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ALL THE PEOPLE'S FOLK

Contents of No. 51

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CORRECTION

Correction to Discography on p. 154: *The Blues* Vol. 4 is not on Pye, but is (English) Chess CRL 4003.

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Blues in the Archway Road

BEN COVINGTON

LOOKING AT THE POSTERS THAT LITTER THE SIDE STREETS of central and suburban London, one might be forgiven for assuming that the Blues was created by a post-Aldermaston generation of art students rather than by the afflicted negro population of the American Deep South. The posters advertise AUTHENTIC RHYTHM 'N' BLUES by groups which play a variety of music—some Pop-oriented, some Folk-oriented, some Jazz-oriented but largely derived from the music of the more sensational coloured entertainers of the USA, like Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, James Brown and T-Bone Walker. Of the 2,000 or more groups working the multitude of large and small clubs, no more than two dozen are in any way original, even in pop-music terms, and even these are rootless shadows of the singers on whose material they draw. The difference between the blues of modern America and the "blues" of modern Britain is the difference between music which is an authentic racial expression and music which is an expression of no more than a liking for the authentic form.

The origins of British "blues" are far from clear. Their seminal genius may have been Muddy Waters who toured Britain in 1958 but it was not until March, 1962, when the harmonica player Cyril Davies and the guitarist Alexis Korner opened the first of the clubs—next door to the ABC Teashop off Ealing Broadway—that the "boom" really had its beginnings. Korner and Davies played mainly pre-war blues in a style derived from the post-war blues of the negro night clubs of urban America. Once they had their own stage the "boom" gathered momentum, and by May, 1962 they were playing at the *Marquee Club* in Central London, attracting a young audience in reaction against a particularly enfeebled pop music—this was the hey-day of Cliff Richard. The Band—known as Alexis Korner's Blues Incorporated—had the now familiar line-up of harmonica, guitars and drums and if it was unexciting compared with its Chicago parent it had, at least, a rhythmic earthiness and an emotional directness which had been completely absent from pop music since the demise of rock 'n' roll in the late '50s.

By the end of 1962 the Beatles had had their first small hit, *Love Me Do*, featuring the magical combination of harmonica, guitars and drums, and the Rolling Stones were making their early public appearances at Ealing and elsewhere. In January, 1963 the Stones appeared for the first time at the *Marquee*. The bill was topped by

Brian Knight's Blues-by-six and the Stones earned £2 each as the fill-in group. By March the Stones had moved on—to the fringe of pop success—and their place was taken by another group from Ealing, the Mann-Hugg Blues Brothers, later to be re-named Manfred Mann. By the time the Stones had their first small hit, *Come On*, in the summer of 1963 (only enough to earn them 83rd position in the 1963 *New Musical Express* Points Table, equal with Sammy Davis, Frank Sinatra, Ken Dodd and Chuck Berry) r 'n' b was freely tipped as the next pop craze.

It seems to have happened for much the same reasons as rock 'n' roll ten years earlier: a teenage reaction to the sickly gutlessness of orthodox pop. Its success has led to extraordinary results. The Cliff Richard pop image of tidy, boy-next-door Christianity, has been replaced by a stylised image of rough-living—beards, long hair, defiant nonchalance and an incoherent, unarticulated curse against conformity. The new image may be as unreal as the old but it is a great deal more tolerable. It is a cliché to observe that pop music is a major field for the exploitation and manipulation of young people, generating respect for false values and poor standards, exploiting dissatisfaction to turn young people in on themselves rather than out on society, serving the function ascribed by Marx to religion, that of an "opiate of the people". It would be unrealistic to claim that r 'n' b has altered this deeply engrained pop-cultural pattern but it may have dented it. Since the success of the Beatles—recorded not because they might be made into stars but because they *already were* local stars—teenagers have shown a gradually increasing independence of the will of record companies. Merseybeat and r 'n' b—or at any rate the local variant on the American theme—were created by teenagers for themselves and although the companies have exploited this music, they have had their usual role, that of *creating* stars, stolen from them by teenagers. This has been a tendency rather than a decisive trend but it may represent the first steps of teenagers to free themselves of the parasites who live off them and their enthusiasms. It is not just that the quality of the music is better, although I believe it is (compare the Beatles' *I'm a Loser* or Manfred Mann's *I'm Your Kingpin* with Adam Faith's *What Do You Want?* or Cliff Richard's *The Young Ones*) but that the relationships between stars and audiences have changed. The new stars are *of* their public, neither patronising nor stupid. They are irreverent, they smoke, they drink, they behave with a naturalness which would have earned them nothing but abuse ten years ago and they are articulate spokesmen for the teenage thing as well as for their music. The new stars are not held in awe except by the very young. The club-goer knows that records are poor imitations of club performances, that record success leads to nothing so much as the dilution of a group's "sound" in an endeavour to court general popularity. It is, in short, doubtful whether the companies have ever held so little sway over the avant garde "popnik". Most young people listen to nothing but pop music and within this context the infusion of some blues-form into pop music is extremely welcome. Even in the hands of white singers it has introduced into a sadly ailing pop culture some elements of an infinitely richer folk culture

and some elements of less corrupted *pop* culture—the music of Bo Diddley, Chuck Berry and James Brown still expresses something of the agony of negro life as well as the enormous surging vitality and new optimism of the Northern ghettos. British blues is primarily a dance music and if it is impure it has, at least, an enthusiasm which is positively damning to inhibition. In the clubs there is a new vigour.

Kenneth Rexroth once argued that jazz is a revolutionary music only insofar as it is conducive to eroticism in dancing. The same might apply to British r 'n' b. Today's audiences are active and the groups, who still play for the critical club audiences rather than the easily pleased pop "concert" audiences, must make people want to dance. The modern dances are not set pattern dances. The Shake, the Dog, the Jerk are dances for crowded rooms, improvised round a basic pattern, and the groups must be able to improvise to provide variety. In the clubs, for example, Manfred Mann have played numbers like Cannonball Adderley's *Sack O' Woe* and their original—naturally enough never recorded—*Packet of Three*, which involved violent climaxes and sudden cliff-hanging breaks in the rhythm. Graham Bond and Brian Auger, recruits from modern jazz, and Georgie Fame, a recruit from rock 'n' roll, play in much the same manner and now that instrumentation is veering away from harmonicas and guitars, to saxes, flutes, organs and pianos it is these latter groups who may really come into their own.

If the new music is different, so are the new stars. Many of them are strange pop idols. Keith Relf, leader of the Yardbirds, was a Beat before he made a living by singing and so was Rod the Mod Stewart, possibly the best vocalist to emerge from the "boom". (Rod Stewart was also an International Amateur footballer.) Many groups *look* Beat; tired, worn and weary with the bum's slouching walk. Indeed the mythology of the r 'n' b clubs is the mythology of the angry, dishevelled reject of orthodoxy, the protesting bum. The Pretty Things, the most beat-looking of all, sing: "I'm on my own, just wanna roam/I'll tell you man, don't wanna home/I wander roun' feet off the groun'/Digging sounds from town to town/I say I think this life is grand/I say, I dig it man, don't bring me down, man/Don't bring me down I met this chick the other day/Then to me she said she'll stay/I got this pad just like a cave/And then we have a little rave/And now I'm lying on the ground/My head is spinning round, don't bring me down man/Don't bring me down".

Other singers too have strange pasts. John Mayall, leader of one of the most vigorous groups, the Bluesbreakers, lived in a tree top house. Manfred Mann (singular) was classically trained at Juillard in the USA and is, even now, more than a little odd by pop standards. The whole Mann group took one man's name but insist that they have no leader, that leadership is redundant and responsibility shared and equal. It may have something to do with the fact that their vocalist Paul Jones was once a member of the Oxford Committee of 100 and is, apparently, still a *Tribune* contributor. The Animals, probably the best pop-r 'n' b group, emerged from the strange North East phenomenon of "animals", young people who spent the weekends away from their

bourgeois homes, on cheap transport, living "rough". (In the South they might have earned the derisive Beat epithet "weekend ravers".)

Most of the r 'n' b groups who have had hits have done so with numbers which were not r 'n' b numbers. The Stones made a brave attempt with the slow blues, *Little Red Rooster*, but most of their hits were white pop in origin—*Not Fade Away*, a Buddy Holly number, *It's All Over Now*, originally recorded by the C & C Boys in America, a country-and-western type number, *I Wanna Be Your Man* was by Lennon and McCartney and *The Last Time* was written by themselves although it is reminiscent of the Staple Singers' *This May Be The Last Time*. Manfred Mann recorded pop numbers, nonsense songs and a ballad. Georgie Fame had a big hit with *Yeh, Yeh*, a sophisticated Lambert-Hendricks-Bavan "cool" jazz vocal with little blues content. (Significantly his follow up *In the Meantime*, in the same vein, did not do so well, dashing the hopes of those who thought Fame represented some sort of commercial breakthrough for soul-jazz.) The Animals' big hit, *House of the Rising Sun*, was a folk song. Other groups have either recorded and wrecked blues classics or concentrated on monotonously contrived and unvaryingly dismal versions of Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley numbers, the staple diet of the uninventive. With their own material they are rarely convincing; authentic material they wreck by an apparent incomprehension of what they sing. In the clubs they are usually better and to hear British r 'n' b, with all its undeniable excitement and all its undeniable, overall mediocrity, it is necessary to visit the clubs.

There are clubs all over the country. In London there is the *Flamingo*, once the modern jazz centre, with its large, lively and critical audience, many of whom are West Indian; *Klook's Kleek* in West Hampstead (the name a give-away of its modern jazz origins); the *Crawdaddys* at Richmond and Croydon; *Bluesville Harringay* at Manor House; *Club Noreik* at Tottenham and many, many more. In Southampton there is *Club Concord*, in Manchester the *Twisted Wheel*, in Guildford and Windsor the *Ricky Ticks*. The outlandishness of their names is only equalled by the names of the groups who play in them. Some take their names from song titles—the Rolling Stones, the Hoochie Coochie Men, the Pretty Things, the Thunderbirds, the Dissatisfieds. Others borrow other singer's names—the T-Bones, the Bo Street Runners. Some use names which seem to sound good—the Authentics, the Soul Agents, the Delta Five, Hogsnot Rupert, the Loose-ends, The Downliners' Sect. The British blues has its acknowledged "originals", as does negro blues. The more hip fans talk as reverently of Alexis Korner, Cy Davies and even George Melly, as blues enthusiasts of Son House, Charlie Patton or Robert Johnson. The leading star of this old elite is Long John Baldry who was a vocalist-tambourinist with Cyril Davies' All-Stars (formed, from Screaming Lord Sutch's former backing group, the Savages, after Davies' break with Korner) and took over the band, changing its name to the Hoochie Coochie Men when Davies died, late in 1963. Baldry has an enviable reputation, earned partly because he is convinced of his own value and

partly because most groups are very poor, which has enabled him to break attendance records set by more apparently successful groups like the Rolling Stones. He is a passable singer, clever but unmoving. The sort of boredom he induces has often been thought a sign of authenticity.

Over the last eighteen months there has been a steady stream of *real* bluesmen to this country, among them Big Joe Williams, Sleepy John Estes, Lightning Hopkins, John Lee Hooker and the unquestioned genius of instrumental blues, the harmonicist Little Walter Jacobs. While it remains sadly true that local white singers are preferred to the "originals", it is almost entirely due to the propaganda efforts of the white musicians that we have been able to see the genuine article at all. People like Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones have been admirably unselfish in their fulsome praise of singers like Muddy Waters, James Brown and Howling Wolf, an unselfishness which clearly places them apart from most English revivalist jazz band leaders.

It is tempting to end this account by arguing strongly that white singers and musicians should leave negro "folk" music alone. The British singers argue, correctly I think, that no music is sacrosanct, that if they wish to play what they like and publicly champion, that is their affair. So it is. It is also the critic's right to assess their music, rather than their social significance, in terms of the negro tradition and find it wanting. When Rod Stewart made the memorable statement that it is as easy to have the blues in the Archway Road as on a Deep South railroad he was, in a way, right. You can have the blues in the Archway Road—the blues is, in one sense, the immemorial music of sadness. But it is more than a sadness in the heart, more than the ache of hunger, more than the misery of the hobo. It is the vocal expression of a people, just as all *real* folk music is. Rod Stewart is only half right. It may be as easy to *have* the blues in the Archway Road. It just is not as easy to *sing* them.

What have they done to the folk?

KEVIN McGRATH

ONE DAY YOU WAKE UP and find that your minority cult has mushroomed. It may be your politics, or your anti-politics, it may be a place, it may be some activity, a sport, a music. Do you rejoice at the arrival of the millenium? No, the chances are you don't. More likely you feel resentment, perhaps you move on further out, trek into the wilderness and restore your minority cult—until the crowd follows on.

There is an intrinsic selfishness in most enthusiasms—you may preach, spread the good word, but always there is a part of you that takes pleasure in the very condition of cliquishness. Thus, where a cult

suddenly ceases to be a cult and turns into something more like a crusade, there is resentment. It is partly a quite understandable and justifiable pleasure in having things on the human, personal scale. Pleasure in knowing what is going on, who is who—and also in forming part of a movement or group, in which there is only rudimentary development of organisational barriers—of barriers between audience and performer, between those whose tastes tend one way and those whose tastes tend the other.

As things get bigger, the barriers go up—there is an audience to be entertained, and entertainers to do the job. And the barriers get institutionalised; you get internal segregation developing, clashes of doctrine, almost amounting at times to holy war. Where once ethnics, folkniks, popniks and r'n'b exponents could all go to the same club, and be aware of what they have in common, now the differences come to the fore.

As the next stage of the boom comes along, the public at large starts to take note—Bob Dylan is heard on *Housewives' Choice*—gets a profile in *Melody Maker*—The *Observer* starts trying to pontificate on the subject in its customary switched-on (though not plugged-in) manner. Research chemists in the laboratories of Ready Steady Go synthesize an ersatz Dylan. Folk programmes proliferate on TV ranging from the excruciating Hob Derry What-not (why don't the Welsh Nationalists do something about it; like blowing up the studio) to the remarkably good Folk in Focus. It becomes possible to buy folk-records (some folk-records) in ordinary local record shops. If you are running a club, the prices for guest singers rocket. If you are not running a club, you find that you cannot get in any more, and you could not afford to anyway.

The easy reaction is to reel away in horror, shouting "commercialism", and pointing at the mass of fake-singers who are jumping on the bandwagon, and the fake-folk that is being pushed, *Catch the Wind*, or *I'll Never Find Another You*. (N.B. I say fake-folk, not because the songs are not traditional, but because they are not honest songs.)

And there is, of course, reason in this reaction—the big money is more likely to go, for the most part, to the sweetened, smoothed-up imitators, who are moving in now, rather than to the singers who have been around so long without the bait of big money. But though this is unfair, the fringe pickings that go to the people who built up the club scene are at any rate bigger than they were.

And actually of course, the present boom is very largely not a native thing at all, but an American import. It's the clubs, and the native scene, oddly enough, that are in a sense parasitic, profiting from the interest that spreads over from the imports. Similarly with television. This is the way it's been for a long time, in a less extreme form. I'd hazard a guess that nine out of ten folk enthusiasts, even the most austere ethnics, had their taste for folk aroused in the first place by American songs (or by songs in American style—e.g. most CND songs). And that includes many of those who hail from a still comparatively living

folk tradition. Many is the Scot or the Irishman who hardly thought of singing a Scots or Irish song until he came to England or America and had his taste aroused by American material. And the folk scene as it has existed for the last few years was predominantly composed of ex-skiffers.

The danger with an enthusiasm is that it can blind you to what lies outside its limits. You build walls round your garden, and the walls become the garden, and it is only a flower if it grows within the walls. So a purist might listen to Bob Dylan, say "It's not Folk", and ignore the truth that perhaps it's better than much that is folk. Or he might listen to a folk-influenced pop-record, and denounce it as a corruption, dismissing the truth that it may have its own special and distinct merits. Or he may cry "entertainer" at, for example, Alex Campbell, as if this were an insult (and as if he were making a fortune out of it instead of a pittance).

The funny thing is that of all types of cultural activity, folk-music is perhaps the one least suited to this kind of cultism. An acceptable capsule definition might be "The popular music of another time and/or place, together with songs, etc., written in imitation or under the influence of this". Even this is too narrow a definition if it is to include a number of songs rightly accepted in any club. But the point is the emphasis on other times and places is only relevant where your own contemporary tradition is dead. And this need not be so.

There are two distinct elements running like separate threads through the folk revival, since its earliest days (which I suppose one could say were some time in the 18th century—Bishop Percy, Robert Burns, etc.—revival is not perhaps the best word, but it is current). There is an antiquarian element, and a refugee element. Or, less elliptically, you may be interested primarily in preserving something that is in danger of being lost, or you may be a fugitive from some aspect of mainstream culture, finding in folk-song, or music, something that you are unable to find in the culture that you flee. And the culture you are fleeing may be high, low, pop, or the lot. And what you are after is a culture with a greater degree of relevance—and freedom; one which is not in itself clique-directed, but rather, at least in its origins, directed towards the community as a whole, not just the intellectuals or the fans; songs which are not restricted in subject, language or form in the way that pop songs are, and which are relevant, as mainstream poetry so rarely is.

The antiquarian aspect is of course important, but it is secondary. The reason it is important to preserve something is because what is preserved is in itself important, and in some way irreplaceable. And so far as the refugee aspect is concerned, what is most important about excursions into the culture of other times or places is what you bring back, and what you do with it. Otherwise it's just escapism, and essentially sterile. It's possible to take folk-song in this way, and much good may it do you; sing sea shanties in order to feel tough and identify

with the men who made them, sing rebel songs and save yourself the trouble of rebelling, sing love songs and save yourself the effort of loving. Whereas the *purpose* of a shanty is to help you keep on working, a rebel song is to get you rebelling, and a love song is typically to get her (or him) feeling sorry for you, or help you feel better if that's no good. And the relevance of traditional songs to us is closely tied up with their original function. By which I am not trying to say that entertainment as such is out, which would obviously be absurd. But if you think primarily in terms of entertainment as a goal in itself (instead of an indication that the goal has been reached), then you're going to miss an awful lot.

So the most important thing about the folk-revival, at least so far as I am concerned, is what is produced in the way of new songs, new kinds of songs. For once you have access to the storehouse of images, themes, techniques, etc., used in folk traditions (note the plural), you have a vastly increased potential for saying important things, expressing yourself in terms that enable real communication, such as become virtually impossible in mainstream culture, poetry or pop song. And it becomes possible to at least hope for a kind of culture that will sidestep arbitrary barriers of this kind (pop, intellectual, etc.) and replace them with a graduated spectrum with the merging divisions based on functional criteria—so that you would have songs for dancing, songs for explaining, songs for preaching, songs for exalting. In fact this kind of distinction one can (but need not) make within folk music in the wild.

However, it seems overwhelmingly probable that the current boom is likely to be relatively short lived, on the pop side, if only because pop music is essentially for dancing, and words are ultimately of secondary importance. But the collapse of the boom is not important, for the kind of change I'm talking about is essentially a long-term one, and each turn of the wheel advances it. Skiffle died and left behind it the basis of a folk underground, and also the seeds of the beat groups and r 'n' b. The present thing will leave a similar residue but at a higher level, and one which approaches more closely the kind of unified culture of which I am writing.

Already you have individuals who have made the bridge, though it is still fairly tenuous. In America you have Bob Dylan as a kind of cross between Yevtushenko and Woody Guthrie, and Pete Seeger as a one man personification of the folk revival, US style. Here, the cult of personality is less obvious. There is of course Ewan MacColl, but though he may be the High Priest of British Folk, he is a bit short in the ecumenical spirit. He is so firmly rooted in history that he sometimes seems to be approaching the 20th century as an immigrant—as a kind of ethnic Dr. Who. This is of course a gross over-simplification, I hasten to add, to save you the trouble of scrawling this in the margin. Whatever does develop in the way of neo-folk will owe a fantastic debt to MacColl, to his singing, his song writing, and particularly to his work in the radio-ballads. It is largely due to him, directly or indirectly, that

traditional songs have escaped from the custody of the collections, and the English Folk Dance and Song Society (not that I'm knocking the EFDSS which, with the help of Peter Kennedy, among others, has undergone an internal revolution in the last few years). And it is again largely MacColl's direct and indirect influence that has saved the next generation of singers and song writers from being pale reflections of the Americans. There can scarcely be a singer in the country (within the relevant context) whose whole way of singing and attitude to material has not been deeply influenced by MacColl, and the influence stretches further—even a style that is on the face of it totally different, Bob Dylan's frequently shows traces of MacColl (e.g. *North Country Blues*). But for all that, listen to a song by Ewan MacColl such as *The Gallant Colliers* (on his LP *The Best of Ewan MacColl*) and I think you will see what I mean.

Closely related to MacColl in their approach, are singers like Lou Killen, Bob Davenport, Enoch Kent, Matt McGinn and Johnny Handle. The last three, with Ewan MacColl himself, are perhaps the most important essentially traditional song writers of the present day. But though they have produced and are producing fine songs, I cannot help feeling that to follow directly in their paths is to run the risk of going up a cul-de-sac.

Further away from MacColl are a large number of song writers. These range from those who are still in many ways very close to MacColl (such as perhaps Ian Campbell) to a lone wolf like Leslie Haworth. What these writers do tend to have in common is songs with a greater degree of accessibility. (Incidentally I only use the word "writers" for lack of a convenient alternative. In this context it can be misleading, since it carries the implication that a song is made up on paper, whereas in many cases, and these perhaps the most important, the actual writing down of a song only comes at a late stage. Indeed there are many contemporary songs, even quite widely sung ones, that have probably never been written down—and I don't just mean the ones that would scorch the paper. Leslie Haworth is the obvious example.) By "a greater degree of accessibility" I don't necessarily mean that the songs are simple. But even where they are difficult, they are related to the world outside. You do not need to undergo an apprenticeship in folk-song before you can see there is something in them that concerns you. They are not wearing fancy dress.

I picked out three essentially traditional song writers. To set against them, a suitable trio of the more accessible variety might be Fred Dallas, Cyril Tawney and Sidney Carter. All three are definitely rooted in the British tradition, but in addition they have obviously incorporated elements of other traditions as well and, paradoxically, the finished result, at least in my opinion, has a greater oneness in consequence. If you live in a diversified cultural milieu, then it is only when you allow the multitude of influences that are working upon you to mingle and breed and come out in your songs, that these songs can

truly express you as you are. It is no good trying to impose a kind of cultural apartheid on your mind.

So, in the writers I selected, you may have clear American influences, the trace of the chansonniers, or the flavour of Brecht. Cyril Tawney comes out with *The Grey Flannel Line* with its borrowings from *Dink's Song*, Sidney Carter writes *Port Mahon* with a Greek tune and echoes of *Venezuela*.

This borrowing of what is needed, without worrying about its former context, is carried to a beneficial extreme in Bob Dylan, e.g. *Hard Rains* (*Lord Randall*, inter alia), *Restless Farewell* (*The Parting Glass*), *Bob Dylan's Dream* (*Lord Franklin*), *With God on Our Side* (*The Patriot Game*). Not that there is anything in the least new or unusual in reworking old songs to fit new circumstances—but what is special, as with the Cyril Tawney example I quoted, is that the new contexts are, conventionally speaking, so utterly removed from the old. In some ways it resembles the cultural miscegenation that gave rise to jazz—or for that matter, to the Renaissance.

Take away the barriers and you can get anything. And this is what the whole folk revival can do—except where it erects new barriers of its own.

This kind of borrowing and reworking can, and probably typically does, take place unconsciously—as indeed it does in a traditional folk culture in the wild. To give a personal example, on the 1963 Aldermaston, while walking from Reading to the RSG shelter, I made up a song. The tune sounded familiar, but I couldn't place it. The same for the words. Both of which presumably helped it catch on for the limited period of its topicality. It was not, so far as I recall, till the last day of the march that I read in the evening papers about marchers "singing their new marching song to the tune of *I love a lassie*", and remembered. Though I was more aware of it as *I love a sausage*. From which my subconscious folk-process had made *I've got a secret*.

You are likely to get the most audacious and successful transformations in contexts where there is a heightened emotion of some kind involved. It may be the kind of helpless rage that is aroused by the casual brutality of governments, by napalm raids on villages, by lynchings, by apathy, by the universal acceptance of the intolerable. It may be indignation at some comparatively minor injustice, or exultation at some token victory of justice. Or it may be more personal—perhaps you're in love. Whatever the reason, you are more interested in what you want to say than in how you say it. You are not after applause from an audience; rather you want to help them, her, or yourself, to feel in a particular way, or to understand a particular emotion.

So where does entertainment fit in? Is it just a coating of sugar on a bitter medicine—a ploy to entice the poor suckers in and then preach at them? Evidently, since I phrased the question in that way, I'm going to answer "No". And to justify my answer I fall back on two

aphorisms which I won't elaborate at the moment:

- (a) The purpose of art is to help you appreciate life (and hence also to assist and encourage you in making life worth appreciating).
- (b) Entertainment is what you have when art is successful (the degree of success of course varies).

This, the range of art and entertainment, is as wide as you can go. And there is no conflict between different parts of it. A song may have no purpose beyond arousing laughter, or it may aim at arousing laughter for some purpose, or it may aim at doing a thousand different things to the listener. And it is all entertainment and it is all art.

A good club session will in fact have songs from widely separate parts of the range. If it's all jolly chorus stuff, or all doom and soul, or all protest, it will lose much of its value and impact. It is liable to become entertainment in the narrow escapist sense, catering to people who know what they want, giving them a prepackaged commodity. You lose the sense that anything might happen, as it becomes nothing more than a pleasant way to spend the evening. Flexibility is gradually superseded by rigidity.

Undoubtedly this tendency is encouraged and emphasised in any folk boom. Singers also lose flexibility, and concentrate on supplying what is expected—Joan Baez tends to sing all kinds of songs in the same voice, and the same mood. For that matter, Ewan MacColl does exactly the same thing. You have, in fact, that tendency to self-fixation, even self-parody, that seems to be inextricably linked with success, whether it is on the scale of Bob Dylan and Pete Seeger, or of hundreds of amateurs in clubs everywhere who get themselves trapped within an image. And it is of course a universal human trait—call it *mauvaise foi* if you prefer pigeon holes.

But the very presence of a strong traditional foundation in folk-song, works against this trait. There is a certain analogy with a masked ball, where by assuming a formal mask, you shed the one that you wear the rest of the time. The very element of tradition to which anyone who gets involved in folk-song to any real extent is going to get exposed, can nourish a kind of individualism which can then go on to grow, to integrate, to propagate—and to remove the mask.

So personally, I am optimistic. One may squirm to hear the Searchers assassinating *What Have They Done to the Rain*, and tremble for the future of those who get caught up in the glare of publicity (for all one knows, Donovan might have great potential—and we'll probably never find out now). But it's something when you can have *Masters of War* blasting out of a million transistors tuned to a pirate station.

And when the present thing dies down, the ferment will still be working, and the new tradition growing and changing.

"Whereas urban societies produce barbaric substitutes for art, the rejects of such societies, because they approach the community-pattern, are still able to create work which has a human significance. The primitives have seceded or been ejected from the structure of society and its relative security, into ghettos, barracks, huts, casual wards, and there they have set up a way of life of their own, subject to risks and constraints which make them the indisputable victims of their environment, and the constraint is one which a sympathetic intellectual can only share if he shares the circumstances which created it. The Blues or the cante hondo are the product of the contact between this grindstone of adversity and a tradition which is either there already or ready to hand in a few months: the tradition of the Blues came into existence in a matter of years, its form dictated by the circumstances under which it was sung, and its musical pattern by the availability of instruments . . ."
ALEX COMFORT: *Art and Social Responsibility* 1946.

Blues walking like a man

CHARLES RADCLIFFE

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO SAY WITH ANY CERTAINTY when the blues became a complete musical form, recognisably different from its antecedents—the songs of the farms and levee camps, the work songs, axe songs, arwhoolies, hollers and rags. It is equally difficult to ascertain in which of the southern states of the USA it originated. Many of the early singers were migratory labourers or blind men who travelled widely to beg and earn money by singing, so it seems probable that it was a concurrent development over large areas of the Deep South. What is quite certain is that the blues was not the creation of any one man (W. C. Handy's self-inflating claim to be Father of the Blues has always seemed more than a little ludicrous to blues enthusiasts). Neither was it a product of city life. Bessie Smith, for example, is frequently held to be the finest blues singer ever to record but she recorded *Classic* city jazz-blues, which were a descendant, rather than a close relation, of the rural blues, although they found their way onto record earlier. Her style is most often praised by jazz critics, which correctly indicates her position as the creator of jazz-blues, rather than a blues singer *per se*.

Although the precise geographical, historical and musical origins of the blues are uncertain, the social conditions which produced it are well-recorded, not least of all in the blues itself. In the white supremacist society of the south the negro was in a situation of terrifying paradox:

isolated by race and colour, yet forced to conform to the *mores* of a society in which he was denied a voice and from which he was rigorously excluded. It is, incidentally, one of the most bitter ironies of the history of America's negroes that they should have practised their own form of racialism—that of distinction based on Creole blood, "yellow-skins", "brown-skins" and "black-skins". Despite these conditions being a primary factor in the creation and evolution of the blues, it is not usually a music of direct social protest and the few magnificent protest blues are far outnumbered by blues on women, men, cars, and rent, on the everyday life of an oppressed minority.

The blues has influenced jazz, "pop" music and even "serious" music, yet its structure is extremely simple. In its developed form it amounts to a three line stanza, with one line repeated and a third line, rhymed or unrhymed, in the form of call and response, a heritage from work songs. Sleepy John Estes, one of the finest living rural singers, sings:

*Now I was sittin' in jail wif my eyes all full of tears (repeat)
Y'know, I'm glad didn't get lifetime, boys, that I 'scaped th' 'lectric chair*

and Jaydee Short sang bitterly:

*So dark was the night now, people; cold, cold was the ground (repeat)
Me 'n' my buddies in two foxholes, had to keep our heads on down*

Earlier singers drew more on the entire tradition of negro folk-song and less on a still incomplete blues tradition, and there was less fixed form. Bukka White, in a haunting blues, sings:

*I'm lookin' far in min', believe I'm fixin' to die,
I believe I'm fixin' to die,
I'm lookin' far in min',
I believe I'm fixin' to die.
I know I was born to die, but I hate to leave my chillen cryin'
Mother, take my chillen back, before they let me down,
'Fore they let me down,
Mother, take my chillen back,
'Fore they let me down,
And don' leave them standin' and cryin' on the graveyard' groun'*

Another early singer, Skip James, sings in two line verses:

*Hard time here, everywhere y' go
Time's harder than they ever been before.
If you certain y' had money, you better be sure,
'Cause these hard times will drive y' from do' to do'.*

Like Son House, the doyen of the Delta singers, and the superb Charlie Patton, the "father" of the Mississippi Blues, White and James were from Mississippi, and played their guitars in the peculiar regional "bottleneck" style. This involved the use of a knife, a steel ring or a smoothed down bottleneck which was usually placed on the thumb or little finger, and used as a drone on the strings of the guitar. It gave their instruments a high-pitched whining sound which they were able to utilise for lyric passages, for simple rhythmic or melodic accompaniment or as a highly dramatic form of punctuation. Any blues looks rather bleak in print, because it is literally only half there. In the case of the

early Delta singers it gives a more than usually hollow effect.

Although Mississippi takes pride of place in any discussion of blues, there were fine singers from other areas. Jay Bird Coleman, a superbly ferocious harmonica player came from Bessemer, Alabama, and was so successful that the local Ku Klux Klan took over his management. Blind Boy Fuller came from Carolina, Oscar Woods (The Lone Wolf) from Louisiana, Peg Leg Howell and Blind Willie McTell from Georgia, Bill Broonzy from Arkansas, and Furry Lewis from Tennessee. Also from Tennessee came the two great jug bands—Gus Cannon's Jug Stompers and the Memphis Jug Band. The other great jug band—the Birmingham Jug Band—was from Alabama.

The early blues found its way onto record in the early 'twenties, not through the devotion of ethnomusicologists but because record companies realised that it was a commercial proposition. Most of the early recordings were "field-recorded" in rural centres like Memphis, Dallas and Atlanta, in small halls and bars, wherever space could be found to set up equipment, and the records, by Skip James, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Son House, Charlie Patton, Gus Cannon, Jed Davenport and later Sonny Boy Williamson, Bill Broonzy, Tommy McLennan, Blind Boy Fuller and Cripple Clarence Lofton, flooded through the mails and from the small-town stores into thousands of negro homes. The singers soon found themselves "race-heroes" and the derisively labelled "race-record" market was a booming business. Fortunately men like Ralph Peer of *Victor* and Mayo Williams of *Paramount* had excellent taste and much of the early field recording was of great interest and superlative quality.

It requires enormous efforts of imagination to understand the conditions in the Deep South during the years in which the blues began. After the Civil War, when negroes had been given their "freedom", the white south, with embittered ruthlessness, set about the re-enslavement of the negro population by "legal" means. The negroes soon found themselves driven off their newly-gained land by former owners and the fast developing railroad companies. They were increasingly the victims of Jim Crow legislation, designed to keep them in their place regardless of the Fourteenth Amendment. They were forced to work on the railroads; to work the land as tenant share-croppers, which meant in effect reversion to slavery; to work on the levees, in the sawmills or turpentine camps, which became symbols of racial subjugation. Wherever they went they were swindled and exploited with sophisticated savagery, designed, consciously or not, to demoralise as well as to enslave. Often they were charged more for food and lodging than they could possibly earn. It is a bitter commentary on the south that when Alan Lomax issued his superb *Blues in the Mississippi Night* recordings in 1957, he still felt it necessary to hide the real identities of the three singers whose reminiscences were contained on the record. The performers are listed simply as Sib, Natchez and Leroy but they were in fact the harmonica player Sonny Boy Williamson, the guitarist Bill Broonzy and the pianist Memphis Slim Chatman. There was always the added risk of natural calamity. Texas is subject to floods and so is Mississippi: when

the levees burst in 1927, it was the negroes, forced to live very close to the banks, who died in thousands. Segregation affected everything. Even hospitals refused to treat negroes, and although the Bessie Smith death-legend is largely apocryphal, many negroes died through lack of sufficient medical care.

In the search for better work and living conditions, thousands of negroes trekked north, from the 'twenties up to the present, in the sort of exodus which is a feature of the history of racially tormented minorities. They arrived in the north by road and rail. They had no right on either, but the rail usually gave them a better chance. They could either walk the long straight lines—always risking a fall between them, and with it death, induced by the tiring and hypnotic effect of doing so—or they could "jump" a train. This was riskier, but quicker. The traveller stands on one of the few slow curves in the track and then, in Paul Oliver's words:

" . . . breaks from cover and dashes towards the track taking advantage of the slowing of the train to make boarding possible, and of the bend to hide his movements. Crooked fingers clutch the couplings and he swings perilously on the swaying truck before getting a firmer grip. He may make for the blinds if he can. These are the baggage cars next to the tender, which are 'blind' or, in other words, have no side door. Sitting on the step he is safe and out of reach of the brakeman's club. . . . More dangerous, but out of sight and unapproachable, are the brake rods that run beneath the freight cars. Risking his life he may try to worm his way across these, or if he is unusually adept he may carry a small board to throw across the rods and then precipitate himself upon it in the narrow gap between them and the underneath of the truck . . . in icy winds, in choking poisonous fumes of the railroad tunnels, he may freeze to numbness or succumb to exposure and drop to certain death . . . "

There can be few worse condemnations of a society than that it should make this method of travel acceptable. Despite the risks the exodus continued, and women and children, as well as men, risked road and rail to go north:

*Oh, stop your train, let a poor boy ride.
Don't you hear me cryin'?*
Woo oo woo oo woo . . .
*Oh, fare you well, never see you no more.
Don't you hear me cryin'?*
Woo oo woo oo woo . . .
*Oh, train I ride, smokestack shine like gold.
Don't you hear me cryin'?*
Woo oo woo oo woo . . .

With them they took their blues, into railside hobo jungles where in hopeless poverty they could scratch a living, comparatively free from white interference, into the fast-developing northern ghettos, into "New World". The blues proved remarkably resilient to city life at first. There were refinements which have continued up to the present: drums, basses and pianos were added to the more portable, and more

musically flexible instruments favoured by rural musicians, such as harmonicas (known as "harps"), violins, guitars and jugs which, when blown into, acted as bass resonators. However it was not until just before the last war that the blues altered dramatically and irrevocably, and even today there are traces of Mississippi in the blues of some Chicago singers.

From the blues recordings we have a record of negro life, its joy and laughter—blues were primarily to entertain—as well as its bitterness and sorrow. We have stories of broken relationships, of rent parties, of work in the fields of the south and the mills and factories of the north. Much of it is fine folk poetry, some of interest because of its subject, at its best an index of the singer's feelings as well as a vivid picture of social conditions and the despair of the negro's brutalised life, a despair usually lightened only by the spiritual release of religion, the erotic release of sex or the physical release of violent pleasure. A much recorded blues begins:

*Rock me, mama, rock me all night long (repeat)
I want you to rock me, mama, till my back ain't got no bone.*

and Chester Burnett (Howling Wolf) sings:

*Tell ole Pistol Pete, everybody gonna meet,
Tonight we need no rest, we really gonna throw a mess,
We gonna break out all the windows, we gonna kick down all the doors,
We gonna fix a Wang Dang Doodle, all night long, all night long. . . .
Tell Fats and Washboard Sam, that me 'n' everybody gonna jam,
Tell Shakey, Box Car Joe, we got sawdust on the floor,
Tell Jennie Mae, till I die we gonna have a time,
Well the fish scent fill the air, there's love juice everywhere.
We gonna fix a Wang Dang Doodle. . . .*

Race records catered for various audiences and ranged from the harsh religious songs of Blind Willie Johnson—once arrested for incitement outside a Customs House, for singing his Samson song, *If I Had My Way I'd Tear This Building Down*—to the lilting, leering blues of Blind Boy Fuller, which were often simply strings of sexual metaphors. Johnson and Fuller epitomised two main sources of relief for the negro—religion and sex. There were also songs on the catalogues about everything from cocaine sniffing to meningitis, and there were a large number of blues about prison, suffered usually as result of minor offences but frequently enough for more vicious crimes, and quite often for murder.

Prison was a daily feature in the lives of many families. It is some indication of the viciousness of the prisons and prison farms that, as recently as 1951, fourteen prisoners in the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola hamstrung themselves rather than submit to beating with the "bat", a particularly crude, fourteen pound leather strap which, according to Paul Oliver, "can break a brick at a single blow". Yet prison farms, like Angola, were preferable to the overcrowded, unhealthy, closed prisons. The prison system is, even by conservative judgements, totally inadequate and archaic and even where there have been Federal

Commissions the south has ignored them and their recommendations. Despite the horror, many negroes have testified that life in prison was less frightening than life outside: at least in prison the next meal was assured, the tyranny rarely varied and there was *less* chance of the casual cruelty which typified the lives of so many racial underdogs. The great folk singer Leadbelly sang his way out of prison, but not all singers were so lucky—Big Joe Williams did a term at Parchman Prison Farm, Mississippi, and so did Bukka White, who sang a fine blues about it. Hogman Maxey and Robert Pete Williams did time at Angola. More recently the great Chicago guitarist, Auburn "Pat" Hare got a ninety-nine year sentence for shooting his mistress's husband and a policeman who tried to arrest him.

Murder occurs frequently in blues, both as a threat and as an occurrence, an indication of the everyday violence of American negro life. Sonny Boy Williamson sang:

*I got the meanest woman, the meanest woman you most ever seen,
She sleep with an ice pick in her hand, man, fights all in her dreams,
I'd sooner be sleepin' with the devil, I'd sooner be sleepin' with the
devil . . .*

Williamson died in 1948 on his way to hospital—his cranium split by an ice-pick—the victim of the casual violence of his own people, killed either by a jealous husband or young thugs after his money.

The blues quoted above is also indicative of the disintegrative effect the negro's position in society had on the stability of family life. Many singers have recorded blues about leaving women, or women leaving them; many have sung about their mothers, few about their fathers. The reason is not hard to find—in thousands of cases the mother was left to bring up children on her own, the father having left in frustration or in search of work. Not surprisingly jealousy also looms large:

*Lord, my hair is a-rising', my flesh begin to crawl (repeat)
Had a dream last night, babe, 'nother mule in my doggone stall*

And so does seduction:

*I am a back door man (repeat)
Well the men don't know but the little girls understand
When everybody tryin' to sleep, I'm somewhere makin' my midnight creep.
In the mornin' when the rooster crow, somethin' tell me I gotta go. . . .*

As an aid to sexual ability and attraction, charms were used—mojo teeth, mojo hands, black cat bones, John the Conkeror roots. Muddy Waters sings:

*I'm goin' down Louisiana, baby, behin' the sun (repeat)
Well, you know, I just found out my troubles just begun
I'm goin' down in New Orleans—hmmm—get me a mojo hand (repeat)
I wan' show all you good lookin' women just how to treat your man.*

Even today magazines, like *Rhythm 'n' Blues*, read by working class negroes, carry advertisements for these strange fertility symbols and charms—produced in Louisiana voodoo circles—along with patent devices for straightening hair, strange medicines and other necessities of

ghetto life.

For the most part however there was little relief and little assistance. The great Robert Johnson, another Delta singer, obviously haunted by the phantoms of a divided society and using imagery of considerable richness, sang:

I gotta keep movin', I gotta keep movin'

Blues fallin' down like hail, blues fallin' down like hail (repeat)

I can't keep no money, hellhound on my trail,

Hellhound on my trail, hellhound on my trail

and again:

You may bury my body down by the highway side

(Spoken: Babe, don't care where you bury my body when I'm dead and gone)

You can bury my old body down by the highway side.

Lord, my ole evil spirit can catch a greyhound bus and ride.

Johnson's blues remain the most personal and frightening of negro folk music, with their sense of transient ecstasy and sorrow, heightened by an abiding torment and despair. In his work the blues lays its most serious claim to be considered an art form, and of all the great singers he is the most likely to chill and electrify the listener, to make the agony of his life real, and to communicate, from his intense, tortured, private emotions, the situation and condition of his people. Johnson is frightening because he is a victim without realisation of the complete meaning of his victimisation. His songs are, in the social sense, inarticulate, and this gives them their peculiar eloquence. It was not only social conditions which affected Johnson: he was obviously chained by his own shyness and frustration. He is thought to have been poisoned by his common law wife or to have died from alcoholic poisoning; whichever way, he died young in 1938. Howling Wolf, who knew him vaguely, says he was about 25 at the time; Muddy Waters thinks he was about 30; he is generally thought to have been about 19. Johnson must have had more money than most negroes of his age and he seems to have had some trouble with women:

Got up this mornin' to fin' it was gone (repeat)

Got up this mornin', all I had was gone

Well, leavin' this mornin' if I have to, gon' ride the blinds

And in another of his blues he sang:

Gonna stay roun' Jonesboro, until my teeth crowned with gold (repeat)

She got a mortgage on my body, got a lien on my soul.

In Johnson—the inheritor of a tradition which stretched from the itinerant timbermill worker Charlie Patton, a beautiful, heavy voiced singer, reputedly half-Puerto Rican, who first recorded *I Shall Not Be Moved*, Son House, Bukka White and Skip James, whose oddly oriental-sounding blues were amongst the strangest and most haunting noises to come from the Delta—the blues reached its peak. Despite a handful of superb singers since, it has never again reached such an emphatic state of artistic unity.

Undoubtedly the finest of the early singers from outside Mississippi was a dirty, ugly and dissolute Texan—Blind Lemon Jefferson. Blind men have often made good blues singers—they are doubly oppressed, a minority within a minority. Jefferson was a harsh singer with enormous powers of expression and his guitar playing was amongst the best to be recorded. He is now best remembered for his moving *See That My Grave is Kept Clean*:

Well, there's one kin' favour I ask of you,

One kin' favour I ask of you,

Oh Lord, one kin' favour I ask of you

Please see that my grave is kept clean.

It's a long lane got no end (three times)

An' it's a bad way that don' never change

Lord, it's two white horses in a line (three times)

Gon' take me to my buryin' groun'

Dig my grave with a silver spade (three times)

You may let me down with a golden chain

Have you ever heard a coffin soun'? (three times)

Then you know the poor boy's in the groun'

Have you ever heard a church bell toll? (three times)

Then you know the poor boy's dead an' gone.

Jefferson began recording in 1924 and was dead by 1930, frozen to death on a Chicago sidewalk during a snowstorm. His records sold well but they did not stop his life being as sad as any of his people's. Today, in a cemetery at Wortham, Lemon's grave is almost lost under the grass and weeds.

The blues changed subtly over the years and as the radio networks extended their influence, the various regional styles began to mingle. By the mid-'thirties it was increasingly difficult to recognise regional characteristics in blues vocals—the demonic intensity of Mississippi, the harsh but more introverted blues of Texas, the jollier blues of Carolina—though some were unmistakable. Leroy Carr, who seemed to fuse various regional styles in his singing, had an enormous effect on the future of the blues, during his career in the late 'twenties and early 'thirties. Carr was more sophisticated than the rural singers and his singing, over the sensitive accompaniment of his piano and Scrapper Blackwell's guitar, emphasised melody rather more than emotion. His better recordings are marked by musical intelligence and an appealingly wistful quality and his *How Long Blues* is one of the few enduring, and widely recognised blues classics. Carr was easily imitated—even today there are Carr imitators like Bumble Bee Slim—and the "style" he invented was the dominating current in blues until the war. Carr was excellent but the blues trend he started was somewhat disastrous. The new blues were lighter, more swinging, but often depressingly insensitive. They were recorded, by this time, mainly in the Northern Cities, for a city audience which demanded slickness and polish. With the more rigid discipline imposed by pianos, basses and drums, which greatly restricted the flexibility and individuality of singers, it was perhaps inevitable that, by 1940, the urban background, which was, broadly

speaking, "introduced" by Carr, should have drastically affected the sound and content of blues. There were good records by the likeable Bill Broonzy, the irrepressible Memphis Minnie, the harshly intense Tommy McLennan, Sonny Boy Williamson, Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup and the great, rolling pianist Big Maceo Merryweather. There were a few "social blues" like John Estes' *Working Man Blues*, which contained an invocation to the whites to break up trucks and tractors and work more mules and men, thus ensuring employment, and a few recordings in an older, country style, but the 'forties was a lean period for blues which said anything.

During the war the negroes found themselves fighting for freedom against racialism and tyranny: the paradox didn't fail to strike any number of them and many have retained a lasting cynicism as a result. They either joined up cynically:

I've got my questionnaire and they need me in the war (repeat)
Now I feel like murder, won't have to break the county law.
All I want's a thirty-two-twenty, made on a .45 frame (repeat)
Yes, and a red, white and blue flag, wavin' in my right hand.

Or pathetically eagerly:

Uncle Sam is gonna give me a thunderbolt, he want me to fly up above
He want me to drop a bomb on the Japanese, I really got to make my
I want a machine gun, wan' be hid way out in the wood (repeat)
I want to show ol' man Hitler Sonny Boy don' mean him no good.
I want to drop a bomb, and set the Japanese city on fire (repeat)
Now because they are so rotten, just love to see them die

The reality was different. Uncle Sam wouldn't have dreamed of letting negroes operate a precious "thunderbolt", though he was happy enough for them to fight—and die. The bitterness of the negro community was clearer after the Second World War than it had been after the first, but the lessons have been learnt incompletely or not at all, and there are still blues like Jimmy Roger's *World is in a Tangle* or Lightnin' Slim's (Otis Hicks) *GI Blues* which express, in terms nearly as militant as the blues quoted above, the desire to fight the Russians. In this the singers reflect the tone of white society in a way that more isolated singers would have found impossible, even if they had felt it desirable. The institutions of state violence can now speak directly to the negro whereas there was little to convince older singers, like the previously quoted Jaydee Short, that they had anything to gain from the whites' wars and their natural feelings certainly told them otherwise.

THE POST WAR BLUES

The decline of blues in the 'forties was an indication not so much of integration *into*, as of imitation of white society: this coupled with the record companies' lack of discrimination and the comparative ease of ghetto life. But if the early 'forties were lean years, the late 'forties and early 'fifties saw an increase in both the quantity and quality of

blues recording. *Victor*, *Decca* and *Bluebird*, before and during the war, had the money and organisation to ensure large scale distribution for their records but the post-war companies were much smaller, with fewer resources. It took a big hit to give them a reputation, and with it distribution, and in the search for success many hundreds of new singers were recorded, many of them performers in an older style. John Lee Hooker recorded some archaic-sounding blues and singers like Muddy Waters, Sonny Boy Williamson (the second), Howling Wolf and Lightning Hopkins, all of them fresh from the country, were recording relatively simple rural-style blues. There were others, like John Brim, Harmonica Frank, Big Boy Spires, Houston Boines, less well known but almost as good. The list of labels then and since seems unbelievable. There were *Aristocrat*, *Checker*, *Chess*, *JOB* (Chicago), *Gotham*, *Savoy* (East Coast), *Excello*, *Gold Star*, *Sun*, *Trumpet* (Southern States), *Flair*, *Modern* and *RPM* (West Coast) and many, many more. They often disappeared after a few releases of exceptional quality, like the amazing *Bloodstains on the Wall* by a singer improbably named Honey Boy or Harmonica Frank's *Howling Tom Cat*, which might as easily have been recorded in the South during the 'twenties, as in Chicago by Chess during the 'fifties.

From this profusion of new bluesmen there were a handful who became very big names and who still play a rôle close to that of the race-hero; others have sunk to the second rank, often playing as well as their "betters"; still others—and they are the majority—have died or live on half-forgotten, their memories sustained only by a few worn 78s in junk shops or collections. Of the post-war Chicago singers Muddy Waters takes pride of place. He first recorded, for Alan Lomax in the Delta, in 1941, using his real name of McKinley Morganfield. By the late 'forties he had moved to Chicago and was making an exciting series for *Aristocrat*. His guitar playing, in the old bottleneck tradition, retained much of the vigour of earlier Mississippi bluesmen and his voice was rich and thrilling. He was usually accompanied by the finest of all blues bassists, Big Crawford, and the harmonica player Little Walter Jacobs. Jacobs was, and is, a magnificent musician and in his hands the harmonica became a horn-like instrument, with superb tone, range, flexibility and crispness; he blew long, flowing phrases of classical elegance and feeling, saying as much about the condition of the negro in his playing as most singers say in a lifetime of singing. He and Waters achieved a fine unity, exemplified by such tracks as *Louisiana Blues*, where the guitar and harmonica fuse so that they sound almost like a single instrument. Waters continued his series for *Chess* when that company took over *Aristocrat* but there was a new mood about to hit Chicago and the "rural" bluesmen—a mood that had its cause in both social and musical developments.

Migration figures are not an entirely accurate index of population movement since they neither give reasons for migration nor take into account temporary migration. Quite obviously the well-to-do white moves for widely different reasons than those which compel a socially

and economically harrassed negro. It is interesting, however, that the figures show negro population movement to be both more permanent and more frequent during the period 1940-1947 (14.1%). This period of increased migration roughly coincides with the beginning of the post-war revival. Further point is added by the fact that in 1900 90% of the negro population lived in the south, and 74% in rural areas, whereas by 1960 only 60% lived in the south and just under 25% in the rural south. Of the 40% elsewhere, under 2% lived in rural areas. The American negro has become increasingly a northern city dweller rather than a southern country dweller and in the years immediately post-war this process speeded up. This would seem to show one major reason for the blues' new lease of life in the early 'fifties and also why since the middle-'fifties there has been a marked decline in quality. The negro who left the south after the war was usually brought up in an environment where the blues was a part of daily life, fulfilling a function both as entertainment and as a psychological release, and there was a consequent demand from this migrant group for "down-home" blues. The migrants moved all over the USA and new recording companies sprang up to meet their demands, often in places where no authentic blues tradition existed. The record companies, previously deeply committed to the urban blues market, centred on Chicago since the late 'thirties, now found themselves with a new audience for country-style blues which many enthusiasts had considered dead. The country-style blues were able to survive this transplantation as long as singers and audiences kept their southern roots, but they began to lose their *raison d'être* as the southern audience grew older and gave way to a younger white pop-influenced negro record buyer who, far from wanting blues, found the constant reminder of southern servility deeply embarrassing.

The musical developments arose to some extent from the social developments. In 1954 a young white singer walked into the *Sun* studio in Memphis, Tennessee. *Sun* had issued good blues by singers like Joe Hill Louis, Walter Horton and Doctor Ross but their biggest hit was an old Crudup blues, *That's All Right, Mama*, recorded after a number of attempts by the young Elvis Presley. Victor bought up *Sun's* Presley contract in 1955 and rock 'n' roll music (a nice white name, invented by the disc jockey Alan Freed, for what was basically negro rhythm 'n' blues) flooded into a million white homes. For the first time the popular music of the two racial groups was broadly similar. Partly in sub-conscious self-defence and partly in emulation of white youth, the young urban negroes demanded a noisier, more aggressive blues, expressing their increasing confidence. There were singers like Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley and Fats Domino (who sold more records than anyone except Presley during the "rock era"), who were selling to both racial groups, but many of the older singers were forced to use screaming, over-amplified electric guitars and saxes to keep up. Some, like Howling Wolf, managed the change without too much difficulty, but most were less lucky. Wolf had a rough, rasping voice which came across the amplification with exciting power—he had made fine

records in the country style in the late 'forties—but in Chicago he had a massive beat and his records for *Chess* have a raucous, jangling sense of guts and urgency which suited the new audiences. Muddy Waters, although he has retained to the present his reputation as "King of Chicago", was hit badly.

From the mid-'fifties his records became worse and worse, with poor accompaniment, trivial and repetitive words, and a badly strained singer: the only relief was afforded by one or two splendid blues shouts, like his *Hoochie Coochie Man*;

*I got a black cat bone,
I got a mojo tooth,
I got a John the Conker root,
Gonna mess with you.
Gonna make all you girls
Lead me by the hand,
Then the world will know
I'm a hoochie coochie man.*

Waters is aware of his deterioration but he now fits the requirements of the new audience—an exciting stage act rather than interesting blues.

The other great post-war bluesman from the Mississippi, John Lee Hooker, began recording in the late 'forties. At his best he has more than a little of the old Delta manner in his rich, sensual voice and dramatically rhythmic and flexible guitar style. He started his career recording imaginative, earthy blues in a most arresting style, accompanied only by his own guitar. His voice was strong and, occasionally, bitter and his guitar had a throbbing vigour and a magnificent drive rarely heard before. With its terse, intense and rhythmic phrasing it acted as a foil for the voice and gave his blues extraordinary tension, strengthened by his sharply stamping feet. The early tracks, particularly the slow, atmospherically sensual ones, take their place amongst the great blues. Hooker's versatility is a bit discomfiting but he can still be a magnificently haunting singer. Like his contemporary, Lightning Hopkins, Hooker entertains on the predominantly white folk circuit as well as the negro rhythm 'n' blues circuit. He gives the white audiences folk-tinged blues and the negro audiences highly rhythmic boogie-type numbers. He rarely sings in the old style now, but his recent visit to Britain emphasised his position as one of the dozen finest post-war singers, with roots stretching far back into the Delta of his youth.

A number of singers have earned the reputation of being "Kennedy-line" singers. Bobo Jenkins castigated those who voted Republican in 1952 (*Democrat Blues*), Louisiana Red sang about tugging Castro's beard and removing missile bases from Cuba in *Red's Dream* (though he demanded for himself and his soul-brothers, Ray Charles, Jimmy Reed, Big Maybelle and Lightning Hopkins, a share in running the nation) and about Civil Rights in *Ride on Red, Ride on*. J. B. Lenoir savaged Eisenhower so mercilessly in one blues that the record, which had a more moderate indictment of the Korean War on the other side, was banned.

Amongst these few singers with a marked sense of social justice is a tall lean Texan, who wears dark glasses perpetually and learned his blues as a child from his cousin, Texas Alexander, and his "master", Blind Lemon Jefferson. Sam "Lightning" Hopkins sings in lines of uneven measure, his singing without normally accepted blues discipline. He plays incessant bass runs and rhythms as he sings and then his guitar rings out sharp and clear in the lyric passages between lines and verses. His style is even more intense than Hooker's, the voice harsh, comparatively deep and with an almost unbearable sense of loneliness and desolation. Hopkins can be an ingratiating singer, particularly for white audiences, but on his earliest and best records he never bothered and the result is the purest body of country blues to be recorded post-war. Despite many miles of travelling and widely varied audiences, Hopkins is still oddly superstitious, with an abiding distrust of aeroplanes ("just cain't be natural") and an intense hatred of wine—his feelings don't extend to whiskey! He is fiercely proud of his Houston roots, and is witheringly contemptuous of the Chicago singers—"They cain't sing 'bout nothin' but women". He has tended to protest where and when he sees injustice, natural or man-made, bothering less about cures.

In *War is Starting All Over Again* he sings of his feelings about the Korean War:

*Woah, y'know this world is in a tangle now, baby,
Yes, I feel they're thinking to start war again,
Woah, y'know this world is in a tangle now, baby,
Yeah, I feel they're gonna start war again,
Yes, there's gon' be many mothers and fathers worry,
Yes, there's gonna be as many girls that lose a frien'.
Oooh, I got news this morning, right now they need a million men*
(repeat)
*Woah, y'know I bin overseas, woman, poor Lightnin don' want to go
there again.
Y'know my girl frien's got a boy frien' in the army, that poor body goes
to sea.
Y'know I don't hate it so bad, boys, y'know there's a bit of a break for me.
Ohhhhh, this world is in a tangle, about to have war again. . . .*

He did a slightly altered version of the song under the title *Blues for Queen Elizabeth*. It must be the most horrific and least sycophantic work of art ever dedicated to a resident of Buckingham Palace:

*Y'know the soldiers in France they wade in blood knee deep,
Y'know the soldiers in France, they was wadin' in blood knee deep,
An' at that time whole lots of people wanderin' roun' hungry an' didn't
have a bite to eat.*

In *Awful Dream* he amplified his horror of war:

*Have y' ever looked over a mountain, one you ain't never seen? (repeat)
Have y' ever lay down in your bed and had one of them lonesome dreams?
Sounds like the world was comin' to an end, somebody had passed and
dropped a bomb.
Y'know they tell me, this world is in a tangle now and them things is
sure to come
But I don't know, God knows I don't, teach me, teach me, teach me that
I'm wrong.*

His sharp sense of pity for the afflicted comes through in a fine blues about a one-eyed woman:

*Yeah, the poor soul look so pitiful, cryin' out that ol' one eye. . . .
. . . Yeah, y'know it's misery, it's misery, every time she cry it hurt poor me.
She ain't got one eye to cry from when there's something in that good eye,
It hurt me to know that she can't see.*

Hopkins is probably the last great bluesman. When he, and the few other singers in this mould, have gone, the blues, the *real*, down-home, country blues, will finally be dead and with it will pass a dishonourable episode of American history.

It is impossible to regret the passing of the conditions which made the old blues culturally relevant yet it is permissible to regret the passing of the old singers who have enriched the lives of so many people, both coloured and, albeit after the event, white. The blues will be left to the white folk-singers, a few good modern stylists like Otis Rush, the rabble-rousing Chicago blues-beat bands—the descendants of singers and musicians of some sensitivity like Elmore James—and the blues-rock 'n' rollers like Chuck Berry, James Brown and Bo Diddley. The blues in some form may live on for a generation or more. It is possible to see in the harsh, angular, neurotic-sounding blues of Buddy Guy the logical extension (via singers like B. B. King) of the early post-war blues—noisier, uglier, more involuted, more intense and expressing increasing confidence. But the course of the blues, whether it be classic, urban or country, is notoriously difficult to predict and it may be that the clearest expression of the urban negroes new preoccupations is in the "rock 'n' roll" songs of Chuck Berry who sings about cars, machinery and the teenage American Way of Life—telephones, juke boxes, soda stalls, hot dog stands, drive-ins and even the backwoods myth of "country-boy-makes-good" (*Johnny B. Goode*). Despite prison sentences he sings constantly and without bitterness of his delight at being resident in the Land of the Free. Bo Diddley's songs are equally instructive but, mercifully, more sceptical. On the whole the blues gives every indication of being a dying form, increasingly less relevant to the audience for which it is obviously intended.

The record companies which, since the war, have tended to have parallel catalogues of "pop" music and blues, have gradually utilised more and more "pop" production gimmicks in their blues issues. More and more releases are dependent on careful arrangements, careful words, catchy tunes or phrases, set-pattern instrumental breaks, pre-determined playing time and gimmicks like double-track recording and "girlie" choirs. The sham techniques of mass production do not affect all issues but they have effectively stemmed the stream of good recordings which ran from the 'twenties to the mid-'fifties.

Even in this the blues are a reflection of social conditions, of increasing automation and decreasing artistry. Today, however, one feels that the environment is reflected more in the production of records than in their content. Recently, the supposedly rhythm 'n' blues sound of the negro-operated Tamla-Motown-Gordy set-up of Detroit, consciously designed as a gospel and blues tinged "soul-beat" music,

has shown a possible new direction for blues-influenced music. It is, perhaps inevitably, the direction of white tin pan alley and the *Billboard* Top Hundred. (Equality and integration in all things!) As Muddy Waters told Pete Welding*: "I think the blues—the old style blues—will die with us. I don't see any youngsters coming along in that style nowadays. The Negro kids, they don't like it at all; they're more interested in the popular music. And these young white kids that are playing in the old style. Now, maybe they feel the blues like I do, and maybe they can play like I do, but they can't sing like I do. So I don't think that's the answer. I guess maybe the old blues will die, but I don't like to think about that."

It only remains to be seen whether the attainment of some measure of social equality will be a fair exchange for the passing of the blues. It is to be hoped that the courage, endurance, hopes, fears and feelings of the thousands of negroes, named and unnamed, who have sung the blues for recordings, for friends and for personal solace, in huts, halls, bars, prisons and ghettos all over the USA, will not be betrayed, for it is they who have, in a very real sense, kept alive the vision of something better, who have created from appalling conditions a vital and extremely beautiful folk music. If the spirit of the blues is to be honoured the negro must demand something better and more dignified than mere integration into the affluent squalor, neurosis and schizophrenia of modern America.

**Down Beat*, October 8, 1964.

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"i gotta million friends"

CASSANDRA VAUGHAN

"you ask: how does it feel to be an idol?
it'd be silly of me to answer, wouldn't it . . ."

THE BRILLIANT YOUNG AMERICAN SINGER BOB DYLAN is currently engaged in a full-blooded assault on the English hit parade, to the obvious delight of those who believe that folk-music, to be relevant, must be treated as an adjunct of pop-music, and to the equally obvious consternation of those who believe Dylan to be the only major American song writer since Woody Guthrie.

It seems worthwhile, therefore, to write briefly about Dylan in this issue of *ANARCHY*—whether this piece is by way of an obituary remains to be seen. If it is, it will not be entirely Dylan's fault: he has been picked up by the pop parasite as the *frisson nouveau*. Pop traditionally preys on more virile musical forms, either corrupting the original practitioners to suit the market or producing its own pre-corrupted copyists, as happened in the case of rhythm 'n' blues. It usually works out best from both sides when pop produces its imitations and leaves the originals to go their own way. In the case of Dylan both things seem to have happened. The manipulators of pop fashion who have for a long time been pushing "folk" as the next teenage rave have created their own English Dylan, by name Donovan, who plays Tommy Steele to Dylan's Elvis Presley. Fortunately Donovan does not matter; he is going to earn a lot of money and keep himself, and thousands of little girls, happy by imitating Dylan. But the fate of Dylan, who is highly original, despite admitted debts to Woody Guthrie and Guthrie's disciple, Rambling Jack Elliott, and whose songs have been an emotionally articulate vehicle for the feelings of the integration generation in the USA and the anti-nuclear generation here, is of great concern. The news that his current American single *Subterranean Homesick Blues* is being sold in a sleeve bearing photographs of the Beatles heightens this concern.

The process of popularising Dylan has been going on now for several months. He is the logical successor to the long-haired r 'n' b groups—the protest implicit in the Pretty Things and the Rolling Stones is explicit in Dylan—but recording as he does for the American Columbia company, whose concern for the fast buck rather than for the effect of over-exposure on their artists is notorious, there has always been the

risk that Dylan would be stretched on the rack of the publicity machine, and it does indeed look as though Dylan, already strained as a writer by Columbia's recording requirements, may increasingly turn out ill-considered, poorly constructed songs. His latest LP available here at the time of writing, *Another Side of Bob Dylan*, may be symptomatic of his decline or it may be a passing phase—after all he is not yet twenty-four and has not necessarily reached the height of his powers. But we hear occasional sighs of discontent from American Dylan fans that he is withdrawing more and more into the private world created by his success and refusing to face real life—something very close to treason in a Guthrie disciple. He has even been criticised in an open letter in the most influential folk magazine, *Sing Out*; this would be a blow to the orthodox American singer but its probable affect on Dylan is difficult to assess. We can only hope that Dylan will survive the commercial obstacle race in which he has become involved. It is impossible to say at this point what his chances are. If he does survive it will be as big a tribute to him as a person as his best songs are to him as a serious contemporary song-writer.

In all that has been written about Dylan, only one writer, Philip Oakes, in a valuable and perceptive article which appeared in *Queen* almost a year ago, seems to have described accurately how Dylan is being mythologised: "... a powerful piece of myth-making is taking place. Dylan is being promoted not just as a folk-singer (and he is a good one) but as a folk-hero, a randy Johnny Appleseed for this day and age."

This still does not fully account for the rapid rise of Dylan's *The Times They Are A-Changin'* in the top twenty, for the fact that tickets for his two May Albert Hall appearances sold out in a total of under two days, or for the consistent appearance of his LPs amongst the ten national best sellers. Has he captured this enormous public as a result of plugs given him by such groups as the Beatles and the Animals? Is his nasal voice, rudimentary guitar and uncomfortable harmonica style really the sound the record buyers have been craving for, having been sated on the noise of the British "Chicago-line" r'n'b groups? Or is it possible, by some chance, that his "message" corresponds with a new outlook held by all these people, that they actually listen to the words and not just the overall sound? The answer seems to lie somewhere between the first two possibilities. For if half the people who now buy Dylan's records really listen to the words of *With God on Our Side*, why is radical activity in Britain confined to minute local groups? If a quarter understand what he is saying in *The Masters of War*, why aren't the streets filled? And if but a tenth feel every emotion in *The Hard Rain's Are Gonna Fall*, when is the revolution? Philip Oakes probably has the answer: "Folk song has become everyone's instant conscience; easy to summon, easy to settle. To ditto the message, to agree with the sentiments, is all that's required. You too can be a liberal: all you have to do is play the record".

The catchers in the Right

PETER WILLIS

THE UNATTACHED by Mary Morse. (Pelican 3s. 6d.)

ONE OF THE BASIC TENETS OF ANARCHIST EVANGELISM (if they aren't mutually exclusive terms) is, common with that of the church or any other body, to catch 'em young. In the anarchist case this applies more in practice than in theory, simply because anarchist characteristics—open-minded questioning, dislike of authority, a capacity for honesty—are essentially youthful qualities. Not all the young possess them, alack, but they tend to be lost rather than acquired with age. They are a bit more common, though, than a discouraged anarchist might think; it's just that those who possess them have a healthy suspicion of any organisation and are, logically, unlikely to form themselves into that notorious paradox, an anarchist organisation.

There are, however, other hunters out. In 1960, three incognito social workers were sent to three different towns "to make contact with unattached young people, to discover their interests and leisure-time activities and, following this, to help in whatever way seems appropriate". The project was organised by the National Association of Youth Clubs, and *THE UNATTACHED* is an account of these people ("unattached", as might be expected in a NAYC project, meant unattached to any official organisation; nobody seems to have expected that the unattached might be perfectly happily attached to each other), and how the workers fared in "Seagate", "Northtown" and "Midford", finding, and establishing relationships with, the unattached in, mainly, coffee bars (an apt subtitle might have been: "With Net and Notebook Through Darkest Gaggia-land"). The principal value and delight of the book is that it is an amazingly real piece of evidence (about the unattached *and* the workers); almost as good as a novel—if not better in parts: the bald sketching-in of characters which nevertheless reveals very clearly the real people behind them, and the in-spite-of-itself moving description—written in best casebook manner, not unsympathetic but asympathetic—of the sad and inevitable disintegration of the Seagate group.

The workers, although not at all painfully impaled on its horns do give some indication of being faintly aware of the dilemma that haunts (or should) everyone whose job involves mental welfare: whether to encourage basically healthy mental attitudes whenever they are found, regardless of the conflicts this will lead to in a sick society, or whether to so amputate and adapt them that they will fit neatly into society as it is. The workers all speak of rebellion against "adult values" "authority", "society", but never stop for long enough to even briefly

question these values for themselves. "To a disturbing degree it was found that the unattached young people were often consciously or unconsciously attacking the workers' own standards and values." Surely they were intelligent and aware enough to realise that no set of values is ever a way of life in isolation, but, in a community where opposing values obtain, is unavoidably an implied criticism of those values? All they managed to do was worry about the seeming impossibility of their task. "Faced with all the discrepancies between traditional middle-class beliefs and middle-class behaviour, how was the Seagate worker to indicate . . . that middle-class values were preferable to the 'bum' philosophy" (note use of word "that"). Although this troubled them continually, they never—and this is the tragedy of the project and the book—managed to find the right questions to ask. The only criticisms of adult society, voiced with the nervous defiance of minor heresies, are to the effect that its failings lie in not having helped "these young people to feel that they belong". Despite some shilly-shallying, the basic creed is always returned to: These are The Unattached; attach them. . . . They are in the wrong. We are in the right. NAYC know best.

Nevertheless, the workers' own experiences of "adult" attitudes and social conditions obliquely support the unattached's resentment and distrust. The Northtown worker's horrifying description of the factory she worked in, and the Seagate worker's difficulty in finding "adults with an attitude sufficiently tolerant and understanding to accept the group for what it was without wishing to impose change or insist on conformity to narrowly defined standards just for the sake of it" both speak eloquently for themselves.

The workers themselves all achieved a fair measure of identification with their unattached. Surprisingly so since they didn't know what to expect. The Seagate worker—age 22, played jazz piano, liked drama—met up with a vague but cohesive group of intelligent middle-class rebels, many of whom had thrown up "lifeless, secure and comforting" office jobs, and only worked casually when they were short of money. Their ambitions were to become actors, artists, writers, models. The worker dismisses these as being "centred around highly-paid occupations", but goes on to say, "Paul W., who felt he was being creative at the arts college was the only one during the three years that the worker heard admit to enjoying his work". The Seagate project was perhaps the most successful. Under the worker's guidance, the group produced an Ionesco play. At Midford, on the other hand, as befits a more rural community where unavoidable social mixing between age-groups produces a more conservative attitude in young people, the worker—a 28-year-old schoolmaster—seems too stolid and humourless. While the Seagate worker can talk almost non-judgementally of a girl being "sexually generous", the Midford man writes: "Mavis . . . has been involved with a great many local boys. Jean (an older, outside person) talked to some of this group recently and told them of the dangers of leading this sort of life. They bluntly told her she didn't know what she was missing." He also mentions "rescuing" girls from "compromising situations with local boys" (did he, like the Peter Sellers' headmaster,

"go round with a crowbar and prize them apart"?).

Maybe, however, the workers simply found, of the many available, those teenagers that responded to their personalities; the Northtown worker's account is the most dreary, despite the fact that she was working in what was even then one of the most exciting cities for the unattached. She makes no mention of the several hundred beat groups and clubs even then operating in the city, apart from a vague "jazz group" (she is "uninterested in jazz") that played once a week above a coffee bar.

The type of activity most popular with all the groups (apart from the play produced by the Seagate group—a logical next step for a group consistently more self-integrated, articulate and creative than the others) was discussion, almost as a group therapy, talking about themselves, their environments, and about larger issues—the unattached were far from unattached in their concern for society, vide the "ban-the-bomb, abolish-hanging" group at Midford. All three workers used their flats as centres for discussions, where their function was to act as a catalyst; encouraging, provoking and occasionally holding back. This was only possible because each worker was totally accepted as one of them by his or her group. (Most unattached groups naturally possess somewhere some such older, wiser member.) It was this fact of total acceptance that made it "an insoluble problem" for the workers to find suitable replacements for themselves when the projects finished—it will continue to be so as long as they continue to look to the present Youth Service for this facility, and to refer to it as "adolescent counselling".

This is where the project really falls flat. The whole tone and evidence of the workers' reports indicate that the authoritarian and condescending attitude of the existing youth service is unsuitable and inadequate for the needs of the unattached. They found the clubs "unsophisticated" and the clubs found them "disturbing". The Midford worker wrote frankly: "To some extent these clubs seemed to me to attract the sort of members they deserved ('thirteen-year-olds'; 'kiddies and hearties'; 'a load of twots'). I could never recommend such a club to the attention of my present unattached contacts." But they never quite lose faith. In Seagate, after his group's play had been performed at a Youth Drama Festival, where it was not allowed to compete on account of the group not being affiliated to the local Youth Association, the worker persuaded them that affiliation would be worth their while. "Rather reluctantly, the group decided to apply. The official application form proved impossible to complete and the application was finally made by letter in which it was argued that the group had never found it necessary to draw up a constitution nor officially appoint officers and a committee. The work of the group had been done efficiently and enthusiastically without the aid and support of such a structure. The letter went on to state that the group was a spontaneous and flexible one and that the element of formality implied by the form was contrary to the spirit of the group. As a result, the Local Education Authority granted the group 'temporary affiliation' . . . The principal motive in applying was the purely selfish one of being able to enter competitions and use LEA equipment." The worker, although aware of this,

encouraged the group to apply in what he describes as "the hope" that "a more positive attitude towards officialdom might ensue". This is unlikely while the function of the Youth Service is to graciously welcome "the young people" to the adult world of dreary jobs and—to avoid awkward contrasts—meaningless pastimes. Most of the unattached, quite reasonably, were dissatisfied with their jobs and, like the habitués of the Teen Canteen (ANARCHY 27, but not mentioned in this book) "attached excessive importance to their off-work hours . . . they seek in leisure the freedom and dignity denied to them in work." This is patently not provided in the ping-pong and party-games type of youth club, which is really a time-killer for the well-adjusted and "normal" (a word they have the grace to put in inverted commas). Nothing is thought of such as the Teen Canteen or Ray Gosling's famous Leicester Club. ("It started as a caff run by the lads for the lads; grass roots, ground level"¹) which, although eventually closed down, was a success in terms of involvement:

"I remember coming back one night from Oxford, and it was around four in the morning, and as we came in over the bridge to the Central Station, I could see the lights and the open door. Walking down the street from the station and in through the door, and the jukebox was playing, and there were two dancing couples, beautifully and slowly soft, and one behind the bar. There had been a good take-in from the till, and the coffee was still good and hot and fresh. There was blood on the floor, and the dirt from a fast night. It had a wonderful used look about it. It was an oasis in a city of the dead. The only place open. That was the way I liked it. That was the way it could have been. It became that night both open and exclusive; the sort of place where I could feel proud at being a customer."²

The nearest this book gets to anything like that is the tentative suggestion that "some members of the community may be especially well-placed to help—fish-and-chip-shop managers, coffee-bar proprietors and public-house landlords have unique opportunities". As Ray Gosling put it in '59, a year before this project started: "An idea—to bridge the gap between those with high ideals, and good intentions, those who care and do not make contact; and the commercials who make contact but don't care."³

And meanwhile the NAYC go on talking about looking for a breakthrough, and chucking sandbags of piety into the one staring them in the face. The project—by our standards and even by theirs—must be counted to have failed. However, failures are invariably more interesting than successes, and, while not hoping with its authors that "as a result of this book, public opinion will be roused and action follow"—I have less faith in public opinion, particularly when roused—I think the report, with its quaint mixture of priggishness and enlightenment, might give some of the right people something to think about.

¹"Sum Total" by Ray Gosling. Faber, 1962. p 154.

²Ibid. p 161.

³Ibid. p 149.

TOP PEOPLE READ MALATESTA—DO YOU?

"In most English works on the early socialists and anarchists the Italian figure of Malatesta flits across the stage with accompanying hints that he is worth knowing, yet the reasons for his renown are seldom explained. The shadowiness of his reputation—compared with Kropotkin's say, or Bakunin's—derives partly from the fact that though he was nearly 20 years in England, from 1900 until after the First World War, those years were strangely unproductive. He had to return to Italy, in his middle sixties, before taking up the full flow of his writing again in anarchist journals.

"Mr. Richards set out to even the balance in a study which he describes as 'undisguised anarchist propaganda'. About two-thirds of it is made up of skilfully compiled extracts from Malatesta's anarchist writings. Another 70 pages are what Mr. Richards calls 'Notes for a Biography'—and it is a pity that he did not work more at them; they are tantalizingly fragmentary. The last section, of some 40 pages, is Mr. Richards' summing up of the man's teachings.

"If not a born rebel Malatesta was one soon after. He was in prison when he was 14 for having written a blistering letter to the Italian monarch, and was retrieved by his sorrowing, fairly well-to-do father. He was often in prison again. Yet he became a middle-of-the-road anarchist, a man of practical mind compared with many of the others, advocating neither 'propaganda by deed' (bombs) nor Tolstoyan passivity.

"He proclaimed the need to prepare for insurrection and pooh-poohed the idea that it could all be done nicely and painlessly by a general strike. Above all, he differed from Kropotkin and others in believing that anarchism, while working by free agreement among groups, had to be organized.

"Disarmingly Mr. Richards says that his summing up rambles. But for English readers of the subject he fills a gap."

—THE TIMES 22/4/1965.

ERRICO MALATESTA: HIS LIFE AND IDEAS
FREEDOM PRESS, 21s. (cloth); 10s. 6d. (paper).