, did focus exclusively on rock 'n' roll during the late 1950s.

²⁹ This was not exclusively the case, but certainly the dominant trend. In other scenes, Liverpool obviously, "beat" (or proto-beat) music was a common club music as early as 1960. Eric Burdon was working in Newcastle clubs in a Count Basie-inspired big band by late 1962.

the public we play for [is] without apparent reservations, *so long as we produce a strong beat for dancing*.³⁰

Performance opportunities expanded for Blues Incorporated (BI) quickly after their debut at the Marquee. In late July, Korner and company performed at the annual National Jazz Festival held in Richmond.³¹ Blues Incorporated's first broadcast opportunity would also come from within the jazz infrastructure when, on Thursday, July 12, 1962, the band appeared on BBC radio's "Jazz Club" program. While the broadcast itself provided invaluable source of exposure for the burgeoning genre, it also created a different kind of opportunity for British R&B. With BI otherwise occupied on the Thursday night of the BBC broadcast, the newly-formed "Mick Jagger and the Rollin' Stones" along with "Long John Baldry's Kansas City Blue Boys" filled in for the band at the Marquee that week.³² While other R&B bands were almost certainly taking shape by this point, the announcement that the Stones and the Baldry group would be performing at the Marquee the night of July 12th was the first mention in the press of any R&B group other than Blues Incorporated.

In early November, the newly relaunched *Jazz News and Review* initiated a regular "Rhythm & blues column" to chronicle the growing R&B activity in the clubs of London's Soho district and beyond.³³ In its debut, the column functioned as a sort of roundup of the genre's

³⁰ Emphasis added. Note that the available copy of this article, via Proquest database, cuts off the text in the fold of the pages so that the words in brackets are my best guess.

³¹ Sunday, July 29, 1962. Advance write-ups of the festival indicate that a crowd of 10,000 was anticipated over the course of the weekend. This might have been a direct result of the band being a Marquee act. The Marquee was run by the National Jazz Federation who also organized the festival. The NJF apparently was also the force behind *Jazz News*, one of Blues Incorporated/R&B's early champions in the press. "Extra Bands for Richmond," *Jazz News*, July 11, 1962, 3; and "JAZZ AT RICHMOND," *The Stage and Television Today*, July 12, 1962, 3.

³² As noted in the *Jazz News* club diary (*Jazz News*, July 11, 1962, 3, 15).

³³ "Rhythm & Blues Column," *Jazz News and Review*, November 7, 1962, 15. This column is often uncredited although at times features a byline from the National Jazz Federation's Bill Carey. It was predated by a short-lived *Record & Show Mirror* column of the same name that ran between July and

current participants and where in London these groups could be heard. Included among the names mentioned in the article were seasoned trad jazzers trying on the sound for size as well as youthful upstarts like the aforementioned Mick Jagger and the Rollin' Stones. Pride of place in the column is given to Blues Incorporated's Thursday nights at the Marquee which were reportedly drawing crowds upwards of 700 each week by this time.³⁴ Two weeks later the R&B Column noted that rhythm and blues would soon be performed every day of the week in London clubs from the soon-to-be eight groups that now specialized in the genre.³⁵ Among the eight would be the newly formed Cyril Davies Group; the result of a falling out between Korner and Davies in early November over disagreements about what musical directions Blues Incorporated should pursue.³⁶

Defining "R&B"

In *Melody Maker's* first issue of 1963, Chris Roberts posed the question: Is British rhythm and blues "Trend or Tripe?" The query was particularly relevant at this moment as the trad jazz boom was showing signs of decline, a point raised by countless editorials, articles and letters in the music press in late 1962. Trad, the pop music weeklies pointed out, was starting to struggle for marketshare in the British musical economy. In the early months of 1963—due in part to these movements' shared roots in a pervading post-war pattern of revivalism in the British jazz

October 1961. The *Record Mirror* column, however, almost exclusively discussed American R&B recordings.

³⁴ The November 21st R&B Column states that the Thursday Marquee sessions play to capacity crowds, with the club turning people away starting around 10pm. For perspective, it is worth noting that early British R&B impresario and original Rolling Stones manager Giorgio Gomelsky suggested that around 1960 there were perhaps as little as forty people in all of London who were "seriously interested in authentic blues," although he is unclear about how many of these would consider R&B as an "authentic" form (Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues*, 119).

³⁵ "R&B," *Jazz News and Review*, November 21, 1962, 14.

³⁶ These differing approaches will be discussed shortly.

community—R&B quickly began replacing the social position trad had occupied. Furthermore, as noted above, it was emerging in the very same spaces that trad was performed; a point reinforced by perusing the weekly jazz club listings of *Melody Maker* or *Jazz News and Review* from this period.³⁷

Although the Marquee was the indisputable epicenter for the movement, the Flamingo club also developed into an R&B hotspot beginning in 1963. Starting the first week in January, Alexis Korner's Blues Incorporated moved to the Flamingo, performing Thursday and Sunday nights as well as the Friday night "All-Nighter" session at the same address, which was slotted to run from 12-5 am.³⁸ Recent R&B converts Georgie Fame and the Blue Flames alternated sets with Korner's band on Friday nights at the club in addition to their Sunday afternoon slot.³⁹ Following Korner's Marquee departure, the Cyril Davies All-Stars took over the club's Thursday "R&B Night," often with the support of the Rollin' Stones—who also played Monday nights at the Flamingo. In addition to the Marquee and the Flamingo, spaces like Klook's Kleek, the Piccadilly, the Top Ten, the Richmond Station Hotel (The Crawdaddy), the Red Lion Sutton, the Railway Club and the Dankworth Club were regularly featuring the "new sound" of R&B as performed by Davies, the Stones and a small host of other up-and-coming R&B groups. A March 30th announcement in *Melody Maker* noted that even the modernist club Ronnie Scott's was, as of that week, also getting in on the act.

Not all of these early R&B venues were former/current jazz havens, however. As noted above, the Ealing Club was founded exclusively for the presentation of R&B. A number of the

³⁷ See for example *Melody Maker*, January 5, 1963 which announces, with the debut of Blues Incorporated's regular Sunday night at the Flamingo, the beginning of "the Rhythm and Blues Era, 1963 onwards."

³⁸ Alex Korner Shifts HQ," *Jazz News and Review*, December 27, 1962, 10-11. Korner signed an exclusive contract with the Flamingo.

³⁹ Georgie Fame and his three-year residency at the Flamingo Club is discussed in detail in the following chapter.

other clubs that formed in response to the nascent rhythm and blues boom viewed the genre as more closely related to rock 'n' roll and the commercially successful “twist” and “beat” crazes of 1962. Cyril Davies’ four weekly residencies at London venues during January 1963 illustrate this point: On Tuesday nights Davies played the strictly R&B-oriented Railway Hotel; Wednesdays and Thursdays were at the jazz clubs the Piccadilly (Wednesdays) and the Marquee (Thursdays); and Davies’ Friday nights were at the Top Ten, a venue with anything but a purist R&B policy.⁴⁰



Figure 4.1 – Top Ten Club advertisement, *Melody Maker*, January 5, 1963⁴¹

⁴⁰ Davies’ drummer, Carlo Little, kept a log of gigs and the amount he got paid during this time. Little was best compensated for Marquee gigs, as much as 20 GBP per gig by July (just short of 300 GBP in 2016). On back-to-back dates in January for example, Little earned 13 shillings (20 shillings = pound) for a Wednesday night performance at the Piccadilly and 12 pounds, 10 shillings at the Marquee the following evening. <http://carlollittle.wixsite.com/carlollittle/gigography-1963>, accessed December 13, 2016.

⁴¹ *Melody Maker*, January 5, 1963, 13. An announcement that accompanied this ad in the January 5, 1963 *MM* indicated that the Top Ten Club was aimed as “young pop music enthusiasts,” with their Friday’s dedicated to R&B and the rest of the weekend “devoted to presenting the best up-and-coming rock bands.”

As this suggests, no monolithic idea of what should be contained within the category of “R&B” existed in early 1963; nor what, appropriately, could stand adjacent to it, for that matter. There was at best a rough consensus about what sources of American R&B were worthy of reproduction and about what British R&B should sound like in the London scene. Each of the biggest-drawing R&B acts of the period exemplified unique, if intersecting, conceptions of R&B drawn from a broad field of possibilities.⁴² The Rolling Stones, for example, with their ready incorporation of Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley, (*re*)presented a Chicago/Chess Records brand of rhythm and blues inflected with a touch of rock ‘n’ roll influence. For his part, Georgie Fame seemed to eschew the Chicago approach for a mix that incorporated elements from Ray Charles, Motown, soul jazz and the recently introduced sounds of Jamaican popular music. Following their split at the end of 1962, Alexis Korner and Cyril Davies presented very different notions of R&B; with Korner now steering toward a more modernist jazz sound which was frequently described as “Mingus-esque.”⁴³

Cyril Davies’ approach to rhythm and blues could be considered the most “traditional” of the early exponents of British R&B. As Davies noted in a pair of interviews with *New Record Mirror*’s Norman Jopling, his brand of “R&B just grew out of the blues.”⁴⁴ Davies is more explicit about his proclivities in a follow-up interview, stating that “Muddy Waters, of course, is my kind of blues. He’s about the only one who has the background enough to be a genuine and pure blues singer.”⁴⁵ He goes on to outline in some detail his relative disdain for Chuck Berry (“I

⁴² It is worth remembering that, with very rare exception, the music performed by British R&Bers in 1962-3 consisted of covers rather than original compositions. How an artist/group defined the boundaries of R&B could therefore be read in their choice of songs to reproduce.

⁴³ By this time, following the departure of Davies and Long John Baldry, Blues Incorporated’s lineup was made up exclusively of former modern players rather than those from the “earthy blues part of the jazz spectrum” (John Merrydown, “All Mod Cons,” *Jazz News*, November 14, 1962, 8).

⁴⁴ Norman Jopling, “The Soul-Beat Revival...,” *New Record Mirror (NRM)*, April 20, 1963, 7.

⁴⁵ Norman Jopling, “I’m Still Striving for my Sound,” *NRM*, June 22, 1963, 2.

don't rate Chuck as a rule."), Bo Diddley ("I just don't like Bo Diddley. He's been on the scene for eight years now and hasn't much to show for it.") and Jimmy Reed ("I don't like his singing, which I consider is out of tune [sic], his harmonica playing, and his guitar work. Which means I don't like Jimmy Reed."). As might be surmised from these positions, concerns about and claims toward authenticity were of great importance to Davies and to his fans. The caption

"Authenticity is his keynote" under his photo in the April interview makes as much clear.⁴⁶

Davies' success seems explicitly linked to this ideal. "The Marquee is probably one of the most successful clubs in London," Jopling informs his readers, "thanks to the authentic—and it is authentic—brand of R&B that's being played there.... Cyril, a purist, is probably the most authentic R&B harmonica player in England."⁴⁷ Questioned by Jopling if such a thing as a genuine British blues singer was even possible, Davies responded: "Why not? If you've been singing the blues long enough and in the right sort of way there's no reason whatsoever why you can't be authentic." Such questions about rhythm and blues were often the source of lively debate and served as ample fodder for the critical columns and letters to the editor sections of Britain's popular music and jazz press. Editorials penned by staff writers and musicians weighed in on what was or wasn't rhythm and blues, or to what degree a certain performer or composition could be considered "authentic" to the genre.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ An advertisement on the front cover of the same issue celebrates Pye-International's latest "Authentic R&B" singles, in which Davies' debut record "Country Line Special" is listed along with reissues from Bo Diddley, Howlin' Wolf and Sonny Boy Williamson.

⁴⁷ Jopling's opinion about Korner was quite the opposite: "[Korner]'s no purist, but he is regarded as having a purist sound by the up-and-coming young R & B men on the British scene." Norman Jopling, "The Story of the British Rhythm and Blues Riot-Raisers... The Wildest Men in the World..." *NRM*, Dec 15, 1962, 7.

⁴⁸ Each of these voices contributed to the construction of generic expectations. As Brackett (*Categorizing Sound*, 14) observed: "The 'audience member' of today may become the 'artist' of tomorrow [Mick Jagger from Blues Incorporated fan to bandleader]; the 'artist' of tomorrow may become the critic or music industry executive of the day after tomorrow [George Melly]."

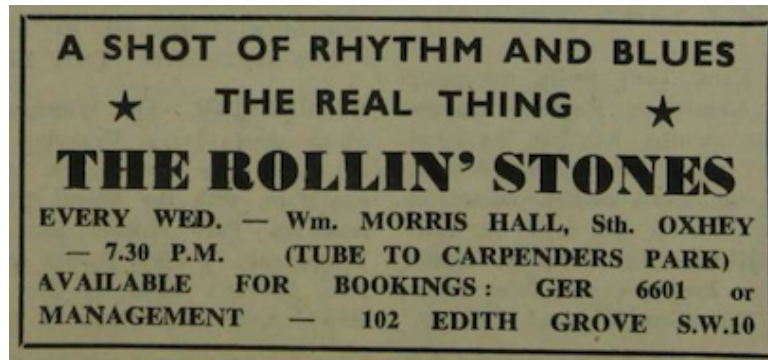


Figure 4.2 – Advertisement in *Jazz News*, November 14, 1962, 9.

Deliberations about what constituted “authentic” R&B raged well into 1964 in the pages of *Melody Maker* and *New Musical Express*; with local artists like the Rolling Stones and Long John Baldry as well as American singers Howlin’ Wolf and Muddy Waters central to the debates. A number of conflicting positions and arguments were forwarded by pundits, columnists and musicians, as well as in letters published in *Melody Maker*’s “Mailbag.” Many of these letters are, again, concerned with what types of rhythm and blues should be celebrated and emulated. The “Mailbag” from April 18, 1964 offers a representative example of these positions. The first letter in the section attempts to offer “some humble enlightenment” on the subject of R&B. Geoffrey Smith from Lancashire informs his fellow *Melody Maker* readers that there exists a sort of authenticity spectrum for rhythm and blues ranging from “Purist blues... whose crude yet sincere vocals contain some of the misery and dejection of the American Negro’s history”; to “Real” Rhythm and blues—think Muddy Waters and Howlin’ Wolf; to the commercial R&B of Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley; and finally to the “rock and pop” R&B of Fats Domino, Little Richard and Ray Charles.⁴⁹ This position is followed and countered by A.J.

⁴⁹ For an expanded visualization of this “authenticity spectrum” see Figure 1.1 in the introduction.

Beaver of London who decries “putting everything into compartments, proclaiming what is R&B and what is not.” “Don’t analyze it,” he concludes, “enjoy it.”⁵⁰

As becomes evident, definitions of the term R&B ranged from “the commercial music of the American Negro” to a very specific set of stylistic characteristics emanating from a specific time and place.⁵¹ While some of these conceptions placed R&B at odds with notions of a relatively coherent “blues continuum” (to borrow a term from LeRoi Jones), the most commonly held beliefs located rhythm and blues within just such an ideal. The jazz intelligentsia, critics and musicians claimed that R&B belonged within an unbroken blues tradition. Disagreements arose around just how far the boundaries of that tradition could bend before they broke. If there was one musician whom all, or at least almost all, involved with British R&B could agree upon, however, it was Muddy Waters.

CHICAGO CALLING

Interviewed by *Melody Maker* in November 1963—having just completed his first tour of England since his 1958 appearance—Muddy Waters himself validated the British R&B scene, saying that he “feel[s] good about what is happening with the blues in Britain... it’s starting to sound like it does in Chicago.”⁵² In the same interview Waters admitted that he was pleased, if a little surprised, that at least “two or three” British blues groups were performing his tune “Got My Mojo Working” regularly. Remarking that two or three bands were performing “Mojo” at

⁵⁰ Similar rhetorical patterns are present in reader letters starting in early 1963 in *New Record Mirror*, *NME* and others. The editorial strategy of grouping contrasting/contradictory letters together was commonplace. For another example, see *NRM*, July 2, 1963, 2 where the letter titled “R&B Part One” excoriates the publication for devoting so much ink to R&B (“I’m fed up with reading nothing but R&B in your paper. R&B can’t be that special because nobody seems to know what it is.”), while “R&B Part Two” congratulates *NRM* for “daring to print page after page of Rhythm and Blues.”

⁵¹ Manfred Mann quoted in Bob Dawbarn, “Well—what is R&B?,” *Melody Maker*, March 30, 1963, 6.

⁵² “London—it’s the new Chicago!,” *MM*, November 11, 1963, p 6. Waters was in the UK as part of the American Folk Blues Festival tour that visited Britain in late October, 1963.

this time was an understatement. Within the R&B revival “Mojo” was so ubiquitous that George Melly dubbed it the “[When the] Saints [Go Marching In]” of the R&B boom, an allusion to the latter tune’s omnipresence in trad jazz repertoires.⁵³ Chris Barber claims to have dispensed with “When the Saints Go Marching In” as his standard showstopper in early 1959, replacing it with “Got My Mojo Working” shortly after the Muddy Waters 1958 tour.⁵⁴ Mick Jagger recalls that, as one of the many singers to sit in with Blues Incorporated, “we’d all sing the same bloody songs... we’d all have a turn singing ‘Got My Mojo Working’ or whatever it was. It was Muddy Waters that went down best.”⁵⁵ Around the same time Derrick Stewart-Baxter noted this trend, offering that “the ever-lasting *Mojo Working*... has been ground into the earth by our local monsters.”⁵⁶

Although not impossible, it is unlikely that most of the musicians performing R&B in the UK ever saw Muddy Waters perform live prior to the American Folk Blues Festival tour of October 1963, by which time the London R&B revival and its performance conventions were well established.⁵⁷ Even those who attended the October 20, 1958 St. Pancras Hall Waters-Barber concert in London and heard “Mojo” as the show’s finale would not have experienced Muddy Waters as he usually presented himself.⁵⁸ Instead, it was primarily via British-released

⁵³ Quoted in Roberta Freund Schwartz, “Putting the British in British Blues Rock,” in *Transatlantic Roots Music: Folk, Blues, and National Identities*, Jill Terry and Neil A. Wynn, eds. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 141.

⁵⁴ Chris Barber “We were on an R&B kick years ago!,” *MM*, December 21, 1963, 6. A 1960 live recording of the Barber band in Berlin indicates that they did not *always* close with “Mojo,” as Barber suggests here. On that particular recording the set finale was “Saints” (*Barber Back in Berlin 1960*, <https://itun.es/us/oI66gb>, accessed November 21, 2016).

⁵⁵ Quoted in Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues*, 127.

⁵⁶ Derrick Stewart-Baxter, review of “My John the Conqueror Root,” *Jazz Journal*, April 1965, 36.

⁵⁷ As noted in the previous chapter, Otilie Patterson, Chris Barber and their band mates are notable exceptions.

⁵⁸ Even the 100 or so attendees at the “unofficial” Muddy Waters Blues and Barrelhouse appearance heard the singer accompanied only by piano and Korner’s resonator guitar. Tony Standish’s review of the 1958 Muddy Waters/Chris Barber St. Pancras Town Hall concert reports that Waters and the Barber band

LPs, EPs, 78s and the occasional import—in Susan McClary’s words, “the technology of recording, which made possible (though not necessarily probable) the transmission of African American voices beyond their own times and places”—that early British R&B performers gained exposure to Muddy Waters, the blues or black cultural expression.⁵⁹

While many of Muddy Waters’ sides were reissued by the Vogue and London-American labels between 1951 and 1960, his original 1956 recording of “Got My Mojo Working” was never issued on a British label prior to or during the British R&B boom. In fact, not a single Waters track released in the UK pre-1961 was recorded after 1954.⁶⁰ Only after Pye International obtained the British release rights to Chess recordings in early 1961 was more recent material considered for UK reissue.⁶¹ Consequently, “Mojo’s” availability in the country was severely limited and would have only been accessible to those who could get their hands on imported, potentially illegal copies of the Chess single.⁶² It appears that the version of “Got My Mojo Working” that served as the basis for so many R&B revivalists did not originate in Chicago

concluded the show with a “stomping” version of “Mojo.” How much resonance this performance might still have had within the British jazz/blues/R&B scene in mid-1962 is unclear and probably unknowable.

⁵⁹ Susan McClary, “Thinking Blues,” in *Conventional Wisdom* (Ewing, NJ: University of California Press, 2001), 61.

⁶⁰ Even the Chess LP *The Best of Muddy Waters*, released in the US in 1957 and reissued by London the following year, contains only cuts from the period between 1948 and 1954.

⁶¹ *MM* reported on Pye’s acquisition of the Chess catalogue in May 1961, stating that “Pye have signed a deal to market the American Argo, Chess and Checker labels in Britain...” (“Pye captures top U.S. disc labels,” *MM*, May 13, 1961, 20). A variety of unsubstantiated assertions about this transition circulate in the British blues discourse. Schwartz claims the acquisition was in 1958. The Pye-International discography at 45cat.com indicates that one of, if not *the* first Chess single to be reissued on Pye was Etta James’ “At Last” b/w “I Just Want to Make Love to You” in April of 1961, which would support spring 1961 as the date when Pye took over Chess distribution (<http://www.45cat.com/record/7n25079>, accessed November 16, 2016). A Chuck Berry LP titled *Juke Box Hits* appears to have been released by Pye in 1961 (same year on Chess, <http://www.45worlds.com/vinyl/album/npl28019>) and the Bo Diddley LP *Bo Diddley is a Gunslinger* (NJI33) was released in 1960/1.

⁶² Prior to January 5, 1959, the importation of sound recordings required a special import license that it appears many local distributors did not hold. *MM*’s report that this restriction had been lifted concluded with the following: “The news could mean an end to the prosecutions against London record shops for selling second-hand records” (*MM*, January 10, 1959, 9).

however, but rather from an upscale, island resort town off the coast of Rhode Island via a live version on the Muddy Waters LP, *At Newport 1960* (Chess LP 1449/Pye Jazz NJL 34).⁶³

At Newport 1960 captures Waters performing for a mostly white, Northeastern crowd as part of the Newport Jazz Festival's Sunday blues program. Considering the setting and the fading American interest in the "downhome" sounds of Chicago urban blues at this time (displaced as it was by rock 'n' roll on one flank and the emerging sound of early Motown and soul on the other), Waters' appearance at Newport—and resultant album—can be understood as an appeal to the revivalist/jazz connoisseur set that saw his output as linked to the "real" blues of an earlier era and as a stylistic antecedent to jazz.⁶⁴ Jack Tracey's liner notes for the album indicate that this was the most likely audience as Waters was "a virtual stranger to most jazz listeners," although he had long been "a favourite of those familiar with country blues."

⁶³ The version of "Mojo" from the *At Newport* LP serves as a particularly complex object for revival. *At Newport 1960* was the first time Chess issued a set of recordings directly to LP rather than compiling a set of previously successful single sides (i.e. "Best of" collections) into an album. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, LPs and 45 rpm singles were directed toward very different markets. Selling at a significantly higher price point, LPs were often created and marketed with an affluent, older, typically white middle-of-the-road (MOR) consumer in mind. Conversely, singles were considered the media of choice for those with less disposable income: notably teenagers and poor African Americans. As Mark Burford notes in reference to Sam Cooke's albums of the late 1950s and early 1960s, this economic reality frequently resulted in a singer recording very different material for the LP market than they might for the 45 market (Mark Burford, "Sam Cooke as Pop Album Artist—A Reinvention in Three Songs," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 65, no. 1 (2012), 113-78). Andrew Flory has observed a similar trend in the output of Marvin Gaye in the early 1960s (Andrew Flory, "'She Needs Me': Marvin Gaye, Crooning, and Vocal Agency at Motown," paper presented at the American Musicological Society Annual Meeting, Vancouver, CA, November 4, 2016). This disparity in audience for LPs and singles carried over in the UK where, prior to the Beatles album releases of 1963, for example, the best selling albums of the early 1960s were cast recordings from musicals like *South Pacific* and a set of releases from the *Black and White Minstrel Show*. Especially when taking into consideration Chess's other early LP releases from Waters—*Muddy Waters Sings "Big Bill"* (1960) and *Muddy Waters, Folk Singer* (1964)—*At Newport 1960* seems to align with this marketing strategy. Taken as a set, Waters' LPs of the early 1960s appear to be directed at a more affluent, white folk music audience, rather than either a working-class, African-American audience or a crossover, teen rock 'n' roll crowd.

⁶⁴ Muddy Waters' last commercially successful single, "Close to You," released on October 20, 1958, spent thirteen weeks on Billboard's Hot R&B chart, peaking at number nine (Joel Whitburn, *The Billboard Book of Top 40 R&B and Hip-Hop Hits* (New York: Billboard Books, 2006). Not only was it his last single to chart, it was the last top ten R&B hit by any of the "big three" Chicago blues artists (Waters, Little Walter and Howlin' Wolf).

Prior to the *At Newport 1960* release, Muddy Waters was best known in Britain for his “adherence to the traditional blues of the Delta,” and celebrated for his “vocal qualities, his strange modulations, unexpected phrasing and rich, untutored voice.”⁶⁵ Unexpectedly, it was the rhythmically driving character of Waters’ Newport set that was most frequently commented upon when the album was released in the UK during the fall of 1961.⁶⁶ Sinclair Traill’s review of the LP, for example, highlighted this aspect of *At Newport 1960*; particularly the propulsive nature of the seven-plus minutes of side B occupied by “Got My Mojo Working”:

Opening with two medium-paced rockers [“I Got My Brand on You” and “I’m Your Hoochie Coochie Man”], one can sense the programme gaining momentum and intensity until the high spot comes with an infectious, long version of “Mojo”—a version that really had the cats dancing in the aisles.⁶⁷

By contrast, Waters’ cover of Big Bill Broonzy’s folk blues “I Feel So Good” goes unmentioned by Traill.

It was these three “rockers”—along with the up-tempo, double-entendre “I Put a Tiger in Your Tank,” also from the *At Newport* album—that Blues Incorporated chose to re-present on *R&B from the Marquee*. Performed in close emulation to the *At Newport 1960* versions, “Got My Brand on You,” “Hoochie Choochie Man,” “I Put a Tiger in Your Tank” and “Mojo,” were the first of Waters’ tunes recorded by British R&B artists. Sung by Cyril Davies, these four tracks make up a third of *R&B from the Marquee* and half of the vocal numbers on the album. Such an intense focus on Waters’ songs sourced from one particular record attests to the impact *At Newport* had on Blues Incorporated. That these songs, “Mojo” chief among them, would be picked up by other R&B acts is a testament to Cyril Davies’ influence among the developing

⁶⁵ Paul Oliver, “Muddy Waters’ Blues,” *Music Mirror*, November 1955, 12-13.

⁶⁶ It was not always viewed positively. Owen Bryce’s review for *Disc* found this aspect of the album “very disappointing” and “very much aimed at the R ‘n’ R fans.” *Disc*, October 28, 1961, 11.

⁶⁷ Sinclair Trail, “Muddy Waters at Newport,” *Jazz Journal*, November 1961, 35.

London scene. As I argue below, Davies' faithful recreation of Waters' style was instrumental in establishing the Chicago bluesman as an archetype for much the British R&B to follow.

Considering Blues Incorporated's position as the only band in the British R&B business for much of 1962, and the importance of their Marquee sets for setting the scene in motion, Davies' performance of "Mojo" may well have been just as powerful a reference point as Waters' own records.⁶⁸

"What Exactly Is a Mojo?"⁶⁹

Lyrically, "Got My Mojo Working" falls within the "superstition blues" category, a type of blues verse that British revivalists in the early 1960s would have been aware of primarily through other records by Muddy Waters. A chapter in Paul Oliver's *The Blues Fell This Morning*, "The Jinx on Me," for example, addresses songs that express a persistent Southern African-American investment in hoodoo and other black folk religious practices. Oliver cites Waters' evocations of "mojo hands" and a "gypsy woman" in "Louisiana Blues" as a representative example of this type of lyric.⁷⁰ Furthermore, Oliver detailed for his British

⁶⁸ Talent notwithstanding, Davies was somewhat of an awkward fit for such a role. Unlike so many of the early R&B scene, Davies was not a core member of the trad jazz or skiffle revivals, but rather more of a satellite contributor. A 12-string guitarist, singer and harmonica player, he did not fit musically with New Orleans-style trad. An introverted, balding, slightly overweight man of 30-some-odd years, he lacked the physical and personal qualities that many of the up-and-coming groups of teens and twenty-somethings could leverage to attract broader audiences.

⁶⁹ A question posed in a *Rave* letter to the editor published on July 1, 1964:

"I've heard an awful lot about a 'mojo.' There is a group called the Mojoes, a song called 'Got my Mojo Working.' But what exactly is a mojo? –Mike Davis, Winchester
A mojo is worn by Negroes in the Southern States of America and it is meant to give the wearer or owner great powers and make them more attractive to the opposite sex."

⁷⁰ Paul Oliver, *The Blues Fell this Morning: The Meaning of the Blues* (London: The Jazz Book Club/Cassell, 1963), 141. The meaning of the term "mojo" would have been understood to varying degrees within the British jazz/R&B scene as early as the mid-1950s if not before. Oliver offered an explanation in a 1955 piece on Waters prior to the recording of the 1956 "Mojo" single. In reference to "Louisiana Blues," he states: "a Mojo Hand is a Voodoo charm which is reputedly capable of revealing the secrets of wayward lovers and of forcing the person against whom its magic is directed to be subjected to

readership the ways in which “the folk Negro of the older generation is bound by strictures and superstitions that govern everyday behaviour... [delivered through the] survival of African magic in the Americas.”⁷¹

Although “Mojo,” and superstition songs more broadly, were inextricably linked with the Chicago bluesman, “Got My Mojo Working” was not composed or originally recorded by Muddy Waters, but rather was written by a little-known musician/songwriter named Preston Foster and first recorded by Ann Cole.⁷² While Waters’ lyrics to “Mojo” revolve around the Foster-composed refrain “I got my mojo working, but it just don’t work on you,” his verses draw upon his earlier hits like “Louisiana Blues” (1950) and “Hoochie Coochie Man” (1954).⁷³ Upon its introduction to British jazz and blues devotees in 1961, “Mojo” would have been quite quickly associated with these earlier compositions, both of which had been available in the UK during the 1950s; in particular “Louisiana Blues,” which was released once as a 78 in 1952 and again on *The Best of Muddy Waters* in 1958.

the will of the owner” (Paul Oliver, “Muddy Waters’ Blues,” *Music Mirror*, November 1955, 12-13). The following definition was included in the liner notes of *R&B at the Marquee* by Blues Incorporated: “A mojo, en passant, is a sexual amulet which still enjoys great popularity among some urban Negroes.”

⁷¹ Oliver, *The Blues Fell this Morning*, 136-7.

⁷² As Ann Cole’s producer tells the story, prior to recording the song, Cole was featuring “Mojo” during a 1956 tour on which she shared the bill (and backing band) with Muddy Waters (<http://rec.music.rock-pop-r-b.1950s.narkive.com/LMgcF7IP/sol-rabinowitz-on-mojo>, accessed Dec 6, 3016). By the end of the year, both Waters and Cole recorded versions of the song with Cole’s record credited to Foster and Waters listing himself as the song’s composer. (The provenance of the song was later litigated and a court awarded the copyright to Foster.) The singles were released in rapid succession and, by late April 1957, *Billboard* placed the two records side-by-side as “This Week’s R&B Best Buys.” Both renditions feature a variation on the lyric “I got my mojo working but it just don’t work on you, I want to love you so bad that I don’t know what to do.” Cole’s performance uses the line as a refrain at the end of each her five verses. While Waters’ version limits his evocations of superstitious folklore to references to the “mojo hand,” and seeking a “gypsy woman’s advice,” the Foster lyric sprawls out to further include “black cat bones,” “a four-leaf clover,” “hoodoo ashes,” “black snake roots,” a “rabbit foot” and a “strand of hair.”

⁷³ I find it more than likely that Preston Foster had these songs in mind when composing his version of “Mojo,” in particular “Hoochie Coochie Man” (a top-10 R&B hit in 1954), which references a gypsy woman, black cat bones, mojo, john the conqueror root, etc. Although Foster was officially assigned credit for the song, this appears to be a case of complicated streams of influence and references to common blues tropes.

“Got My Mojo Working” (as performed by Muddy Waters)*Verse 1 (Mojo)*

I got my mojo working, but it just don't work on you (x2)
 I want to love you so bad that I don't know what to do

Verse 2 (Louisiana)

Going down to Louisiana to get me a mojo hand (x2)
 I'm going to have all you women [wretch?] under my command

Chorus

Got my mojo working (x4)
 Got my mojo working but it just won't work on you

Verse 3 (Gypsy)

I've got a gypsy woman giving me advice (x2)
 I got a whole lot of trick[s] keeping her on ice

Formally, “Got My Mojo Working” is a 12-bar blues employing *aab* phrase structure (as indicated in the lyrics above) and a double-time feel. A number of major points of contrast exist between Waters' 1956 recording and his *Newport 1960* version of “Mojo.” Most perceptibly the *Newport* version is performed faster and lasts substantially longer.

The extended running time is achieved primarily through three additional repetitions of the chorus section—for a total of four reiterations, as opposed to one in the 1956 record.⁷⁴ On each and every reoccurrence of the chorus in the *At Newport* performance of the song, Waters' statement of the line “got my mojo working” is answered by the band and audience in kind, creating a call-and-response effect.⁷⁵ In addition to theses multiple restatements of the chorus, the other primary means by which Waters extends the live performance to more than four minutes (from 2:51 in the 1956 version) is by giving harmonica player James Cotton additional verses

⁷⁴ While the repetitive nature of this stanza alone would qualify it for this sort of designation, its multiple reoccurrences in the 1960 record unmistakably establish this section as a chorus.

⁷⁵ This call and response device is absent from the 1956 recording.

over which to improvise.⁷⁶ The final major difference between these versions is the ways in which they conclude. Like so many single releases of the era, the 1956 record ends on a vamp that is faded out. Without the fade option, Waters ends the live version of song in a more dramatic manner at *Newport*. After building momentum, excitement and increasing tempo over three call-and-response driven choruses (interspersed with a harmonica solo), the band abruptly drops out, leaving Waters to sing one final response of “it just don’t work on you” unsupported, before returning for a typical half-time, chromatic descending cadential blues figure.

Example 4.1 – Waters’ “Mojo” Cadenza (*At Newport 1960*)

Waters (vocal) 8 But it just don't work on you

Band E7

In almost all regards, Blues Incorporated’s 1962 recording of “Mojo” carefully emulates the *At Newport* performance that had the “cats dancing in the aisles,” despite condensing its essence into a compact three minutes and twelve seconds. In terms of form, feel and individual instrumental performances, BI’s rendition is an incredibly close match to Waters’ 1960 live recording of “Mojo.”⁷⁷ The opening tempo is identical at 124 bpm (as opposed to 110 bpm for the 1956 recording) and the feel is replicated almost exactly by the BI drummer who plays a double-time backbeat that places accents on each upbeat. This is not to say that each instrumental part or turn of phrase is replicated note for note. For example, instead of Otis Spann’s piano

⁷⁶ The entire time occupied by “Mojo” on the *At Newport* album is actually closer to seven and a half minutes when the reprise “Got My Mojo Working, pt II” is taken into account.

⁷⁷ Although BI performs the song in the key of G instead of Waters’ original key of E.

taking a lead role in the accompaniment texture and in responses to vocal lines, Alexis Korner's guitar assumes this role with a recurring riff and the occasional improvised figure. Nevertheless, the spirit of the original instrumental roles is retained.

Example 4.2 – Blues Incorporated's "Mojo" Introductory/Recurrent Riff



The most noteworthy *Newport* feature that is faithfully recreated by BI is the frequent repetitions of the call-and-response chorus (labeled “Chorus w/ C&R” in the table below), which are not only retained, but highlighted by virtue of the chorus-plus-solo portion of the performance occupying more than half of the track's total run-time (verses 5-8). The relative intensification and crescendo through the final four verses leading up to the band dropping out for a final vocal cadenza is also replicated by BI.

Table 4.2 - Comparison of Three Recordings of “Got My Mojo Working”

	Muddy Waters - Single	Muddy Waters - <i>At Newport</i>	Blues Incorporated⁷⁸
Verse 1:*	[00-:25] Instrumental	[00-:22] Instrumental	[00-:22] Instrumental
Verse 2:	[26-:50] Mojo verse	[23-:45] Mojo verse	[23-:45] Mojo verse
Verse 3:	[51-1:15] Louisiana	[46-1:07] Louisiana	[46-1:08] Louisiana
Verse 4:	[1:16- 1:41] Chorus	[1:08-1:31] Chorus w/ C&R	[1:09-1:31] Gypsy
Verse 5:	[1:42-2:06] <i>Harmonica solo</i>	[1:32-1:53] <i>Harmonica solo</i>	[1:32-1:55] Chorus w/ C&R
Verse 6:	[2:07-2:32] Gypsy	[1:54-2:14] <i>Stop-time / solo</i>	[1:56-2:18] <i>Harmonica solo</i>
Verse 7:	[2:33-2:48] <i>Vamp and fade</i>	[2:15-2:35] Gypsy	[2:21-2:41] <i>Harmonica solo</i>
Verse 8:		[2:36-2:56] Chorus w/ C&R	[2:42- 3:01] Chorus w/ C&R
Verse 9:		[2:57-3:18] Chorus w/ C&R	
Verse 10:		[3:19-3:39] Instrumental	
Verse 11:		[3:40-3:57] Chorus w/ C&R	
Cadenza:		[3:56-3:59] “just don’t work on you” (solo vocal)	[3:02-3:04] “just won’t work on you” (solo vocal)
Outro:		[4:00-4:08] Cadential tag (full band, halftime)	[3:05-3:12] Cadential tag (full band)

* each verse represents a turn through a 12-bar blues form.

That the Blues Incorporated recording was substantially shorter than the version on which it was modeled follows the logic of recording industry norms at the time. Generally speaking, in the early 1960s it was unusual for a recording of a song even peripherally related to pop music to run more than four minutes. This is certainly the case for *R&B From the Marquee* on which the twelve songs that make up the album run between 2:21 and 3:49.⁷⁹ There is ample evidence to suggest, however, that in live performance at clubs like the Marquee, Blues Incorporated played the song for much longer; most likely at least as long as Waters did at Newport.

⁷⁸ When compared to the *Newport* performance, the most notable difference in BI’s recording is the omission of the first chorus.

⁷⁹ A *Disc* report published the week the Blues Incorporated recording was cut indicates that Decca originally planned to release “Mojo” as a single, virtually insuring that it would clock in at less than the three minute-thirty second space constraint of a seven-inch, 45 rpm single (“Numbers picked for Korner discs,” *Disc*, June 9, 1962, 7).

Sounding the Scene, Moving the Scene

From the Jack Good review of BI's debut at the Marquee, one gets the sense that the musicians, "gone to the world," tended to lose themselves in a collective, trance-like, euphoric state while performing. Such a description alone implies that BI did not necessarily attend to strictly outlined, brief arrangements in live performance. Two-and-a-half to three-and-a-half minute songs do not tend to induce this kind of response from musicians (or audiences) and typically serve as less than ideal soundtracks for dance-oriented club scenes. Furthermore, the repeatable, circular harmonic pattern of 12-bar blues number like "Mojo" facilitates formal extension. As such, a song that may have started as a short work can be stretched *ad infinitum* in response to an active audience.⁸⁰ Specific comments by Cyril Davies offer evidence that "Mojo" was almost certainly performed at the Marquee for much more than three minutes and eighteen seconds. Speaking with the *New Record Mirror* in June of 1963, he outlined his hopes for a future album on which he and his R&B All-Stars would "perform some originals, and some numbers that Cyril performs down at the Marquee."⁸¹ In particular, Davies expressed his interest in re-recording his debut single "Country Line Special"—a 2:21 version of a rollicking, up-tempo, bluesy one-chord-vamp harmonica feature—so that it could run for its typical live length of about ten minutes.

As the liner notes for *R&B from the Marquee* suggest, "Mojo" had become a "trademark for Blues Inc." by the time of their 1962 recording session, "providing a climax to their club appearances with the audience joining in with the vocal."⁸² In other words, regardless of what other songs the band performed on a given night from the "very large repertoire which the group

⁸⁰ There are countless examples in the histories of jazz and the blues (Louis Armstrong, Robert Johnson are just two examples that come to mind) of performers extending blues numbers as long as necessary to accommodate a crowd that is "feeling" a given song.

⁸¹ Norman Jopling, "I'm Still Striving for my Sound," *NRM*, June 22, 1963, 3.

⁸² <http://www.cyrildavies.com/ACL1130.html> accessed December 5, 2016.

ha[d] assembled,” it was Blues Incorporated’s standard practice to end their set with a performance of “Mojo” in which Davies and a crowd of up to seven hundred fans engaged in chorus after chorus of call and response in a manner not unlike a secular preacher-choir responsorial. This evocation of an ecstatic worship experience is all the more reinforced by the closing moment of the song’s performance where the lead singer is suddenly left to sing the song’s final response by himself.

It seems more than probable that the practice of performing “Mojo” as a finale was not only standard operating procedure for BI, but for other British rhythm and blues bands performing at the Marquee and perhaps for the London R&B scene more generally. Given the band’s primacy, BI’s adherence to the *Newport* model formed the basis for other British R&B performances of “Mojo” in the months and years to come. Many of the future mainstays of the Marquee’s R&B nights—in particular Cyril Davies and his R&B All-Stars, Long John Baldry and His Hoochie Coochie Men, Manfred Mann, the Graham Bond Organization and (later) Alex Harvey and his Soul Band—performed/recorded “Mojo” during the R&B boom.⁸³ Of the twelve recorded versions of “Mojo” by British acts released or broadcast between November 1962 and May 1965, eight originated from this roster of Marquee regulars.

⁸³ Both Davies and Baldry were members of BI in 1962 before becoming bandleaders in their own right, as were the other three members of the Graham Bond Organisation: Dick Heckstall-Smith (tenor sax), Jack Bruce (bass) and Ginger Baker (drums). Bruce and Baker left BI to work with Graham Bond in March of 1963 (“Phil Joins Blues Inc.” *NRM*, March 2, 1963, 6). Both Manfred Mann and Graham Bond made their Marquee debuts in December of 1962, while Alex Harvey became a Marquee Thursday night regular in March 1965. For a day-by-day listing of all Marquee performances between 1962-1965 see Bacon, *London Live*, 164-167.

Table 4.3 - British Recordings/Performances of “Got My Mojo Working,” 1962-1965⁸⁴

Artist	Recording/Program/Venue	Date
Blues Incorporated	<i>R&B from the Marquee</i>	recorded June 8, 1962 / released Nov. 62
Cyril Davies & his R&B All-Stars	<i>Hullabaloo (TV)</i>	rec. between 5/30-7/29/63 / aired between 9/28-12/14/63
Cliff Bennett & the Rebel Rousers	Single - Parlophone R51119	(advertised March 28, 1964)
Long John Baldry (w/ guests)	First British R&B Festival, Birmingham, UK	February 28, 1964
The Sheffields	Single - Pye (7N 15627)	(advertised April 4, 1964)
Alex Harvey and his Soul Band	<i>Alex Harvey and his Soul Band (Live)</i>	(reviewed April 4, 1964)
Manfred Mann	<i>The Five Faces of Manfred Mann</i>	rec. April 64 / rel. Sept 4, 1964
Long John Baldry w/ Sounds Inc.	“Around the Beatles” (TV)	audio rec. April 19, 1964 / first aired May 6, 1964
Long John Baldry & His Hoochie Coochie Men	<i>Long John's Blues</i>	rec. Aug. 1964
The Mojos	EP - Decca	(reviewed Sept. 18, 1964)
Graham Bond Organization	<i>The Sound of '65</i>	(reviewed May 7, 1965)
The Zombies	<i>The Zombies Begin Here</i>	(reviewed Aug. 6, 1965)

These performances, as well as other live recordings of London R&B groups from the period, suggest that “Mojo” and songs like it were broadly employed as call-and-response, audience-participation showstopper finales. The First British R&B Festival, held in Birmingham on February 28, 1964, for example, concludes with an all-star jam of “Mojo” led by Long John Baldry with support from an all-star cast including Steve Winwood, Rod Stewart, Eric Clapton and Sonny Boy Williamson. This version runs for close to six and a half minutes and repeats the call-and-response chorus four times. A performance of Ray Charles’ “What I’d Say” from the Graham Bond Organisation’s LP, *Live at Klook’s Kleep*, recorded in London on October 5, 1964

⁸⁴ Five of the seven studio recordings of “Mojo” and all of the live performances feature call-and-response choruses (with the Cliff Bennett and the *Long John’s Blues* versions as exceptions to the rule). All but one of these twelve performances (Cliff Bennett’s) follow the *Newport*/BI model of making a call-and-response chorus-plus solos section the centerpiece of their arrangements, often cutting out a verse to give over more time to this element. All but the Cliff Bennett record (which sounds like it was based in the 1956 Waters rendition) concludes with a version of the same vocal cadenza effect used by Waters/Davies. I find it just as likely that these versions were informed by live performances at the Marquee as they were by Blues Incorporated’s album or directly by *At Newport*.

unfolds in a similar call-and-response fashion. Introduced by Bond as “one of our favorite numbers,” he implores the crowd to “all join in when we come to the chorus.” The audience does indeed join in, responding enthusiastically both to Bond’s calls of “Tell me what did I say?” and his impassioned cries of “Yeah!”⁸⁵ The record ends with a fadeout of a back-and-forth exchange of “yeah!” with little sonic evidence that the band was close to bringing the song to an end, even after 5 minutes and 28 seconds. How much longer the band and crowd might have kept this up is hard to say.⁸⁶ While the song may be different in this October 5, 1964 example, the performance practice and subsequent live experience remained the same as employed on “Mojo.”

Around the Beatles with Long John Baldry

Nowhere was the communal call-and-response ritual of British R&B more conspicuously on display than in the Long John Baldry performance of “Mojo” recorded for and internationally broadcast on the “Around the Beatles” television special.⁸⁷ Filmed just two months after Beatlemania reached North American shores, this hour-long variety program was produced by Beatles manager Brian Epstein and early British R&B advocate Jack Good. Sandwiched between musical and comedy performances by the Fab Four, “Around the Beatles” featured a twenty-five-minute, non-stop parade of song and dance numbers by current or soon-to-be chart-toppers

⁸⁵ Exchanges that mimic the back and forth between Ray Charles and the Raylettes on the original recording of the song.

⁸⁶ In reference to the Cyril Davies All-Stars performance on a *Saturday Club* BBC Radio broadcast from July 1963, former Blues Incorporated/Davies pianist Keith Scott noted that the band performed a set “typical of what we were doing at club gigs [‘See See Rider,’ ‘Chicago Calling,’ ‘Country Line Special,’ ‘Roberta,’ and ‘Roll ‘em Pete’], but in shortened versions as the attention span of the average Saturday Club listener was short and sharp, especially through their portable trannies [transistor radios].” <http://carlolittle.wixsite.com/carlolittle/gigography-1963> accessed Dec 13, 2016.

⁸⁷ “Around the Beatles” was filmed on April 28, 1964, with audio tracks pre-recorded on April 18th and originally aired on May 6th. The date of this performance very closely coincides with the recording or release of four other versions of “Mojo”—three of which were from groups not previously associated with British R&B (see Table 4.3).

Cilla Black, PJ Proby, and Millie Small; all backed by the Vernon Girls backup singers and Sounds Incorporated, an instrumental pop group and frequent Beatles opening act. This medley was a whirlwind tour of tunes from along the rhythm and blues spectrum including abbreviated versions of recent, commercially successful songs such as “Night Train,” “Walkin’ the Dog,” “Hit the Road Jack,” and “Heatwave” interspersed with dance numbers choreographed to 12-bar blues choruses. Also included, in what appears to be an effort to embrace the increasingly visible London R&B scene, was a rendition of “Mojo” performed by Baldry.

Keeping with the conventions of Jack Good’s teen-pop television directorial style, in “Around the Beatles” “Mojo” is reduced to a mere one minute, fifty-three seconds.⁸⁸ The number opens against a backdrop of thunderous applause produced by a crowd of teen fans that all but overflows the theatre-in-the-round soundstage designed for the program.⁸⁹ From off screen, John Lennon, screaming above the din, exclaims: “Long John Baldry, yeah!” seconds before the six-foot-seven singer emerges from behind a glass-paned door at the back of the stage. From an elevated platform just above the stage, Sounds Incorporated begins playing the BI “Mojo” riff (see example 4.2) as Baldry walks toward the microphone.⁹⁰ As he works through the song’s three verses, the crowd, seen in the periphery of the various shots of the performers, claps along.⁹¹ When the first chorus arrives, the visual edits of the scene replicate the call-and-response of the musical performance, the camera cutting back and forth between tight shots of the lead singer, the Vernon Girls (as backing vocalists) and the Beatles (as audience members) as they

⁸⁸ For more about Jack Good’s televisual style see Norma Coates, “Excitement is Made, Not Born: Jack Good, Television, and Rock and Roll,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 25/3 (September 2013), 301–325.

⁸⁹ At the time of this writing, the Long John Baldry “Around the Beatles” performance of “Mojo” is available on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eroobdCORsI>, accessed June 28, 2017).

⁹⁰ The pacing of this number is so fast that the pre-recorded track of Baldry singing actually begins before he even arrives at the mic!

⁹¹ Baldry’s vocal performance will be discussed in depth below.

collectively respond to Baldry's exhortations. Leading into the second and final repetition of the chorus, the camera shifts to a wide shot of Baldry, the Beatles and a segment of the larger audience. At this point we see and hear that the entire crowd has joined the refrain. The audio mix appears to follow this progressive layering of respondents. In the first exchange of "got my mojo working" only the Vernon Girls can be distinctly heard responding to the lead singer. The Beatles' voices become audible when they come into the picture in measure six of the first chorus. The sounds of these distinct singers are then swallowed up into a choir of hundreds of voices exclaiming that they got their "mojo working" as well. Only as the band drops out and Baldry delivers the final line, "but it just don't work on you," does the camera return to a singular, tightly-framed focus on the singer.

In this brief appearance on a show dedicated to the newly international sensation of the Beatles, Long John Baldry was afforded an opportunity to bring a facsimile of the London R&B club experience into the homes of millions of British (and later American) viewers who may have been otherwise unaware of such a scene. Jack Good's condensed, choreographed rendition of the "Mojo" ritual attempts to distill the essence of the R&B scene, aptly placing the burden of representing the collective practice of a myriad of performers and thousands of scene participants on the trope of call-and-response. What curiously isn't represented here, and could not concretely be captured on the various sound recordings of "Mojo," is that the song, and the scene it is called upon to represent, was broadly associated with and thoroughly invested in corporeal responses to the music. As the various reports of the nascent R&B scene cited earlier suggest, British rhythm and blues was music for dancing. "Mojo's" double-time feel presented a tailor-made beat for wide array of bodily responses on the dance floor. For those not necessarily invested in the depictions of and allusions to the black American "folk" experience present in its

repertoire—and it can be assumed that many members of the young audience Good described as “twisting the night away” at the Marquee in mid-1962 were not so inclined—R&B offered a visceral aesthetic pleasure. For a great number of London scenesters who frequented R&B clubs like the Marquee and its progenitors between 1962 and 1964, R&B, and “Mojo” in particular, offered just such an experience.

Cyril Davies on Hullabaloo

Close to a year before Long John Baldry’s “Around the Beatles” appearance, a Cyril Davies R&B All-Stars version of “Mojo” appeared on British television under a very different set of circumstances. By mid-1963, the performance activities of Cyril Davies’ Rhythm and Blues All-Stars, riding the rising tide of the R&B revival they had in part set in motion, expanded to venues beyond London and into the occasional radio, recording and television program as well. Recorded in a Middlesex television studio during the summer of 1963, the All-Stars rendition of “Mojo” aired on *Hullabaloo*, a program that couldn’t be seen in London, much less in America.⁹² *Hullabaloo*, a folk-music television series that broadcast most Saturday nights at 11:15 pm in the Midlands region in late 1963, was a 25-minute show of live musical performances for an in-studio audience of around 300. Included within producer and host Rory McEwan’s vision of folk music was rhythm and blues, or at least as it was performed by the Davies group.⁹³ The Cyril

⁹² Not to be confused with the American show of the same name that debuted in early 1965. The UK show was produced by ABC Television and broadcast on ITV in the Midlands and Northern regions, but not in London to the consternation of at least two *MM* letters to the editor. A London television executive is quoted as stating that *Hullabaloo* would not appear on the schedule for the capital as “Two programmes of pop-type music might be too much in one evening”—the other being *Thank Your Lucky Stars* (“TV Spotlights Folk Stars,” *MM*, September 7, 1963, 3).

⁹³ And later by guest star Sonny Boy Williamson. Williamson and the R&B All-stars were the only R&B artists to appear on the four commercially available complete episodes (the two with Peter, Paul and Mary and the two with Sonny Boy Williamson) and three additional clips available online. Show line-ups appeared in *TV Times* listing for each episode, none of which mentioned another known R&B act. In the

Davies Rhythm and Blues All-Stars—which by this time grew to include Baldry and a trio of black South African backup singers named the Velvettes⁹⁴—appeared on nine of the show’s thirteen episodes, all of which appear to have been “telerecorded” over the course of six sessions held in May, July and September of 1963.⁹⁵

The *Hullabaloo* performance of “Mojo” opens with a wide shot of the All-Stars.⁹⁶ The camera slowly pulls in past a snapping and swaying Baldry and the Velvettes to hone in on Davies standing on a riser surrounded by the rhythm section. As *Hullabaloo*’s typical acts were far from dance-inducing, the attendant audience is seated in the sound studio’s large semi-circle of chairs that surround the group. The band begins by playing four statements of the signature BI intro riff performed on organ, guitar, bass and harmonica, which is responded to by an eighth-note snare drum figure.

two *TV Times* features on the program, one penned by McEwan, R&B is never mentioned. As Davies and later Williamson (who was originally supposed to appear on the program with the Cyril Davies All-Stars) were the only R&B acts featured alongside more traditionally defined folk artists (American popular-folk revivalists Peter, Paul and Mary; Scots folk singers the McEwan brothers; etc.), rhythm and blues was clearly the exception to a more strict generic conception of folk forwarded by the program. This is not to say that artists at the more “authentic” end of the R&B spectrum such as Davies would not have been classified as folk musicians by many at this time.

⁹⁴ The Velvettes arrived in the UK in early 1961 as part of a South African production of a “jazz musical” with an “all-African” cast titled *King Kong*. (Benny Green, “From principles to chorus, all in ‘King Kong’ make it an exhilarating experience,” *Record and Show Mirror*, March 4, 1961, 8-9. This review is coupled with advertisements for the show at the Princes Theatre and for a cast LP on Decca). After the show’s run, the trio stayed on in London launching a recording career.

⁹⁵ A *Melody Maker* industry report and Carlo Little’s gig log indicate that the pilot was filmed May 30th and subsequent episodes were filmed in July (“Blues-n-folk Package on ABC-TV,” *MM* June 29, 1963, 3.; <http://carlolittle.wixsite.com/carlolittle/gigography-1963>, accessed Dec 13, 2016). *NME* indicates that the Peter, Paul and Mary episode, on which Davies appears, was recorded September 23 (“Peter, Paul and Mary’s TV shows,” *NME*, Oct 11, 1963, 6.).

⁹⁶ This Cyril Davies performance is also available on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QynodK3u0O8>, accessed June 28, 2017).

Example 4.3 – Cyril Davies’ All-Stars “Mojo” Introduction

Organ, Guitar, Bass
& Harmonica

Snare Drum

(4x)

The group then settles into “Mojo’s” signature double-time groove for the remaining eight bars of the 12-bar form. Following this introductory material, Davies begins singing, progressing through the song’s three verses (curiously, with the second and third verses reversed so that the “Gypsy” verse comes before “Louisiana”), with interpolations of the word “Mojo” from the Velvettes immediately after all but one of his vocal lines. Two call-and-response choruses and a harmonica solo follow, building an intensity of feeling similar to that heard in the *At Newport*, Blues Incorporated, and Long John Baldry renditions. The number diverges substantially from these models only after the final chorus. As noted earlier, Waters and Davies’ vocal performances on prior recordings (and in almost all of the British versions to follow) conclude with an unaccompanied statement of the single phrase “But it just don’t work on you” taken at a slightly slower tempo followed by a halftime turnaround cadence from the band to end the song (see Example 4.1).

Rather than ending with this brief cadential device, Davies instead leads the band and backup singers into an extended vocal cadenza. The very tail end of the final chorus is performed in the “typical” manner, with Davies singing “But it just” over the band’s lead-in to a staccato beat-one accent. It is then followed unexpectedly by a pentatonic, melismatic exclamation of “Oh, *Lawdy*, I got my mo-o-o-jo workin’!,” and another melismatic prolongation on the phrase words “I-I-I-I, got my, got my-y mo-jo workin’” punctuated by drum hits and calls of “yeah!”

and “wool!” from Baldry and the Velvettes. Only after twenty seconds of this gospel-inspired exchange does Davies re-establish some sense of pulse with the final antecedent “I got my mojo working” which appears to be the band’s cue to return to accompany the consequent “but it just don’t work on you” followed by the final cadence and resolution to the tonic.

Example 4.4 – Cyril Davies’ “Mojo” Vocal Cadenza

But it just! Oh, Law-dy got my mo_____ jo wor kin' I

_____ got my_____ got my mo_____ jo wor kin' I got my

mo - jo wor-kin' but it just don't work on you_____

As the above discussion intimates, Davies’ performance of “Mojo”—and by extension Long John Baldry’s and the many, many other versions of the song Davies inspired—communicates a sense that British R&B singers strove to mimic an aural impression of “blackness,” not only in specific phrasing but in vocal inflection and timbre as well. Not only is any hint of a British accent expunged, Baldry, and to a lesser extent Davies, goes so far as to affect a distinctly black Chicagoan pronunciation of “woykin’” and a Southern-inflected articulation of “Loos-ana” throughout his performance. In the All-Stars’ extended, gospel stop-time cadenza, Davies similarly affects tropes of black speech (“Lawdy”) and vocal technique. Beyond the concretely emulative performance practices that can be represented through traditional Western musical

notation and phonetic spelling, a more generalized, less quantifiable impression of “sounding black” is suggested in both Baldry’s and Davies’ performances. Through the (*re*)presentation of subtle aspects of vocal technique—microtonal inflection, timbral shading and intentionally imprecise rhythmic note placement—these singers approximate expressive qualities typically associated with Southern African Americans.⁹⁷ Careful listening indicates that more than just a general blackness, they are trying to evoke a particularly “Muddy Waters-ian” sound of black expression through a fairly strict adherence to Waters’ original phrasing, emphasis and even unusual vocal effects—here I am referring to Baldry’s frequent replication of Waters’ “buuhh workin’!” effect that can be heard in each of his three recordings of “Mojo” from 1964.⁹⁸

WHY MUDDY? WHY MOJO?

Based on his fieldwork in African-American communities in Chicago in the early 1960s (writing sometime following the emergence of the Rolling Stones in America and before his findings were published as the book *Urban Blues* in 1966), Charles Keil endeavored to locate ideal types of the African-American “expressive male role” in blues performances. Toward this end, Keil classes Muddy Waters’ best-known works, among them “Got My Mojo Working,” more specifically, as presenting an “accent [that] is either bravado and virility or—conversely—

⁹⁷ Annie J. Randall outlines a set of vocal features and practices that signify blackness that include many of the elements demonstrated by Davies’ performance: “the soloist’s individual relationship to the beat; newly invented passages of text and music added to pre-existing songs; individualistic, improvised ornamentation; [and] call and response between soloists and backup singers” (Annie J. Randall, “Dusty’s Hair,” in *She’s So Fine: Reflections on Whiteness, Femininity, Adolescence and Class in the 1960*, Laurie Stras ed., (Farnham, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 126).

⁹⁸ A similar vocal effect is also present in studio versions from Manfred Mann (April 1964) Graham Bond’s Organization (Feb 1965). My assumption is that this was an effect that Bond and Manfred Mann singer Paul Jones (who apparently also sat in with BI at times in 1962) picked up from Baldry at the Marquee.

helplessness.”⁹⁹ It is through a desire to identify with this ideal representation of black masculinity via traits of bravado and virility—in this case typified by the sound and lyrics of Waters—that British articulation to rhythm and blues, in particular Waters’ brand of R&B, is most commonly understood.¹⁰⁰ What I have hoped to demonstrate in this chapter is that it was not only the “bravado and virility” communicated through his lyrics that attracted London R&B fans to Waters’ music, but also its ability to move a scene to get up, dance and sing.

As Susan McClary among others have observed, most of the musicians and fans that formed the core of the British R&B possessed “[no] clear sense of black culture in America; they used their musical allegiances to meet their own needs.”¹⁰¹ What they did possess, however, was familiarity with the representations of blackness communicated through the conventions of minstrelsy on radio and television. The generation of British R&Bers that came of age in the early 1960s had ready access to blackface (and blackvoice) through BBC programming aimed at children and families throughout their formative years.¹⁰² It is not hard to imagine a ten-year old Mick Jagger, for example, listening to minstrel radio plays on a Sunday morning or sitting around the TV on a Saturday night to watch the latest *Black and White Minstrel Show* broadcast with the family.¹⁰³ While minstrellesque mimesis of black culture was clearly understood as ersatz, it still projected an impression of what “real” blackness might look and sound like. If *counterfeit* African Americans sang, danced, clowning and engaged with the world in a distinctly

⁹⁹ Charles Keil, *Urban Blues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 71-2.

¹⁰⁰ Articulation to urban blues as an expression of a desire to enact black masculinity is problematized by the “open secret” of Long John Baldry’s queer identity. See Paul Myers, *It Ain’t Easy: Long John Baldry and the Birth of the British Blues* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2007), 39.

¹⁰¹ McClary, “Thinking Blues,” 53.

¹⁰² See chapter 2 for more about Britain and minstrelsy.

¹⁰³ Shawn Levy suggests that Jagger’s was a “stereotypical-to-the-point-of-banal suburban upbringing [typical] of the postwar era” (Shawn Levy, *Ready, Steady, Go!: Swinging London and the Invention of Cool* (London and New York: Fourth Estate, 2002), 98).

corporeal manner, perhaps so did their models. What was left for white British revivalists was to unearth a “genuine” version of this ideal.

Muddy Waters served this purpose well. As I have discussed at length in this and previous chapters, British jazz critics preoccupied with folk authenticity established and frequently reiterated Waters’ position as “a living link to the folk tradition of the Deep South.”¹⁰⁴ In Cyril Davies’ words, “Muddy Waters... is my kind of blues. He’s about the only one who has the background enough to be a genuine and pure blues singer.”¹⁰⁵ In a British mainstream society that placed a premium on mind/body split, propriety, and neo-Victorian morality, Muddy Waters’ “authentically-felt” lyrics overlaid upon a “rocking” beat served as ideal points of articulation for a dissident and disaffected musical community.

The flaw in this motivational logic rests in the assumption made by white British receivers of black American blues and R&B that the music reflected an authentic black lived experience in a strictly homological manner. While black cultural expression was certainly formed in part by the material conditions of the black experience—and as such a presence of “blackness” can be said to reside in the sound of the records—the lyric content and musical choices were as much the result of black artists’ aesthetic and, just as often, commercially motivated choices. That Muddy Waters chose to sing about “mojo” and “gypsy women” is best understood as just that, a choice that is perhaps informed by his social surroundings, but not a necessary result of his cultural background.¹⁰⁶ In an interview with Robert Palmer late in his life, Waters suggested as much:

¹⁰⁴ Oliver, “Muddy Waters’ Blues.”

¹⁰⁵ Jopling, “I’m Still Striving for my Sound.”

¹⁰⁶ Although the field of possible aesthetic positions could still be said to be delimited by the temporal and geographical specificity of Waters social position as a black American musician living in Chicago during the mid-20th century.

When you are writin' them songs that are coming from down that way, you can't leave out somethin' about that mojo thing. Because this is what black people really believed in at that time. We played so many times, 'I'm goin' down to Louisiana / Get me a mojo hand,' and I tried to make a picture so you could see it, just like you are looking at it. When I was singing it, I didn't believe in it no way.¹⁰⁷

Addressing black popular music, Stuart Hall asserts that “popular culture, commodified and stereotyped as it often is, is not... where we find the truth of our experience.... It is an arena that is *profoundly* mythic... a theatre of popular desires, a theatre of popular fantasies.” The professional musicians that recorded R&B for record companies understood well that they were participating in a commodified and stereotyped arena of cultural production. While they may have represented themselves in a manner that at least cursorily reflected their inner desires and senses of self, they also projected an imagined/imaginary persona—hypermasculine, primitive, or what have you—that would help sell records.

Despite Waters' motivations or beliefs, what many British R&B fans heard in his music and voice—transmitted to them through the commercial sound recording—was what they perceived to be an unmediated, uncensored, distinctly black expression of masculinity. There is something to be said for the potentially naïve convictions of British revivalists. As Paul Gilroy contends, black identity formation “remains the outcome of practical activity: language, gesture, bodily significations, desires. . . . These significations are condensed in musical performance, although it does not, of course, monopolise them.”¹⁰⁸ I would add that these significations remain legible (and therefore citable by British R&B practitioners) in the recording of black musical performance, even though the interaction of the performer and audience is in this case strictly in the realm of the imaginary. Repeated on a large scale, this imaginary interaction has the capacity

¹⁰⁷ Robert Palmer, *Deep Blues* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 97. Part of this quote appears on the “Got My Mojo Working” Wikipedia page with the part about Waters not believing in “mojo” elided.

¹⁰⁸ Paul Gilroy, “Sounds Authentic: Black Music, Ethnicity, and the Challenge of a *Changing Same*,” *Black Music Research Journal* 10/2 (1990).

to produce homological relationships. In Rick Altman's words, "all 'ancients' are just moderns of an earlier day. All encoders were once decoders; all decoders are potential encoders."¹⁰⁹ British R&B, therefore, represented a complicated web of relations, expressing, almost simultaneously, imaginary, emergent, homological and *post-facto* associations between musical sound and musical communities.¹¹⁰

* * *

If, as David Brackett has argued, musical genres function in a similar fashion to film genres, then the white, British countercultural performances and reception of R&B can be read in terms of Altman's observation that genre communities enact a "split subjectivity of genre spectatorship."¹¹¹ As Altman concludes, "pleasure derives from a perception that activities producing it are free from control exercised by the culture and felt by the spectator in the real world." Therefore, perhaps an affinity for rhythm and blues by young, white men and women in Britain at this historical moment can be thought of as a way to explore alternative identities. Whether this took the form of "twisting the night away" or temporarily luxuriating in a perceived/imaginary/projected world of assertive masculinity, overt sexuality, and unmediated emotional expression, white Britons used rhythm and blues to "perform blackness" while still largely functioning in line with cultural norms.¹¹²

Drawing on an existing revivalist impulse in post-war England, the nascent R&B movement was, in part, a *purely* imaginary identification. In the acts of performing, listening to,

¹⁰⁹ Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1999), 182.

¹¹⁰ Born, 35-6. See this dissertation's introduction for a more detailed discussion of Born's four "structural" articulations.

¹¹¹ Altman, *Film/Genre*, 156.

¹¹² Ibid, 156. The long-term result of this sidestepping of cultural norms, however, results in this case in a palpable shift in accepted behaviors and boundaries of the abject within Western cultures.

and dancing to faithful recreations of black American rhythm and blues, British musicians and audiences thought themselves to be momentarily tapping into some form of psychic “truth” so often perceived to be resident in musics considered primitive or Other. The British performance of R&B at this time, however, was more than just a diversion into fantasy. It was also an emergent, transitory moment that—while exoticist for certain—prefigured a long-standing relationship between blues-based music and rebellious, white, youth culture.

5 - RHYTHM AND BLUEBEAT: **GEORGIE FAME, MILLIE SMALL, & JAMAICAN R&B IN THE UK**

A crowd gathered on the afternoon of Wednesday, September 25, 1963 at the Flamingo Club, just across Soho from the Marquee. Afternoon was a bit early for a club best known for its “All-niter” sessions, but word was out that Georgie Fame and the Blue Flames were recording a live album that day and, as any Flamingo devotee knew, Mr. Fame was not an act to be missed. As the recording engineer Glyn Johns fashioned a makeshift control booth in a broom closet and the rest of the band set up, a team of club regulars helped Fame bring his Hammond L-100 organ down the stairs of the basement club and onto the stage. Not long after, tape began rolling and the band blazed through ten tunes, only to find out that the two-channel mobile recorder malfunctioned mid set.¹ Undeterred, Fame and the Blue Flames hopped back on the bandstand and started the set again from the top. To open “take two” the Blue Flames settled into a vamp, Flamingo club MC Johnny Gunnell announced the band, and the crowd audibly expressed their enthusiasm—which was apparently no worse for wear for hearing the band play the same material a second time:

“Yeah, here we go now, Georgie Fame, the Blue Flames, and let’s listen to... “Night Train!”

The group then transitioned from the vamp to the song’s signature groove and Fame follows:

“Miami, Florida! Atlanta, Georgia! Raleigh, North Carolina! Washington, D.C.! All aboard!”

So opens Georgie Fame’s *Rhythm and Blues from the Flamingo*. This number stands as a rather fitting representation of Georgie Fame and the Flamingo club sound circa 1963. Originally

¹ Chris Welsh, *The Whole World’s Shaking: Georgie Fame Complete Recordings 1963-1966*, Compact Disc Box-set Booklet (Polydor/Universal 4739865, 2015), 18-19.

a #1 R&B hit for Jimmy Forrest as an instrumental in 1952, “Night Train” had been re-recorded by James Brown in 1961 with a sparse lyric that emulates a train conductor calling out a series of destinations along the United States Eastern Seaboard. Released in 1962, Brown’s version achieved crossover success, reaching #5 on *Billboard’s* R&B chart and #35 on the Hot-100. By performing this recent African-American commercial hit, Fame affirmed his dedication to a style of R&B that was markedly more modern than the kind favored at the Marquee’s R&B nights. Fame’s conception of the genre embraced rather than distanced itself from the sounds of soul jazz, Atlantic, Stax and Motown that were becoming increasingly popular with black American audiences. *Rhythm and Blues from the Flamingo*, the first truly live long playing album of British R&B, is in this regard a departure from the Chicago-centric approach typical of the Marquee.

Not quite all of the tracks recorded on that September afternoon were of the type that might have been celebrated as the best of modern black American music at this time, however. Sandwiched between a Booker T-inspired rendition of “You Can’t Sit Down” and a version of The Miracles “Shop Around” was the track that seemed to elicit the most vocal response from the crowd, Monty Morris’ “Humpty Dumpty.” In its instrumentation, form, fundamental back-beat shuffle and even nursery rhyme lyric, “Humpty Dumpty” was not far removed from the American rhythm and blues tradition. From its first moments however, as the horn section pulses away on staccato upbeats, it is evident that this was not a performance that could easily be confused with the standard fare coming out of the US. This was R&B of a very different kind and quite literally oceans removed in its source from the majority of the material discussed in this dissertation thus far. This was not an attempt to emulate American rhythm and blues; rather “Humpty Dumpty” was a cover of *Jamaican* R&B. This style of music—although it was

occasionally called “ska” in Jamaica, and by early 1964 would be referred to as “blue beat” in the UK—was, on both sides for the Atlantic, known simply as a variant on rhythm and blues. For the moment at least, it was contained within the broad R&B category that also applied to James Brown, Chuck Berry, Motown and Muddy Waters.

The case studies in chapters two, three and four address issues of revival in a rather traditional sense. That is to say, they pertain to the re-creation and re-presentation of African-American cultural practices by white British artists with limited points of interaction between black and white, British and American. This chapter focuses on a quite different phenomenon in that it speaks to the formation and importation of a musical form that was from its inception understood to be less strictly bound to a single cultural source. As will be discussed below, the performance and reception of Jamaican rhythm and blues in the UK was the product of a web of cultural interaction—stylistic influences, performance practices, listening and business practices—animated by a confluence of black Americans, Jamaicans of all ethnic stripes, British West Indians and white Britons.² In other words, this music was more transparently hybrid than the “downhome” blues/R&B of Waters and similar African-American artists who were so revered by the first wave of British R&Bers. Nonetheless, as the Georgie Fame example above

² This was a yet-to-be codified or strictly labeled musical genre at the time. Music from this period is now referred to as JA Boogie (as it was then at times in Jamaica), proto-ska, Jamaican rhythm and blues, ska or blue beat depending on when a particular song was released and/or its stylistic characteristics. The retrospective category of “ska” now generally applies to most Jamaican popular music produced between 1960-1966. Kevin O’Brien Chang and Wayne Chen, *Reggae Routes* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), x. As will be demonstrated in the discussion to follow, UK press mentions between 1960 and 1963 refer to this genre and its predecessors as Jamaican rhythm and blues/R&B, West Indian R&B or simply R&B without any additional qualifier. I will be using the term JA-R&B to encompass Jamaican sourced and inspired records from the period between 1958-1964 for the sake of simplicity and to highlight the relationship between this music and that of black America at the time and leading up to it. As “blue beat” became an accepted and widely used term at the start of 1964, I will use this term as well when referring to recordings/discourse from 1964.

demonstrates, it was performed and listened to in at least some pockets of the 1963 R&B scene, rising to prominence alongside more strictly North American forms.

The presence of Jamaican R&B (JA-R&B) in the UK during this period—particularly as performed by British artists—is often relegated to a side note in the histories of either “authentic” Jamaican ska or British blues. More often than not JA-R&B doesn’t register in the British blues literature whatsoever.³ If addressed at all, it is typically mentioned in reference to Georgie Fame. Even then, it is only considered to be one of the many sounds that Fame “interweaved” into his brand of R&B rather than a fundamental element of his repertoire.⁴ Leslie Fancourt, for example, refers to Fame “combining R&B with a West Indian flavour” in the preface to his discography of British Blues, but only mentions this as the basis for Fame’s exclusion from the volume.⁵ Similarly, works like Christopher Partridge’s *Dub in Babylon* and Lloyd Bradley’s *This is Reggae Music* and *Sounds Like London* give only minimal and often dismissive attention to the fact that white Britons were listening to and playing Jamaican-styled rhythm and blues.⁶ Jamaican R&B’s intermediary position between these two coherent/intelligible traditions of British blues and ska/reggae, coupled with the genre’s eventual exploitation as a commercial novelty dance style, has resulted in a lack of critical interest in a most complex and commercially successful/popular genre. This chapter recuperates the production, emulation and consumption of Jamaican rhythm and blues in the UK into a broader

³ A notable exception to this rule is John Stratton’s “Melting Pot: The Making of Black British Music in the 1950s and 1960s,” in *Black Popular Music in Britain Since 1945*, Jon Stratton and Nabeel Zuberi, eds. (Farnham, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), 27-45.

⁴ Bob Brunning, *British Blues: The History 1950s to Present* (London: Blandford, 1995), 73-76.

⁵ Leslie Fancourt, *British Blues on Record 1957-1970* (Faversham, England: Retrack Books, 1992), A.

⁶ Lloyd Bradley, *This is Reggae Music: The Story of Jamaican Music* (New York: Grove Press, 2000); Lloyd Bradley, *Sounds Like London: 100 Years of Black Music in the Capital* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2013); Christopher Partridge, *Dub in Babylon: Understanding the Evolution and Significance of Dub Reggae in Jamaica and Britain from King Tubby to post-Punk* (Bristol, UK: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2010).

narrative of the British R&B boom. Following a discussion of the cultural roots of Jamaican rhythm and blues and the diasporic routes through which it found its way onto British record labels, the chapter addresses the historical moment JA-R&B moved from the relative shadows of the underground Jamaican social scene into the clubs of Soho and London's recording studios. As suggested above, the performing and recording activities of Georgie Fame between early 1962 and early 1964 offer a unique opportunity to interrogate the means by which JA-R&B came to be embraced by many of the same fans who celebrated American R&B. I conclude the chapter by addressing the brief period in early 1964 when JA-R&B entered the pop charts through British-made recordings by Millie Small and a handful of others.

The story of Jamaican popular music in Britain in the late 1950s and early 1960s presents a unique set of challenges and contraindications to the more firmly historicist approach to sources employed in other chapters in this dissertation.⁷ As Lloyd Bradley notes in his influential and expansive history, *This is Reggae Music*, "The black Jamaican tradition is oral, thus scientific precision will be noticeable only in its absence."⁸ *This is Reggae Music*, along with many other examples in the literature on Jamaican popular music, reveals that oral histories and interviews form the basis of much of these investigations, certainly for the period before 1964.⁹

⁷ In an effort to minimize the influence of presentist perspectives in previous chapters, I have foregrounded primary sources almost to the exclusion of (auto)biographical sources and oral history. Considering the pivotal role that the articulation of British popular music to African American musical styles played in the formation of the sounds of the popular music to follow—as well as the ideological assumptions and the attendant nostalgia this moment has since inspired—this strategy is of particular importance when addressing British R&B. As I discuss in the introduction, another issue with retrospective histories of British R&B/blues is the fact that they are most often musician-oriented and therefore the picture painted by these narratives has more to do with how the artists wish to remember themselves (or wish to be remembered) than with the events themselves.

⁸ Bradley, *This is Reggae Music*, 49.

⁹ See for examples see Chang and Chen, *Reggae Routes*; Bradley, *This is Reggae Music*; David Katz, *Solid Foundation: An Oral History of Reggae* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2003); Ray Hitchins, *Vibe Merchants: The Sound Creators of Jamaican Popular Music* (Burlington, VT and Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2014); Klive Walker, *Dubwise: Reasoning from the Reggae Underground* (London, CA: Insomniac Press, 2000). Michael de Koningh and Marc Griffiths, *Tighten Up!: The History of Reggae in*

While, as Bradley suggests, an element of cultural preference may have contributed to this being the case, this approach is a matter of necessity more than choice. With only the rarest of exceptions, the social interactions and cultural production of black Jamaicans in the UK was undocumented in the press at this time.¹⁰ Such a dearth of written records can be patently linked to racialized and class-oriented power structures. Such structures positioned the day-to-day activities of (typically impoverished) urban black Jamaicans in both Kingston and London primarily under the radar of the “uptown” Jamaican and “mainstream” British music publications. While I maintain my focus on mass media discourse in this chapter, I also embrace retrospective accounts found in Jamaican popular music scholarship for both the historical data and the personal perspectives they provide. My intention here is to let the marginalized voices of West Indian artists and fans help guide and enrich the historical narrative and discursive field presented by contemporaneous media coverage.

The roughly two-year span of the British R&B boom—and even shorter JA-R&B craze—was a period of incredibly rapid musical and social change. What was revolutionary in the summer of 1962 was standard operating procedure by the summer of 1963 and potentially passé by the following year.¹¹ As such, the difference of even as little as a month or two when dating an event/performance/recording has the potential to drastically alter its meaning and implications. As a result, this chapter strives to reconcile the invaluable contributions of oral history with the relative precision of archival research.

the UK (London: Sanctuary Publishing Ltd, 2004) is less explicit about this orientation, however the list of sources for this book are predominately interviews conducted by the authors.

¹⁰ I admit that I am loathe to question Bradley’s judgment on the “traditional” position of orality in a culture to which he can claim a much closer affiliation than I.

¹¹ As noted in chapter four, for example, Blues Incorporated’s performances of “Got my Mojo Working” in March 1962 were revolutionary. A little more than a year later, it would be considered odd if an R&B band did *not* play “Mojo.”

JAMAICAN ROOTS: FROM SOUND SYSTEMS TO SELLING RECORDS

Despite the wealth of diverse musical styles—big-band swing, Cuban *son* and *bolero*, Trinidadian calypso, traditional Jamaican mento¹²—that made up the post-World War II Jamaican soundscape, “the minds of [post-war] Jamaican people were colonized by American rhythm and blues.”¹³ The iterations of rhythm and blues evidently first arrived in Jamaica via two media: on record by way of informal importation of records by American servicemen and Jamaican migrant farm laborers returning from the States, and on radio stations broadcasting out of US cities like Nashville, New Orleans and Miami.¹⁴ By the early 1950s, records by the likes of Louis Jordan, Jimmy Reed, Wynonie Harris and even Nat King Cole provided the preferred beat for Kingston’s nightlife, typically blasting out of the speakers of local businesses or from one of any number of outdoor dances.¹⁵ Almost concurrent with the importation of American R&B in Jamaica was the rise of sound system culture powered by large-scale, often custom-designed mobile DJ set-ups. For a combination of aesthetic and economic reasons, these “Big Rigs” were typically used to provide the soundtrack for outdoor social gatherings rather than live bands.¹⁶ The sound system, however, as Bradley argues, was much more than a turntable, powerful amplifier and set of oversized speakers,

it was, quite literally, the community’s heartbeat.... Crowds flocked to wherever the big beat boomed out, it was a lively dating agency, a fashion show, an information exchange, a street status parade ground, a political forum, a center of commerce, and, once the deejays began to chat on the mic about more than their sound systems, their records, their women or their selves, it was the ghetto’s newspaper.¹⁷

¹² Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 1-3.

¹³ Prince Buster, quoted in Bradley, *This is Reggae Music*, xv.

¹⁴ Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 4-5. Walker, *Dubwise*, 108.

¹⁵ Bradley, *This is Reggae Music*, 13. Dick Hebdige, “The Roots of Reggae: Black American Music,” in *Cut n’ Mix* (London and New York: Routledge, 1987), 45-47.

¹⁶ See Chang and Chen, *Reggae Routes*, 20-21; and Jason Toynbee, *Bob Marley: Herald of a Postcolonial World?* (Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007), 82-3, for brief discussions of the economics and aesthetics of sound systems.

¹⁷ Bradley, *This is Reggae Music*, 4-5.

As early as 1952 these centers of cultural interaction had multiplied in number to the degree that competition between rival systems—be they in adjacent neighborhoods, nearby lawns or even in the same dancehall—became commonplace. The capacity to win over paying customers was often dependent not only on the power of a soundman’s system or his skill at reading a crowd, but on his ability to spin records that could only be heard coming through *his* speakers.¹⁸ These “exclusives” typically came in the form of relatively obscure R&B records obtained through trips to, or via mail order from, the United States.¹⁹ By the mid-1950s a new strategy was being employed by sound system operators to obtain unique music: the commissioning of locally produced records. These “restricted recordings,” as Ray Hitchins refers to them, were original songs by Jamaican musicians cut to one-off acetate discs that could be played at a sound system the same day they were recorded.²⁰ It was in producing these restricted records that Jamaican musicians first recorded rhythm and blues. Furthermore, it was through these restricted records played by sound systems that such homegrown productions were first heard. Although these acetates offered the desired exclusivity (and superior bass frequencies), they degraded in quality quickly such that none of these restricted records have been preserved.²¹

It would not be long before a shift to recording JA-R&B for mass commercial production followed. According to multiple sources, one of the first of these records was Laurel Aitken’s 1958 “Boogie in My Bones,” which “represents one of the first local recordings of which the

¹⁸ There is no reference in the historical literature whatsoever of female sound system operators at this time, thus the exclusive use of masculine pronouns.

¹⁹ Once obtained, the physical labels for these records would typically be removed and the song renamed to avoid competitors from procuring the same disc. Bradley, *This is Reggae Music*, 37-39.

²⁰ Hitchins, *Vibe Merchants*, 33-36. These records were typically recorded at one of two relatively primitive recording studios in Kingston: Ken Kohuri’s Records Limited or Stanley Motta’s Motta’s Recording Studio.

²¹ Hitchins, *Vibe Merchants*, 34. A version of “Lollipop Girl,” recorded around 1956 is said to be one of the early efforts at these types of recordings. The song was later recorded by the Jiving Juniors for Duke Reid.

sound can be considered comparable... to a North American recording.”²² Unlike the previous “exclusives” that were commissioned by black “downtown” soundmen, the recording of “Boogie In My Bones” was arranged and financed by Jewish-Irish “uptown” jukebox rental business owner and entrepreneur Chris Blackwell. As Australian-born and BBC-trained sound engineer Graeme Goodall recounts the recording of the record, it was made “illicitly” in the Radio Jamaica Rediffusion (RJR) studio, the only studio in Jamaica at the time capable of achieving the international expectations of sound quality.²³ Over the course of a seven-hour session, Cuban-born, Jamaican-raised singer Laurel Aitken recorded two sides, backed by a band comprised of two black Jamaican musicians and three white Australian musicians.²⁴

Issued in 1959, “Boogie in Bones” became the first locally recorded song broadcast on Jamaican airwaves.²⁵ Against competition from a bevy of American releases, the song reached #1 on the recently founded Jamaican Broadcast Company’s record chart in October of that year and stayed at that position for thirteen weeks.²⁶ The success of “Boogie in My Bones” appears to have motivated a great many other figures in the nascent Jamaican popular music community to produce records for commercial sale. Following the opening of Federal Studios in 1959, leading

²² Hitchins, *Vibe Merchants*, 56. Hitchins’ devotes an entire chapter to the production of this record, drawing heavily on interviews with session engineer Graeme Goodall. This chapter is the basis for the following brief synopsis of this process (“Establishing an Internationally Competitive Recording Model,” 51-71).

²³ RJR was, until a year later when the Jamaica Broadcasting Company launched, the only professional radio studio in Jamaica. The relatively state of the art Federal Studios would also open the following year. The details of how Goodall/Blackwell/Aitken gained access to the studio are not mentioned by Hitchins.

²⁴ The emphasis on ethnicity and nationality in this passage is meant to draw attention to the fact that the recording of this influential statement of homegrown Jamaican popular music (like so many that follow) was the result of the intercultural cooperation of participants from a broad spectrum of ethnic, racial, national and class backgrounds. And while it is tempting to gather these participants along racial/class dividing lines aligned with labor and capital (which is sometimes the case), such distinctions are rarely definitive.

²⁵ On the Jamaican Broadcast Company, which debuted in September of 1959. Katz, *Solid Foundation*, 20.

²⁶ Ibid.

soundmen Coxson Dodd and Duke Reid committed additional resources to this type of recording, setting in motion a full-blown, if relatively small-scale recording industry by 1960.

Sound system culture found its way to Britain shortly after its formation as part of the ever-increasing flow of Jamaicans to the mother country.²⁷ Instead of clubs and ballrooms, the social hubs of everyday British West Indian life were “blues dances” and “shebeens”; regular or one-off, often all-night social gatherings held in basements or front rooms in London neighborhoods such as Brixton or Ladbroke Grove.²⁸ Although indoor affairs, these events served essentially the same function as the lawns/dancehalls of Kingston. Recognizing that the radios that were first used for such dances weren’t producing the same effect as back home, recent émigré and former Jamaican “selector” Vincent Forbes (Duke Vin) had a “big rig” custom build, launching Britain’s first sound system in 1955.²⁹ Duke Vin’s friend and top competitor Wilbert Campbell (Count Suckle) debuted his own system latter that year.³⁰ As a means to supplement what selections were available in British stores, both Duke Vin and Count Suckle special ordered rhythm and blues records directly from the US. In addition, contacts in Jamaica would ship them copies of the latest sides that were popular on the Kingston sound systems. By the end of decade these records would come to include the efforts of the emerging Jamaican recording industry.

²⁷ “Mother country” was a term frequently found used by West Indians at the time—in the *West Indian Gazette*, in songs and in other media. It is hard to say if the sentiment behind the term is genuine affection toward Britain or a tongue-in-cheek way to refer to the source of imperial/colonial power/subjugation.

²⁸ Bradley, *This is Reggae Music*, 115. As early as the late 1930s a small handful of public spaces such as the Paramount Ballroom made themselves accessible to London’s West Indian community; however, as segregation remained legal in the UK until the Race Relations Act of 1968, by and large people of color were barred entry to a vast majority of commercial dancehalls and clubs. See Partridge, *Dub in Babylon*, 101–103, Bradley, *Sounds Like London*, 28–9.

²⁹ Paul Sullivan, *Reverb: Remixology: Tracing the Dub Diaspora* (London, UK: Reaktion Books, 2013), 58. A “selector” is equivalent to a deejay in typical American parlance in that s/he is the one that decides which records to play when.

³⁰ Or perhaps the following year. The date of Suckle and Vin’s joint arrival in the UK (they travelled together as stowaways) is listed as either 1952 or 1954 depending on the source. The date of Suckle’s debut is also a subject of debate.

DIASPORIC ROUTES: NOW AVAILABLE IN ENGLAND... BLUES FROM JAMAICA

Despite Lloyd Bradley's assertions regarding the exclusively oral nature of communication and tradition in black Jamaican culture, some written record of the emergence of Jamaican rhythm and blues in the UK exists. Launched in the political aftermath of the August 1958 Notting Hill race riots, Britain's first commercial black newspaper, the *West Indian Gazette* (*WIG*), was conceived to serve the growing population of British-resident African-Caribbeans. From its inception, the *WIG*—founded by “communist, feminist and anti-imperialist” editor Claudia Jones and housed in a two-room flat above the West Indian/Jamaican-owned Theo Campbell's Record Shop in Brixton, South London—concerned itself primarily with the interrelated issues of immigration, civil rights (reporting on incidences of “racialism” in Britain as well as closely following South African boycotts related to apartheid and the American struggle for racial equality), anti-imperialism and the long road to independence for the British colonies of the West Indies.³¹ In addition to this overtly political orientation, the *Gazette* included a “Show Column” and a “Let's Talk About People” regular feature as well as advertisements directed at its unique readership. Within these pages the paper frequently reported on and assisted in facilitating community building cultural endeavors aimed at the local West Indian population. Most notably, the *WIG* sponsored, promoted and organized annual Notting Hill Carnivals between 1959 and 1964. The first carnival, held in St. Pancras Hall in January of 1959, was co-sponsored by Melodisc Records, one of the few labels catering to the British West Indian population at the time.³²

Founded by European-Jewish, US-based entrepreneur and part-time London resident Emil Shallit in 1947, Melodisc focused on licencing American jazz recordings for the UK before

³¹ Donald Hinds, “The *West Indian Gazette*: Claudia Jones and the black press in Britain,” *Race and Class* (50:1), 2008, 88-97.

³² “West Indian Carnival – June 29,” *West Indian Gazette*, June 1963, 3.

expanding its business model to include recording local and visiting talent in the early 1950s.³³ Throughout the decade the label licensed and produced records and, thanks to its ongoing relationship with Lord Kitchener in particular, became one of the leading purveyors of calypso in UK. Perhaps due to his long-standing business relationships with West Indians in London, Shallit was the first British record producer to reissue Jamaican popular music/JA-R&B records. By 1960, less than two years after the Jamaican recording industry got off the ground, Melodisc released its first Jamaican-sourced JA-R&B recordings on its Kalypso subsidiary, including Laurel Aitken's "Aitken's Boogie" and "Boogie in My Bones." In response to the brisk sales of Aitken's records Shallit launched a new imprint specifically for the new sounds coming out of Jamaica. Aware that some Afro-Caribbean Londoners were referring to the new sound of Jamaican rhythm and blues as "*blues* beat," Shallit's employee Siggy Jackson suggested a name for the new label: "Blue Beat."³⁴

The earliest advertisement for Blue Beat records in the *WIG* appeared in the November 1960 issue of the newspaper with the tag "Latest hits on Blue Beat... blues from Jamacia [*sic*]."³⁵ The launch of the new label coincided quite closely with Laurel Aitken's relocation to London, an event noted in two *WIG* articles covering a pair of promotional events sponsored by Melodisc/Blue Beat. The first, "Meet Laurel Aitken: Dynamic West Indian Star," is a write-up of the welcome party the label hosted for the singer which celebrates his accomplishments in Jamaica—nine records in the West Indian Top-20 in the past six months—and his aspirations for

³³ See de Koningh and Griffiths, *Tighten Up*, 21-27 and Bradley, *Sounds Like London*, 41-44 for more on Shallit and the early history of Melodisc Records.

³⁴ de Koningh and Griffiths, *Tighten Up!*, 23.

³⁵ *WIG*, November 1960, 7. The ad is for an Aitken 45 on Melodisc ("Lonesome Lover" b/w "Marylee," as well as Byron Lee's "Dumplin's" b/w "Kissin' Gal" (BB2) and Higgs and Wilson's "Manny Oh" b/w "When You Tell Me Baby" (BB3). The latter two records, along with Aitken's "Boogie Rock"/"Heavenly Angel" (BB1) represent the first three releases from Blue Beat; all of which were recorded in Jamaica and licensed to Shallit. These appear to be the earliest advertisements and press promotion for Blue Beat anywhere as far I as can ascertain.

his new career in the UK. The second is an announcement (or perhaps advertisement) for Aitken's appearance at the "Grand Carnival Dance" at which the singer and a group called the Blue Beats were scheduled to perform.³⁶ In addition to live music, the evening included a "Miss Blue Beat Contest" open to "girls of any nationality" eighteen years of age or older, provided that the contestant is "intelligent" and has "rhythm and beat in her."³⁷ Six months later Siggy Jackson, now running Blue Beat for Shallit, hosted a "Rhythm and Blues Dance" which would again feature "famous Blue-Beat artist" Aitken as headliner.³⁸

Melodisc/Blue Beat's primary competition in the UK's JA-R&B record market at the outset was Starlite, an imprint of Carlo Kramer's jazz label Esquire. Between 1960 and mid-1962 these were the only two labels to advertise in the *WIG*, with Starlite beating Melodisc to the punch by three months. So tightly aligned were the efforts of the two labels that reissues of Laurel Aitken's "Boogie in My Bones" appeared almost simultaneously in the UK from both companies (clearly neither had secured exclusive rights to the record!).³⁹ Having missed the opportunity to work with Aitken in the UK, Starlite signed another local Jamaican talent named Beresford Ricketts. The December 1960 edition of the *Gazette* features a profile of Ricketts similar to the November article on Aitken. Ricketts had been performing regularly at a club in Brixton in a Nat King Cole-style act before signing with Starlite. While Ricketts failed to achieve any great success, the *WIG* coverage of him at this juncture is noteworthy in that it attests to a

³⁶ Tickets for the November 4, 1960 Carnival concert were obtainable through "your Record Shop" or by writing the Melodisc offices. As will be discussed shortly, the Blue Beats appear to have been a rotating assemblage of musicians that were, at its core, made up of white British jazz/rock 'n' roll/R&B musicians.

³⁷ "Girls! Here's Your Chance! 'Miss Blue-Beat' to be Chosen Nov. 4," *WIG*, November 1960, 8.

³⁸ *WIG*, May 1961, 11.

³⁹ de Koningh and Griffiths, *Tighten Up!*, 23.

broad push to exploit local talent to market to the British West-Indian market; talent that was expected to sing rhythm and blues, “which is what the youngsters of today most enjoy.”⁴⁰

Amid a flurry of reporting on Jamaica’s impending independence from colonial rule in the *Gazette*’s May 1962 issue, an advertisement appeared for a “new label in Jamaican Rhythm and Blues... now available in England”⁴¹ With this ad, Chris Blackwell and Island Records entered the British market in mid-1962. Island’s first eight releases, all “Hot from Jamaica Top 10” [*sic*], were promoted in the *WIG* including the timely release “Independent Jamaica” from Lord Creator, and Jamaica’s then-#1 single “We’ll Meet” from Roy and Millie. Other than this and similar ads, the *Gazette* reported on no other popular music events in 1961 and 1962. Instead, the balance of the music coverage was about stage, folk and classical performers.⁴² At this time, advertisements by record labels and record shops with a West-Indian orientation provide the only extant evidence that JA-R&B was being produced, marketed or consumed.

The mainstream popular music press certainly wasn’t covering Jamaican popular music. The press coverage of Blue Beat Records offers an illustrative example. The only mention of Blue Beat in the British popular music press in 1960 was a small industry announcement in *Disc*, which noted that Melodisc’s latest imprint would focus on “rhythm and blues... the biggest seller on the label is reckoned to be Laurel Atkins [*sic*].”⁴³ Throughout the following year four reviews of Blue Beat releases appeared in *Disc*.⁴⁴ Not a single Blue Beat side was reviewed by any other pop music paper in 1961. In fact, until the second half of 1963, Blue Beat Records was entirely

⁴⁰ “Fabulous Singing Discovery,” *WIG*, December 1960, 9. Despite the promotional push from the label, he never really became Starlite’s answer to Aitken and appears to be all but lost to history except for the scant coverage of him in the *WIG* at this time.

⁴¹ *WIG*, May 1962, 13.

⁴² This selective coverage is indicative of the “cultural uplift” agenda found in much of the international black press.

⁴³ Owen Bryce, “Trad Jazz News,” *Disc*, December 10, 1960, 9.

⁴⁴ Out of forty-six singles and one LP released by the label that year.

absent from the reviews, news and advertisement columns of *Disc*'s main competitors *Melody Maker*, *New Musical Express*, and the *Record Mirror*. This was similarly the case in the more "seriously minded" jazz press, despite the fact that some jazz outlets made efforts to promote calypso a decade earlier. What the *WIG*'s coverage of Blue Beat artists and events suggests, then, is that JA-R&B records were almost exclusively marketed toward, and considered the domain of, Britain's West Indian communities at this time. Yet even this coverage could be considered scant at best. Post-1960 the *Gazette* appears to have shied away from covering JA-R&B, leaving advertisements in its pages as the primary locus for information about West Indian popular music in the press. Advertisements for Jamaican rhythm and blues records from Blue Beat, Island and Starlite appeared among ads for shipping and travel agencies, Mt. Gay Rum, Red Stripe Lager and West Indian culinary staples such as goat's meat, green bananas and hot pepper sauce. From at least one point of view then, these records could be seen as an essential West Indian commodity or service; a product for purchase and consumption, but not necessarily news-worthy. Entirely missing from the *WIG* is even the slightest mention of blues dances, shebeens or sound systems.⁴⁵

Nonetheless, Jamaican popular music in London continued to sell. Blue Beat Records quickly established itself as the go-to source for JA-R&B, producing a steady flow of records for the market. Through regular trips to Kingston, Emil Shallit cultivated relationships with a number of soundmen-turned-producers who were happy to licence their records to Blue Beat for British release.⁴⁶ The top tracks from Jamaica's dancehalls found their way to British sound

⁴⁵ The justification for this absence may be the unlawful nature of these events or, just as, if not more likely, it was because these activities were of too low a perceived cultural value to justify any discussion.

⁴⁶ Most notably Duke Reid, Coxsone Dodd and Prince Buster. Only Prince Buster had an exclusive agreement with Shallit. Reid, Dodd and other Jamaican record producers appear to have worked rather indiscriminately with Kramer at Starlite, Blackwell at Island or later with the Kings at R&B Discs (Bradley, *This is Reggae Music*, 127-130).

systems and homes in this manner. Continuing to forge relationships with UK-based Jamaican talent, Blue Beat greatly expanded its local recording roster by late 1961.⁴⁷ According to Lloyd Bradley, in the early 1960s Blue Beat's top releases were selling "into the tens of thousands." These sales, he notes, were "mostly away from the chart-return shops and often through informal distribution channels," a fact that accounts for the absence of JA-R&B from the pop charts while at the same time making it all but impossible to corroborate these figures.⁴⁸

TWISTING THE NIGHT AWAY WITH GEORGIE FAME AND COUNT SUCKLE

In April 1962, JA-R&B and the sound system tradition began the "inevitable" transition from the underground of sheebens and house parties to the relative mainstream of Soho's club scene.⁴⁹ As the Jamaican-born population in Britain grew exponentially in the early 1960s, so did the demand for the distinctive Kingston "dancehall" tradition.⁵⁰ As the number of events featuring the sound systems of Duke Vin, Count Suckle and their disciples multiplied and word spread of these events beyond the communities of Ladbroke Grove and Brixton, curious "uptown" (white) bohemian types began seeking out blues dances. Although the details of this transition are a bit hazy in the secondary literature, an advertisement in *Melody Maker's* club listing

⁴⁷ This roster included singers Owen Grey, Errol Dixon and Bobby Kingdom and trombonist Rico Rodriguez among others.

⁴⁸ Bradley, *This is Reggae Music*, 128. de Koningh and Griffiths indicate that independent labels were regularly denied television and radio access by the BBC, a situation which would also hinder Blue Beat's access to "chart-return" record shops (*Tighten Up!*, 21-24).

⁴⁹ To borrow Bradley's term (*This is Reggae Music*, 144.)

⁵⁰ Roughly 50,000 Jamaicans were moving to the UK per year by 1960. By 1962 there were an estimated 200,000 Jamaican-born British citizens in the mother country (Bradley, *This is Reggae Music*, 110-113). This increase occurred in the lead up to the Commonwealth Act of 1962 (put into effect July 1, 1962) which curtailed migration from colonies and commonwealth nations in direct response to a growing national fear of the "unarmed invasion" by peoples of color arriving from the West Indies and the Indian sub-continent. An editorial from the *WIG* indicates that this impending legislation was being debated in the House of Commons and a topic of much discussion among British West Indians ("The Common's Debate On: Migration Restriction," *WIG*, April 1961, 4.; "Bill to Ban Us Expected," *WIG*, October 1961, 5.)

suggests that Count Suckle's Soho debut occurred on Sunday, April 22nd at the Flamingo club.

"SPECIAL ADDED ATTRACTION," the listing reads, "disc jockey COUNT SUCKLE presents his hour of 'ALL THAT JAZZ' from 7-8."⁵¹ This is the first time the name Count Suckle, or that of any other West Indian soundman, appeared in *Melody Makers* Club listing. Although it is distinctly possible that Suckle worked at the Flamingo prior, the verbiage of "special attraction" in the listing suggests that this was first time he was to appear at the club. A similar ad ran in the following week's club listings, but after that, Suckle's name disappears completely from the pages of *Melody Maker* in 1962. It is tempting to conclude from this that Suckle's appearances at the Flamingo were limited to a two-week engagement, although that would run counter to other sources, however; at least one of which refers to Count Suckle as "a Flamingo regular."⁵²

Although his sound system appearances at the Flamingo served to introduce a broader public to JA-R&B, it was the musicians who performed at the club who seemed to be most influenced by the Count Suckle's sets. Perhaps most significant was the effect the soundman had on Georgie Fame. Almost contemporaneous to Suckle's first appearance at the Flamingo was the Blue Flames debut at the Flamingo's All-Nighter Club.⁵³ The group's first advertised appearance at the club was Monday, April 10th, 1962, less than two weeks before Suckle's. As part of the club's "Twist Night," Fame and his band were slated to appear alongside the All-nighter's regular attraction, Earl Watson and the Twisters.⁵⁴ While the Flamingo was more ardently

⁵¹ "Jazz Clubs-London," *MM*, April 21, 1962, 12.

⁵² Welsh, *The Georgie Fame Story*, 17. Bradley's source, a selector for Suckle during the early 1960s, indicates that Count Suckle's sound system was the focus of Flamingo Sunday nights around this time, although this runs counter to the club's published schedules.

⁵³ Guy Stevens, "'Look for the Blues' Says the Boy with the Ray Charles Sound," *New Record Mirror*, July 20, 1963, 7.

⁵⁴ *New Record Mirror* columnist and deejay/manager for the Scene Club Guy Stevens reported that Fame and the Blue Flames got their first opportunity at the Flamingo as a fill-in for a no-show group in March of 1962. "Jazz Clubs-London," *MM*, April 7, 1962, 12. The All-Nighter Club, opened May of 1959, was housed in the same basement space as the Flamingo, but was organized by a different set of promoters.

committed to modern jazz at this time, the All-Nighter sessions had a looser music policy. As early as January 1961, the club offered “Big Beat” sessions—a term used at the time for rock-oriented acts like Elvis Presley and Cliff Richard—for what one can assume was a dance-oriented crowd that was less invested in the trad craze.

Thanks to in part to Chubby Checker’s December 1961 tour and television appearances, however, London was in the throws of a “new dance boom.”⁵⁵ The latest American dance was spreading through the country to such an extent that from the start of the year through mid-summer at least one song with the word “twist” in its title occupied a spot in the *MM*’s top-20.⁵⁶ The twist had become so ubiquitous by mid-1962 that the film *It’s Trad Dad* included a cameo appearance from the Chubby Checker.⁵⁷ The All-nighter first responded to this trend by changing the name of Earl Watson’s backing band from the “Big Beat Band” to the “Twisters” and later by adding the aforementioned “Twist Night” on Mondays from 8 pm-12 am. The Blue Flames, as it happened, were a good fit for these sessions. As one of the bandleaders interviewed for *Melody Maker*’s “Twist Grabs us by the Wrist” piece noted, “the big thing [about the twist] is that it can be danced to any old rock tune.”⁵⁸ Before shifting his musical approach during his days at the Flamingo, Georgie Fame modeled his piano playing after Jerry Lee Lewis.

The Flamingo was run by Sam and Jeff Kruger and operated Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights from 7 pm to roughly 11:30 pm. Before expanding its hours over the course of the year, the All-Nighter opened Friday and Saturday nights from midnight to anywhere from 4:30 to 8:30 am as well as Sunday afternoon from 3-6 pm.

⁵⁵ Ray Coleman, “Twist Grabs us by the Wrist!,” *MM*, January 6, 1962, 9.

⁵⁶ This “twist” chart dominance was led by Chubby Checker’s “Let’s Twist Again” and Sam Cooke’s “Twistin’ the Night Away,” but also included other selections from such divergent acts as Petula Clark, Joey Dee and Frank Sinatra.

⁵⁷ It is worth acknowledging that this was the pop music backdrop against which Blues Incorporated debuted at the Ealing Club. I strongly suspect—however blasphemous as it may sound to the purist faithful—that the commercially-oriented twist craze helped usher in the “traditional” R&B boom that was to follow. Embraced by ballrooms, dance band arrangers, and basement clubs like the Flamingo alike, the twist provided an introduction to relatively recent danceable African American music for fans that may have then sought out a “shot of the thing,” as the Rolling Stones once advertised themselves.

⁵⁸ Coleman, “Twist Grabs us by the Wrist!”

Furthermore, the Blue Flames had served as the supporting band for Brit-rockers Gene Vincent, Eddie Cochran and Billy Fury (1959-1961) and had just backed Chubby Checker on his UK appearances shortly before they began their Flamingo residency.⁵⁹

As important as these early interactions at the Flamingo were for Fame and Suckle, Fame gained the most sustained access to the Jamaican-born selector's musical tastes at the Roaring Twenties. It seems that Fame, as backing musician for Earl Watson, appeared at the "20s" shortly after the club opened in April.



Figure 5.1 – “Twisting at the 20’s” Advertisement, May 1963⁶⁰

All evidence suggests that Count Suckle and Georgie Fame first shared the bill at the Roaring Twenties on July 4th, 1962.⁶¹ David Katz—who interviewed Count Suckle for his book *Solid*

⁵⁹ The Blue Flames were apparently fired from the Fury gig during the Chubby Checker package tour for playing an insufficiently “rocking” Ray Charles tune during a sound check. Welsh, *The Georgie Fame Story*, 12. For more about Fame’s pre-Flamingo career, see Keith Gildart, “Exploring London’s Soho and the Flamingo Club with Georgie Fame and the Blue Flames,” *Images of England Through Popular Music: Class, Youth and Rock ‘n’ Roll, 1955-1976* (London and New York: Palgrave, 2013), 44-61. Gildart’s discussion of Fame at the Flamingo and the Roaring Twenties between March 1962 and October 1964 only occupies four-plus pages of this chapter.

⁶⁰ *Melody Maker*, May 12, 1962, 13.

Foundation—indicates that Suckle was invited by “an African percussionist who played in the house band at the Roaring Twenties” to play an American Independence Day celebration.⁶² It is likely that the “African percussionist” in question was Ghanaian congo player Nii Moi “Speedy” Acquaye who joined the Blue Flames around May of 1962.⁶³ While the Roaring Twenties did not regularly advertise its line-ups, the “Twisting at the 20’s” ad above indicates that the Blue Flames played the club at least once prior to July 1962. When, in June 1963, Georgie Fame and the Blue Flames were being touted by their management as “Britain’s ‘No. 1 Rhythm ‘n’ Blues Band...the busiest band in town bar none,” the group held a regular Sunday engagement at the 20s.⁶⁴

Table 5.1 –Early Georgie Fame and Count Suckle Soho Club Appearances

Date	Artist	Venue
April 10, 1962	The Blue Flames (debut)	The Flamingo
April 22, 1962	Count Suckle (debut)	The Flamingo
May 12-13, 1962	Earl Watson and the Blue Flames	The Roaring Twenties
July 4, 1962	Georgie Fame and the Blue Flames / Count Suckle	The Roaring Twenties

⁶¹ This event is sometimes cited as occurring in 1961; however, the fact that Fame debuted alongside Suckle, and the fact that Suckle remembers distinctly that it was a Wednesday indicate that the year was in fact 1962. 50 Carnaby Street has a long history of black music performance, housing the Florence Mills Social Club in the 1930s, Club 11 in the 1950s, the Roaring Twenties in the 1960s and Columbo’s in the 1970s and 1980s. http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/lucy-harrison/carnaby-echoes_b_3836168.html, accessed January 30, 2017.

⁶² David Katz, “RIP Count Suckle, London Soundsystem Pioneer,” *Red Bull Music Academy Daily*, May 19, 2014, <http://daily.redbullmusicacademy.com/2014/05/count-suckle-rip>, accessed February 6, 2017.

⁶³ For more about Acquaye see Bradley, *Sounds Like London*, 144-5.

⁶⁴ “Georgie Fame and the Blue Flames” advertisement, *MM*, June 29, 1963.

As Suckle recalls, at the time when he first performed at the Roaring Twenties, the club had a prohibitive door policy that excluded people of color.⁶⁵ It was only after Suckle threatened to quit the gig that the club opened its doors to West Indians. This more or less jibes with Fame's recollection that, after a period of inactivity at 50 Carnaby, "we re-opened [the Roaring Twenties] with us and Count Suckle's sound system and then it was full of West Indians and everybody was having a great time. We ended up doing a Sunday All-niter at Suckle's place on Carnaby Street for a good year or two."⁶⁶ Lloyd Bradley's source Jah Vego suggested that the Roaring Twenties was the real epicenter for JA-R&B circa 1963. "The Roaring Twenties," he recalled, "was the first place in the center of town like that to be playing *real* Jamaican music every night."⁶⁷ It was the Roaring Twenties that became synonymous with the Jamaican sound in the minds of London clubgoers. For example, in a "Blind Date" column—*Melody Maker's* equivalent to *Downbeat's* "Blindfold Test"—Rolling Stone's bassist Bill Wyman questioned if Prince Buster's ska classic "30 Pieces of Silver" could have been "recorded at the Roarin' Twenties."⁶⁸

By late 1962 in at least two locations, JA-R&B (the latest form of which was stylistically ska although never referred to as such) was heard in Soho alongside and within the emerging R&B scene. By all accounts, Suckle's sets at the Flamingo and the Roaring Twenties featured a mix of American rhythm and blues, soul jazz (often from the Blue Note label) and the records the soundman sourced directly from Kingston. Increasingly, it can be assumed, his sets also

⁶⁵ Carl Gayle, "The Reggae Underground," *Black Music*, July 1974: Vol. 1 / Issue 8 http://forum.speakerplans.com/reggae-sound-system-list-back-in-the-real-days_topic17036_page3.html, accessed February 6, 2017.

⁶⁶ Welsh, *The Georgie Fame Story*, 17. The Flamingo, by contrast, appears to have had an open door policy and was a favorite destination for white British R&B fans/mods, black American servicemen and, following Suckle's appearances, black West Indians alike.

⁶⁷ Bradley, *This is Reggae Music*, 145.

⁶⁸ "Blind Date," *MM*, September 9, 1964, 7.

included the growing stock of JA-R&B records produced domestically by Blue Beat. For a dance-oriented, West Indian crowd, these records were contained within a single framework of “R&B.” Interaction with these relatively obscure rhythm and blues sounds was instrumental for the direction Georgie Fame would take his performing career in the following year. It was primarily through access to Suckle’s sound system that Fame gained exposure to a broad spectrum of American and Jamaican rhythm and blues records. Fame recalls that Suckle:

had this fantastic record collection and contacts in Memphis, so he’d get the latest soul, West Indian and Blue Note jazz records. He played them LOUD on this Sound System which was wonderful. Two of the crowd favorites were James Brown’s “Night Train” and Booker T.’s “Green Onions.”⁶⁹

“Wash All Your Troubles Away”

Georgie Fame and the Blue Flames wasted little time building a Soho fan base. In a span of less than six months, Fame went from an uncredited member of the Flamingo’s Monday evening relief act to being the All-nighter’s feature attraction five nights a week.⁷⁰ As the coming R&B boom was building steam into 1963, the Flamingo began listing their star attraction as “Rhythm and Blues Organist and Soul Singer Georgie Fame.”⁷¹ By that summer Fame was reportedly playing as many as forty-three dates a month for total crowds of over 25,000.⁷² These dates included the ongoing residency at the Flamingo, the Sunday night All-nighter at the Roaring Twenties and Friday nights at the Scene as well as frequent gigs at US military bases outside of

⁶⁹ Welsh, *The Georgie Fame Story*, 17. As noted at the outset of this chapter, Fame opened his debut LP with “Night Train.” He would later record “Green Onions” (1964). One of the most direct influences of these records was Fame’s decision to switch from piano to Hammond organ, the instrument that would define his sound for most of his career. While it has been argued that Fame was substantially ahead of the curve in the UK by taking up the instrument, a number of stories and ads in *MM* from Oct/Nov. indicate that interest in the Hammond organ was building more broadly. See for example the story “The Swing is to Organ,” *MM*, October 20, 1962, 7, which states that “Jazz organ is currently enjoying quite a vogue in the States. And it looks as though Britain may follow suit.”

⁷⁰ “Jazz Clubs,” *MM*, August 25, 1962, 12.

⁷¹ “Jazz Clubs,” *MM*, December 22, 1962, 8.

⁷² That is, if advertisements for the band can be taken at face value. *NRM*, July 27, 1963, 2.

London. At these venues Fame played to crowds made of up of black and white American servicemen, West Indians émigrés and the emerging mod subculture.⁷³

Table 5.2 – George Fame and the Blue Flames Schedule, June 28-July 31, 1963⁷⁴

Date	Venue(s)
June 28th	The Scene Club, The Allnighter Club
June 29th	Abbots Langley
June 30th [Sunday]	The Scene Club, Flamingo Club, Roaring 20's
July 1st	Flamingo Club
July 3rd	Fairford Village
July 4th	Brize Norton
July 5th	The Scene, The Allnighter
July 6th	Lakenheath, The Allnighter
July 7th [Sunday]	The Flamingo, Chicksand's, Roaring 20's
July 8th	The Flamingo
July 11th	The Flamingo
July 12th	Farnham Art School, The Allnighter
July 13th	High Wycombe
July 14th [Sunday]	The Allnighter 3-6 p.m., The Flamingo, Roaring 20's
July 15th	Flamingo
July 18th	Westcliff-on-Sea
July 19th	The Scene, The Allnighter
July 20th	High Wycombe, The Allnighter
July 21st [Sunday]	The Flamingo 3-6 p.m., The Scene, Roaring 20's
July 22nd-31st	<i>HOLIDAYS</i>

Between these numerous gigs, Fame and the Blue Flames found time to make their recording debut. It was once again as a backing musician that Fame broke through, this time in support of visiting Jamaican singer Prince Buster for the Blue Beat label. Reflecting the below-the-radar status of Blue Beat at the time, nothing about this album's production, release or reception is to be found the British popular music press. While the resultant album, *I Feel the*

⁷³ "Georgie Fame and the Blue Flames" advertisement, *MM*, June 29, 1963; "Georgie Fame Car Smash," *NRM*, July 27, 1963, 2.

⁷⁴ As advertised in the above mentioned June 29, 1963 *MM*. The inconsistency in venue names has been reproduced as it appeared in the ad.

Spirit, receives some attention in retrospective histories of the period, discussions of the Prince Buster/Georgie Fame recording session are short on detail. Bradley's *Sounds Like London* suggests that Speedy Acquaye introduced Fame and the Blue Flames to Blue Beat records, that Prince Buster taught Georgie Fame the "rudiments of ska," and that Fame recorded with Buster.⁷⁵ Bradley doesn't cite any sources and doesn't given any indication of timing, however, so it is unclear in what order these events may have occurred. De Konigh, et. al. mention that Shallit and Jackson brought their exclusive artists Prince Buster and Derrick Morgan to London to promote their Blue Beat sides through live performance, indicating that this was done to help stave off "the threat posed by rival labels."⁷⁶ This statement suggests that, at the earliest, the tour and recordings occurred sometime after Island records started business in the UK during the summer of 1962. However it came to be, Fame is clear in his recollection that his "first recording on Hammond organ was with Prince Buster. Buster was doing an album called *Soul of Africa* and I played on three tracks."⁷⁷

I Feel The Spirit was released sometime in 1963.⁷⁸ Bearing the catalogue number BB-LP 802, it was only the second long-playing record issued by Blue Beat.⁷⁹ In many ways *I Feel The Spirit* can be considered as representative of the record label's activities as a whole at this time.

⁷⁵ Bradley, *Sounds Like London*, 142-5. In addition to recording West Indian musicians, Melodisc also worked with West African artists starting in the late 1950s. I am inclined to disagree with Bradley's statement about Buster teaching Fame the "rudiments" of ska. I find it likely that Fame had been hearing JA-R&B records from Count Suckle for some time prior to this moment. He may have learned the finer points of ska from Buster, but would have already been generally acquainted with the style.

⁷⁶ de Koningh and Griffiths, *Tighten Up!*, 25.

⁷⁷ Welsh, *The Georgie Fame Story*, 15. Georgie Fame also played on Derrick Morgan's "Telephone" among other Blue Beat releases.

⁷⁸ As there was no reporting of Buster's visiting the UK prior to 1964 (his 1964 trip received a modicum of press mentions) in either the popular music press or the *West Indian Gazette*, it is hard to pinpoint exact dates for the sessions on which Fame accompanied Buster. It is well documented that Fame acquired his first organ in November 1962 and as noted above, the first time he was advertised as an organist was in December of that year. Therefore, the recordings were almost certainly made in 1963.

⁷⁹ The first album, titled *Jamaican Blues* (BB-LP 801), was pressed in 1961 and exclusively contained licensed tracks recorded in Jamaica.

Of the twelve tracks contained on the album, six were recorded in Jamaica and had been previously released there by Buster's Prince Buster/Voice of the People label. These songs feature the Drumbago All-Stars as backing musicians (the default session band for most Jamaican recording artists in the early 1960s) and include the title track "I Feel the Spirit," "Black Head Chinaman," and Buster's most well known record from this period, "Madness." The balance of the songs on the album were recorded in London. With the exception of the Rico Rodriguez Afro-Latin instrumental feature "Soul of Africa," the backing band for these UK-sourced tracks is listed as the Les Dawson Blues Unit.

Table 5.3 – Prince Buster, *I Feel the Spirit*, Track Listing

Track	Title	Accompaniment
1	"I Feel the Spirit"	Drumbago All Stars
2	"Madness"	Drumbago All Stars
3	"Don't Make Me Cry"	Les Dawson Blues Unit
4	"They Got to Come"	Drumbago All Stars
5	"All Alone"	Drumbago All Stars
6	"Soul of Africa"	Rico Rodriguez Blues Band*
7	"Wash Your Troubles Away"	Les Dawson Blues Unit
8	"Jealous"	Les Dawson Blues Unit
9	"Black Head Chinaman"	Drumbago All Stars
10	"Beggars are no Choosers"	Les Dawson Blues Unit
11	"Run Man Run"	Drumbago All Stars
12	"Just You"	Les Dawson Blues Unit

* Prince Buster does not sing on this track

Very, very little has been written about the Les Dawson Blues Unit in terms of the group's personnel.⁸⁰ What is apparent is that this band was also known as the Blue Beats and that the group served as the backing musicians for most of the label's local sessions starting as early as 1961. On these early records by the likes of Laurel Aitken, Owen Grey and Girl Satchmo, the

⁸⁰ Other than the fact that they also recorded as the Blue Beats, all that has been mentioned about them in the secondary literature is that Les Dawson was apparently a "white drummer" (de Koningh and Griffiths, *Tighten Up!*, 25).

group sounds very much like a standard “big beat” combo playing an American style of tenor saxophone-driven rhythm and blues. This sound is on display on *I Feel The Spirit* on the 12/8 ballad shuffle “Don’t Make Me Cry” and the instrumental sax wailer “Just You” that closes the LP. These styles, it should be noted, remained quite active in Jamaica right up to the time the record was made. For the most part, however, the Blue Beats audibly took steps toward the emerging ska style while backing Prince Buster for these 1963 sessions. Part of accomplishing this, for three tracks at least, was to bring in Georgie Fame on organ to supplement the band’s line up. As the organ was not a common instrument in JA-R&B/proto-ska, it was most likely Georgie Fame’s familiarity and facility with the style that earned him the opportunity to record on these tracks.

Although he is not credited anywhere on the album liner notes, the three tracks where Fame’s organ can be heard are “Jealous,” “Beggars are No Choosers,” and “Wash All Your Troubles Away (Wash, Wash).” His role on the first of these is the most reserved, effectively only padding the horns and guitar up-beat “ska” rhythm. He plays a rather more pronounced role on “Beggars.” Here Fame provides an introductory riff figure, pads the up-beats and even takes a solo chorus. It is on the last of these three tracks, “Wash, Wash,” that Fame plays a most essential role. “Wash, Wash” was Prince Buster’s reimagining of the 1949 hit composition “That Lucky Old Sun,” which, by the time of the Fame-Buster recording session, had become a standard of sorts, particularly among rhythm and blues and proto-soul artists.⁸¹

The original version of the song employs an AABA 32-bar song form. Each of the A sections opens with a unique four-bar antecedent phrase followed by a slight variation on the

⁸¹ The song was originally recorded in 1949 by Frankie Laine, Frank Sinatra and Louis Armstrong. R&B artists to record the song include LaVern Baker (1955), Sam Cooke (1957) and Aretha Franklin (1962). “Wash, Wash” was almost certainly recorded before Ray Charles version was released in late 1963. As previous chapters indicate, it is not always clear what source or sources an artist may have had access to.

consequent refrain: “But that lucky old sun has nothing to do, but roll around heaven all day” (see lyric below). Typical recordings (Sinatra, Louis Armstrong, Aretha Franklin, for example) are taken at a relatively slow tempo, feature lush string and/or choral accompaniment and are constructed with a single turn through the 32-bar form with a final repetition of the B and final A section (the lyrics below are as sung by Louis Armstrong).

“That Lucky Old Sun” (1949)

A:

Up in the morning out on the job,
Work like the devil for my pay
But that lucky old sun has nothing to do
But roll around heaven all day

A^I:

Fuss with my woman, toil for my kids
Sweat ‘til I’m wrinkled and gray
While that lucky old sun has nothing to do
But roll around heaven all day

B:

Good Lord above, can't you know I'm pinin'
Tears all in my eyes
Send down that cloud with a silver linin'
Lift me to paradise

A^{II}:

Show me that river,
Take me across and wash all my troubles away
Like that lucky old sun, give me nothing to do
But roll around heaven all day

The Prince Buster record opens at a moderate, danceable tempo with drums, bass and guitar establishing a groove that is maintained throughout the performance. These three interlocking parts—the sparse, march-like drum figure with heavy backbeat accents, the bass riff with heavy emphasis on the downbeat, and the signature ska upbeat guitar pattern—are

reinforced throughout the introduction by Fame's organ.⁸² Backing vocalists enter after four bars with two repetitions of a newly formed refrain sourced from the original A^{II} section: "Wash, wash, wash all my troubles away, oh yeah, oh yeah."⁸³ Prince Buster responds to these lines with melismatic statements of "oh, woo yeah." A first verse follows which aligns almost exactly with the A^{II} section above stated in its entirety. Buster proceeds through two additional verse sections using the lyric from the original A^I section. The improvisational, responsorial role Buster occupies during the initial refrain is taken over by Fame in the verses now that Buster is otherwise committed to communicating the primary melody and lyric. Fame's organ continues to pulse out the up-beats along with the guitar at this point while adding (seemingly) improvisational fills.

"Wash All My Troubles Away (Wash, Wash)" (1963)

Wash, wash, wash all my troubles away, oh yeah, oh yeah* [x2]

Show me that river, take me across

and wash all my troubles away

Like that lucky old sun, give me nothing to do [ooohs]

But roll around heaven all day, so don't you hear me

Wash, wash, wash all my troubles away, oh yeah, oh yeah (x2)

Fuss with my woman, toil for my kids

Man, I **sweat 'til I'm wrinkled and grey**

Like that lucky old sun, give me nothing to do [ooohs]

But roll around heaven all day, so watch out sinners

Wash, wash, wash all my troubles away, oh yeah, oh yeah (x2)

[Instrumental break, horns playing a variation on the main melody]

⁸² According to Wikipedia, at least, the bass part on this track is played by Jamaican jazz guitarist Ernest Ranglin. It is possible, considering Ranglin was in London for at least parts of 1963, but I haven't seen any additional evidence to support this claim.

⁸³ It has been speculated that Fame is one of the backup singers on the record. I have not been able to discern his voice among the chorus.

Fuss with my woman, toil for my kids
 Man I **Sweat till I'm wrinkled and grey**
 Like that lucky old sun, give me nothing to do [ooohs]
But roll around heaven all day, so no more worries

Wash, wash, wash all my troubles away, oh yeah, oh yeah (x2)

*Lines in **bold** sung by backing vocalists/chorus*

**sung by the chorus, Buster responds with adlibbed "Woo yeah, yeah, yeahs"*

Prince Buster's lyrical revision retains the communicative intention of "That Lucky Old Sun" while at the same time aligning "Wash All Your Troubles Away" more firmly with contemporaneous JA-R&B compositions that drew on religious and/or spiritual themes. Recent records like Robert (Bob) Marley's "Judge Not," Delroy Wilson's "Lion of Judah" and the Maytals' "Mathew Mark" (all 1963), to cite a few examples, emphasized just such a connection with African American spirituals and gospel numbers. For a British R&B audience these lyrics may well have resonated with the sort of lamentation often found in types of "folk" blues and ballads discussed in chapter two.

As the preceding discussion indicates, Buster's version bears only passing resemblance to any existing version of "That Lucky Old Sun" while making allusions to a number of different black-associated genres. The degree to which Buster reinvents the original composition even resulted in some inconsistency in composer credit for the recording. Blue Beat released the single twice, once in late 1963 as BB200, listing the song as "Wash All Your Troubles Away" composed by "C. Campbell" (Cecil Campbell being Buster's birth name). The track was released again in early 1964 as BB210, this time with the parenthetical subtitle "That Lucky Old Sun" and

“Gillespie Smith” credited as composer.⁸⁴ It would appear that there wasn’t an established convention for citing authorship for a hybrid creation such as this.⁸⁵ And thoroughly hybrid it is.

“Wash, Wash” is the result of what can best be considered a complex, transnational, intercultural process. The original composition, the product of a Nashville songwriter, became a well-known popular ballad in the US at the end of the 1940s. Throughout the 1950s, this composition was subject to re-versioning by a number of black American rhythm and blues artists; many recordings of which undoubtedly made their way to Jamaica as part of the sound system trade. Finally, as recorded by Prince Buster in Britain, it is subject to an almost wholesale re-imagining into a more integrally spiritual ska dance tune; and by a mixed-race, culturally diverse band no less. In this final point in particular, “Wash, Wash” brings attention to the interdependence and interconnectedness of the production of Jamaican and American R&B in the UK at this moment.⁸⁶ The popularity of the Jamaican variation of R&B provided the opportunity for Prince Buster’s transatlantic travel and for the recording session. It was predominately with white British musicians fluent in the American R&B tradition, however, that Buster recorded.

DO THE BLUE BEAT

The single “Wash All Your Troubles Away” and the LP *I Feel the Spirit* were released amid a growing interest in Jamaican-styled rhythm and blues in London, a point highlighted by the following excerpt from a September 1963 music industry report:

⁸⁴ The original song was by songwriter and bandleader Beasley Smith, with lyrics by Haven Gillespie.

⁸⁵ This situation resonates with the original composition of “Got My Mojo Working” cited in chapter four.

⁸⁶ I refrain from using the term “ska” here as it was not used in the UK and may not even have been used in Jamaica yet. Music from this period that is now considered ska was referred to as rhythm and blues.

Is there a big boom on the way for West Indian rhythm and blues music? Certainly there are signs that this is quite a possibility. In the United States, for years it has been obvious that what the Negro market goes for today the white market goes for a few months, or years later. It has been true for rock and the various “refinements” such as the twist.⁸⁷

One of the signs of this potential boom was the late-1963 launch of a new independent label intended to compete with Blue Beat and Island for market share in the British JA-R&B niche. The new imprint, R&B Discs, announced their impending entry into the fray with pair of August 1963 announcements. The first of these, an advertisement in the *West Indian Gazette*, informed readers that they should keep an eye out for “the R&B Discs with a beat.”⁸⁸ A similar ad appeared in the pop music weekly, the *New Record Mirror*, along with an industry report which offered that R&B Discs “have gone into business to bring the best of Jamaican records to Britain,” but will “also record material here.”⁸⁹ That R&B Discs debut was mentioned in these two publications simultaneously—two publications with very different demographics—is the first indication in the press that JA-R&B was now appealing to, and was being marketed to West Indian and white British audiences alike.

Considering the publication’s reputation as the go-to source for British R&B news, it was fitting that *New Record Mirror* (*NRM*) would become the first mainstream popular music periodical to dedicate editorial and advertising space to Jamaican R&B. *NRM* was the first of Britain’s four most widely-read pop papers (the others being *Melody Maker*, *NME* and *Disc*) to cover American rhythm and blues in any depth with their short-lived, late 1961 R&B column.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ “West Indies R&B Boom?,” *New Record Mirror* (*NRM*), September 9, 1963, 6.

⁸⁸ *WIG*, July/August 1963, 8.

⁸⁹ “R&B Discs New Label,” *NRM*, August 24, 1963, 6.

⁹⁰ *Disc* and *NRM* were apparently a distant 3rd and 4th to *MM* and *NME*. *NME*’s readership hovered around 300,000 while *NRM* was closer to 70,000 at its peak in 1963/64 (Norman Joplin, *Shake it Up Baby!: Notes from a Pop Music Reporter* (Surrey, UK: RockHistory Ltd, 2015)). As noted in chapter four, *Jazz News and Review* was another early source for R&B information, but did not have the same level of

NRM reaffirmed its position as the primary source for R&B information in early 1963, primarily through Norman Jopling's features on American and British R&Bers, his "Great Unknowns" column and various discographies of rhythm and blues artists like Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley and Fats Domino. Consistently ahead of the curve at the time, *NRM* was likewise the first paper to publish features on the Beatles and the Rolling Stones (on October 27, 1962 and May 11, 1963, respectively). *NRM*'s readership was, in turn, rather forward-looking and potentially predisposed toward the sounds of a Jamaican offshoot of rhythm and blues. As its September "West Indian R&B Boom?" piece noted, *NRM* began reviewing Jamaican R&B records at this time "in view of the growing interest among *NRM* readers in this type of beat music."⁹¹ The presence of a growing white market for JA-R&B was similarly underscored by the presence of ads for R&B Discs on the cover of *NRM* each week between September 14 and November 9, 1963.

Among the R&B Discs releases featured on the cover of *NRM* during this period were two 45s recorded in the UK containing the playing of Georgie Fame and the Blue Flames.⁹² The first of these, Clive and Gloria's "Change of Plan" b/w "Little Gloria" (JB113), has the band in a supporting role. The second disc was the Blue Flames debut single, a pair of instrumentals titled "J.A. Blues" and "Orange Street" (JB114).⁹³ For the first time, Fame and the Blue Flames, listed in this R&B Discs ad as the "star attraction at the London Flamingo Club," moved beyond their role as supporting act and live club attraction and assumed the position of featured recording

readership as *NRM* nor as broad a scope. The niche publication of the Blues Appreciation Society, *Blues Unlimited* began providing similar coverage in early 1963, but from a much more "purist" perspective.

⁹¹ An Island distribution manager noted that the label was selling between 5,000-15,000 copies of their recent records "without any plugging or any kind of slick promotion" ("West Indies R&B Boom?," *NRM*, September 9, 1963, 6). *NRM* again reported on the Jamaican R&B boom in October, noting that, "in London, at least, the sale of Jamaican R&B discs has been nothing short of fantastic" ("Jamaican R&B Boom" *NRM*, October 19, 1963, 2).

⁹² R&B Discs initial releases were Jamaican licensed records such as the Maytals "Mathew Mark," Lee Perry's "Man and Wife" and Delroy Wilson's "Lion of Judah."

⁹³ Both the Clive and Gloria record and the Blue Flames debut are mentioned in the ad that appeared on the cover of *NRM*'s October 12, 1963 issue.

artist. Reflecting the fluid state of Jamaican-oriented rhythm and blues at the time, each of these 45s featured one track in the ska performance style highlighting pulsing up-beats (“Little Gloria” and “J.A. Blues”) and one in a more relaxed, organ-driven American R&B style reminiscent of Jimmy Smith or Booker T and the MGs (“Change of Plan” and “Orange Street”).⁹⁴

In the December 21, 1963 issue of *NRM*, Melodisc ran an advertisement that read: “Melodisc Records wish retailers and all friends in the trade the best for Christmas and the New Year. Remember 1964 is Bluebeat year.”⁹⁵ Although it had long been a British popular music press tradition for labels, promoters, managers, and clubs to run ads thanking fans and sending best wishes around the holidays, rarely has a year-end ad been quite so prophetic. Roughly two months later, Blue Beat/Melodisc could claim that their signature musical style was fast on its way to becoming “The Rage of 1964!” This advertisement, which ran in the more widely read *New Musical Express*, followed this claim with the observation that even “the mods are with it now.”⁹⁶ It would be just as accurate to have said that the “majors” were “with it” come early 1964. That month record industry leaders Decca, Columbia, Pye and the relatively smaller Oriole issued singles meant to exploit the Jamaican R&B trend that had been simmering in Soho. Decca, for its part, paired British rhythm and blues singer Chris Farlowe with studio bandleader/arranger Chris Stapleton and his orchestra (under the name the Beazers) to enter the

⁹⁴ The Blue Flames served as the primary backing band for R&B Discs for the remainder of the year, appearing on four additional sides. They would also record another 45 under their own name. The record, “Stop Right Here” b/w “Rik’s Tune” (JB126) was another pair of instrumentals both in the JA-R&B mold.

⁹⁵ *NRM*, December 21, 1963, 6.

⁹⁶ *New Musical Express*, February 28, 1964. The subcultural community/identity known as “mods” were early adopters of bluebeat, Tamla-Motown, Blue Note jazz and similar “modernist” expressions of rhythm and blues. The relationship between mods, Jamaican immigrants and these forms of R&B has been explored by Dick Hebdige and Keith Gildart among others. Dick Hebdige, “The Meaning of Mod,” in *Resistance Through Rituals*, Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds. (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 71-79. Gildart, *Images of England through Popular Music*, 87-148.

fray with a single titled “Blue Beat.”⁹⁷ By the end of February, Columbia issued a single by Jamaican émigrés Ezz Reco and the Launchers. The release, a cover of Jimmy Cliff’s 1963 “King of Kings” b/w “Blue Beat Dance,” became the first-ever charting JA-R&B single.⁹⁸ As song titles on these singles attest, by the start of 1964 the term “blue beat” was no longer just the name of a record label, but was on its way to becoming generic term in its own right.⁹⁹

The Blue Beat “Rage of 1964” advertisement in *NME* seems a clear indication that the genre’s namesake was attempting to capitalize on the impending boom. Following a list of the company’s ten best sellers, a tag line reads: “Authentic Blue-Beat records are only on the Blue Beat label.” As this suggests, part of the label’s strategy at this moment was to highlight the fact that their records were primarily sourced from Jamaica and featured Jamaican talent; at least for those mods “in the know” that is who would recognize the artist’s names in the ad and understand the origins of the blue beat sound. Nowhere in this ad, nor in any of the advertisements for the major label releases, is there any indication that “blue beat” is Jamaican music.

⁹⁷ Decca followed up this record with “Cross My Heart” / “Ooh-La-Lah” (Decca F11850) by The Exotics, a “West Indian Outfit” featuring former Jamaican star Owen Grey on vocal (reviewed in *Disc*, February 29, 1964, 10). Pye’s first effort at the new style came via commissioning session musician Jimmy Nichol to re-tread two staples from Georgie Fame’s Flamingo repertory: “Humpty Dumpty” and “Night Train.” Review of “Humpty Dumpty” / “Night Train” by Jimmy Nichol and The Shubdubs (Pye N15623), *Disc*, February 22, 1964, 9.

⁹⁸ “King of Kings” would hover around #28 in the *NME* chart for the three weeks. Reco and the Launchers issued another single rapidly thereafter, “Little Girl” b/w “Bluest Beat.”

⁹⁹ Advertisements for the Beazers single indicate the apparent depth of the emerging trend at moment: “Get with it –Do the Dance Everyone’s Doing – Get “Blue Beat,” read the *NME*, February 7, 1964 ads for the single (8) and the sheet music (16).



Figure 5.2 – Blue Beat Records Advertisement, February 1964¹⁰⁰

The single listed in the #1 slot of Blue Beat’s “Best Sellers” was the first of many overt efforts by the label to cash in on the nation’s nascent dance craze. An instrumental from the white British R&B group Micky Finn and the Blue Men released in January of 1964 titled “Tom Hark Goes Blue Beat” was the first record from Blue Beat to include the label/genre’s name in the title.¹⁰¹ Three of the label’s four March 1964 singles similarly incorporated the words “blue beat”: the single release of the title track from Prince Buster’s *I Feel the Spirit* LP retitled as “Blue Beat Spirit” (BB211)¹⁰²; “Blue Beat’s Over (The White Cliffs of Dover)” (BB209),

¹⁰⁰ *NME*, February 28, 1964.

¹⁰¹ “Tom Hark Goes Blue Beat” represents a fascinating intersection of two exotic dance craze novelties. The original “Tom Hark” by Elias and his Zig-Zag Jive Flutes was a hit in Britain in 1958 and set off a short-lived craze for the South African genre Kewla. In an interview with *NRM*’s Norman Jopling, Blue Beat executive Siggie Jackson confirmed that “Tom Hark” was indeed the label’s bestseller at the moment, although Prince Buster’s “Madness” was their all-time sales leader with over 120,000 copies sold (Norman Jopling, “It’s the Blue Beat Craze,” *NRM*, February 15, 1964). As Lloyd Bradley and others have noted, these sales numbers would have most likely been sufficient to land “Madness” in one of Britain’s pop charts except for the fact that Blue Beat discs were not sold in the record shops whose sales were used to compile the charts.

¹⁰² As the words “blue beat” appear nowhere in the song, the new name for the song can be seen as nothing short of a clear and blatant effort to sell a record based on the craze. The fourth single released

featuring vocalist and tenor saxophonist Red Price; and “Blue Beat Baby” (BB212) featuring Soho cabaret singer Brigitte Bond. The latter two were recorded in London with the Blue Beats as backing band and appear to have been conceived in direct response to the emerging JA-R&B craze.

Table 5.4 – Selection of British “Blue Beat” Releases, late-January – early-March 1964¹⁰³

Artist	Song	Label
Micky Finn and the Blue Men	"Tom Hark Goes Blue Beat"	Blue Beat
The Beazers	"Blue Beat"	Decca
Ezz Reco and the Launchers	"King of Kings" (#28 <i>NME</i>)*	Columbia
The Exotics	"Cross My Heart"	Decca
Jimmy Nichol and The Shubbubs	"Humpty Dumpty"	Pye
Ezz Reco and the Launchers	"Little Girl"*	Columbia
Erroll Dixon and the Bluebeaters	"Rocks in my Pillow"	Oriole
Red Price and the Blue Beats	"Blue Beat's Over"	Blue Beat
Brigitte Bond and the Blue Beats	"Blue Beat Baby"	Blue Beat
The Migil 5	"Mocking Bird Hill" (#10 <i>NME</i>)	Pye
Millie	"My Boy Lollipop" (#2 <i>NME</i>)	Fontana (Island)

*the titles to these record's B-sides also included the words “blue beat”

With the exception of Reco's recording of “King of Kings,” the earliest efforts to cash in on blue beat's emerging popularity failed to garner appreciable chart success. Pye would reverse this trend with its next release, a re-working of the 1951 American pop hit “Mocking Bird Hill” by the Migil 5 (Pye N15597). Originally a trio backing act for pop singers, the group added two additional members in early 1964 including former Flamingo and Roaring Twenties saxophonist/singer Alan “Earl” Watson to better position themselves in an increasingly R&B-

during the period was a reissue of “Wash All Your Troubles Away” only a few months after the initial single release. This could be in response to Prince Buster's UK visit which was scheduled to begin on March 15th, 1964 (“On the Upbeat: London,” *Variety*, March 4, 1964, 60).

¹⁰³ This list is in approximate chronological order of release dates based on my research.

heavy market.¹⁰⁴ It would turn out to be Watson's experience with blue beat, however, that paid off for the group. Of the material the Migil 5 tested for Pye's recording manager in early 1964, it was their blue beat treatment of "Mocking Bird Hill" that was selected to be their next release. As the group indicated to *NME* as the song was climbing the charts, other than Watson the band had little experience with or even exposure to Jamaican R&B prior to recording the track.¹⁰⁵ Nonetheless, they were opportunist professional musicians who prided themselves on adapting to emerging trends.¹⁰⁶ The "Mocking Bird Hill's" combination of a catchy, familiar refrain and an up-to-date dance rhythm proved effective enough for the record to climb #10 on *NME's* pop chart by the end of April.

"My Boy Lollipop"

The song that defined the blue beat moment for the British mainstream—and for future generations—was not the product of a British major label, but rather an Island Records production featuring recent Jamaican émigré Millie Small. In the first weeks of the "Bluebeat year," Island head Chris Blackwell expressed his goal of landing a "blue beat disc in the charts, even if it was only at No. 50."¹⁰⁷ Blackwell had, for some time, been working on a strategy to do just that. In July of 1963—contemporaneous to Prince Buster's first UK visit and the *I Feel the Spirit* recording sessions, Blackwell brought fifteen year-old Jamaican singer Millie Small to London with the intent of grooming her for British pop stardom. As one half of the Roy and Millie duo, Small had been a local success story in Jamaica. Blackwell believed Millie's

¹⁰⁴ "Reviews," *Disc*, March 7, 1964, 11. This is the same Earl Watson discussed earlier in the chapter who shared the bill with and occasionally was supported by the Blue Flames in 1962.

¹⁰⁵ Ian Dove, "'Blue' lie led to hit," *NME*, April 10, 1964, 12.

¹⁰⁶ An ad for Migil 5, for example, indicates that they "perform all kinds of music from two-beat to blue-beat; from R&B to C&W; from Ballads to Bolleros." (*NRM*, August 22, 1964, 4.)

¹⁰⁷ Norman Jopling, "It's the Blue Beat Craze," *NRM*, February 15, 1964.

distinctive high-pitched voice and youthful, effervescent personality had the potential, if properly “cultivated,” to produce hit records in the UK as well. In the early months of 1964 Millie and the British market were ready. Blackwell’s dream was realized with the release of the Millie single “My Boy Lollipop.”

Much like “Mocking Bird Hill,” “My Boy Lollipop” was a revamping of a 1950s’ American pop/R&B tune. To craft the sound of the record, Blackwell handed the song over to visiting veteran Jamaican guitarist Ernest Ranglin. Ranglin in turn hired a horn section of London-resident, Jamaican-born jazz players and one of the many established, rank-and-file British R&B groups active at the time, the Five Dimensions.¹⁰⁸ The record opens with two concise full-band accents that establish the tempo and tonal center of the song. Millie’s vibrant soprano follows with an unaccompanied statement of the song’s catchy, title refrain of “my boy lollipop.” The band then settles into a typical ska groove featuring a walking bass line, a subtle backbeat swing, “skanking” guitar up-beats, and staccato brass punctuations that respond to most of Millie’s vocal statements. In what appears to be a nod to the concurrently growing British interest in American R&B, the song features an eight-bar harmonica solo following one full statement of the song’s AABA form.¹⁰⁹ As important as these personnel and performance choices were, perhaps just as significant was Blackwell’s decision to lease “My Boy Lollipop” to Fontana, a British label with a more established distribution network and greater promotional and production resources. This cleared the logistical hurdle of getting the 45 into the “chart shops,”

¹⁰⁸ With Pete Pitterson on trumpet. Ernest Ranglin – British Library Jazz Oral History Project, as told to Val Wilmer, Shelfmark: C122/198-199.

¹⁰⁹ The horn section sits out during the B sections and the harmonica solo. Although the song opens with a typical AABA chorus, the overall form of the song is: AABA ABAA. The harmonica solo is performed by Five Dimension’s leader Jimmy Powell, not Rod Stewart as is sometimes reported. Stewart has apparently denied any involvement with the recording and would have been with Long John Baldry and the Hoochie Coochie Men at the time, not the Five Dimensions.

<http://www.brumbeat.net/jimmypow.html>, accessed February 27, 2017.

an issue that had stood in the way of previous independent label JA-R&B singles. A week after its release, “My Boy Lollipop” achieved Blackwell’s goal of cracking the top 50. By late April, the record was awarded a “Silver Disc” for sales of 250,000 or more.¹¹⁰ The record would reach number two on the British charts in May where it stayed for two weeks.¹¹¹

John Stratton has argued that the key to the commercial success of “My Boy Lollipop” was to take

a song located in African-American rhythm and blues, match it with a Jamaican singer with a winning smile and a voice that sounded cute to British listeners, and back her with an English rhythm and blues group playing ska arranged by a black Jamaican [Ernest Ranglin].¹¹²

Stratton further contends that, in light of a growing anxiety felt by the general British population regarding increased Jamaican migration, it was necessary to soften what was perceived as the musical “rough edges” of JA-R&B in “Lollipop” and to present Millie as young, innocent, attractive and non-threatening in order for the song to appeal to a white British mainstream audience.¹¹³ He notes in the latter regard, that Small sufficiently embodied “British colonial

¹¹⁰ “Silver Disc is Millie’s Prize for ‘Lollipop,’” *Disc*, May 2, 1964, 6.

¹¹¹ The blue beat craze was not restricted to the pop charts in 1964. Long a feature (live and on disc) at the Flamingo and Roaring Twenties, a number of other Soho clubs including the Marquee began incorporating blue beat by early 1964. The Marquee’s Blue Beat nights, co-sponsored by the Blue Beat label, ran from February through July, with the advertised entertainment shifting over time from Lester Dawson and the Blue Beats (with special guests like Red Price and Brigitte Bond) to the sound system of Duke Vin (Tony Bacon, *London Live* (San Francisco: Balafon, 1999), 166).

¹¹² John Stratton, “Chris Blackwell and ‘My Boy Lollipop’: Ska, Race and British Popular Music,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, 22:4 (2010), 458-9. Stratton suggests that Blackwell’s capacity as a Jewish Jamaican to function as a “cultural mediator” played an important role in facilitating this success. I consider this argument neither invalid nor unproblematic; however, it is beyond the scope of this project and my expertise to fully unpack and interrogate this position. I would nonetheless add that each of the three independent British-based JA-R&B labels were run by owners of Jewish descent, which seems to lend some credence to Stratton’s contention.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 447-449. An estimated 29-30,000 Jamaicans emigrated to Britain between the years 1960-62, a twofold percentage increase over years prior. While Jamaican and general “West Indian” diasporic flow to England had been a common occurrence in the decades after WW II, this increase was unprecedented and, as mentioned above, has been linked to concerns over the potential impact of the impending Commonwealth Immigration Act of 1962 among Jamaicans interested in resettling in England.

fantasies of the exotic Caribbean, and she was distinguished from the West Indians who had been settling in England.”¹¹⁴ In musical terms, Stratton suggests it was only Millie’s pleasing, high-pitched melody that made “Lollipop” relatable to audiences who were otherwise accustomed to youthful pop singers.¹¹⁵

In interviews, Millie appeared to distance herself from the Jamaicaness of her music. In her first interview with *Melody Maker*, she stated her desire to “just... be a pop singer. That’s what I am and what I want to be. They’ve tagged me a blue beat singer but I’m not really.”¹¹⁶ Nonetheless, Millie became the face of blue beat for the general public. Even though blue beat’s popularity among white audiences began in the countercultural clubs of the Soho R&B scene, once it reached the masses it was predominantly associated with the pop milieu. The “softened edges” of Millie’s records coupled with her “cute” persona elided the possibility that she could be taken seriously by the countercultural faithful.

As discussed in chapter four, debates about the authenticity of various forms of American R&B played an important role in popular music discourse throughout 1964. Such controversies did not emerge around blue beat when the genre ascended into the popular charts. Although the Jamaican origins of blue beat were well documented by *NRM* as early as September 1963, *Melody Maker*’s introduction to the genre published on April 25, 1964 opens with the claim that

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 452. An *NME* profile titled of the singer underscores this point (Cordell Marks, “Millie—Banana Tree Singer,” *NME*, May 1, 1964, 14). The article refers to Millie as possessing a “water-melon smile” and quotes her talking about climbing banana trees in Jamaica before moving to the UK: “I used to sing for hours in the trees.” In a letter to the African diaspora-oriented UK magazine the *Flamingo*, Millie claims that she was misquoted and the interviewer mischaracterized her statement. “These articles in the press have been a great embarrassment to me and I am sorry if they distressed others also,” she wrote (Millie Small, “Millie Replies,” *Flamingo*, December 1964, 2).

¹¹⁵ He fails to recognize the potential for the distinctive ska beat to serve as the site of aesthetic pleasure in the record, claiming that this feature needed to be “offset” by Small’s vocal performance. Ibid, 458.

¹¹⁶ “Millie,” *MM*, April 18, 1964, 7.

“no one knows for sure where it came from.”¹¹⁷ Even taken as the exaggeration it appears to be—the article recognizes that two of the most successful blue beat recording artists were Jamaican ex-pats Ezz Reco and Millie Small, but doesn’t mention the work or UK appearances of Jamaican residents like Prince Buster—this is a far cry from the American R&B narrative that practically begged readers to hear the obdurate conditions of the black American experience in the blues and its many forms. The blue beat discourse suggests that the origins and cultural associations of JA-R&B were all but irrelevant for the mainstream listener of early 1964. With 45s from Prince Buster and Derek Morgan just as readily available as those by Muddy Waters and Howlin’ Wolf, authenticity to a Jamaican standard of cultural expression was just as possible, but this did not seem to be a consideration at the time.

JA-R&B was thus judged and valued based on its relationship to a black American authenticity as it was depicted in British pop music press. This standard prized a romanticized notion of the music of African Americans across the Atlantic, over the vibrant, localized, post-colonial music of the Jamaican immigrants in London. It would appear that the proximity of the growing West Indian immigrant population of Britain—what at least one author at the time referred to as an “unarmed invasion” and the “greatest social crisis since the industrial revolution”—left the possibility of a romanticized view of Jamaican cultural production all but impossible for most British listeners.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Chris Roberts, “Blue Beat Breaks Through,” *MM*, April 25, 1964, 7.

¹¹⁸ Lord Elton, *The Unarmed Invasion: A Survey of Afro-Asian Immigration* (London: Collins, 1965).

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When Prince Buster's *I Feel The Spirit* LP was issued, the cover sleeve made no mention of the generic terms "ska" or "bluebeat," but rather marketed Buster as the "King of the Blues." Despite the fact that JA-R&B and American rhythm and blues were received, consumed and reproduced in Britain from late 1962 to (very)early 1964 within the single category of "R&B," the two subgenres ended up with very different legacies. It was the appeal to authenticity (or lack thereof) that contributed to these different outcomes in the both the short and long terms. As I discuss in the following chapter, the American-influenced R&B of Georgie Fame, the Rolling Stones, Long John Baldry and their British R&B contemporaries continued to be received as vital and original, even after the genre became part of the popular musical currency of 1964. Conversely, by the end of 1964, the music that came to be called blue beat was considered little more than a passing novelty associated with a recent dance fad. As a pop novelty, JA-R&B could not, through the narratives of the day, maintain a firm association with "real" R&B; a musical genre that was increasingly being valued for its connection to a pre-industrial, non-commercial past. Blue beat had no past as far as the general British public was concerned. If much thought was given to the genre beyond its status as a dance soundtrack, it was considered a transnational, commercial product of a post-colonial, modern world; a status that effectively precluded the possibility that narratives about authenticity and tradition could be sown into the story of genre.

6 - ENGLAND'S NEWEST HIT MAKERS: THE ROLLING STONES, REVIVAL, & R&B HIT THE POP MARKET

Wednesday night, September 25, 1963, some ten miles west of Soho, the Rolling Stones made their final appearance at the trad-turned-R&B haunt, the Eelpiland Jazz Club.¹ Housed in a dilapidated hotel on the Twickenham-adjacent Eel Pie Island from whence the club derived its name, Eelpiland was a favorite venue for R&B scene stalwarts and up-and-coming acts alike.² On any given night the sounds of white Britons playing and dancing to the sounds of black America could be heard emanating from the hotel ballroom and floating across the Thames. However, September 25th was anything but typical. Earlier that day the Rolling Stones debut single, a cover of Chuck Berry's "Come On," peaked at twenty-one on the *Record Retailer* pop singles chart. The size of the crowd pouring onto the island that night reflected this newfound fame.³ As Eelpiland founder and manager Arthur Chisnall recalls:

Nevermind the hotel, the whole bloody island was overflowing. The hall was [packed] solid, the grounds were solid and there were queues back over the bridge; it was hair-raising really. In theory, we should have stopped the music and told everyone to leave, but we would have been torn to pieces if we had; there'd have been a riot!... We had no other option than to let them get on with it, but, boy, it was a neurotic few hours.⁴

Although the Rolling Stones established its identity and sound in such spaces, the band was about to outgrow venues like Eelpiland, the Marquee, and the London R&B scene altogether.

¹ As discussed in the introduction to chapter five, this was the same day that Georgie Fame recorded *R&B from the Flamingo*. Michele Whitby, "Eelpiland: How it All Began," in *The British Beat Explosion: Rock 'n' Roll Island*, ed. .C. Wheatley (Twickenham, UK: Aurora Metro Books, 2013), e-book Location 476.

² Eelpiland, the near-by Ealing Club, and the Richmond Station Hotel were three of the handful of satellite R&B clubs outside of the Soho orbit. Cyril Davies, Long John Baldry and Georgie Fame were all regulars at the Eel Pie Island location.

³ Information from the Official Charts Company was drawn from *Record Retailer* at this time. <http://www.officialcharts.com/artist/28195/rolling-stones/>, accessed April 26, 2017. Unless otherwise noted, *Record Retailer* chart information in this chapter is drawn from the Official Charts Archive (<http://www.officialcharts.com/archive/>). Other chart data is sourced from the original publications.

⁴ Quoted in Whitby, "Eelpiland: How it All Began," e-book location 476.

Four days later, the band embarked on a package tour in support of visiting American artists the Everly Brothers, Little Richard and Bo Diddley, never to return to the clubs of Soho.⁵

The start of the Rolling Stones ascendance from cult to pop can at least partially be attributed to their first major press attention. Under the headline “The Rolling Stones—Genuine R&B!,” Norman Jopling’s profile in the May 11, 1963 *New Record Mirror* sung the praises of the group, observing that they were not only “genuine R&B fanatics,” but that “unlike all the other R&B groups worthy of the name, the Rollin’ Stones [sic] have a definite visual appeal.”⁶ The group was unsigned at the time of the article; however, plans were in the works for a recording debut. The group had, in fact, recorded their first single just a day before Joplin’s profile published. Released in June on the Decca label, “Come On” would, by summer’s end, become the first single by a British R&B band to land in the nation’s popular record charts.⁷ Released on June 7th, “Come On” was slow to make its way into the top-50. Although positive press coverage, major label promotion and a Beatles endorsement were important factors in the Rolling Stones’ move from club act to recording stars, this ascendance was equally, if not more indebted to the presentation of their “visual appeal” on television, notably a spot on the July 7th *Thank Your Lucky Stars* and an August 23rd appearance on the recently launched *Ready, Steady, Go!* “Things were quiet until we did an appearance on ‘Thank Your Lucky Stars,’” Mick Jagger told *New Musical Express (NME)* at the moment “Come On” first cracked the *NME* top-30,

⁵ David Hinckley and Debra Rodman refer to this moment as “the night before Christmas” for the Rolling Stones, although “they just didn’t know it yet.” For more about this tour and a fascinating photo essay of the band during the fall of 1963 see David Hinckley, Debra Rodman and Gus Coral, *The Rolling Stones: Black and White Blues, 1963* (Atlanta: Turner Publishing, 1995).

⁶ Norman Jopling, “The Rolling Stones—Genuine R&B!,” *New Record Mirror*, May 11, 1963, 2. Joplin also notes that none other than the Beatles were “knocked out” by the Stones’ Station Hotel performance from the week prior.

⁷ “Come On” entered *Record Retailer’s* pop chart on July 31, 1963 at #50 and remained in the charts for fourteen weeks. Singles from Cyril Davies earlier in the year, although also released by a major label (Pye), failed to register in the charts.

“then the disc started to take off.”⁸ In the months to follow, the Rolling Stones appeared on national television no less than six times—three appearances on *Ready, Steady, Go!* and *Thank Your Lucky Stars*, respectively. Leading into 1964, the Stones were poised to become the second most popular group in Britain behind their ardent supporters, the Beatles.⁹

The confluence of two important trends intersected in the Rolling Stones' rise to fame. The first of these was the conversion of the British affection for the sounds of black America into a presence in the mainstream, a presence that was particularly strong in (*re*)presentations of blues-oriented artists. It was no longer just British takes on blues-oriented R&B that made the scene, however. Progressively, from the fall of 1963 on, male and female British singers alike began emulating contemporary black American pop/proto-soul artists in a (quasi-) revivalist manner that was previously reserved almost exclusively for more the “downhome,” blues-based R&B of the 1950s (Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf) and the “rockin'” sounds of Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley. Moreover, contemporary American R&B artists were appearing on the same television shows, and placing singles in the same charts that British R&Bers were concurrently gaining access to. The second trend, which gained momentum almost simultaneously, was the expanded role of popular music television programs in shaping national tastes by transmitting popular youth (counter)culture into living rooms around the country. Although competing shows like *Juke Box Jury* (BBC) and the aforementioned *Thank Your Lucky Stars* (ABC/ITV) broadcast the latest pop music makers in late 1963, no show captured the essence of this emerging trend

⁸ Ian Dove, “New To the Charts: Twitch on TV Did It!,” *New Musical Express*, August 2, 1963, 9. “Come On” debuted at the #26 spot on *NME*'s chart. In addition to the chart placement and the Ian Dove article, two separate advertisements mention “Come On” in the August 2, 1963 issue of *NME*, one as part of a Decca “Forerunners” ad (page 3) and the other as a separate ad on page 2 that read “The Stones are rolling! No. 26 in the charts ‘Come On!’” accompanied by a picture of an actual stone.

⁹ Contrary to the popular oppositional images the two groups cultivated over the course of the mid-1960s (the clean-cut, if subversive Beatles and the bad-boy Rolling Stones) the two groups maintained a friendship and mutual admiration.

more actively or effectively than the London-club-scene-turned-weekly-broadcast *Ready, Steady, Go!* (Associated-Rediffusion/ITV).¹⁰

Following an overview of the state of R&B in Britain in 1964, this chapter focuses on a specific, R&B-heavy broadcast of *Ready Steady Go!* starring the Rolling Stones, Marvin Gaye, Jerry Lee Lewis, and a host of aspiring British R&B acts. In this analysis, I address the contemporaneous ascendance of British and American iterations of R&B from the stages and sound systems of Soho to the television sets and pop charts of the nation over the course of 1964. The role of mass reproduction (via major-label record releases) and mass media (television in particular) in this process is of specific interest as it was these factors that facilitated access to these musics beyond the limited, liminal spaces in which they once circulated. At this moment, through the success of the Rolling Stones and the groups that followed in their wake, R&B revivalism moved into the sphere of mass pop culture. As mentioned in the previous two chapters, the scope of R&B source material that was danced to and contemplated in the clubs of Soho expanded to include currently popular black music just prior to and throughout 1964. Although the differences between these two forms of R&B—what I will refer to here as “downhome” (which also encompasses rock ‘n’ roll-oriented performers of the 1950s) and “new wave” respectively (Motown, girl groups, etc.)—were recognized (and were the subject of fierce dissent among various factions of fans), they were just as often understood as being of a generic piece.¹¹ Part of what this chapter offers is a reconceptualization of British R&B “revival” to

¹⁰ Other programs, the regional folk/R&B program *Hullabaloo* (Grenada/ITV) and the children’s show *5 O’Clock Club* (Associated-Rediffusion/ITV) among them, played lesser, but still relevant roles in transmitting popular music on television. Unlike the government-run monolith, the British Broadcasting Corporation, Independent Television (ITV) was made up of a loose network of independent, regional franchises working in collaboration.

¹¹ I draw the term “new-wave R&B” from a letter published under the header “Let’s have ‘new wave. U.S. R&B’” in the April, 4, 1964 issue of *New Record Mirror* (page 2) that argues that rather than “insist[ing] on going back five years for ‘good’ music... we want the ‘new wave’ American records” by

include not only British affiliation with and recreation of downhome-if-electric blues, but contemporary black popular sound as well.

Revivalism is essentially a modernist impulse. Revivals are typically cast, in scholarship and by their participants, as a means by which to reject and/or evade the trappings of modernity (capitalism, artifice, etc.), yet they cannot exist without such a structure to resist. It is therefore, perhaps, more accurate to understand revivals as a form of resistance to a specific set of modern circumstances rather than to modernity *tout court*. If this is the case, then any system of expression seen as outside/other to a specific modernity—for the present purposes, R&B in relation to post-war, post-austerity Britain and its related pop culture norms—can serve as the basis for revival, even if the means by which these expressions are made accessible are allied with the commercial/capitalist mechanisms of modernity.¹² Here we witness a break from, or at least a variation on, Bourdieu's opposition between economic and symbolic capital which fuels musical revivals.¹³ Within this transnational context, the extremes of authentic, autonomous expression and large-scale production are less clearly defined. Furthermore, while the revivalist impulse assigned value through proximity to “honesty” and “real feeling,” mass mediation did not, at this point, preclude the perception of authenticity.¹⁴ This is also where television most clearly enters the picture. Contesting a commonly-held belief that an ideological opposition exists between television and countercultural popular music—summarized by Simon Frith's

the likes of Martha and the Vandellas, Major Lance, Mary Wells, the Impressions and others. The term is employed again in the *TV Times* advertisement for Marvin Gaye's November *Ready, Steady, Go!* appearance which is addressed below.

¹² Dissemination via the capitalist mechanism of mass mediation is all but unavoidable if a form of expression is to impact a society/culture at large. The influence of mass mediation is just less transparent in genres that present themselves as “folk.”

¹³ Pierre Bourdieu, “The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed,” in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, edited by Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 29-73.

¹⁴ Although the tension between these two forms of capital certainly informed the positions taken by artists, critics and fans.

assertion that “rock ‘n’ roll was defined against TV”—the program *Ready, Steady, Go!* played a formative role in disseminating, if not formulating, the culture of British R&B on the national stage.¹⁵ As will be discussed below, *Ready, Steady, Go!* strove to transmit the latest visible and audible markers of Britain’s revival-oriented, collective youth culture identity in the form of well-dressed Londoners listening and dancing to rhythm and blues.¹⁶

THE BRITISH BOOM AND THE US INVADE THE CHARTS

As the R&B boom gained momentum through the spring of 1964, *New Record Mirror (NRM)* conducted Britain’s first-ever R&B poll with results announced in the April 25, 1964 issue.¹⁷ Containing seven categories—“Top Female Singer,” “Best Male Singer,” “Best Female Group,” “Best Male Group,” “Best Instrumental Group or Artiste,” “Best British Artiste,” and Best All-Time Disc”—the poll set out to produce a snapshot of current tastes in what was fast becoming Britain’s second biggest pop music sensation.¹⁸ Alongside the raw rankings for each category *NRM* included analysis of the voting. This uncredited piece opens with the observation that the results were “very, very interesting to say the least. After sifting through thousands of entries we came to the conclusion that R and B in Britain is much bigger than anyone suspects.”¹⁹ What *NRM* meant by “bigger,” however is unclear. That rhythm and blues had amassed a significant

¹⁵ Simon Frith, “Look! Hear! The Uneasy Relationship of Music and Television,” *Popular Music*, Vol. 21/3 (2002), 282.

¹⁶ This “ideological opposition,” as summarized by Keith Negus’ statement that the “domestic setting of television reception... is perceived to undermine the rebellious spirit of rock,” is discussed in Ian Inglis “Here, There and Everywhere: Introducing the Beatles,” in *Popular Music and Television in Britain*, Ian Inglis, ed. (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2010), 138.

¹⁷ “R&B Poll Results” and “All About the Poll Results,” *NRM*, April 25, 1964, 4-5, 7.

¹⁸ The Beatles (and Beatlemania), British R&B, and the increased popularity of contemporary black pop music were clearly interrelated phenomena. While it was largely acknowledged in the press that the Beatles drew upon elements of R&B in their music, they were never considered a British R&B group. Instead they were referred to as “Beat,” “Merseybeat,” or as an uncategorized participant in pop music.

¹⁹ “All About the Poll Results,” 5.

following by early 1964 was well documented in *NRM*'s own pages as well as those of *Melody Maker*, *New Music Express* and just about every other pop music and jazz publication. It may be that instead of referring to the depth of interest in rhythm and blues in Britain, *NRM* was speaking to its breadth. That is to say, what may have been most surprising about the poll results, both at the time and in retrospect, is the broad range of sounds British listeners associated with the term R&B.²⁰

This is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the "Top/Best Singer" categories. Four of the top five vote getters for "Best Male Singer," for example, are not surprising: #1 Chuck Berry (543), #3 Jimmy Reed (229), #4 Howlin' Wolf (182), #5 Bo Diddley (181).²¹ That the then-little-known (in the UK at least), Detroit-based singer Marvin Gaye placed second (357 votes) is less expected considering the emphasis usually placed on Chicago downhome singers in both contemporaneous and retrospective discussions of British R&B. Another Motown artist, Mary Wells, decisively won the "Top Female Singer" category by garnering almost twenty times more votes than the next nearest finisher.²² Along with the four Tamla-Motown singles found in the "All-Time Best Disc" category, these poll results indicate that more recent, modern versions of African American popular music were being heard and celebrated by Britons alongside more traditionalist iterations of R&B.²³ It could be said that this was also reflected in the "British Artiste" category as well where Georgie Fame (452) finished first ahead of the more traditionally

²⁰ I should note in relation to the previous chapter that no blue beat artists registered in the poll although Georgie Fame, as noted below, did take the #1 spot in the "British Artiste" category.

²¹ Other finishers of note are James Brown (#6/106 votes) and Muddy Waters (#8/73 votes).

²² Representing just how divergent the singers grouped under the "R&B" banner could be, Victoria Spivey, a revivalist favorite who made her first record in 1926, placed eighth. I should note that the *NRM* editors disregarded votes for "purely pop" artists that were cast in the poll. The results therefore represent the intersection of the magazine's editorial and its readership's ideas about R&B.

²³ One of the subsections of the "All About the Poll Results" article is titled "Tamla-Motown" and speaks to this phenomenon.

blues-oriented Long John Baldry (165) and the recently deceased R&B-purist Cyril Davies (164).

Tables 6.1.a & b – Top Female Singer and Top All-Time Disc, *NRM* R&B Poll Results

TOP FEMALE SINGER

1.	Mary Wells	1,617
2.	Etta James	85
3.	Laverne Baker	81
4.	Dionne Warwick	78
5.	Timi Yuro	62
6.	Tina Turner	49
7.	Barbara Lewis	41
8.	Victoria Spivey	40
9.	Shirley Ellis	28
10.	Betty Everett	26

TOP ALL-TIME DISC

1.	“Smokestack Lightnin’” — Howlin’ Wolf	168
2.	“Green Onions” — Booker T. and the MGs	126
3.	“What I’d Say” — Ray Charles	100
4.	“Two Lovers” — Mary Wells	98
5.	“You Really Got a Hold On Me” — Miracles	83
6.	“Money” — Barrett Strong	83
7.	“Shop Around” — Miracles	65
8.	“Help Me” — Sonny Boy Williamson	61
9.	“Pretty Thing” — Bo Diddley	54
10.	“Got My Mojo Workin’” — Muddy Waters	53

NRM concluded its analysis with a question: “Altogether this poll probably confirms the suspicions of R and B fans about the most popular stars in Britain, but there is one strange thing. Why don’t they get into the charts more often?” As this question highlights, most American R&B acts had, with some notable exceptions, failed to place singles in the British pop charts up

to this point.²⁴ Of the “all-time discs,” for instance, only Bo Diddley’s “Pretty Thing” had so much as cracked the top 50.²⁵ A mini-surge of interest in American girl singer and girl group records would begin to alter this landscape just prior to the poll.²⁶ The Ronettes “Be My Baby” entered the *Record Retailer* chart in October 1963, peaking at number four a month later. In February 1964, Dionne Warwick began a string of chart success starting with her recording of “Anyone Who Had a Heart.” These were just the first of eight records to chart for Warwick and the Ronettes before the end of 1964.

In June, Mary Wells “My Guy” entered the top ten in each of Britain’s pop charts.²⁷ Despite the high ranking of numerous Tamla-Motown artists in *NRM*’s 1964 R&B poll, “My Guy” was the first single from the label to chart, much less reach the top ten.²⁸ As *NRM*’s poll suggests, Motown records that had achieved US-crossover success had been released in the UK prior. “All-time discs” “You Really Got a Hold on Me” from the Miracles (Oriole American CBA 1795, March 1963) and Mary Well’s “Two Lovers” (Oriole American CBA 1796, January 1963), for example, both achieved cult status, but did not chart, despite their success in the US. Similarly, Martha and the Vandellas’ “Heatwave” (Stateside SS228), Marvin Gaye’s “Pride and

²⁴ Little Richard, Chuck Berry and the Coasters had numerous hits in the 1950s while Ray Charles, the Crystals and the Shirelles scored hits in the early 1960s. Chuck Berry, after two hits in the 1950s shot back up into the top-ten in late 1963 with “Let it Rock” b/w “Memphis Tennessee.”

²⁵ In October of 1963 concurrent with his UK tour supporting the single.

²⁶ The term “girl singer” here is used in a positive sense inspired by Laurie Stras’ collected volume on female vocality in the 1960s which strives to recuperate these “chronically undervalued and dismissed” participants in popular music history (Laurie Stras, “Introduction,” in *She’s So Fine: Reflections on Whiteness, Femininity, Adolescence and Class in 1960s Music* (Farnham, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 2).

²⁷ Peaking #3 on *NME*’s June 12 and #5 on *Record Retailer*’s June 24th charts respectively. *Record Retailer*, *Disc*, *Melody Maker* and *New Musical Express* all published their own weekly charts (*New Record Mirror* published *Record Retailer*’s results). Although compiled using different sources, there is a general sense of agreement between the charts in terms of trends if not specific rankings.

²⁸ Along with all Motown records at the time, “My Guy” was released on EMI’s Stateside imprint in the UK released on EMI’s Stateside imprint in the UK. “My Guy” spent the balance of June in the top-ten. British versions of Motown songs—Brian Poole and the Tremelos rendition of “Do You Love Me,” for example—had charted in the UK prior, however (Andrew Flory, *I Hear a Symphony: Motown and Crossover R&B* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 107-108).

Joy" (Oriole American CBA 1846) and "Can I Get a Witness" (SS 243) were all released in late 1963 without entering the charts.²⁹ As the year progressed, Martha and the Vandellas and the Supremes followed the lead established by Warwick, the Ronettes and Mary Wells. In October, The Supremes' "Where Did Our Love Go" became the first of America's new wave R&B artists to reach number one in the UK.³⁰

The commercial fates of male downhome singers would similarly, if not quite so dramatically, experience a shift. With the exception of the more rock 'n' roll inclined Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley, none of the Chicago-based, typically Chess-affiliated singers revered and emulated by the London scene had achieved any degree of commercial/chart success prior to this point.³¹ This would change for a period of a few months in mid-1964. The first to join Berry in the charts was not one of the 1950s "greats," however, but a virtually unknown Chicago bluesman named Tommy Tucker. Tommy Tucker's "Hi-Heel Sneakers" was released on the Checker label in the US in January of 1964. By March 7th the song was #1 on the *Cash Box* R&B chart and reached #11 on *Billboard's* Hot-100 two weeks later. Even before the record proved its crossover, commercial value in the US by reaching these heights, Pye International released the song for the British market.³² "Hi-Heel Sneakers" entered the *Record Retailer* chart at #47 on April 1st. A week later the record slipped two positions and appeared destined to fall out of the charts entirely until, two days later, the Rolling Stones included a cover of the song in their set

²⁹ This was the case despite the frequent plugging of these artists by *NRM's* Norman Jopling, Dusty Springfield, the Beatles and other members of Britain's pop music elite.

³⁰ "Baby Love" was *Record Retailer's* #1 on November 25th and December 2nd. As will be discussed below, Marvin Gaye reached the very bottom of the *Record Retailer* chart twice in 1964 ("How Sweet it Is" #49/December 16, 1964 and "Once Upon a Time," a duet with Mary Wells, #50/August 5, 1964).

³¹ After two hits in the 1950s, Chuck Berry shot back up into the top-ten in late 1963 with "Let it Rock" b/w "Memphis Tennessee" in November 1963. Bo Diddley's "Pretty Thing" charted around the same time, just after Diddley's 1963 tour of the country.

³² Advertised in *Disc*, February 22, 1964, 3. Pye had exclusive UK rights to Chess/Checker artists starting in 1961 (see chapter four).

on the national broadcast of *Ready, Steady, Go!*'s "Rave Mad Mod Ball." The following week Mick Jagger raved to *Melody Maker* about the song:

We all think it is a knockout.... Frankly, I didn't imagine for a minute that a record like this would get in the chart over here. It's such a great, honest blues track that I still can't understand why it's there in the hit parade.... A lot of records are good, but this is great.³³

In the weeks to follow the song jumped to #28, #26 and #22 in *Disc 's*, *Melody Maker's* and *Record Retailer's* charts respectively. As the *Melody Maker* April 18th story "A bluesman hits the chart" attests, such an accomplishment was virtually unheard of for this type of R&B recording.³⁴ "Hi-Heel Sneakers," *MM* reported, "is final proof, if needed, that the current boom is [sic] beat and rhythm-and-blues has strengthened the commercial chances of a record like Tucker's." As information about Tommy Tucker was "virtually nil in London," it was also evidence that the sound of the song, coupled with the endorsement of the Rolling Stones, was sufficient cause for commercial success.³⁵ Even the record label was "awaiting news about their new star."

As demonstrated in the June 13, 1964 *Melody Maker* top-50 below, a series of modest (and one not-so-modest) hits by members of the established downhome R&B pantheon would follow shortly after "Hi-Heel Sneakers."

³³ Ray Coleman, "A bluesman hits the chart," *MM*, April 18, 1964, 7.

³⁴ Coleman, "A bluesman hits the chart."

³⁵ Assuming that the "causes" for popular music success can ever be ascertained with any certainty.

Table 6.2 – Pop-50 (“downhome” excerpts), *Melody Maker*, June 13, 1964

Artist	Song	Position (Peak)
Chuck Berry	“No Particular Place to Go”	#8 (#6)
Little Richard	“Bama Lama Loo”	#44 (#22)
Howlin' Wolf	“Smoke Stack Lightnin’”	#45 (#42)
John Lee Hooker	“Dimples”	#46 (#26)
Bo Diddley	“Mona”	#50 (#50)

Among these only “Smoke Stack Lightnin’” was well known in the UK prior to its 1964 release. The balance of downhome R&B tracks in this chart were songs new to the British market, if not new recordings. That said, none of the other four songs represent stylistic departures from the types of material British audiences might have been familiar with. The two new compositions among the five, “No Particular Place to Go” and “Bama Lama Loo,” were quite similar to 1950s releases from Chuck Berry and Little Richard, the former a loosely veiled revamp of “School Days” and the latter little more than “Tutti Frutti” with different lyrics. The other two songs here would have sounded quite familiar to R&B revivalists as well. “Mona” (1957), for example, features the same signature “Bo Diddley Beat,” maraca part and chorus-soaked slide guitar break as was present in the well-known and commonly covered song “Bo Diddley.”³⁶

Although not the top vote-getter in the “British Artiste” category (where they finished 5th, and Mick Jagger finished 7th), the Rolling Stones were the only British group to rank outside of this locale-based category. The Stones finished fifth in “Best Instrumental Group or Artiste” (63 votes) and received 378 votes in “Best Male Group” finishing third behind the Miracles (512)

³⁶ As I discuss in chapter four, distinctions were made between the more mainstream, rock ‘n’ roll-oriented Chuck Berry and the relatively obscure Howlin’ Wolf; however these artists were generally understood to be contained within a single tradition of Chicago-styled R&B. Other “Best Male Singer” top-five finisher Jimmy Reed would similarly place his record “Shame, Shame, Shame” in the lower end of *Record Retailer*’s top 50 in September. As *Jazzbeat* noted, this “prov[ed] once again the lasting impact real R&B has had on the pop buying public.” This is even more the case as “Shame, Shame, Shame” was first released by Stateside in July 1963 (as SS205) when it failed to chart. Pat Richards, “Editorial,” *Jazzbeat*, October 1964 (no. 10), 2.

and the Coasters (453).³⁷ The Rolling Stones “crossover” here has as much to do with their overall popularity as it does with their effective emulations of downhome R&B. The follow-up to their version of Berry’s “Come On,” “I Wanna Be Your Man,” fell just shy of cracking the top-ten (#12 *Record Retailer*) in January of 1964. Composed by John Lennon and Paul McCartney, “I Wanna Be Your Man” was created to align with the Rolling Stones’ R&B aesthetic.³⁸

Although some distinctly Beatles-esque stylistic markers remain in the Stones recording of the song (the active bassline, the guitar figure that responds to the “I wanna be your man” refrain), the song is infused with Chicago blues elements, most notably Brian Jones’ slide guitar work throughout.³⁹ The group’s first release of 1964, a cover of Buddy Holly’s “Not Fade Away,” would peak at #3. While drawing lyric and melody from Holly, the Rolling Stones’ rendition makes use of Bo Diddley-associated performance practices (maracas, guitar breaks) throughout and includes a prominent blues-based harmonica accompaniment. Their eponymous debut album, predominantly composed of R&B covers of songs ranging from Slim Harpo (“I’m a King Bee”) to Marvin Gaye (“Can I Get a Witness”), reached #1 on *NME*’s LP chart on April 26, the first non-Beatles LP to occupy the spot in nearly twelve months.⁴⁰ The Rolling Stones were but the vanguard of a host of British R&B groups, however, that would find chart success in the UK over the course of the year. Simultaneous with and immediately following the publication of this poll, British downhome R&B-oriented acts other than the Rolling Stones—Manfred Mann, The Mojos, The Animals, The Yardbirds—began capturing the nation’s attention.

³⁷ The only other British acts to place in any category other than “British Artiste” were in “Best Male Group”—Manfred Mann (#9 rank/46 votes) and the Yardbirds (#10/31).

³⁸ The lyrics, in particular, read like a toned-down version of Willie Dixon’s “I Just Want to Make Love to You,” made popular by Muddy Waters and performed regularly by the Stones.

³⁹ For more about “I Wanna be your Man” including a photo essay of the recording session, see Hinckley, Rodman and Coral, *The Rolling Stones: Black White and Blues*, 1963, 39-43.

⁴⁰ It would occupy the top spot for nearly three months before being unseated by *A Hard Day’s Night* on July 19, 1964, <http://www.officialcharts.com/charts/albums-chart/19640719/7502/>, accessed April 10, 2017.

As the Stones' cover of "Can I Get a Witness" suggests, Motown and other new wave R&B records were increasingly serving as the source material for British rhythm and blues acts. The Beatles, although not R&B by the American or British definition, were among the pioneers of this trend, producing versions of Motown recordings such as "You Really Got a Hold On Me," "Money (That's What I Want)," and "Please, Mr. Postman" in 1963.⁴¹ Georgie Fame would likewise record a number of Motown classics including "Money," "Shop Around" and "Pride and Joy." Furthermore, Liverpool-bred Cilla Black and Scottish teenager Lulu both covered "Heatwave" in 1964.⁴² Dusty Springfield recorded a version of "Can I Get a Witness" the same year, in addition to the numerous covers and emulations of new wave R&B originally performed by African American women, all of which appeared on her debut album *A Girl Called Dusty*.⁴³ Although the modest British success of Dionne Warwick's recording of "Anyone Who Had a Heart" was a watershed moment for her career, it was a version by Cilla Black that really put the song on the map in Britain. Entering the *Record Retailer* chart almost simultaneously, Warwick's version spent three weeks hovering in the forties. Black's version spent seventeen weeks in the chart and three weeks at number one.⁴⁴ Much like the Rolling Stones and the downhome male singers they championed, the success of R&B-influenced British girl singers Dusty Springfield, Cilla Black and Lulu was concurrent with an elevated profile for African-

⁴¹ Along with many other covers of non-Motown "new wave" R&B recordings on their first two albums.

⁴² See Flory, *I Hear a Symphony*, 203-205 for a rather comprehensive list of British versions of Motown songs between 1963-1967.

⁴³ These include the Shirelle's "Mama Said" and "Will You Love Me Tomorrow," Warwick's "Anyone Who Had a Heart" and the Supremes "When the Lovelight Starts Shining Through His Eyes." A number of other tracks on the record were written by Burt Bacharach and Hal David, the team that composed "Anyone Who Had a Heart" and other hits for Dionne Warwick (Annie J. Randall, *Dusty!: Queen of the Post Mods* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 20).

⁴⁴ Warwick did not shy away from expressing her dissatisfaction with this turn of events. "I didn't like Cilla's version one bit," Warwick admitted, "and I was very annoyed indeed that she reached the top in Britain. I do not think she did the song justice" ("Dionne Warwick Changes Mind," *MM*, November 21, 1964, 2).

American girl singers. The seventeen British R&B, three blue beat, and eight American R&B acts in *NME*'s year-end chart survey indicates the depth of these trends and gives a glimpse of broader pop music field in which these artists were emerging.

Table 6.3 – *NME* 1964 World Famous Points Table Survey (excerpts)⁴⁵

Rank	Artist	Points
#1	The Beatles	1232
#3	The Rolling Stones	1005
#8	Manfred Mann	676
#9	Cilla Black	618
#10	The Hollies	610
#12	Dusty Springfield	522
#14	The Swinging Blue Jeans	514
#15	The Supremes	471
#20	Kinks	390
#21	Animals	388
#27	<i>Millie</i>	342
#31	Nashville Teens	272
#34	Dionne Warwick	250
#43	Mary Wells	194
#47	Chuck Berry	174
#48	<i>Migil Five</i>	171
#49	Rockin' Berries	168
#57	Pretty Things	134
#62	Lulu and the Luvvers	122
#66	The Ronettes	103
#68	The Mojos	94
#76	Georgie Fame	44
#81	John Lee Hooker	28
#84	Moody Blues	23
#86	<i>Ezz Reco</i>	22
#89	Little Richard	20
#104	Martha and the Vandellas	8
#106	The Yardbirds	6
#117	The Downliners Sect	2

Unlike in the clubs of Soho, where British R&B's identity increasingly swung toward the masculine and downhome in the years prior, by the time R&B emerged into the popular sphere it

⁴⁵ British R&B artists (in **bold**), American R&B artists (unmarked), and blue beat artists (in *italics*). The Beatles #1 point total is included for comparative reference. "NME's World Famous Points Table Survey," *NME*, January 1, 1965, 2-3. *NME* compiled a list of the artists that appeared in their top-30 over the course of each the previous year. 119 artists were included in the 1964 list. The table was calculated as follows: "Every week throughout the year, points are awarded to the entries in the NME top thirty—on the basis of 30 pts for No. 1 position, 29 points for No. 2, and so on... down to one point for No. 30. The annual points table shows the aggregate number of points awarded to each artist during 1964." Only seven British groups/singers performing R&B appeared in the 1963 year-end survey with Dusty Springfield and the Rolling Stones ranking highest at #56 and #60 respectively.

presented a significantly more balanced representation of the genre in terms of style, historical influence and gender. There appeared to be no room for women singers in the R&B club scene other than for the well-established Ottilie Patterson, who was performing a much different take on R&B than that of the typical acts of 1963-64. With only the rarest of exceptions, downhome was the domain of the boys, with new wave the domain of the girls. There were, as should be evident from previous chapters in this dissertation, very few American women singers who would qualify as downhome and those that might (Sugar Pie Desanto, Etta James, perhaps) never served as the basis for revival. It was to the “girls” of the new wave—the Ronnettes, the Supremes, Mary Wells—that young British women looked to find their models for emulation. Through the consumption and reproduction of the records produced by black girls, these white British singers enacted the same, or at least similar, revivalist impulses so publicly carried out by their male counterparts.⁴⁶

READY, STEADY, GO!

*The true Mod was half real and half myth. The itinerary for our ideal Mod went something like this. Monday evening, The Scene Club. Tuesday, local dance. Wednesday, La Discotecheque. Thursday, The Scene again or maybe the Marquee or the Lyceum. Friday, Ready, Steady, Go! and then on to the Scene or the Discotecheque. Saturday, shopping down Carnaby street in the morning, then to Imhoffs [Records] or some obscure record shop in Hampstead or Brixton. Saturday night to the Flamingo and All-nighter.... Sunday afternoon back at the Flamingo for the afternoon session. Sunday evening to the Crawdaddy club in Richmond.*⁴⁷

As Richard Barnes suggests in the epigraph above, consuming R&B was a central feature of the stereotypical London teenage “Mod’s” lifestyle circa 1964. The form that this consumption

⁴⁶ This is not to suggest that downhome R&B did not appeal to women or that men never listen to new wave R&B. Such a clear gendered divide in consumption did not appear to exist.

⁴⁷ Richard Barnes, “Mods,” in *The Sharper Word: A Mod Anthology*, Paolo Hewitt, ed. (London: Helter Skelter Publishing, 2009), 103. For a similar “life in the week of a mod” schedule see Harry Shapiro, “London’s Speeding,” in *The Sharper Word*, 75.

assumed—from the hyper-local live performance by a band or DJ in a basement club to the mass-mediated lip-synching of a hit single on a television broadcast—seemed to matter little to this audience.⁴⁸ In fact, for the better part of the mid-1960s, the “weekend began” for much of Britain’s youth with *Ready, Steady Go!*’s Friday early evening broadcast.⁴⁹ A new addition to ITV’s popular entertainment programming in the late summer of 1963, *Ready, Steady, Go! (RSG!)* was introduced to its potential viewership as an effort to “capture the immediacy, the pace of modern show business” in an informal setting with an “audience that will participate actively.”⁵⁰ The program, hosted by former Radio Luxemburg DJ, onetime *Thank Your Luck Stars* host and current *NME* record reviewer Keith Fordyce, was, at the outset, designed as a broad survey of what was on offer for the London youth/pop culture market on any given weekend.⁵¹ *RSG!*’s debut broadcast on August 9, 1963, for example, featured simulated performances from British rockers Billy Fury and Brian Poole, Pat Boone, and Burl Ives introducing clips of their upcoming films, and an interview with Chris Barber.⁵² A review of the show’s second episode offered that *RSG!* was missing its mark:

⁴⁸ Despite the fact that the mod ethos was rooted firmly in notions of cultural prestige deriving from exclusivity and authenticity.

⁴⁹ *Ready Steady Go!* ran from August 9, 1963–December 23, 1966. “The weekend begins here” was *RSG!*’s tagline and was featured prominently in the show’s opening sequence.

⁵⁰ *RSG!* director Bill Turner quoted in Dave Lanning, “Stand by for take-off: Ready, Steady Go!, *TV Times* (Northern Edition), August 2, 1963, 32. The Television House studio from which the show was broadcast held a maximum standing/dancing audience of 200.

⁵¹ Louis Barfe, *Turned Out Nice Again: The Story of British Light Entertainment* (London: Atlantic Books, 2008), 173–177. Fordyce did double duty as TV host and music critic between August and December before ceasing to review records for *NME* at the start of 1964.

⁵² “Foreign TV Reviews: Ready, Steady, Go!,” *Variety*, August 21, 1963, 29, 36. The *TV Times* listing for this episode only mentions Brian Poole and Billy Fury as guests. Information about who appeared on which episode has been compiled on various internet sites including: <http://www.tv.com/shows/ready-steady-go/august-9-1963-rsg-debut-308634/>, <http://www.ranker.com/list/full-list-of-ready-steady-go-episodes/reference> and <http://ctva.biz/Music/UK/ReadySteadyGo.htm> (the ctva site indicates that the Episode Guide was compiled by The Classic TV Archive with contributions by: Tom Alger; references: *TV Times*/ *TV World* / British Film Institute / Internet Movie Database); all accessed April 11, 2017. All following information about scheduled appearances draws directly from *TV Times* listings and/or cross-reference with these various resources.

This show is a mess.... It is impossible to cater for quite as many interests as “Ready, Steady, Go!” tries to do without disappointing.... The result of this hectic thrusting together of all-assorted snippets was a programme that was the epitome of all the worst magazine programmes that have ever been seen on television.⁵³

Shortly after this unfocused debut the show settled into a more consistent format and stylistic approach centered on “mod” musical and fashion sensibilities as articulated in the clubs of Soho. This connection manifest itself in the adoption of Manfred Mann’s “5-4-3-2-1” as the show’s theme song in November of 1963 and in the elevation of 19-year old “teen adviser” and archetypal mod Cathy McGowan to co-host starting with the January 17, 1964 broadcast.⁵⁴ In the show’s near-weekly live transmissions, home viewers were invited to “listen to hit discs” (many of which were mimed to by the recording artists) and to “dance [along] with the teenagers in studio.”⁵⁵ Not all of the discs were hits at the time they were heard on the show, nor were the artists who performed them necessarily hit makers. In a joint effort to stay ahead of the latest trends and to highlight its Soho connection, *RSG!* booked many an up-and-coming London club act, giving groups like Georgie Fame, The Animals, Davey Jones (David Bowie) and the King Bees, and the Who some of their biggest, earliest national exposure. This was first the case for the Rolling Stones, who appeared on the show’s third broadcast (August 23, 1963) and returned no less than twelve times between then and the end of 1964.⁵⁶

⁵³ Marjorie Norris, “Review of ‘Ready, Steady, Go!,’” *The Stage and Television Today*, August 22, 1963, 10.

⁵⁴ “*Ready, Steady Go!* listing,” *TV-Times* (London Edition), January 10, 1964, 42. For more about McGowan and her importance to the show see Adrienne Lowy, “*Ready, Steady, Go!* Televisual Pop Style and The Careers of Dusty Springfield, Cilla Black, Sandy Shaw and Lulu” in *Popular Music and Television in Britain*, Ian Inglis, ed. (Farnham, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 59-69, 63-65.

⁵⁵ In addition to “the weekend starts here!,” these lines appeared in each of the show’s *TV Times* listings throughout 1963 and into early 1964. *RSG!* also presented annual “The New Year Starts Here” specials each December 31st between 1963-1965.

⁵⁶ Louis Barfe indicates that then-24-year-old *RSG!* programme assistant Vicki Wickham saw the Rolling Stones at Eeliland in early August 1963 and recommended they be on the show (Barfe, *Turned out Nice Again*, 176). As Lowy notes, *RSG!* also offered large-scale media exposure to Cilla Black, Sandy Shaw,

RSG! likewise served as an indispensable promotional vehicle for visiting American acts. During the show's first few months, when *RSG!*'s identity was less coherently defined (as was the case for British pop music more broadly, for that matter), the program featured back-to-back appearances from rockabilly-pop singers Tommy Roe and Roy Orbison, and country artist Hank Locklin.⁵⁷ The October 18, 1963 broadcast, starring Brook Benton, Dee Dee Sharp, Timi Yuro and Dion, signaled the start of a shift in that it was the first of many instances American R&B was included in the show's format—and the first time *RSG!* incorporated African American performers.⁵⁸ This revised musical outlook seemed to be solidified in the two broadcasts that bookended the show's New Year's Eve special; the last regular episode of 1963 (Little Stevie Wonder / the Rolling Stones) and the first episode of 1964 (The Ronettes / Georgie Fame). Of the twenty-three American artists that performed on the show in 1964 only five were white.⁵⁹ The black acts that made up the balance of visiting American performers were drawn from

Lulu and particularly for Dusty Springfield. Springfield performed on the show or guest-hosted no less than eight times during this period.

⁵⁷ Roe and Orbison, who were in the country as part of separate, but simultaneous package tours (<https://www.bradfordtimeline.co.uk/mindex63g.htm>), appear on September 6 and 13, 1963 respectively. Locklin's appearance was on September 20th.

⁵⁸ Black British singer Kenny Lynch had appeared prior (more on Lynch below). This is indicative of a larger sea change in *RSG!* (and Brit-pop generally). Two weeks earlier the Beatles had made their debut on the show performing their cover of the Isley Bros.' "Twist and Shout" among a number of Lennon-McCartney originals. Less than a month later, Dusty Springfield made her solo debut on the program singing the girl group-inspired "I Only Want to Be with You."

⁵⁹ The Beach Boys, Carl Perkins, The Crickets, Bill Haley and Jerry Lee Lewis. The Beach Boys were becoming hit makers in the UK in their own right by the time of their November 6th appearance. Perkins was in the UK as part of a package tour headlined by Chuck Berry and appears on the same episode as Little Richard. Bill Haley was also over for a package tour (with Manfred Mann). Jerry Lee Lewis's appearance will be discussed below. Notably, four of the five had their greatest moments of fame during the 1950s first wave of rock 'n' roll. Their British appeal at the time could have been motivated more by nostalgia than efforts to keep up with the "latest thing."

across the R&B spectrum as it was understood in Britain. Downhome and new wave R&B artists filled out the show's rosters on a near-weekly basis.⁶⁰

On the heels of the success of Mary Wells' "My Guy," negotiations for an all-Tamla-Motown package tour of the UK were underway. *Disc* reported on tentative plans for a September tour with the headline "U.S. Invasion!: Top American stars bid for British fans."⁶¹ Acknowledging that most Tamla-Motown artists would have been little known in the country, the bulk of the piece is a series of brief introductions to the label's top acts. In support of the pending package tour, which would not actually materialize until early 1965, a number of Motown artists came over for week-long promotional blitzes that helped feed *RSG!*'s demand for such artists.⁶² Likewise, trips from downhome R&B artists were becoming commonplace starting in the final months of 1963. Concurrent with Bo Diddley's fall package tour, the American Folk Blues Festival returned to the UK in October featuring John Lee Hooker, Otis Spann, Sonny Boy Williamson, Willie Dixon and Muddy Waters.⁶³ Waters and Spann would return six months later as part of the American Folk Blues and Gospel Train.⁶⁴ Chuck Berry, Jimmy Witherspoon, Memphis Slim, Little Walter, Jimmy Reed, Howlin' Wolf, Hubert Sumlin, Willie Dixon, Sunnyland Slim, Sugar Pie Desanto, and Lightnin' Hopkins would also appear on British stages

⁶⁰ Examples include Little Walter (Sept. 25, 1964) and John Lee Hooker (Oct. 2, 1964) in the former category, The Crystals (Feb. 14, 1964), Dionne Warwick (May 22, 1964, Sept. 18, 1964 and Oct. 16, 1964) and Martha and the Vandellas (Nov. 6, 1964) in the latter.

⁶¹ Jonathan Clark, "U.S. Invasion!," *Disc*, June 6, 1964, 4.

⁶² For more about Tamla-Motown's activities in Britain during this period see Flory, *I Hear a Symphony*, 120-123.

⁶³ See Ulrich Adelt, "Germany gets the blues: race and nation at the American Folk Blues Festival," in *Blues Music in the Sixties* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010) for more about the American Folk Blues Festivals.

⁶⁴ Along with Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Blind Gary Davis, Cousin Joe Pleasant, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee.

in 1964.⁶⁵ While many of these appearances were the result of touring festival packages, some were individual visits in support of record releases like the one's mentioned above. For downhome and new wave alike, television appearances were increasingly becoming an integral aspect of any trip to the UK. Although African American artists occasionally would be the subject of specially planned, one-off programs, just as often they would appear on one (or many) of the programs that made up the existing broadcasting infrastructure of the British entertainment world.⁶⁶ Quite often this would find American and British R&B artists sharing the same line-up on one of the many pop music television programs like *Ready, Steady, Go!*

Friday, November 20, 1964, 6:08 pm⁶⁷

Rarely was the broad scope of *RSG!*'s coverage more clearly on display as it was on the November 20, 1964 episode. This broadcast was advertised in *TV Times*—with an accompanying full-color, full-page photo of the Rolling Stones—as follows:

Ready, Steady, Go!
The Weekend Starts Here!
 KEITH FORDYCE
 with
 CATHY MCGOWAN
 invites you to meet a galaxy of guest stars, including
THE ROLLING STONES
 back from the United States with a great new record
MARVIN GAYE
 one of America's New Wave Singers
JERRY LEE LEWIS
 the veteran rocker strikes again⁶⁸

⁶⁵ See Roberta Freund Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues: The Transmission and Reception of American Blues Style in the United Kingdom*. (Aldershot, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 145-162 for more about these tours.

⁶⁶ Examples of specialty programs dedicated to visiting African American artists include *I Hear the Blues* (1963) and *The Blues and Gospel Train* (1964). See Michael Brocken, "Granada TV, Johnny Hamp, and *the Blues and Gospel Train*: Masters of Reality," in *Popular Music and British Television*, Ian Inglis, ed. (Farnham, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 144-154.

⁶⁷ As per *TV Times* listings, the program expanded from thirty to forty-five minutes at the start of 1964 and again, by June, to run from 6:08-7:00 pm.

The balance of the “galaxy of guest stars” for this episode includes seven British acts: three additional bands and four more solo singers.⁶⁹ Quite frequently, appearances on *RSG!* coincided with the initial release a song as part of promotional tour. Such promotion often, if not always, translated into chart placement for the artists.⁷⁰ Underscoring this fact, each of the ten acts included in the show’s line up released singles on or very close to November 20th.

⁶⁸ *TV Times* (London Edition), November 12, 1964, 7, 51.

⁶⁹ Clips of eleven of the fourteen musical numbers performed on this broadcast have been included in VHS releases of *Ready, Steady Go!* footage and/or aired on BBC4 and have consequently been uploaded to YouTube. It is believed that the whole episode exists in its entirety although it is not currently accessible. According to internet chat sites and YouTube posts, the back catalog of *RSG!* is owned and carefully controlled by Dave Clark (formerly of the Dave Clark Five). I have combined the existing footage into a rough cut version of the episode and uploaded it here: <https://youtu.be/0AQaA7Z8cXc>

⁷⁰ Lowy, “*Ready, Steady, Go!* Televisual Pop Style and The Careers of Dusty Springfield, Cilla Black, Sandy Shaw and Lulu,” 59-62.

Table 6.4 – Songs Performed on *Ready, Steady Go!*, November 20, 1964⁷¹

Artist	Song	Release/Review Date ⁷²
The Plebs	"Babe I'm Going to Leave You"	Oct. 30, 1964 (<i>NME</i>)
Paul Williams	"Gin House"	Nov. 21, 1964
The Zephyrs	"Wonder What I'm Gonna Do"	Nov. 20, 1964
Marvin Gaye	"Can I Get a Witness"	Nov. 30, 1963 (<i>NME</i>)*
Simon Scott	"My Baby's Got Soul"	Nov. 20, 1964
Kenny Lynch	"My Own Two Feet"	Nov. 27, 1964 (<i>NME</i>)
Jerry Lee Lewis	"Hi-Heel Sneakers"	Nov. 6, 1964 (<i>NME</i>)
	"Whole Lotta Shakin' Going On"	July 1957*
Marvin Gaye	"How Sweet it Is"	Nov. 20, 1964
Them	"Baby, Please Don't Go"	Nov. 6, 1964
Samantha Jones	"All Because of You"	Nov. 27, 1964
The Rolling Stones	"Off the Hook"	Nov. 13, 1964 [B-side]
	"Little Red Rooster"	Nov. 13, 1964 [A-side]
	"Around and Around"	Aug. 14, 1964 [5x5 EP]*

* These songs were performed *in addition* to the latest releases. In the case of Lewis and Gaye, these were the songs that they were best known for in Britain.

Although no footage of the first portion of this episode is currently available, the broadcast would have began promptly at 6:08 pm with the *RSG!* theme, Manfred Mann's original composition "5-4-3-2-1," played against the show's title sequence.⁷³ For the first few seconds of the broadcast the numbers "5-4-3-2-1" filled the screen as the band sings the song's signature countdown to a bluesy descending arpeggio of an Em7 chord (E-D-B-G-E). A thirty-

⁷¹ As listed on <http://ctva.biz/Music/UK/ReadySteadyGo.htm>, accessed April 20, 2017. Cross-reference of *Melody Maker*, *Record Mirror* and *New Musical Express* corroborate this lineup. In addition, I cross-referenced the various extant clips that are attributed to this episode for evidence that these performances were in fact all from the same broadcast and I believe that these are incontrovertibly all from the same episode (supported by other evidence). Cathy McGowan's outfit and Keith Fordyce's suit and tie are consistent throughout. Two distinctive audience members, who I refer to as "sailor hat girl" and the "bleach blond mod boy" (who sticks out his tongue to the camera on three separate occasions!), also can be seen in most of these clips.

⁷² Exact release date given if available. If not, review date is given with source publication indicated in parentheses.

⁷³ Various songs were used in the titled sequence over the show's lifetime. The Safari's "Wipeout" served this purpose when the show first debuted. In early 1965, "5-4-3-2-1" was replaced by Them's "Baby, Please Don't Go" (Lowy, *Ready, Steady, Go! Televisual Pop Style and The Careers of Dusty Springfield, Cilla Black, Sandy Shaw and Lulu*, 63; Clinton Heylin, *can you feel the silence?: Van Morrison: A new biography* (New York: Viking, 2002), 100-101).

second barrage of pop art imagery—including bull's-eyes, pinball machines and stills of teens wearing the latest styles—followed, accompanied by Manfred Mann's up-tempo, harmonica-soaked turn through a 12-bar blues.⁷⁴ Just after the phrase “The Weekend Starts Here” passed across the screen, the image dissolved to a tight shot of a youthful studio audience dancing along to the music. As it did in episode after episode, this standardized opening set the tone for the show that would follow. It would be a 52-minute display of pop music and fashion in action influenced by the Soho club aesthetic.

While not all the songs performed on this broadcast would have been categorized as R&B, at least six of the ten numbers are strongly related to the genre in one way or another.⁷⁵ Of the non-R&B numbers, The Zephyrs' “Wonder What I'm Going to Do” is essentially a beat number with a liberal dose of Beach-Boy-surf-rock vocal harmony added into an otherwise Merseyside sound. The other two cuts—Samantha Jones' “All Because of You” and Kenny Lynch's “My Own Two Feet”—would have been considered pure pop by British audiences despite the fact that Lynch was one of the most successful black British artists of his day and a regular on *RSG!*⁷⁶ Simon Scott's “My Baby's Got Soul” draws loosely on the 1950s-era rhythm

⁷⁴ As Lowy notes, *RSG!*'s title sequence “were the viewer's crucial first experience of the programme [and] formed a key component of the show's visual style.” Lowy, “*Ready, Steady, Go!* Televisual Pop Style and The Careers of Dusty Springfield, Cilla Black, Sandy Shaw and Lulu,” 63.

⁷⁵ Although the relationship between “Whole Lotta Shakin' Going On” and blues/R&B is historically and sonically evident, I am bracketing off this song as rock ‘n’ roll as it would have been broadly understood at the time.

⁷⁶ Studio orchestras rather than the standard R&B/beat/rock ‘n’ roll instrumentation of drums, bass, guitars and/or keyboards provide the supporting track for these recordings. Furthermore, Lynch's and Jones' performances are devoid of any other clear stylistic marker of R&B such as blue notes, metric mixture, etc. John Stratton argues that Lynch was “caught in a delicate balancing act” by 1964 in which he “had to sing material that was reassuringly white to a British audience that was anxious about the visible difference of a black British singer” while at the same time not sounding “too bland” in a market that had come to appreciate “African-American vocal stylings” (John Stratton, “‘A West Indian? you must be joking! I come out of the East end’: Kenny Lynch and English racism in the 1950s and 1960s,” in *When Music Migrates: Crossing British and European Racial Faultlines, 1945-2010* (Farnham, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), 35). Shades of a Phil Spector-esque “wall of sound” on this

and blues ballad although not without “a somewhat weird style,” as *RSG!* host Keith Fordyce noted. While the arpeggiated 12/8 guitar accompaniment and lush vocal harmonies are reminiscent of the Platters’ “Great Pretender,” Scott’s vocal delivery has very little “soul” to it. Instead, the falsetto swoops, glides and overwrought diction that constitute his “weird style” on “My Baby’s Got Soul” sound like they would be more at home in a camp horror film soundtrack than an American R&B record.

Although most closely associated with 1950s rock ‘n’ roll, Jerry Lee Lewis’ output from the early 1960s, particularly his UK releases of cover songs made popular by African American composer/performers (most notably a version of Ray Charles “What’d I Say” that became a top-ten hit in mid-1961) suggests that he was increasingly leaning toward R&B in the post-rock ‘n’ roll era.⁷⁷ This propensity, coupled with his earlier R&B-inflected work in the 1950s, led R&B columnist, DJ and tastemaker Guy Stevens in early 1964 to refer to Lewis as “the greatest white blues star.”⁷⁸ Lewis would again look to the R&B charts for inspiration in mid-1964 settling on a reworking of Tommy Tucker’s “Hi-Heel Sneakers” as his latest release. With simultaneous UK and US releases in October, Lewis’s version of the recent downhome R&B hit “Hi-Heel Sneakers” aligns with the British R&B *modus operandi*. Jerry Lee Lewis’s live performance of the song on *RSG!*, though it takes a few choruses to build to the rave-up frenzy most likely expected from an audience familiar with British R&B performance practice, nonetheless elicited

record and the girl group-influenced female backing vocals gives “My Own Two Feet” a Brill Building effect that would have evoked mainstream pop with hints of black musical conventions.

⁷⁷ Lewis’ post-rock ‘n’ roll, early-1960s’ releases in the United States included a number of country songs as well.

⁷⁸ Guy Stevens, “Jerry Lee Lewis – the greatest blues star for ten years,” *Jazzbeat*, February 1964 (2), 16-18.

an enthusiastic response. By the song's final chorus, wide shots of the studio show a dancing crowd fully engaged in the rendition.⁷⁹

Notably, a new generation of British revivalist R&B is represented on this *RSG!* broadcast and are on display from the show's opening number. The debut (and only single) from a group called the Plebs—a group best known for backing visiting American artists such as Jimmy Reed, John Lee Hooker and Jerry Lee Lewis—starts the program.⁸⁰ Titled “Babe I’m Gonna Leave You,” the song was first recorded by Joan Baez (1962) and is credited as “traditional” on both the Baez and Plebs record.⁸¹ The lyric of “Babe, I’m Gonna Leave You” evokes typical blues themes like leaving a lover, the call of the highway, and a life of rambling. As performed by the Plebs, these lines are sung in a manner that approximates the timbres and phrasing of the electric blues artists they backed earlier in the year and are supported by a rave-up British R&B groove. The second performance of the night, “Gin House,” was first recorded by Bessie Smith (1925) and composed by Fletcher Henderson, although it was similarly miscredited as “traditional” on the first pressing of the November 1964 Paul Williams single. Backed by Flamingo Club resident group Zoot Money’s Big Roll Band (comprised of drums, bass, guitar, organ, baritone and tenor sax), Williams’ version was described by *New Record*

⁷⁹ “Whole Lotta Shakin’ Going On” was similarly received, although on this number Lewis’ incredible intense energy is only partially matched by the audience. By the song’s final chorus Lewis stands on the piano, removes his jacket and swings it over his head while shaking his hips in a manner that would have even made Elvis proud.

⁸⁰ http://forgottenbands.blogspot.ca/2011/03/next-band_7869.html accessed April 27, 2017

⁸¹ Although listed as a traditional song, it was actually composed by American folk singer Anne Bredon (Janet Smith, “The ‘Babe I’m Gonna Leave You’ Story,” in *The Gate at the End of the World: A Collection of Songs by Anne Bredon* (Bella Roma Music, 1991), vii-x).

Mirror as an “atmospheric blues.... It’s certainly different—probably the only comparison [is to] the Animals’ own rendition of ‘House of the Rising Sun.’”⁸²

The group Them performed a third “traditional” number, “Baby, Please Don’t Go,” in the downhome R&B style. Introduced as “an old standard” by Fordyce, “Baby, Please Don’t Go” was first recorded by Chicago blues singer Big Joe Williams in 1935. A bevy of versions would follow including records from Lightnin’ Hopkins (1947), John Lee Hooker (1949), Big Bill Broonzy (1952) and Muddy Waters (1953).⁸³ A later Waters performance of the song was also captured on the influential *At Newport 1960* LP, released in the UK in 1961.⁸⁴ The as-yet-under-recognized, Northern Ireland-based Them, fronted by 19-year old Van Morrison, performed the song following Marvin Gaye’s “How Sweet it Is.”⁸⁵ From the blues-inflected guitar riff and Van Morrison’s rough-hewn exhortations of “Baby, please don’t go!” that open the song, Them’s performance contrasts strikingly with Gaye’s soul-crooning tenor.⁸⁶ Indeed, Them’s performance is extraordinarily raw in terms of timbre and particularly rudimentary in its formal structure, even by comparison to other British R&B of the time. The entire recording consists of intensional variations on a repeating eight-bar verse over a sustained E-blues tonality and a pervasive rave-up groove provided by drums and bass.⁸⁷ Against this backdrop guitarist Billy

⁸² Wesley Laine, “What’s a big-roll band?,” NRM, December 12, 1964, 2. This record is not available in any digital or currently available commercial format, thus the necessity to defer to the review here. Zoot Money’s Big Roll Band included future Police guitarist Andy Summers.

⁸³ Paul Garon, “Baby Please Don’t Go/Don’t You Leave Me Here,” in *Encyclopedia of the Blues*, Edward Komara, ed., (New York: Routledge, 2004), 39-40.

⁸⁴ See chapter four for more about this record and its role in shaping British R&B.

⁸⁵ Although this was the second single from Them, and the song would eventually reach the pop charts top-10 in early 1965, neither the song nor the band are mentioned once in either *Melody Maker* or *NME* between the release of “Baby, Please Don’t Go” in early November 1964 and the end of the year.

⁸⁶ Furthermore, Van Morrison’s Muddy Waters-influenced delivery often renders the words he sings borderline indecipherable in contrast to Marvin Gaye’s very clear diction.

⁸⁷ For discussions about the importance of repetition and variation in black music see David Brackett, *Interpreting Popular Music* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2000 [1995]), 117-119 and Samuel A. Floyd, *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Harrison is granted more-or-less free range to fill in the spaces between Morrison's vocal lines with blues-inflected riffs and responsorial passages. In addition to these elements, Van Morrison's various takes on the song's recurrent melody and refrain, "Baby, please don't go, baby please don't go, baby, please don't go down to New Orleans, you know I love you so, baby, please don't go," contributes significantly to the downhome sound of the record. To a degree almost unrivalled by British singers up to this point, Morrison emulates timbres, accent, inflection and cadences of the "rawest" R&B singers like Waters and Howlin' Wolf.⁸⁸ Even Van Morrison's spoken interlude midway through the song—"How I feel right now, my baby leaving on that midnight train, and I'm cryin'"—sounds closer to what one would expect from a 50-something Mississippi native than a 19-year-old lad from Belfast.

Elements of the visual presentation of "Baby, Please Don't Go" seem intended to reinforce the downhome affect of the performance and the validity of Them's performance of the song. As an apparent means to communicate immediacy between performers and fans, Them and their instruments are positioned directly in the middle of the studio's dance floor surrounded by a dancing, clapping or otherwise grooving audience.⁸⁹ One particular audience member, a young woman of the African diaspora, judging from her appearance, features prominently in the staging of "Baby, Please Don't Go."⁹⁰ Each time the whole group is in frame, and in many wide shots of the audience, this woman can be seen dancing along to the music. At one point toward the end of the song the camera pulls back from a tight shot of Morrison singing only to settle on a close up of the clapping and swaying black hands of this young woman, panning up to her entranced

⁸⁸ In my estimation at least Morrison surpasses Cyril Davies, Paul Jones and Long John Badry in this regard and far outshines Mick Jagger.

⁸⁹ This was not an uncommon technique employed by *RSG!* As noted below, a similar approach is used for Gaye's performance of "Can I Get a Witness."

⁹⁰ As Lowy notes, *RSG!* founder Eklan Allan insisted that the show's audience be integrated. (Lowy, "Ready, Steady, Go! Televisual Pop Style and The Careers of Dusty Springfield, Cilla Black, Sandy Shaw and Lulu," 61.)

facial expression before returning the television viewer's gaze to the singer. Although it cannot be said with any authority if this young black woman was positioned in close proximity to the band intentionally, the way that the cameras repeatedly display her physical responses to "Baby, Please Don't Go" serve to communicate a sense of cultural credibility to this white British performance of the R&B.⁹¹ There is no way to know if this woman was African American, West Indian or from elsewhere. Within the binary understanding of race prevalent at the time, however, the demonstrable, positive reaction to British R&B by a person of color would have been received as a sign of the band's authenticity; perhaps an even more powerful indicator than what could be found in the performance itself (the perceived "authentic blackness" of Van Morrison's vocal performance, Billy Harrison's well-executed blues licks, etc.).

Representing the new wave of R&B on this episode of *RSG!* was Marvin Gaye. Gaye's November 20th *RSG!* appearance was one of three from Tamla-Motown artists that month, part of a 1964 push to generate interest in the label in advance of the Motown package tour scheduled for the following year. Although recognized as a "very consistent U.S. hitmaker," Gaye's only demonstrable commercial success in the UK prior to this broadcast was a one-week, #50 placement on the *Record Retailer* pop chart in August.⁹² Gaye was a darling of the London R&B scene, however, as evidenced by the *NRM* R&B poll cited earlier. In particular, his late 1963 release "Can I Get a Witness" was well received. Shortly after the song's release, *NRM*'s "The Great Unknowns" column suggested that "Can I Get a Witness" was a record that would appeal strongly and specifically, and by implication, *only* to rhythm and blues connoisseurs in the UK.

⁹¹ Mike Brocken argues that how such moments come to be, "whether by direction or inspiration," is of little consequence to a television audience. What matters is what appears on the screen and how it is received. Brocken, "Grenada TV, Johnny Hamp, And The Blues and Gospel Train," 148.

⁹² Wesley Laine, "This stubborn man called Marvin Gaye," *NRM*, January 4, 1964, 12. Gaye charted with the duet "Once Upon a Time" with Mary Wells on August 5, 1964. Wells was already established as a hit maker in the UK by that summer, so even this success was likely due more to her appearance on the record than his.

That Dusty Springfield and the Rolling Stones both covered the song in early 1964 was an indication that this sect certainly embraced it.

“Can I Get a Witness” bridges a divide between downhome R&B and the new wave in a manner that made it a strong candidate for a Rolling Stones cover. The song is constructed around a 26-bar strophic form, essentially a doubling of the 12-bar blues (24 bars) plus a two-measure extension leading into the start of each new turn through the form.⁹³ While Marvin Gaye’s singing style on this record is certainly smoother and more constrained than the typical downhome fare, it nonetheless contains the occasional scoops, slides and subtle growls commonly understood as markers of traditional black vocality. Certainly the call-and-response between Gaye and backing vocalists and the persistent backbeat hand clapping throughout the record would have registered with British R&B fans as an update on gospel vocal practice, another “folk” genre closely associated with the blues and R&B. The signature dense texture and mix-forward horn lines typical of the Motown sound—rather than harmonica and a prominent electric guitar part—are the most clear sonic indication that “Can I Get a Witness” is of the new wave of R&B.⁹⁴

It would appear, from the *RSG!* audience reaction to “Can I Get a Witness,” that the members of the lock-and-step R&B crowd responded enthusiastically to the song, with at least three audience members singing along throughout. The staging conceit of “Can I Get a Witness” focuses on Gaye making his way from a riser on one end of the sound stage, across the dance floor, passing through the crowd, and eventually exiting through a set of doors at the other side

⁹³ By contrast, “How Sweet it Is” employs a verse-refrain/pre-chorus/chorus form more common in pop-leaning new wave R&B.

⁹⁴ Although, as the presence of horns and organ in Georgie Fame’s recorded output from late 1963 indicates, these sounds would not have been unfamiliar and would have been heard as R&B.

of the stage as the show cuts to commercial.⁹⁵ The proximity of audience to performer in this segment inverts the racial dynamic of the “Baby, Please Don’t Go” clip, although it achieves a similar effect. Here, in a move that seems to legitimize the British affinity for new wave R&B, Gaye appears as more-or-less one with the predominantly white crowd as he moves among them. The one noticeable person of color in the audience, the girl who was front-and-center in much of the “Baby, Please Don’t Go” portion of the program, is again seen during Gaye’s performance, although this time the cameras do not pay any special attention to her. She is very much just one of the crowd, jockeying for position near the singer, being jostled out of the frame or obscured entirely behind Gaye as she follows him across the studio during the second half of the song. A sense of difference is nonetheless highlighted as Marvin Gaye’s black body is contained within an all-white tuxedo. Both Gaye’s skin and sartorial choice contrasts starkly with the vast majority of the audience.⁹⁶ Furthermore, Gaye’s suit also contrasts with the black tuxedo and leopard-print vest he wears for the “How Sweet It Is,” a song he performs from a elevated platform that reinforces a sense of distance between Gaye and the crowd.

It has been frequently observed that the essence of *RSG!*’s appeal was the spontaneity of interaction between performer and audience. As Lowy notes, this effect was taken into consideration even in the technical staffing of the program. “In order to capture and convey the atmosphere and immediacy of a style-setting, weekly club venue,” she writes, *RSG!* “employed cameramen with TV experience in outside broadcast and sports programs for their ability to react

⁹⁵ McGowan is seen closing these doors, which display the words “Ready Steady Go! Back Soon” on them, as the song fades out.

⁹⁶ The audience is dressed in typical “mod” attire with the boys in Italian-cut suits or stylish “jumpers.” The male musicians on the broadcast are similarly outfitted. For their part, Mick Jagger, Keith Richards and Charlie Watts all wear sportcoats without ties.

spontaneously to events in the studio.”⁹⁷ This air of spontaneity had to nonetheless be cultivated to communicate the desired effect. A team of youthful producers, the show’s choreographer Patrick Kerr and host McGowan handpicked the studio audience either from auditions or directly from Soho clubs.⁹⁸ The music was similarly selected by the show’s staff from among the latest releases and reflected a specifically curated aesthetic that favored R&B. Even once the core elements of performer and audience were assembled, however, a certain degree of staging and direction was necessary to ensure a cohesive, live-broadcast television program that communicated the excitement and emerging proclivities of tastemakers in the clubs of London. The show’s acceptance of both downhome and new wave R&B reflected the trends of the moment. In programming this music, and coupling its performance with visual suggestions of the music’s value and authenticity, *RSG!* was instrumental in nationalizing British R&B.

The Rolling Stones: Little Red Rooster and Off the Hook

The performances discussed above set the stage for the main attraction of the evening, the Rolling Stones. The segment opens with Cathy McGowan introducing the group as “absolutely fantastic... [and] not just because [they] are really great friends of mine.” In addition to the band miming to a trio of recent records, Brian Jones and Mick Jagger plugged an upcoming live concert and a recent book release in brief interviews conducted by Keith Fordyce. The group’s set consists of “Off the Hook,” “Little Red Rooster” and “Around and Around.” Whereas “Around and Around” was recorded in Chicago and released earlier in the year on the *5x5* EP, the other two songs were originally scheduled for release on the same day as their *RSG!*

⁹⁷ Lowy, “*Ready, Steady, Go!*” Televisual Pop Style and The Careers of Dusty Springfield, Cilla Black, Sandy Shaw and Lulu,” 63.

⁹⁸ Ibid. See also “Ready, Steady, It’s All Go!,” *TV-Times* (London Edition), March 13, 1964, 10-11, for an interview with a pair of young mods selected to appear on the show through the audition process.

segment.⁹⁹ “Little Red Rooster” b/w “Off the Hook” was the Rolling Stones’ fifth UK single. Each of the previous singles peaked progressively higher on the British pop charts until their July release, a rendition of the Bobby Womack song “All Over Now,” reached number one on the *Record Retailer* chart. Given this, and the international popularity of the group in late 1964, expectations for their next single were high. A week before “Little Red Rooster” was released, advance orders for the record were estimated to be anywhere from 200,000 to more than 300,000.¹⁰⁰ As Derek Johnson’s *NME* review of the song indicates, the single was virtually assured comparable success based on these orders alone:

The eagerly awaited Stones follow-up appears to be a slow 12-bar blues in the familiar pattern—in each verse, the second line repeats the first, with the payoff in the third line. I have to admire Mick Jagger’s authentic feel as he propounds the tale of ‘Little Red Rooster.’ What makes it so colourful is the throbbing and pulsating backing—with electronic pulsating gimmicks, a reverberating bass, and a steadily strumming shuffling rhythm. Brilliantly recorded too! If it wasn’t the Stones, I wouldn’t give it much hope, ‘cos it’s not all that commercial—but advance orders already guarantee a massive hit.¹⁰¹

“Little Red Rooster” debuted in *NME*’s top-30 at number one.¹⁰² The single’s A-side, nevertheless presented the British record buying public with a recording they might not quite know what to do with. Despite the occasional purist detractors, the Rolling Stones were consistently aligned with British downhome R&B. What that typically meant within the reaches

⁹⁹ For reasons that are unclear, the single was released a week early on November 13th. “Stone’s tours abroad; single rushed out,” *NME*, November 6, 1964, 9. Because they were released simultaneously on the same record at the same time, the following analysis focuses on “Little Red Rooster” and “Off the Hook” exclusively and does not address “Around and Around.”

¹⁰⁰ “Stone’s tours abroad; single rushed out”; “Way Out Sound for the Stones,” *New Record Mirror*, November 7, 1964, 7.

¹⁰¹ Derek Johnson, “The Stones and Hermits can’t go wrong!,” *NME*, November 13, 1964, 6.

¹⁰² *Melody Maker* did not include these advance sales in their accounting, which led the record to debut at #21 (only to reach the top five the next week). This discrepancy was so noteworthy that *Melody Maker* dedicated a November 21, 1964 cover story, “Stones Chart Mystery,” to explain why the record did not place higher that week. Their number one, coincidentally, was the Supremes’ “Baby Love.”

of the popular charts was moderate to up-tempo danceable records.¹⁰³ The opening line of Johnson's review strives to educate the masses—in a tone consistent with the revivalist blues collector literature—about the formal elements of the song, which they should find “familiar.” Johnson's observation that “Little Red Rooster” “*appears* to be a slow 12-bar blues” (emphasis added) sums up how the average listener most likely heard the song. There was something “familiar” about it, but not quite obvious.

At seventy-five beats-per-minute, the song *is* slow; however, it is not quite a straight-ahead twelve-bar blues. Instead, the band performs the song with the kind of metric elasticity common in rural, Delta blues and occasionally found in Chicago downhome R&B. In verse one, the Rolling Stones prolong the tonic chord an additional measure in two places (mm 9 & 14), extending a typical twelve-bar form to fourteen bars. This prolongation occurs again in verse two before the cadential move to the dominant (m 9); however, the last return to the tonic (mm 12 & 13) is not extended this time. The band further manipulates the final verse by adding two beats to each of the first bars of the subdominant (mm 1 & 5), transforming them into measures of 6/4. In example 6.1 these variations on the standard blues form are noted in grey.

¹⁰³ One notable exception to this was the Animals' #1 hit from earlier in the year “House of the Rising Sun.” The 6/8 groove in “House of the Rising Sun” was well suited for slower dancing.

Example 6.1 – Prolongations in the Rolling Stones' "Little Red Rooster"

Verse 1: "I am the little red rooster..."

G: IV I IV I V IV I

//// | //// | //// | //// | //// | //// | //// | //// | **////** | //// | //// | //// | //// | **////** ||

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14

Verse 2: "The dogs begin to bark..."

G: IV I IV I V IV I

//// | //// | //// | //// | //// | //// | //// | //// | **////** | //// | //// | //// | //// ||

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13

Verse 3: "If you see my little red rooster..."

G: IV I IV I V IV I

6/4: **////** | 4/4: //// | //// | //// | 6/4: **////** | 4/4: //// | //// | //// | **////** | //// | //// | //// | //// ||

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13

While these modifications allude to downhome blues practice, they are not directly linked to the record that served as the Rolling Stones' model for the song: Howlin' Wolf 1961 version. Although a Sam Cooke version of "Little Red Rooster" had been a crossover hit in 1963 and was released in the UK the same year, the Rolling Stones rendition more closely aligns with the original recording of the song. Mick Jagger's vocal approach is much closer in tone, timbre and phrasing to that of Wolf than to the smoother new-wave approach of Sam Cooke. Brian Jones' omnipresent slide guitar work—in emulation of the parts played by Hubert Sumlin or Howlin' Wolf, presumably—also associates the Stones' version directly with the 1961 record.¹⁰⁴ In what audibly resonates as an effort to enhance the downhome effect of the recording, Keith Richards

¹⁰⁴ The Sam Cooke version takes up the role played by the slide guitar with a Hammond organ.

plays his part on a slightly out of tune 12-string acoustic guitar.¹⁰⁵ Howlin' Wolf's recording of "Little Red Rooster," however, does not intentionally play with meter in the manner that the Stones' record does. In fact, Howlin' Wolf's record adheres to a strict twelve-bar form for the entirety of the second and third verses. Only in the introduction and first verse is a flexible metric approach utilized.

This flexibility begins as ambiguity in the introduction where the band projects competing ideas of where measures begin. Willie Dixon's bass part in particular seems "turned around" compared to the rest of the group as he leans into their beat three with a strong up-beat pickup. When Howlin' Wolf begins to sing this ambiguity is partially resolved—Dixon now plays this up-beat as lead in to beat one—while a new conundrum is introduced as Dixon and other members of the band start the verse on the subdominant instead of the typical tonic, indicating that they may have understood the introductory four measures as the beginning of the twelve-bar form. While it is not unheard of to use a IV chord at the start of a 12-bar form, the fact that the following two verses start on the tonic suggest that this was not intentional.¹⁰⁶ Throughout the first verse Dixon's bass line is far from firm in outlining the harmony (unlike his playing in the following verses). In the most obvious instance of this he lands firmly on a D on first beat of measure nine as the rest of the band plays the dominant chord, E. Wolf, Dixon and the rest of the group then stretch this measure by two beats, perhaps to make the "mistake" sound more natural.¹⁰⁷ The result of this correction is a twelve-bar form with the addition of two beats.

¹⁰⁵ The acoustic 12-string guitar was most closely associated with Leadbelly and would have been understood as a folk blues instrument. The imperfect tuning which lends an additional folkish quality to the recording may be more due to Keith Richard's inability to properly tune the instrument (or the instrument's inability to stay in tune), than any strategic decision. The 12-string guitar parts on the Rolling Stones' early recordings are invariably out of tune.

¹⁰⁶ See "Mystery Train" (Junior Parker, 1953; Elvis Presley, 1955) for example.

¹⁰⁷ It is possible that this ambiguity and apparent performance errors were intentional, but it seems unlikely that this was the desired affect.

The Rolling Stones appeared to have embraced this ambiguity and developed it into a formal device in their version of the song. As demonstrated above, their arrangement attempts to assert an even more downhome feel than Howlin' Wolf himself.

While the Rolling Stones' "Little Red Rooster" played out in an approximation of a 12-bar form and featured other generic markers of downhome R&B—vocal slurs and falls in a blues tonality, double entendre lyric, slide guitar responses, harmonica outro—the song's tempo and feel did not do much to elicit a corporeal response. The inclusion of additional measures and beats must have further unsettled listeners' expectations and hindered their ability to dance to the song. This is quite evident in the *Ready, Steady, Go!* performance. Only a small portion of the studio audience even attempts to sway along to the song, much less dance to it, while a handful of others clap along to each down beat. Even the typically manic Jagger is mostly static while singing the song; so much so that he misses his cue to raise a harmonica to his lips to mime his part at the conclusion of the number.

Perhaps to properly warm up the crowd, the Rolling Stones opened their set not with "Little Red Rooster," but with its B-side, "Off the Hook," what Derek Johnson accurately referred to as a "pounding, mid-tempo [155 bpm]" number "featuring some effective guitar work and a plodding, compulsive beat."¹⁰⁸ The song's harmonic and formal structure is not particularly notable. The entire song is constructed around movement between the tonic and subdominant at regular intervals. The most prominent instrumental feature is Keith Richard's "Hi-Heel Sneakers"-inspired guitar intro and brief blues-scale, bent-note solo passages interpolated between chorus and verse and over the final, extended refrain. With the noticeable absence of harmonica and slide guitar, "Off the Hook" is, from an instrumental perspective, more in keeping

¹⁰⁸ Johnson, "The Stones and Hermits can't go wrong!"

with current “commercial”/pop/beat trends than previous Rolling Stones records or American R&B. Only Richards’ lead guitar lines are unquestionably influenced by R&B.

A similar statement could be made about the lyrics to “Off the Hook,” or at least its first verse. In the opening stanza, Jagger sings that he “got into bed, turned out the light, decided to call my baby on the telephone.” He is not able to complete the call, however. The verse concludes with the first take on the song’s refrain: “all I got was a ringing tone, it’s off the hook.” In the second verse, it appears that Jagger has gotten through although once he is actually talking to his “baby,” all he can do is complain that she is “talking so long she upsets my mind.” In verse three Jagger is apparently no longer participating in the conversation he seemed to desire, but then couldn’t stomach. Furthermore, as the closing lines—“tired of letting her upset me all the time, back in the bed started reading my books, take my phone right off of the hook, it’s off the hook”—indicate, he’s taken steps to ensure that he won’t have to speak to her for the rest of the evening. Although the songs’ lyrics start with positive intentions, as “Off the Hook” unfolds it becomes a rebuke of the innocent romanticism and common tropes of young love found in songs like “I Want to Hold Your Hand,” “Hard Days’ Night,” or “How Sweet It Is.” The rejection of this sort of “feminized pop sentimentality,” Susan McClary and others have argued, was a driving force behind the British interest in the blues and R&B.¹⁰⁹ The Rolling Stones’ previous single, with lines like “tables turning now it’s her time to cry/because I used to love her/but it’s all over now,” expressed this stance through though the *(re)*presentation of African American-R&B lyrics. By composing a clever manipulation of a rather pop-oriented theme into a negation of innocent love, Jagger and Richards’ lyrics represent a step toward the

¹⁰⁹ Susan McClary, “Thinking Blues,” in *Conventional Wisdom* (Ewing, NJ: University of California Press, 2001), 53.

group assuming the perceived hyper-masculinist stance of downhome R&B as their own worldview, at least as it was projected through song.

The *RSG!* performance of “Off the Hook” does not reveal too much about the audience’s reaction to the song, as the cameras focus on the band for the better part of clip. The throng of teenage girls that situated themselves at the edge of the band’s riser appears to respond quite positively to the record.¹¹⁰ In between jostling for position nearer to the band and efforts to hold Mick Jagger’s hand, these audience members move, bop and clap to the song to the degree that their close proximity to each other will allow. As *New Record Mirror*’s review of the song suggests, “Off the Hook” was “a real value for money flip.”¹¹¹ In other words, unlike so many other singles produced at the time (and since), the B-side was not a throwaway track, but had its own strong appeal. This is evident in the energy the song generated in the *RSG!* studio.

Oblique suggestions about which song, “Little Red Rooster” or “Off the Hook,” led record buyers to the single emerged in the music press in the weeks following its release. As noted above, *NME* suggested that “Little Red Rooster” would not stand a chance, commercially, if it wasn’t a Rolling Stones’ recording.¹¹² *New Record Mirror* echoes a similar sentiment, referring to “Little Red Rooster” as a “way out sound” that was a “courageous release.”¹¹³ Conversely, “Off the Hook” was “pounding” (*NME*) and “amusing” (*NRM*), adjectives more commonly assigned to R&B and beat records with commercial potential. A *NRM* reader echoed the concerns of these critics in a letter that derides “Little Red Rooster” as too slow a song for a single. “Where’s the ‘rhythm’ in your rhythm ‘n’ blues?” writes Barry Howson; “Come on,

¹¹⁰ or were positioned by the producers of the show?

¹¹¹ “Way Out Sound for the Stones,” *New Record Mirror*, November 7, 1964, 7.

¹¹² Johnson, “The Stones and Hermits can’t go wrong!”

¹¹³ “Way Out Sound for the Stones.”

Stones, live up to your title as 'The Wild Ones,' or you'll be rolling away for good."¹¹⁴ *Melody*

Maker made these positions explicit in December with the following commentary:

['Little Red Rooster'] was one of the beat world's biggest controversies. The Rolling Stones dared to forget the rave-up and play it straight with a blues song.... Some people said the B-side, "Off the Hook," would have been a more typical offering from the Stones.¹¹⁵

This direct and indirect derision, coupled with the amount of copies that reached consumers through advanced sales, suggests that "Little Red Rooster" may not have been the critical and commercial accomplishment placing an unapologetically downhome R&B number at the top of the pop charts that it appeared to be.

It was, however, a triumph of R&B revivalism. Although Mick Jagger was quoted shortly after the song's release stating that "the reason we recorded 'Little Red Rooster' isn't because we want to bring blues to the masses," that was effectively what they had done.¹¹⁶ The release of "Little Red Rooster" as a single signified the Stones digging deeper into the perceived bedrock of "pure" R&B, beyond the critically dubious reaches of Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley, on the mainstream musical stage. This type of deep dive into the more "traditional" and obscure was a process regularly enacted by revivalist musicians and record collectors. The broadness of this trend is on display in the number of other *(re)*presentations of traditionally-composed songs recorded and released around time—many of which were featured on the November 20, 1964 episode of *Ready, Steady, Go!*

It was also, perhaps, the revival's last gasp. "Little Red Rooster" would be the last Rolling Stones single to be a cover of an American R&B record. Their 1965 releases would

¹¹⁴ Barry Howson, "Let's have some more rhythm, Stones," *NRM*, November 28, 1964, 2.

¹¹⁵ "Top Ten Spot Check," *MM*, December 26, 1964, 8.

¹¹⁶ Quoted in Bill Wyman, *Stone Alone: The Story of a Rock 'n' Roll Band* (New York and London: Viking, 1990), 281. Wyman indicates that this quote is from an interview Jagger gave to *Disc's* Penny Valentine although he doesn't give a date or citation.

follow more in the model established by “Off the Hook.”¹¹⁷ The follow-up record, “The Last Time,” makes broad allusions to the gospel standard of the same name while repurposing the title/refrain into a suggestion of a man breaking up with a woman. Mid-1965’s “(I Can’t Get No) Satisfaction” builds upon the blues lyric theme of sexual pursuit and frustration, but turns this trope into a broad critique of mainstream British culture. Sonically, “Satisfaction” incorporates many aesthetic aspects of downhome and new wave R&B without adhering directly to any existing models. That is to say that, during this period, the band absorbed, reprocessed and repackaged the lyric stance and sonic conventions of R&B into their own compositions and sound in a way that moved beyond their models, but maintained their essence. This post-revival phase preserved the impulses that led the Rolling Stones and their peers to R&B in the first place, but channeled those impulses into their own revival-emergent musical community and sociocultural identity.¹¹⁸

* * *

The emergence of British R&B from club scene to (inter)national craze may not have been possible without *Ready Steady Go!* and the exposure it offered African American artists and local groups like the Rolling Stones. Despite *RSG!*’s efforts to create an aura of spontaneity, almost all the “performances” on the program between late 1963 and early 1965 were

¹¹⁷ Them’s single “Please Don’t Go” backed with their original composition “Gloria” would reach #10 on the pop charts in early 1965 after serving as *RSG!*’s theme song for a brief period. It is widely understood that it was the B-side of this record that was more popular at the time and certainly has been the more lasting emblem of the band’s short career. Much like the Stones at this time, their follow-up single was the markedly less downhome, much more pop “Here Comes the Night.”

¹¹⁸ As Ulrich Adelt notes, “[in the mid-1960s] the blues was reconfigured from black to white in its production and reception.... young white audiences began claiming the right to play the blues and live the blues through consumption” (Ulrich Adelt, *Blues Music in the Sixties* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 2).

pantomimed. Until the show altered its format with the April 1965 debut of *Ready, Steady Goes Live!*, the actual playing and singing of live music was a rare exception to a rule of lip-synching along with the record an artist was on the show to promote.¹¹⁹ Between the show's first broadcast to the switch to a live performance model, *RSG!* unquestioningly conformed to at least this one televisual convention established by earlier pop music programs that served the interests of the music industry. British R&B was, after all, a genre that had yet to find its feet, even if it was selling records. With very little in the way of models for countercultural practice becoming part of the mass culture, it was likely unclear how an underground movement was to merge with the mainstream. Just how strongly the ideology of an alternative scene—which placed a premium on authenticity, communal expression and naturalness while attempting to reject artifice and distance itself from commerce—could or should influence the broader set of entertainment practices into which it was absorbed had yet to be established. That the synthetic practice of pantomime would be adopted more or less without question speaks to the transitional nature of the British R&B moment. At least in 1964, acts like the Rolling Stones and Them still “played by the rules” even if they didn’t necessarily believe in them.

¹¹⁹ John Mundy, *Popular Music on Screen: From the Hollywood musical to music video* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), 203. Of existing pre-April 1965 footage I have been able to watch, only Jerry Lee Lewis and Georgie Fame perform live.

CONCLUSION

If you have ever heard the blues righteously sung, you know that it sounds of and from the fields burning under torpid Southern sun, of lands desolately drenched by too high rivers. The intended audience is black people themselves defined by the very blues tones and lyrics as sharers in a nation of common concern and culturally specific voice.

-Houston Baker (1987)¹

Without the Blues, Black life means nothing. The Blues is our collective Black language. Developed out of our resistance to the global dehumanization of colored people, we established a new way to commune with our ancestry.

-Nicholas Payton (2014)²

The conventional wisdom about blues-based musical genres in the 1950s and 1960s was that the blues in all its forms was incontrovertibly music of the black *folk*, a belief that, as the above quotes indicate, continues to hold a fair degree of scholarly and popular currency.³ The narrative of a direct lineage from plantation to juke joint is well represented in the work of authors from Paul Oliver to Amiri Baraka, from Samuel Charters to Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Nonetheless, appropriation of the blues, and in particular rhythm and blues, was among the most important element of mid- to late-20th-century mainstream popular music. One of R&B's predecessors, boogie woogie, was a novelty sensation in the 1940s. Rhythm and blues was the inspiration behind (if not stylistically the same as) the rock 'n' roll that transformed pop music almost beyond recognition in the 1950s. And, through the efforts of British groups the Beatles and the Rolling Stones—and the many less-remembered figures and fans discussed in this dissertation—R&B reinvigorated rock and pop in the mid-1960s. As Susan McClary once claimed, contra

¹ Houston Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 93.

² "Will the Real Black Messiah Please Stand Up" <https://nicholaspayton.wordpress.com/2014/12/17/will-the-real-black-messiah-please-stand-up/> accessed 6 January 2015.

³ I do not intend to imply that a deeply felt connection between blues and black identity is/was not part of the lived experience of many African Americans, nor that there is not some truth in this narrative; rather, I believe it is worth exploring the ideological and discursive underpinnings of this relation and to point out what it also excludes.

Amiri Baraka, “a music scholar of a future time might well look back on the musical landscape of the 1900s and label us all ‘blues people.’”⁴

British revivalists in the early 1960s identified rhythm and blues—broadly defined as urban blues, some rock ‘n’ roll, (proto-)soul, jazz, and even ska—as the music that spoke to them most directly, even as they acknowledged that it was not necessarily “their music” in a homological sense. This dissertation should not be read as an effort on behalf of these revivalists to stake a claim to the blues lineage. It is, instead, a recognition of the complex ways segments of early 1960s’ British society viewed rhythm and blues. It is a study about how white Britons heard themselves represented—or at least wished to imagine themselves—in the lyrics, rhythms and voices produced by African Americans. While consumption and emulation of R&B may not have turned Britons into “blues people,” it did offer them an alternate means to express, and perhaps transform, their Britishness. In the process, they also transformed popular music on the international stage.

I set out to achieve two goals in this dissertation. The first of these was to revise the accepted narrative about Britain and R&B in the early 1960s—by grounding the study in contemporaneous discourse—in order to recognize a much greater diversity of participants, motivations and subject positions. Through my analysis of this discourse I hoped to offer a more nuanced theorization about British R&B revivalism, about how and why Britons were drawn to rhythm and blues in such numbers, and what this music meant to them. The second, related goal was to bring scholarly, analytical attention to the music produced by British rhythm and blues revivalists. The actual sounds created by revivalists have either been under-theorized on the grounds that the music is ersatz in nature or ignored due to a disciplinary focus on the social,

⁴ McClary “Thinking Blues,” *Conventional Wisdom*, (Ewing, NJ: University of California Press, 2001), 32-33.

cultural, and/or political implications of revival. Through close examination of the music produced by Lonnie Donnegan, Otilie Patterson, Georgie Fame, the Rolling Stones and others, this dissertation demonstrates that even in revivalist (*re*)presentations of existing works, aesthetic, personal and cultural meaning can be interpreted through musical choices and performance practices.

In chapter two, I established how blackness was generally understood and represented within the world of British entertainment and how this understanding influenced the reception of traditional jazz and the blues in the early 1950s. I argued that an ideological conception that all black sound was folk sound conditioned (and complicated) the reception of rhythm and blues when it first appeared on the periphery of Britain's jazz and popular music scenes. As chapter three's discussion of Otilie Patterson's recording and performing career suggest, British R&B was far from the exclusive domain of rebellious young men celebrating the most "downhome" element of rhythm and blues. The scene was, in no small part, set in motion by Patterson, although it would later come to be associated with a masculinist appropriation of black sound. In London's Soho district, British R&B, inspired by American and Jamaican models alike, formed the basis of a club scene that would come to fuel a national obsession with black American music.

The main focus of this study—the period between British R&B's mainstream emergence through its purported demise by early 1965—offers an opportunity to interrogate the ways commercial infrastructure shaped revival and, conversely, how revival shaped popular music consumption.⁵ For roughly eighteen months, R&B—broadly defined, performed by both local

⁵ Roberta Schwartz notes that, while "it would be hard to pinpoint when the R&B boom began to wane," the signs of its decline and eventual demise were clear in the early months of 1965. Roberta Freund Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues: How Britain Got the Blues: The Transmission and Reception of*

and visiting artists—fundamentally changed the musical landscape of Britain. At the end of 1963 R&B was still primarily the domain of subcultures (West Indians, hipsters, mods and other Soho club-goers). By the start of 1965 the generic conventions of R&B were a central pillar upon which British popular music was crafted. To varying degrees, this process was a revival in transition, one that broadened in scope, appeal and form until it expanded (or collapsed, depending on one's perspective) into a dialectical intertwining with popular mass-cultural practice. This transformation in British popular music then became a vital ingredient of the most culturally prestigious popular music genre(s) of the mid- to late-1960s, including rock and its many subgenres.

This dissertation, therefore, strives to be more than a historicist genre study or a historiographical revision. Beyond the focus on a particular scene and a set of historical events/artifacts, the story of British R&B that I have tried to tell here is about a pivotal revolution in the nature of international popular music and about Anglo-American popular culture more broadly. The shifts in interests and attitudes that accompanied and were broadcast by the British R&B boom presaged the socio-musical, counter-culture-as-mass-culture movements of the second half of the 1960s. Without British R&B there might never have been swinging London, hippies, free love, blues-rock, folk-rock, psychedelic-rock and a host of other musically imagined communities.

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