

Trad jazz in 1950s Britain—protest, pleasure, politics— interviews with some of those involved

George McKay

These are transcriptions of interviews and correspondence undertaken as part of an Arts and Humanities Research Board (now Council)-funded project exploring the cultures and politics of traditional jazz in Britain in the 1950s.

The project ran through 2001-2002 and was entitled American Pleasures, Anti-American Protest: 1950s Traditional Jazz in Britain.

I edited responses, and structured them here according to the main issues I asked about and to key points that seemed to recur from different interviewees. There is a short-ish introduction to give a sense of context to readers unfamiliar with that period of Britain's cultural history. I hugely enjoyed meeting and talking with these people, whose cultural and political autobiographies were full of energy, rebellion, fun, with music at the heart. Thank you. Some—Jeff Nuttall, George Melly—are, sadly, now dead.

Material from these interviews, and a second set I undertook with modern jazzers and enthusiasts (I acknowledge that the distinction between trad and modern doesn't always bear scrutiny) was included in my book Circular Breathing: The Cultural Politics of Jazz in Britain (Duke University Press, 2005).

Do contact me if you have any queries.

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Most of the archive photographs here are either from Jeff Nuttall's photo album, which he gave me at the end of our interview in Abergavenny—I'd like to pass it on to a family member, please—or © and courtesy of the Ken Colyer Trust: www.kencolyertrust.org

Introduction

British jazz has arrived, in Britain at any rate.

Philip Larkin, *All What Jazz* (42)

After the initial postwar austerity, the 1950s displayed an increasingly confident and vibrant (sometimes violent) range of youth and anti-establishment cultures: coffee bars, Teddy Boys, skiffle, beatniks, Angry Young Men, satire, pop art, left-wing journals, Caribbean culture, CND marches, and so on. These were frequently though not exclusively inspired by the energy of imported American pop culture. In 1955 and 1956, London cinemas were trashed by rioting Teds inflamed by scenes of the curious figure of Bill Haley with his band the Comets, in the American films *The Blackboard Jungle* and *Rock Around the Clock*. By 1958 some Teds would be transferring their riotous attentions to London's migrant black community, in the 'race riots' of the late 1950s, while by 1960 a series of riots broke out at jazz concerts through the summer, culminating in the trouble at the Beaulieu Jazz Festival that September.

Jazz was an important and, as Neil Nehring points out in *Flowers in the Dustbin: Culture, Anarchy, and Postwar England* (1993), for many years overlooked arena in which such dramas of anxiety or desire around American popular culture were played out: 'Jazz had long received an exemption from the Americanisation thesis by English intellectuals' (Nehring 1993, 203). (While the key family of jazz instruments, the saxophones, was invented by the Belgian Adolphe Sax around 1840, James Baldwin writes of jazz as an African-American music born out of a necessity 'to checkmate the European notion of the world': 1979, 326.) In Britain, the twenty year Musicians' Union ban on American musicians that ended in 1956 contributed to an indigenous but also limited music practice—in the eyes of some, the ban had racist origins in fears of African-Americans putting British musicians out of work.

By the 1950s in Britain, the increasingly global culture (is that the case? Or has jazz, by virtue of its transatlantic hybrid provenance—West African slavery, European military bands and instrumentation, American cultural mixing—*always* been a global culture?) of jazz was becoming localised, contributing to a cultural politics of the regions. In the 1940s, a revivalist group from Liverpool called themselves the 'Merseyssippi Band' (see Leigh 2002). In the 1950s, clarinettist and trad band leader Acker Bilk was careful to *retain* rather than disguise his West Country accent, his English rurality. The jazz singer, cultural critic, intellectual anarchist and surrealist George Melly describes Bilk's image in terms of an overtly national cultural discourse, in which Bilk 'represented some kind of chauvinistic revolt against American domination;... the mixture of Edwardian working-class dandy and rural bucolic came to stand for a pre-atomic innocence when we were on top' (1970, 60). More recently, enthusiasts' self- or locally-published histories of the jazz scenes of the time have frequently displayed a regional motivation and identity—Clive Brooks's *Trad Mad: A Concise History of the Traditional Jazz Revival in Kent*, for instance. In a fascinating and rather touching moment of aggrandising desire, Brooks's text even reads that county's jazz practice by mapping it on to the resonant musical landscape of America:

several different ‘scenes’ developed, discrete and recognisable. These can be roughly characterised as West Kent, Medway/Maidstone, Weald and North Kent. On the whole, bands based at the extreme East and West of the county adhered to a broader, eclectic approach to the music, whilst the North/South axis was largely the domain of the purists.... One is tempted to compare this microcosmic variety of styles with that between New Orleans, Chicago, New York and the West Coast (Brooks 2000, 16).

The revival of traditional jazz originates in the USA in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Projects collecting and recording traditional and folk music were organised by the Library of Congress, and in 1938 Jelly Roll Morton recorded his New Orleans classics from twenty years before for Alan Lomax. The same year other New Orleans veterans such as Sidney Bechet and Mezz Mezzrow were also recorded. In California students enthusiastically took up new white revivalist bands, and the revival is seen in surprisingly rapid and wide-ranging export form in such bands as the Dutch Swing College Band (Holland, 1939), Graeme Bell Band (Australia, 1943), and George Webb’s Dixielanders (England, 1943). (Interestingly, round the same time as George Webb is kickstarting the British revival at the Red Barn in Kent, amazing listeners to BBC radio with his band’s authentic sounding broadcasts, an influential export British figure in the States is dismissing the validity of revivalist jazz: critic modernist Leonard Feather wrote of the ‘badly dated relics’ of ‘the crude early stages of New Orleans jazz’ (quoted in Gendron 1995, 41).)

According to George Melly there developed two clearly identifiable forms—or factions—of musical retrospection in Britain, both white. The first was traditional jazz, looking to explore the pre-First World War music of New Orleans. Its most visible proponent was purist New Orleans cornettist and bandleader, Ken Colyer, whose ‘wavery vibrato and basic melodic approach was based on Bunk Johnson. He sounded, and intended to sound, like an old man who had never left New Orleans when they closed Storyville’ (Melly 1965, 46). For David Boulton, ‘the avowed policy of [Colyer’s groups] was to re-create the archaic jazz of the Storyville period’ (Boulton 1958, 79). Colyer’s uncompromising nature and music was signalled by his nickname, The Guv’nor, was boosted by his legendary pilgrimage to New Orleans in 1952/3, and by his wilful anti-commercialism. It was Colyer who opened up space for the pop success of the skiffle boom of Lonnie Donegan, in which he then refused to become further involved, and Colyer who refused to soften or compromise his musical position in the face of the outstanding commercial success of traditional jazz through the later 1950s (Chris Barber and Acker Bilk took the plaudits and hit records instead). Donegan, Barber and Bilk had all been involved with Colyer’s bands.

The second was revivalist jazz, which preferred 1920s-style Chicago jazz, clustered around Louis Armstrong (first appearance, 1934, the year before the twenty year ban came in). This is what the term ‘Dixieland’ refers to: southern music presented originally to and labelled for northern US audiences, as New Orleans musicians made the journey up the Mississippi to, among other cities, Chicago. Revivalist music had been played in Britain since the visit of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band in 1919, but it was with the establishment and broadcasting of George Webb’s Dixielanders in the mid 1940s that it really began to take off. Melly:

What was the difference between revivalist and traditional jazz?... What the revivalists thought of as 'New Orleans Jazz' was the music of Armstrong, Morton and Oliver—New Orleans musicians but based on, and recorded in, Chicago during the Prohibition era.... The basic difference between the two sounds is that revivalist jazz includes arranged passages, solos, and considerable emphasis on the individual musician, whereas traditional jazz is *all* ensemble (Melly 1965, 160-161).

As the trad scene spread through the country through the early 1950s, according to David Boulton in his 1958 book *Jazz in Britain*, 'it began to be obvious that British bands were no longer taking the classic Oliver records as their masters, but were tending to become shadows of either the archaic Colyer band or the smoother [Chris] Barber group' (1958, 80). That is to say, the directly imitative, Americanising moment quickly passed, being superseded by a homegrown praxis and bifurcation, what Larkin called 'our own brisk little wrong-end-of-the-telescope version of New Orleans' (Larkin 1985, 78). This may have been accentuated in the skiffle moment: 'skiffle in its modern form is essentially a British product—British in that it is more or less confined to the British Isles. When Bill Haley was busy introducing rock 'n' roll to Britain, Lonnie Donegan was attempting to sell skiffle to the Americans' (Boulton 1958, 126).

By 1956, the trad and wider jazz boom in Britain was being fostered by the Beaulieu Jazz Festivals, organised by Lord Montagu at Palace House, Beaulieu in the New Forest (better known now for its motor museum) which grew each year until trouble in 1960 broke out between the traddlers and modern jazz fans. A subcultural riot took place. The stage was destroyed, lighting rigs torn down, a building set alight, 39 people injured, and BBC television's live outside broadcast stopped six minutes before its scheduled end, with a commentator's interruption: 'Things are getting quite out of hand. [Pause] It is obvious things cannot continue like this'. Before this, viewers had heard a commandeered BBC microphone used to demand 'More beer for the workers!' (Beaulieu Motor Museum Archive, 1960 Beaulieu Jazz Festival press cuttings file; see also McKay 2000, 1-6).

In Lindsay Anderson *et al*'s short documentary film of the first march of Easter 1958, *March to Aldermaston*, I count 18 shots of jazz bands playing (the first three are of the uniformed Omega Brass Band), and ten times trad music forms the soundtrack. The production team evidently thought trad the key musical accompaniment to the event, even though it is the folk scene which has more generally been recognised as the soundtrack of early CND (Boyce 1993, Brunner 1983). The attraction of folk is, and has been, more readily explained—as an indigenous working people's music, through the revival's links with the Communist Party in Britain, as constructed as a historic cultural expression of struggle, as representing national and regional identities. Georgina Boyes traces distinctions as well as connections between the two musical forms:

although jazz bands provided much of the music for the marches organised by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, it was folksong which became synonymous with protest.... Shared ideology also created links between performers of the two musics—[Humphrey] Lyttelton joined [A.L.] Lloyd as a Vice-President of the Workers' Music Association and prominent jazz and

folk musicians appeared on the same platform at political events. (Boyes 1993, 214-5)

On the Aldermaston marches, the soundtrack was indeed New Orleans jazz, even if, in Jeff Nuttall's view, 'trad jazz for CND had to be folksy. (*JN plays piano*) The scales would be like folk pentatonic, they liked straight arpeggios and rhythm. Churchy, folksy and ostentatiously severe!' (personal interview, December 13 2001). There were other less directly musical connections too between jazz and CND: for instance, David Boulton, writer of the first book-length history of jazz in Britain, 1958's *Jazz in Britain*, was also heavily involved in CND, in an editorial capacity with the organisation's newspaper, *Sanity*.

Trad had practical attractions, too: it was relatively easy to play passably, to listen to and to dance/march to, it was an accessible form of music expression in keeping with the democratic sympathies of many activists and cultural workers of the time. (With its use of homemade instruments from domestic materials, the DIY form of skiffle opened wider still access to pop music performance in Britain.) Its partial origins as a marching music helped as well, not least for brass bands on events like the Aldermaston Easter marches. Writing at the time, under his jazz pseudonym of Francis Newton, Eric Hobsbawm outlines trad's left connections:

It was a self-made music, or at least music made in the image of the amateur. Its bands—in Britain at least—resisted professionalization for the best part of ten years. Moreover, in Britain and Australia, to a very marked extent, they had and maintained links with the political left. World youth festivals, anti-nuclear marches, May Day demonstrations, or other expressions of hostility to the social *status quo* have rarely lacked their quota of imitation New Orleans jazz players, blues and folk-singers, or 'skiffers' (Newton 1959, 76).....

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Interviewees

Correspondence with Colin Barker, 23 April 2002

Trad (and other musics) fan in 1950s
 Professor of Sociology, Manchester Metropolitan University

Interview with executive and other members of the Ken Colyer Trust, St Albans, Herts, 19 January 2002

Alan Bonney, Secretary KCT
 Brian Harvey, jazz journalist, proprietor of an international mail order company, KCT member
 Captain Peter Hunter, retired Merchant Navy, KCT committee member

Correspondence with Steve Lane, 16 January 2001, interview 11 January 2002

Semi-professional trad cornettist over 50 years, played on three or four Aldermaston CND marches
 Editor of *Jazz Music* magazine, 1950s—this superseded the intermittently-produced Jazz Sociological Society magazine, an implicitly leftist one, of the 1940s
 Communist Party member in 1930s

100 Club, London, 5 December 2001

Ken Colyer Memorial Concert

Observations by George McKay

Correspondence with Chris Macdonald, 9 January 2001

Young clarinettist on ad hoc parade band, Aldermaston marches, 1959 on
 Founder, Creole Dance Orchestra (1965), renamed Pasadena Roof Orchestra (1968)
 Played with Harry Strutters Hot Rhythm Orchestra (1974-1990)
 Retired music lecturer, ran Jazz Diploma course, Chichester College of Arts (1981-1996)

Interview with George Melly, February 25 2002, London

Singer, MC, critic and writer on jazz and popular culture
 Author *Revolt into Style: The Pop Arts in Britain, Owning-Up*
 Wrote the bubbles for *Flook* cartoons
 Presented television documentary on the origins of British jazz, called *Whatever Happened to Bill Brunaskill?*

Interview with John Minnion, December 12, 2001, Newport, Gwent

Volunteer, CND national offices, late 1950s

Regional organiser, Midlands CND, mid 1960s
Retired media lecturer (Birmingham CCCS postgraduate student in the 1960s)
Co-editor of *The CND Story* (1983)
Current organiser, Bude Jazz Festival, Keswick Jazz Festival
Trad trumpeter

Interview with Jeff Nuttall, December 13, 2001, Abergavenny

Author of *Bomb Culture* (1968), sixties happenner
Art and culture critic, ex-art college lecturer (Bradford), actor, broadcaster
Trad cornettist
Most recent book: *Art and the Degradation of Awareness* (John Calder, 2001)

Interview with Val Wilmer, 24 January 2002, London

Jazz historian, journalist and photographer
Author of *Jazz People*
As Serious as Your Life
Mama Said There'd Be Days Like This: My Life in the Jazz World

Interview with Colin Bowden, April 10 2002

New Orleans style drummer
With Ken Colyer band from 1955
Snare drummer with Omega Brass Band 1955 on
Drummer since 1952

Interviews

Regarding Ken Colyer

Peter Hunter of Ken Colyer Trust: I saw Ken playing in New Orleans in 1952-53 when I was a young Merchant Navy seaman. In fact I was a 16-year-old cadet. Somehow on shore in New Orleans—can you imagine my excitement at that destination! I loved jazz, and here was the navy taking me to the source of my enthusiasm—I'd found my way to a club on Bourbon Street. The manager came up to me—I thought he was going to throw me out for being under age. Instead he said 'There's another Englishman here, perhaps you'd like to meet him?' I'd seen the Crane River Band in England and loved them—lo and behold the other Englishman was Colyer! *I was in orbit!* It was the George Lewis Band with Percy Humphrey—and Colyer sitting in on cornet, playing a few numbers. Invited to the stand occasionally—it would have been absolute taboo for a white man to play all night with coloured musicians in a club. I may have been one of the very few English men to witness Colyer at that legendary moment.

Brian Harvey/Alan Bonney of Ken Colyer Trust: Well yes, and you're almost certainly the only one who's since gone on to play an important role in the KCT!

Peter Hunter/Brian Harvey of Ken Colyer Trust: The Omega Brass Band may well have been the first New Orleans style marching parade band in England. Cy Laurie and the earlier Crane River Band had sat before then on the backs of lorries

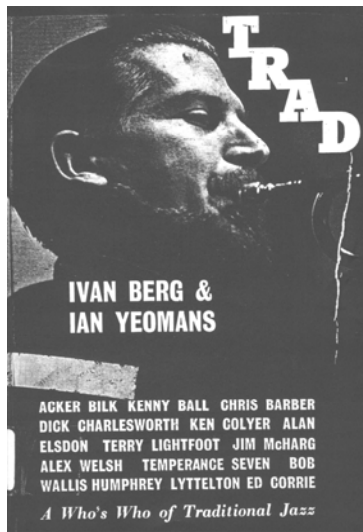
playing tailgate at events like Lord Mayor's Parades, college rags, those sorts of things—but not formal marching, with uniforms and a traditional brass instrumental line up, bass drum and so on. The Omega always marched. The band was formed probably in 1954. We heard about it, all very excited, word spread like wildfire, through the rhythm clubs and record shops, through the LSE and St Martin's School of Art. This was the man's new project—and there was a great sense of anticipation.

George Melly: I always thought Ken Colyer *was* political—why turn up to play at all those marches if you don't at least vaguely support what's going on?

John Minnion: Colyer was a culturally straight guy: check shirt, braces sometimes, not culturally significant clothing at all. In fact, he was a bit John Major-ish in some ways (*Laughs*). Ken Colyer was hungry for an audience for the parade band, but I'd say he personally was fairly apolitical. There just happened to be lots of marchers from Aldermaston each Easter, the ideal—the only—situation for a parade band!

In terms of Colyer's purism, his desire for authenticity, the story goes that Bill Russell may have *told* Bunk Johnson and George Lewis what he wanted to hear when he rediscovered them and recorded them as old men in New Orleans in the 1940s. So Colyer's imitative gesture, and even his claims to authenticity, could be predicated on aspic, on misrepresentation. These are the kinds of tortuous arguments that went round at the time.

Within the scene Colyer was the polished purist—Acker Bilk and Chris Barber, the commercial end, they were the equivalent of, in the folk scene, the Spinners, or Peter Paul and Mary. Though I do think Barber maintained a degree of street cred, of respect, with jazzers.



Berg and Yeomans's book *Trad: A Who's Who of Traditional Jazz* (1962), featuring Colyer on cover

Jeff Nuttall: Even though there was enmity between the 1930s Rhythm Club collectors, with their thorn needles and rare records, and the likes of Colyer, who was actually, you know, actually playing.

Well of course, the Rolling Stones used to play during the interval at Ken Colyer's club!

George Melly: I don't think Ken Colyer was quite so innovative.

Steve Lane: Did I write a piece on Ken Colyer's Jazzmen [in *Jazz Music*]? I don't remember that—I did used to follow them around in the early days of the Crane River Band. Best New Orleans revivalist music this country's ever had.

100 Club, London, 5 December 2001

Ken Colyer Memorial Concert

Observations by George McKay

Audience—totally white, mostly male, average age of, say, 60?

A few men smoking pipes, lots of real ale pint glasses.

The first topic of conversation I hear is How's such-and-such? Oh, his kidney's packed up. She needs another hip replacement.

But they're a constituency, a community: lots of nods from band-members to the audience. And the audience, lots are smiling, swaying with the music. It's a reminiscence smile: songs take them back, I think.

In the first set, a couple of up-tempo pieces—and then there's a couple dancing, off in the space at the side, where there are no tables. They're both slim, well preserved, far from young. They move with ease, with gentle elegance (not SPASM dancing at all). They're happy with each other, here and (back) there. Later, several couples are dancing around the club. These first are the best, though.

The band, seven strong (though the trombonist turns up late, to ironic cheers from stage and tables alike). All are sitting down, even the three frontline of clarinet/alto, trumpet and trombone. The leader, trumpeter, the Colyer figure I guess (we're reminded later that he was actually Colyer's favourite trumpeter), introduces some numbers by tapping 1 - - - , 1234 and then the tight ensemble playing is straight in. The alto and piano strike me as unusual for such a purist occasion, but I am no real expert. There are odd jokes and memories of the 1950s during the patter between numbers. Trumpeter Cuff: 'We welcome back our bassist, after his hernia operation' (Laughs). In fact the ironic discourse recognises the youth culture origins, the pleasure still, the reality of age.

Today at the National Jazz Foundation archive in Essex I pored over Jazz News from 1958 and 1959—and when the couple began dancing, the front line blaring, the red walls of the 100 Club with its B&W photos of artistes and its attractive decay—well, it worked a bit. You got a sense of mad trad days in underground London clubs.

There's a large plaque on the wall, with a larger photograph underneath (and bear in mind that smaller photos show Mick Jagger, Pete Townsend, etc., playing there): 'KEN COLYER CORNETTIST 1928-1988 HAPPY MUSIC ON THESE PREMISES FOR OVER 35 YEARS 100 OXFORD STREET'.

The band played a jaunty march called 'Salutation', originally recorded by Zenith Brass Band in New Orleans in 1946 (so the trombonist explained). Here you got a sense that actually they really were keeping the music alive, not in aspic, but, well, obviously, live. A gig and a history lesson? And history times at least two: Zenith in New Orleans, Ken Colyer—maybe his Omega Brass Band—in England a decade and more later. Also the trombonist explained that Zenith Brass Band played tunes that all the other parade bands ignored or had forgotten: 'they still had the written parts for these songs'. The band really pushes itself on this one; the audience claps syncopatedly along (quite cool, that). It's a palimpsestic culture, this, not just derivative, imitative—not any more anyway: after 40-50 years of UK trad practice

there's a confidence that comes from recognising your own cultural longevity and celebrating that as an achievement.

The spiritual 'Just a closer walk with thee' is introduced—'Bunk Johnson recorded this in 1945, a few years before we did'. The audience recognises and applauds in anticipation.

What the Ken Colyer Trust has done is to make it possible for British jazz to celebrate its achievements, its history. Its weakness may be that there is no real new audience for the music.

Colin Bowden: The Omega Brass Band was formed for the first Soho Fair, held on June 1st 1955. Ken Colyer held a residency at the 51 Club and he was asked to play for the Soho Fair, and he saw it as an opportunity to form a proper marching band. The way it happened was Ken and Sonny Morris, who'd both been together as trumpeters in the Crane River Band a few years before, each now led a six-piece New Orleans band. They put these two together to produce a marching band for the Soho Fair, with musicians swapping instruments as necessary—so Johnny Bastable, Ken's banjoist in the normal band, played bass drum in the parade band. Ian Wheeler, clarinettist, gave the band its name. I played snare drum, and took up the drum chair in Colyer's band in September of that year, which is why I remember the date so clearly.

The Omega Brass Band was a fringe, an offshoot, of Ken's and Sonny Morris's ordinary working bands.

There had been street bands before, and the Cranes had done things like carnivals and fairs, but that was sitting on the backs of lorries, or playing at the side, with banjos and so on. There had never been marching jazz bands up till then, not proper New Orleans style, like the ones Ken saw doing funerals in New Orleans in 1953. So yes, we were the first—Ken's band set the pattern. Ones like the New Taero Brass Band came along a bit later.

The line up of the Omega varied considerably—but would generally feature some mix of two trumpets, two trombones, clarinet, E flat horn, tenor and alto sax, sousaphone, and snare and bass drums. I remember for one parade there were two snare drummers and I didn't like that, didn't think it right.

We loved it when we would have to march under bridges, we could hear what we were playing, the full effect.

The Russell recordings were the influence for us—Ken had seen parade bands in New Orleans, but for the rest of us it was those recordings from a few years earlier that we listened to. We had the records of the Eureka Brass Band—we'd sit down and listen carefully, play along, and work out our lines. There were no written parts.

Head arrangements were the main repertoire. We didn't have books of arrangements written out for us to read as we marched. We played by ear. The brass band played what the ordinary band played, so we knew all the tunes from our normal repertoire.

We never practised the shuffle or stepping. No, none of that. In fact it was a shambles, that side of it! In the very early days the effort at being authentic, with uniforms and performance and all, was absolutely minimal—it was always, for the musicians, the music first and foremost. The uniform was basically black trousers, white shirt and tie, and a peaked cap. Was it Ken who worked for London Transport at the time, someone in the band anyway—and they managed to get a load of London bus drivers' or conductors' caps, and we used them for the uniform. *[Laughs]* The first parades we never even had OMEGA written on our hat straps, and neither did Ken, say, have

LEADER written on his. It was all very informal. I *think* even then though we had a Grand Marshall—a chap called Marcel.



Omega Brass Band, CND march, late 1950s, led by Grand Marshall

I still have the bass drum from the Omega Brass Band; it's a little bit of jazz history. The skin's broken though, so it doesn't have the name on the side. It might not be the one that did the very first gig for the Soho Fair, but it came along pretty soon after that and was used throughout.

Colin Barker: One Saturday, someone organized a high-priced jazz concert in a local club. I forget who played, it might have been a Ken Colyer band offshoot. Paid musicians, anyway. We went along, and our local band played the interval spot. The lights were too bright, the place was alienating, and we decided our own band actually sounded better.

We started a skiffle group, just playing in our parents' back rooms. But we were lousy. Our singer sang flat, and I was sacked from my position on the washboard because I speeded them up as the song went along. The skiffle group fell apart (in 1958) when one of our guitarists was murdered by his mother with an axe because he had his first girl friend.

In 1958 or 59, Ken Colyer's marching band came to Ilford and paraded from Gants Hill up to Hainault one Saturday afternoon in the summer. It was a two-hour free concert for the crowd that marched with them. The sousaphone player had a greyhound on a leash, attached to his instrument. It felt like a rebellion marching through respectable Barkingside High Street with that band. At Hainault they went into a pub garden to carry on playing, but there was a charge for entry and we quit at that point.

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the Aldermaston marches (1958-63), the place of trad jazz on the marches

Steve Lane: I played on a number of the Aldermaston marches. They were organised by John Minnion, who now organises Bude Jazz Festival. He was the inventor of the diabolical system of a stationary band—when the marchers had all passed by, he provided a people-carrier of some sort which transported the band to the front of the march again. Thus the band was playing almost continuously throughout the march—good for the lip, though.

The way I got involved in playing as a marching band during the Aldermaston marches was I think that John Minnion rang me up and asked if I could put a band together for the march. I never used my own band, the Southern Stompers, but would ring around a bit and get some good musicians together. Some might have been going on the march anyway, I suppose. One year, the first we did it I think, going to London [so at earliest, 1959], they put the band at the back of the march, so that all the people would be able to hear it—there didn't seem much point in having us leading it, blowing ahead to no one. After one or two of those, they decided to have the band marching from the front, give it a bit of focus I suppose. *Then* came the innovation of us playing on the pavement, as the marchers passed by. That made it a lot easier for us as musicians, not having to play and march for hours. Minnion was very keen that it be good, professional.

I can't remember where we went, but we didn't camp or anything, so maybe we just did a stretch for a day. I didn't know that Colyer's Omega Brass Band would join the march for the final mile into Trafalgar Square, I never saw that. I never knew Dougie Gray of the Alberts played 'Land of Hope and Glory' outside the Ministry of Defence either [*Laughs*]—I'd like to have seen that. I missed things like that. I *can* remember that, no, we didn't get paid, even though we were sort of booked for the event. We regarded it as a political thing and wouldn't expect to be paid.

Though we were there as a parade band some years we never wore uniforms—my band the Southern Stompers *had* been wearing uniforms for years for our gigs, but here, Aldermaston, there was a general feeling to be free and easy on the marches, a bit of that pre-60s teenage relaxing, I suppose. In terms of repertoire, at that time Colyer's band knew all the correct brass material for parades, him having famously been to New Orleans and even played on some of the parades there. But at Aldermaston we played more in the line of classic 1920s jazz, with less marches or really parade music. One we did know and do was Bunk Johnson's 'Just a little while to stay here'.

John Minnion: During the early years I wasn't a musician. In 1960, 61 I was a volunteer at national CND office in the run up period to each march. After the first couple of years CND realised that bands were springing up spontaneously along the march, and so thought they'd use them. Flyers sent out for prospective marchers asked for addresses etc, but also had a line for people to complete: 'I can play ... and am willing to be in a band'. So if national office knew they'd be getting several bands' worth of musicians they'd use them.

There was a luggage wagon that would pick up and drop at the head of the march. Bands would play on pavements as the marchers approached and went by, and then they would get moved along by the wagon periodically. Also some parade bands played: Ken Colyer's Omega Brass Band would play the last mile.

CND identified a fundamental flaw in conventional politics: let's live, not destroy the world. So: let's have a good time. So: music and dance! People thought about us: not only are they protesting, they're having a good time too!

When I was in Birmingham in the 1960s I helped organise fundraising for CND by a New Orleans jazz music club in the city. 1963 that started. I started the jazz club because I liked the music, and there was a strong overlap between YCND and us. You can still see that slightly idealistic ethos there, in Birmingham and in its trad events: in 2002 for instance, the 36th annual Oxfam Stomp was held in the city, featuring some of the bands, like the Zenith Hot Stompers, who played at our events in the 1960s. Some flyers show a couple of events:

*Jazz Extra Birmingham Town Hall
Saturday 11th December 1965
First time ever in Birmingham
MIKE DANIELS BIG BAND
also the DELTA JAZZMEN...
The TULANE BRASS BAND
(New Orleans parade band)
[includes image of white jazz trumpeter]*

See at the bottom right, tiny letters? ‘Presented by the Holy Ground Folk Club and CND’. I wanted events to be professional, not a benefit-style shambles. And yes, perhaps we were positioning the music over the politics here! This led to an organisation, well a name anyway, called Centre Concerts, which we described in concert programmes as ‘a service employed by various peace movements to arrange fundraising events’. The souvenir programme for a concert called Folk Meets the Blues (actually quite a lot of trad here) at Fairfield Hall Croydon in May 1966 showed the bill, described musicians and featured some photographs of them. It also opened with a column headed ‘Why CND?’



Because, frankly, we need the money: the proceeds for tonight's concert will go to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

Having said that, we would add that we will not try to convert you—merely to entertain you. For the record we must make it clear that the appearance of Jimmy Witherspoon was arranged through the normal agency channels. And does not necessarily involve him in any political position. We are, however, indebted to all the other artists for making it possible to present such a distinguished concert bill.

If you want to know more about CND read the newspaper 'Sanity', or contact us direct.

Programme cover featuring Bob Davenport and Jimmy Witherspoon, for benefit organised by John Minnion and Centre Concerts for CND

There is a large advertisement for Sanity later, and the back cover advertises the folk magazine, *SING*, with a handwritten-style addendum to the magazine's general blurb:

* and, besides, *SING* has always been a committed [sic] magazine on human-rights issues, has supported consistently in words, songs and deeds the anti-bomb, anti-war and anti-apartheid movements.

Jeff Nuttall: The so-called Aldermaston Jazz Band—it was recorded one year, by Folkways Records, we played ‘Land of Hope and Glory’, badly and ironically. Tony Parr was there. Yes, it was our aggressively satirical version of the tune, played at Parliament Square at the end of the march in I think 1959. We set up outside the Ministry of Defence as part of the Aldermaston show. Tony Parr, Chris Farley (of Farley’s rusks, and other things. Hmm.) Ours was a Portsmouth Sinfonia version, as only Dougie Gray knew the tune! It was received by the passing marchers with the understanding Woodstock would have a decade later listening to Hendrix playing ‘The star-spangled banner’!

We were anti-royalist, anti-military, anti-pomp, but no we were not anti-American. We were not pro-empire either, a sort of ‘comic’ nostalgia maybe. My banjoist—working class, no bohemian traits whatsoever—said ‘Why don’t we call ourselves the CND Jazz Band? They’ve got loads of people!’ (*Laughs*)

Ken Colyer’s Omega Brass Band played on the Aldermaston marches, the Soho Fairs before that—it was an opportunity for them to play parade jazz for a marching crowd. Jazz was so apolitical; they’ll take whatever gig comes, so a clear political reading is sometimes difficult. But I do think of it as a music of the left.

Trad jazz had a non-specified left attitude—it thought itself to be authentic, had a purist and a folk connection. Trad jazz for CND had to be folksy. (*JN plays piano*) the scales would be like folk pentatonic, they liked straight arpeggios and rhythm. Churchy, folksy and ostentatiously severe! When rock n roll came, it wasn’t for any sociological grit; there was no clear political angle to it. Ray Gosling’s *Sum Total* was the first book about rock n roll. Rock n roll was more working class—while CND was going strong there was little connection with rock n roll music scene.

Humph was a member of Barnet CND at the time.

There was lots of sexual activity—well, okay, desire anyway—in the trad scene then. At Aldermaston though? I think it may have been a more general perception of the possibility of *freedom* on the march. YCND, the trad clubs—these did begin to feature an aggressive permissiveness, you know, even just using the opposite sex’s toilets was our idea of a pointed bohemianism.



The Aldermaston Jazz Band, featuring the Albert Bros., Jeff Nuttall *et al*

Chris Macdonald: The funny thing is that my clarinet is actually in the photo [my wife] sent you, just below the trombone player's left elbow! Firstly, the musicians in the photo as far as I can remember, were, from the left, Dougie Gray (pocket cornet, bombardon, greyhound, dustcart), Martin Fry (helicon—later to be known as sousaphone player Franklyn B. Paverty in the 1961 chart-topping *Temperance Seven*), Dougie's brother Tony Gray (piccolo trombone), me (clarinet—hidden!), Jeff Nuttall (loud trumpet—author, artist, actor), Dave Aspinwall (very loud trombone...), the kilted drummer I don't remember. I think this photo was from 1959 or 1960 [Aldermaston March].

[On the march] The band would meet daily at specified spots en route between Aldermaston (or Finchfield one year) and Trafalgar Square, and if you were late you scrounged a lift on one of the many lorries which were transporting foot-sore souls back and forth, until you caught the band up. The repertoire was very basic—usual Saints and Down by the Riverside, etc. The pulse of the music was important—it relieved the boredom of the miles for many of the marchers—we always got a cheer, and even polite applause from Canon Collins on one occasion—great days for me as a youngster!

Colin Bowden: And for those Aldermaston parades [with Omega Brass Band]: we used to start at 10 o'clock in the morning at Turnham Green and Chiswick and parade all the way round Marble Arch and on to Trafalgar Square, then go and play at the 51 [Club] in the evening. Wonderful days! [Source: *Ken Colyer Trust Newsletter* Winter 2001, p. 12]

When Omega turned up to play the last mile of those marches, we would try to have a bigger line up than normal—three trumpets, three trombones! On the Aldermaston marches we'd always have a mass of fans behind us, marching with us.



Ken Colyer (trumpet), playing with New Teao Brass Band, May Day rally, London, 1962

Of course, we might have got more political jobs because we played on the Aldermaston marches. If there was another socialist gathering, a May Day march for instance, well they'd book a parade band, to get the Aldermaston spirit, or feeling. In that way the two became connected, perhaps. The New Orleans style was swing on

wheels, perfect for those marching occasions. On the other hand, the Musicians' Union would supply bands for say Trades Union events, and weren't in the MU—we wouldn't have anything to do with it because of the ban on American musicians that was still going on then [ended 1956]. So that might have closed down options. One time we did do a communist event at a London theatre, but the other music was much more folk, Ewan MacColl, that sort of thing, and we felt we didn't really fit. We also played fairs, fetes, carnivals. The parade band was open air, seasonal work. There are a lot more funerals now to play at. We were on a weekly salary, playing seven nights a week with Ken. So I don't know much about the financial side of things, like whether we ever got paid to play the Aldermaston marches. Sometimes we'd get spin-off jobs, playing pick up brass bands outside Omega, and for them you'd expect to get paid.



Omega Brass Band, CND march. From left: Ken Colyer (trumpet), Colin Bowden (snare drum), Bob Wallis (trumpet)

Val Wilmer: We joined the 1960 march on the final day, as it came into London. Ken Colyer's Omega Brass Band played—that was a good occasion for them. The bowler hat with a CND symbol on the front was a big fashion item on the marches then—after Acker Bilk was no. 1 in the charts at the time.

In 1961 I did the whole march, sleeping in school halls along the route. Lots of brass bands played—there were always bands playing. They made the event more appealing. I did go for CND, but the bands were an exciting extra. We'd—my friend Liz, I, and the others—always try to be behind a band on the march, we'd position ourselves with an ear on the music. But you have to remember too that then, from the 1950s and still in the early 1960s, there were always bands playing in the streets anyway, it was a feature of everyday life: the Happy Wanderers, Salvation Army brass bands, things like that. So to have bands marching alongside or by the roadside for CND wasn't perhaps such an unusual feature. The difference was that they were playing jazz and there was the strong connection with New Orleans music and culture.

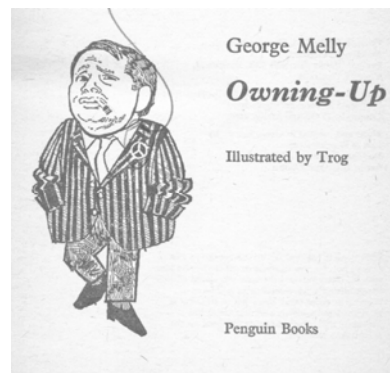
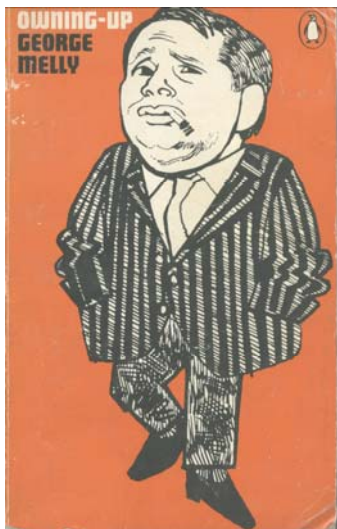
George Melly: I was a member of the Committee of 100. Bertrand Russell invited me to join. It was one of those letters that flattered you, contained a list of rather impressive artists and writers who'd already committed themselves, so you felt you couldn't be left out (*Laughs*). Could all have been absolute nonsense, fiction to get

you interested! I sat down on the big civil disobedience demonstration, sitting down between Shelagh Delaney and Vanessa Redgrave. It was pouring with rain. We sat there getting wet, near the police barrier. We soon decided that if we moved into the road and obstructed it we would get arrested sooner, hence get out of the rain. So we did that, and were. I was carried off rather gently by two policemen, and then when we got round the corner to the van they absolutely threw you in. I'd arranged for Colin MacInnes to do *Flook* [cartoon writing] for me if I was jailed. But I was up in court the next day and paid my £5 fine there and then. Some didn't, they refused to pay and went to jail instead. I thought I'd done my bit.

The early [Aldermaston] marches included even someone like John Osborne, who really wouldn't have been involved in that kind of thing even a couple of years later, not for what it grew into.

Kingsley Amis, he was terribly anti-CND. I remember talking with him once, pointing out that there were all these trad bands playing on the marches, so there must be something of interest to him there. He just said 'Disgusting!'

[The cover of the Penguin edition of *Owning-Up* features a Trog cartoon of Melly, louche and suited. The inside cover page features the same cartoon, but Melly sports a recognisable CND-style badge on his lapel. Who airbrushed this allegiance out of the cover?] Penguin, I should think. I remember also I had a row with a television company once about a CND badge I was wearing during a broadcast. They wanted me to remove it. I refused, and won. The Anti-Apartheid Campaign was the other badge that got attention, that one wore.



Front cover and inside cover of Trogg's image of Melly for *Owning-Up* (1965), showing airbrushed CND-style badge

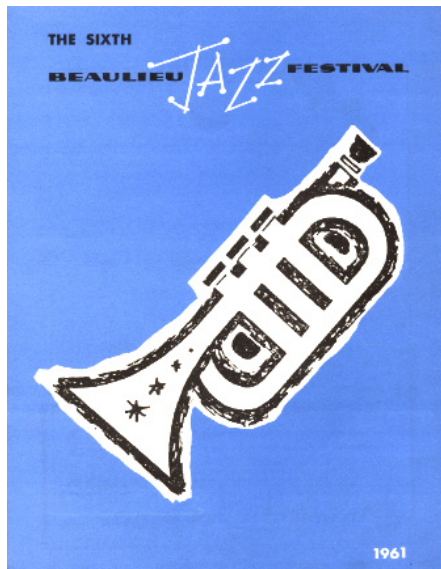
Beaulieu Jazz Festivals (1956-61—the earliest 'pop' style festivals in Britain)

Val Wilmer: Johnnnny Dankworth played the Marquee on Sundays, and in his band was George Tyndale, the Jamaican saxophonist. I got to know George because he



lived near me, in Mitcham, and I went to Beaulieu with that band, on their bus with a friend. That was probably 1960, and I saw Tubby Hayes there too. I didn't see anything of any riot, so it must have happened the previous or following day. No memories of anything about it being talked about on the bus on the way back either.

In 1961 I went to Beaulieu again. I stayed overnight, though it's more likely that I slept in the car that camped, I think I would have remembered camping in a tent. Barber played, and the blues harmonica player Jimmy Cotton appeared with his, Barber's, band. We'd all seen the great film *Jazz on a Summer's Day* [writes about that in *Mama Said*], and we all knew about the Newport Jazz Festival through that, and we were aware that Beaulieu was an imitation, a UK version of Newport—or Newport as seen through the film, anyway. And in 1961 of course, Anita O'Day was on the bill at Beaulieu, so there was very clearly a conscious connection between the two festivals, from the British point of view at least.



I just thought Beaulieu House was very grand and wonderful, a beautiful place all over. The Basie band had been there on a visit and there are photos of them sitting in some of the museum's cars with Lord Montagu. Several aristocrats liked jazz then: Gerald Lascelles, he was a first cousin to the queen, and I knew him because he wrote about jazz for *Jazz Journal* [also wrote a jazz column for the society magazine *Tatler*].

George Melly: I did say that jazz was classless somewhere, didn't I. Well, it wasn't really, was it? There were a few working class people—Colyer, George Webb. But altogether more, many more from the suburbs. And then there were the aristocrats,

Gerald Lascelles, Edward Montagu, even your Humphs. Well, Montagu was just an entrepreneur, trying to raise money for Beaulieu. He did like jazz though. I did a short speech at the launch party for his second autobiography recently [*Wheels Within Wheels*, 2001]. I remember after the homosexuality case was over, at the Beaulieu Jazz Festival soon afterwards, he went on stage to introduce someone in that curious high-pitched voice of his, and everyone clapped. Rousing applause. We hadn't known what the response would be—could have been jeers and homophobic jibes, but the audience rose to him.

Colin Bowden: We didn't really like BJB very much; it seemed to us in Colyer's band and the Omega Brass Band that, with all the fashion, and trouble one year, it wasn't the real jazz thing. It was a sign of the music moving into the mass media, and that whole showbiz style thing wasn't for the likes of Ken. He cut his own path, and his style was always to be uncompromising.

The cultural politics of trad jazz

Jeff Nuttall: Yeah, we were against sexual repression in both the peace movement and in the jazz scene at that time, the late 1950s. The spontaneity of jazz as a form, its audibility came from its bursting into being. And of course there was a longstanding link between jazz and fucking—the sexual lyrics, southern brothels, eruptions. Contrast that with Britain at the time, which was tremendously repressed. And homosexuality was still illegal—I know now that most of my young friends from then were gay—I didn't at the time. There was lots of sexual activity—well, okay, desire anyway—in the trad scene then.

Gustav Metzger's lollipop during the Aldermaston marches: 'Home Rule For Eel Pie Island'. The Scots drummer Jock, in the Aldermaston photo of us marching and playing, he was a trade unionist, a communist too I think.

The 'Ooblies', Humph's name for them, the purist original trad subculture. *A great cult of dirt*. All nighters at the 51 Club in London, bare foot dancing, smelly, thought of themselves as beatniks. Black jeans, duffle coats or donkey jackets, straggly hair, unkempt. They became prominent at Aldermaston, the Ooblies. The Gray Brothers, Sonny Morris were regular performers at 51 Club, Steve Lane too. Colyer's club was the hub, it really was.

There was no beer in most of the jazz clubs then, so you'd dash off to the pub between sets.

Alan Bonney of Ken Colyer Trust: The ravers formed from St Martin's School of Art, ex-Navy duffle coats were a part of their uniform.

Peter Hunter of Ken Colyer Trust: Much of the dress was pure black, and I think, speaking from a Merchant Navy perspective, that it was in part a post-war next generation's reaction against wearing uniform. Instead young people wanted to dress down. And the music, it was happy music, after the austerity of the war.

Brian Harvey of Ken Colyer Trust: Barefoot dancing in the clubs—we were anti-establishment and anti-convention, though this, and our promiscuous behaviour was hyped up. Convention was still present, and I'd say from reading about the past and experiencing this Jazz Age, that the Jazz Age of the 1920s was considerably more promiscuous than ours! There were not even licensed bars in the jazz clubs. For the

jazz all-nighters you would take your own supplies of alcohol. Come the interval bands and punters would be fighting at the bar of the nearest pub to get served.

George Melly: Trad fans—not revivalists, I may add—were moronic on the whole. They had this very strict line about what was admissible in music and what was not. And then they would just jump up and down all the time, leapniks we called them. Schisms in trad and modern scenes, as illustrated at the silly riot at Beaulieu in 1960. There is always that, isn't there, with pop fans—intense feelings, an investment in authenticity. Look at the furore when Dylan went electric a few years later, for instance.

I'm not so sure about the fixation on authentic acoustic trad jazz—some bands even had amplified banjos, chug-chugging away. And the banjo is *not* the sort of instrument you want or need to hear too loud, not the way most traddlers played it anyway [*laughs*].

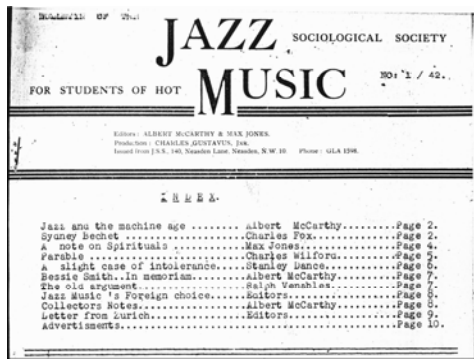
John Minnion: Jazz had a street credibility. There was a subversion of the music industry in the trad scene, evident in its anti-commercialism. In terms of jazz politics, skiffle opened up a sort of amateur, a do it yourself culture, music that wasn't managed by Tin Pan Alley. *And* it wasn't a majority music. Trad had these too, and with Colyer in particular it possessed a strong anti-commercial impetus, which appealed to me (in spite of being a club organiser!).

Delphine Colyer, Ken's wife, did she have a Communist Party background? Mac Duncan, his early trombonist, he was passionately political. My own family were fellow-travelling neo-communists. The Communist Party was active in the folk scene, AL Lloyd, Ewan MacColl, and they could see jazz as *the people's music*. But a singer like Bob Davenport encouraged a folk scene with floor singers, not the polished aesthetic of someone such as MacColl.

Ken Colyer Trust members: Bill Colyer—was he a fellow traveller, around the Communist Party?

Colin Bowden: I do personally think Ken Colyer was a socialist, but Aldermaston was just a gig, that happened to be a very big gig! As for the politics, well, we were after a good blow, having fun with a crowd. The main thing for us was that a march provided a platform for the music. We weren't socialists using music to make a political point—we were musicians who happened sometimes to play at some political events.

Steve Lane: A working class boy, I got a scholarship to Latimer's School. After the war, an officer told me my scholarship was still valid and that it would get me into university! I did get offered a place at University of London, but on the bus back I had a message from my unconscious, if you like—I believe in trusting that—that told me to follow music instead. I decided to get a job and be semi-pro musician, so I could play only music I really liked. This would be around 1947, and I formed my first band in 1950.



Front page of the first edition of the left-wing Bulletin of the Jazz Sociological Society (1942?)

In the magazine [*Jazz Sociological Society*, became *Jazz Music*] originally there was, yes, a left-wing connection, but they didn't make a big thing of it in the writing. We kept the music separate from the politics—we didn't write and connect the music with the working class. I think I just wrote to Max Jones and Albert McCarthy, the original editors of it during wartime, and asked if I could take it over, since its appearance had become so spasmodic. I suppose they said yes, and I think it got going again under my editorship in 1953-54?

You have to remember that we were passionately involved in jazz during the early 1950s revivalist times—we weren't thinking about anything else, not even the politics of it. Though I was still reading the *Morning Star* at that time, we just weren't consciously connecting the two. I'd left the Communist Party years before, though was still politically inclined—and by now of course we were finding out anyway that the Communist Party leaders were all lying to us anyway—you know, in the lead up to Hungary and all that.

Brian Harvey from Ken Colyer Trust: In the early days many trad fans were vehement left-wingers. If there was a march they'd try to get a band to play on it: the tradition of street parades fitted what they were trying to do. This went for all kinds of open air events—university balls, riverboat shuffles ... and demonstrations were another such outdoors group happening, probably with lots of young people, and a bustle of righteous excitement. It was connected by Ken as a folk music, but not overtly political. I myself—yes, now a businessman, I appreciate the irony—was a fellow traveller. Many in those days, especially writers and journalists around jazz, saw Communism as a way forward. In fact to be honest, I haven't met many from then who weren't either actively involved or actively sympathetic to left ideas! But we never discussed politics with musicians; it was much more the people around the scene who were political.

(Follow up email, 19 February): Further to student involvement in jazz/marches. I talked on this question with a jazz banjoist friend who was studying dentistry in I think Coventry at the same time that Ken's marching band was active in London. He tells me that he and his band would seize any opportunity to play in public for whatever cause. At that time, he says, they all saw their participation in appearances on the back of trucks or marching as part of echoing the New Orleans tradition and they rarely cared or even knew what cause their appearance was supporting. Remembering back to the London era of that time I feel sure that when word went round the jazz inner circle grapevine that the Omega (or anyone) was appearing in a

march we neither knew nor cared what the march was all about—only the music mattered—still does.

Alan Bonney of Ken Colyer Trust: A good example to look at is the Suez War demonstration in London in 1956, the big one in Trafalgar Square. I was there, in fact we were basically ordered by our union branch secretary not to come to work on that day but to go on the march instead. Lots of bands played there, and yet among the anti-war demonstrators there were spread groups *supporting* the government line—the National Union of Seamen marched under pro-banners at Trafalgar Square! You’ve got groups supporting and groups opposing the military action at the same national demonstration, and brass band music swirling around everywhere. So you can’t identify a simple link between music played and political alignment.

George Melly: There was that whole group of writers called the Movement—Larkin, Kingsley Amis, Osborne, John Braine. I don’t know how I would reconcile their enjoyment of jazz with the right wing views many of them held or came to hold. You know, there would be Amis and Robert Conquest having their monthly right-wing lunches, the Fascist Dinner Club or something it was called. John Braine started on the left and moved over to the right wing of politics. He was at these lunches. Once he was praising the United States and someone said but you know you wouldn’t have these freedoms and opportunities there if you were black. Braine just replied in his bluff northern voice ‘But I’m not black, you daft bugger!’ And Larkin, a wonderful writer, but he was walking proof that good art is not just made by good people!

Val Wilmer: I think it’s very interesting what you’re trying to do with British jazz and politics, and it needs to be done, but I’m not entirely convinced about the connection you’re trying to make: I have an ambivalent relationship with jazz in Britain, and actually I find the UK jazz scene quite reactionary. The jazz scene is so unpolitical it’s distressing—the 1950s material you’re looking at refers to a period that was almost an aberration. My life experiences, and the formation of my politics have made me uncomfortable with attitudes to jazz in Britain. You know, even looking at something like [the UK magazine] *Jazz Journal*—I’ve often thought, they’re soon going to run out of white musicians to put on the cover! There’s a general cultural rift between my understanding of what jazz is and the UK jazz scene’s understanding of that: in the first instance jazz is a spiritual music where African-Americans are concerned. It’s also one that needs to be understood within its historical and social context. How far are either of those the case with much jazz from Britain?

I joined the Young Communist League as a rebellious act against my family! With a friend of mine, Liz, when I was 16. We went along to meetings without really understanding it, although Liz did, having come from a family with communist connections. The YCL magazine, *Challenge*—I wrote two or three small articles about jazz for it, about Ella, Count Basie coming to the UK. This would be 1959, and they’re among the first pieces I ever wrote on jazz. Before that, I corresponded with the American musician Jesse Fuller. Basically his letters were his autobiography, and I wrote them up as a brief life story—that was my first published piece, and it appeared in *Jazz Journal*.

I would alternate every week between the YCL one night, and the Girls Guides! I didn’t necessarily have a sense of the Girls’ Guides as a female-only space. What that

organisation did for me, and I've always appreciated it for that, was it took me out, into practical and physical skills areas away from school.

Blackness, whiteness

John Minnion: Keith Nicholls said 'I'm going to play white jazz, or in the tradition of white jazz' (Beiderdecke, people like that).

George Melly: For us, jazz was black music, poor people's music—I didn't like white jazz at all—so the politics was bound to appeal to those interested in struggle, overcoming oppression.

We were always disappointed that there were no black faces in the audiences at our concerts and clubs. We did talk about it sometimes, between musicians. The modern jazz scene attracted lots of black people—at Ronnie Scott's for instance there was a constant presence in the audience, and on the stage to some extent. We thought that it was because modern jazz was more contemporary, more cool and cutting edge, and that's what London's blacks wanted, whereas ours was too old music. I think as well now that they, black audiences, may have perceived some element of old Uncle Tomming in our performances. Yes, that's possible, yes.

Val Wilmer: In the first instance jazz was about Black people in New Orleans. It was underground, hip, special—and I knew that at 14! Quite incredible, really!

I was an inveterate letter writer, that's how the break with Jesse Fuller came about, me writing to him out of the blue. Woe betide any American musician who was foolish enough to have a contact address published somewhere—I'd find it and fire off a letter. The amazing thing was really, I mean really, that so many would reply! These great musicians and characters from a black culture on the other side of the world writing back to this young suburban white girl in England.

Brian Harvey/Alan Bonney of Ken Colyer Trust: It's fair to say though that there was an attraction in liking a music born out of slavery, etc, and it's true that more fans were going to be Labour than Tory in later life.

Ken Colyer Trust members: Ken did famously have a go at one Philistine club owner. What was it he said? 'While we've been playing music torn from the souls of oppressed peoples all you've done is fucking cooked fish and chips'. Another famous saying, when he said anything that is, was: 'Listen to the fucking inner rhythms, man.'

Colin Bowden: We never thought about ourselves being white. Or about black American issues. When George Lewis came over he was an absolute gentleman, while the MJQ visiting were complete, well ... —and you know, there are good white players and good black players. I do think that when you get into black and white it's a dicey area for jazz.

Colin Barker: When I went to University in 1959, I just gravitated towards CND. It kind of went with what I wanted to be, and though there had never been any formal 'politics' in the jazz scene in Ilford, and there were no black people around our area in that period, it was taken for granted that we all wished we could hear black American jazz musicians. I read in the newspaper about the early civil rights movement in the

States, and automatically identified with it without ever thinking why. So jazz did imply a kind of connection with anti-racism, even though the term was unknown then. You malign 'the Teds' by the way. Lots of my friends were Teds, as were the clientele at the 'Kraal', but the idea of them either having 'nasty riotous attentions' or going to beat up blacks in London is way off beam. 'Ted' was a dress style, just as 'skinhead' was and is, and it didn't imply a right-wing politics. The point was, it was a bit 'bohemian' to wear long jackets, drainpipe trousers and brothel creepers, people's parents disapproved, that was what made it great.

Jazz issues and distinctions

George Melly: Dennis Preston, producer and entrepreneur, he was a very important figure in all this. Very commercially oriented. He recorded me in all kinds of settings, didn't make a jot of difference to my sales though—country and western, calypso, and so on, the lot. Dennis played a big role in *turning traditional into trad*.

Jeff Nuttall: Chris Barber's hit (c 1959) was the beginning of the trad fad. 1000s of people, including weekend beatniks, flooded the scene. The trad fad took off commercially, but at the expense of say CND, and it ruined the purity of the earlier music.

The music was characterised by a rawness, an energy that came in part from us often not being very good (not Colyer—he was understated in his playing. Nor Kenny Ball either—his were very technical musicians.) In other ways there was communist-style sentimental adulation of the simplistic.

Pic below: Jeff Nuttall, practising the 'boozy masculinity' of trad, c. 1960



John Minnion: Much of trad music had a roughness, a crudeness to it—this made it both raucous and exciting.

Being Birmingham, in the middle of the country, riverboat shuffles like they would always have on the Thames or the Clyde or the Norfolk Broads weren't possible. So:

CANAL BOAT SHUFFLE
SAT OCT 4TH 1969
1.00 pm. til 6 pm.

*Licensed bar throughout
On board, the world famous
KID MARTYN RAGTIME BAND
Kings Norton to Alvechurch and back,
Including 3 miles of canal tunnel!*
[includes image of a horse-towed canal barge]

Ken Colyer Trust members: When Graeme Bell's Australian Jazz Band arrived, and then quickly followed by Humphrey Lyttelton's bands, dancing was encouraged and expected. Others had a purist distaste of such obvious pleasures, and Colyer is usually cited here. But actually Colyer's own attitude to dancers shifted: one night it would be 'Get those fucking dancers out of the way', another it would be 'We've got to have people dancing, it makes the atmosphere'.

Colin Bowden: Our New Orleans material was—is—a deceptively simple music.

Val Wilmer: Rex Harris's *Jazz* was a book published by Pelican, and that was a big influence on me. In fact all those blue Pelican books. I loved them as sources of knowledge, they could be about science, music, biology, birds, I devoured those books.

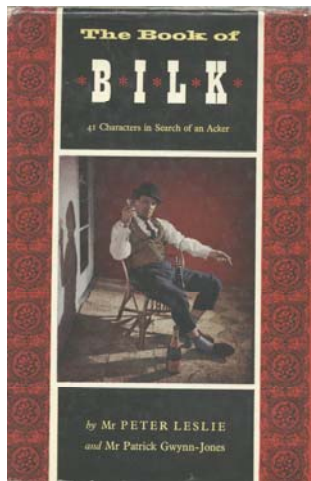
In 1959 I left school, and started a photography course at what was then the Regent Street Polytechnic. In October Buck Clayton came over with a band, and I got to know the drummer Herbie Lovelle. I interviewed him, and my article was published. This was in *Jazz News*, and it came about through Chris Barber, who helped me. I got to know Chris through hanging around at the Marquee Club, and, after that, I became involved with *Jazz News*, so I don't think I ever paid to get in, you know.

Jazz News was a magazine set up by Chris Barber and Harold Pendleton—and Kenny Ball was also involved. That really helped me get into writing about jazz and also, very importantly, into photography. I really don't think they minded that I was a woman in this man's world, which was unusual, refreshing. Of course, working for them was a terrific rip-off, you hardly got paid at all.

The past, retrospection, nostalgia

George Melly: Cultural nostalgia—John Major, George Orwell, Stanley Baldwin—is not necessarily always conservative though. That nostalgic appeal was there in the music—trad as an old form, revived literally. Some of the scene embraced Edwardian style (as did the Teddy Boys of course), some even went back to Victoriana (the Temperance Seven, some music hall). Acker Bilk had that in abundance, and yes I think there's a bit of Hardy in Bilk too, I've never thought of that until now. The past, the West Country. Bilk is a very interesting man.

Cover of Leslie and Gwynn-Jones's *The Book of Bilk: 41 Characters in Search of an Author* (Poet and jazz record critic Philip Larkin on Bilk's bowler hat, in 1961: 'Not so long ago, the unlikelihood of the Briton as jazzman would have been perfectly expressed by thinking of him in a bowler hat.... Yet today the bowler is worn with jolly unselfconsciousness by some of the country's most popular groups as part of their stand uniform.'))



Jeff Nuttall: You're suggesting that there was a nostalgia in CND and in trad. No, it was retro. It seemed suddenly in the 1950s that the reason we'd not talked about the nuclear threat (?)

Aldermaston was not *just* a cultural or lifestyle or youth movement—'we were frightened for the future of our world, yes, we were'. So it was more that just youth and the exuberance of a seemingly new culture. Any retro aspect of the movement—whether politically or musically—is more interesting a feature than you suggests in terms of nostalgia. It was to do with *primitivism* as a mode of the times. In art, this meant action painting, in criticism or philosophy it was Colin Wilson's *Outsider*. These too were efforts to get back to something fundamental and authentic. For trad, for CND-ers it signified in the nomadic gesture of Aldermaston, in the barefoot dancing to acoustic music. And this is the case even though trad's authenticity was totally spurious! You can tap in here to the *comic* ruralism of Acker Bilk, and more interestingly to the anti-commercialism of some of the culture (not least Colyer).

George Melly: Ah, professors, like policemen, keep getting younger. Come in. Not too long, I hope.

Val Wilmer: Brass bands were of the jazz scene of our time, but also they were indubitably connected to the past. So the attraction of the music was about the present and the past at the same time. In fact of course there were multiple pasts—Russell's recordings of the 1940s, the 'original' (whatever that was) musics from New Orleans of the 1920s and earlier. But it also spoke to us—partly through associated 'rave' fashion, maybe just by being *new*—when did New Orleans style brass bands, particularly the formal ones, step-marching and uniformed, like Colyer's Omega Band, invent themselves in Britain anyway?

Colin Barker: Interesting interviews. But they don't catch it from the standpoint of the fans. Except Val Wilmer's reference to the Rex Harris book, which everyone I knew devoured.

I was a teenager in Ilford, London suburbia in the 1950s. Ages 17 and 18 (1956-7ish), I spent every Saturday night with my mates at a large local scout hut called 'The Kraal' in Seven Kings. The regular band was made up of sixth formers from the Ilford County High Schools—mostly male in the usual spots (trumpet, clarinet, trombone,

bass, drums—there were never, so far as I remember, saxophones). But a young woman who played piano, and a brilliant young white woman blues singer from the Girls School who must have been doing her A Levels. The bands played revival jazz numbers, probably learned off scratchy 78s.

There was a tiny stage, a foot up from the hall floor, and the place was packed. You could get to stand right by the band, and talk to the musicians in the intervals between numbers.

It was cheaper than going to the pictures. There were lots of girls there, and ‘jive’. It was the first place I ever saw girls wearing jeans (wey hey) with baggy sweaters that swung about when they danced. My image of liberation.

We had no serious money, so hardly any records. The London scene, though only ten miles away, was beyond our means and our imaginations. The local suburban record shops hardly had any jazz records anyway. If you were lucky, you could sometimes get your valve radio to hit the American Forces Network stations in Germany, where they played a lot of jazz, especially swing.

America, Americanisation

Jeff Nuttall: We were anti-royalist, anti-military, anti-pomp, but no we were not anti-American. It’s true that we were against admass, which can be seen as American, and our desire for authenticity and purism manifested itself in embracing trad, which was another form of America! (GM: this was not a blind contradiction but a sophisticated distinction.) American culture was democratic (up until 1968 anyway), was free of our snobbery, was against the UK class system. You take some of the energy—whether it’s Faulkner, Krazy Kat, Lenny Bruce—because it really did seem to be enormously liberating at the time.



Clash of empires? American music of the Omega Brass Band marching past the Royal Albert Hall on an Aldermaston CND march

John Minnion: Anti-American, no. That’s dangerous. Reminds me a little of the discomfort I felt around the Ian Campbell folk scene in the wake of the skiffle boom: I thought there was a potentially xenophobic line in their insistence that you must play British folk songs!

USA bombing round the world today, in the wake of September 11 2001, and yes you *do* sometimes wonder why you're playing American music, if you have a peace campaigner's background. One of the points of CND for many years was that it managed to get away from the Cold War, by being against both sides' military machines. It may be the situation now that that's more difficult because the US military machine is the sole dominant one.

Val Wilmer: America, as special during the 1950s? No—I never went to see any of those films like *Blackboard Jungle* or anything. Any sense of the United States as representing freedom and affluence—no, no, not for me. I had no sense of America being anything special, not the *idea* of America, and nor did anyone I knew. That wasn't an image we would have recognised, or certainly not spoken of. I really can't answer in the affirmative your question about the US itself being special because jazz was there. And yet of course, jazz for me was American primarily.

Ken Colyer Trust members: The purist attitude of the returning conquering hero, when Ken came back from New Orleans in 1953, was all hype—Melody Maker, his brother Bill Colyer too, they puffed it up. But it was a notorious event: it was reported in the national press, that Ken Colyer had been jailed in New Orleans. The Daily Mirror in particular covered the story, because Ken had a profile before then. He was already a kind of folk hero, a known musician, and the story of him as a Merchant seaman signing off ship in Mobile, for the sake of his music and getting to New Orleans, was too good.

George Melly: Skiffle was a weird thing, from Ken Colyer, who used to play a bit as a break from the relentless purity of the New Orleans music he purveyed to audiences otherwise. Colyer actually sang very movingly. It had been imitated by 1920s white musicians in the USA, too. It was basically rural improvised music on non-instruments. It took off, partly because it was easy to play, and you could make the instruments. It was very easy to do!

Englishness through American music

Jeff Nuttall: Why imitate rare records, like Alexis Corner and skiffle? The music hall side of skiffle (Lonnie Donegan, or Tommy Steel come to that) tapped into Englishness. Lots of trad fans *are* music hall comedian freaks.

John Minnion: Ken Colyer played a *slightly anglicised* version of New Orleans music. In a way anglicised means *more polite*. But it should be remembered too that Colyer sparked off a grassroots tradition in Britain, and diverse styles developed on home territory.

From my experience, and this includes as an organiser of festivals and extensive chats with audiences, including Americans over here, the quality of trad music today is better in the UK and Europe than it is in the USA.

Val Wilmer: It wasn't just Beaulieu that was imitative, UK jazz as a whole was. In fact, all people on the jazz scene *were* essentially imitators at that time. But that can also be seen positively—jazz is (partly) about the development of an individual style, so there became the possibility of developing through the stage of imitation towards

something more individual, more original. But lots of copying too. British musicians played under a cloud, and were trying to shift it, but I'd say it wasn't until the early 1960s that they began to move away from the strictly American model really. Joe Harriott of course, bringing his really rather bold experiments on to the British scene, was very important in this, or John Stevens deliberately trying to cut himself off from USA cultures (while paradoxically working through a style that owed a lot to Elvin Jones).

Yes, it's true that folk offered another approach to these questions of national culture. Sometimes this crossed into jazz—particularly with the SPASM bands and skiffle music side of the trad scene—though a lot of people in the jazz world don't like folk music at all, they think it's trite and unadventurous. I do like folk, and actively enjoyed the music and folk scenes from 1960 on. I remember being struck by and even envious of the sense of a national musical culture I found when I went to Ireland and met several musicians there. I wondered (romantically) if this was how it had been in the US south in pre-jazz times [*laughs*]. Here was an authentic, *real* people's music, on our own doorstep—these are terrible terms, 'authentic' and 'real', but I don't have other ones.

I came to the folk scene from a different angle to that of jazz—through a boyfriend who was in the Communist Party, who was involved with a group of artists in Battersea, south London. Robert Tressell was the model for that group, of course, for a working class folk culture, for folk music, and we all read workers' classics. Later on I did photo shoots of Hamish Henderson, Dick Gaughan, and several Irish concertina players, so it wasn't only jazz that I revolved around musically. And I went to the Cambridge Folk Festival on several occasions.

George Melly: The trad and revivalist movements also got very tired, very quickly. They began to repeat themselves and they had nowhere else to go. And, as it happened, at that time along came a huge amount of startlingly original talent—the Beatles and so on. The Kinks were to my mind the most underrated—not only did they explore Englishness in their songs they did it without resorting to a banal midatlantic drawl.

The Fifties, into the Sixties

Jeff Nuttall: 1956—let's go to Suez. It was all moribund until then. Nobody mentioned the fact of Hiroshima, nor the extraordinary danger of the Berlin Airlift and the Cold War. Post Suez demonstrations opened things up. I'd just done my national Service—and decided not to stay in. So, 1956—Suez, the film *Blackboard Jungle*, Elvis (by the way, talk to PJ Proby about those times. So right wing. Lives in Hebden Bridge. He's good copy). And of course *Look Back in Anger*: I identified myself very closely as a 24-year-old with Jimmy Porter, I really did. Every time I played the horn then in fact I imagined myself as him, making those wonderful speeches. Jimmy Porter as a trad trumpeter—a very important fact, that. [GM: the last production I saw he was updated to a cool Miles Davis type player. JN: hah, really? No. Quite wrong.] John Braine he was a jazz fan too, so very interesting times! Also the purist—a key word—obsessive 'purism', the Crane River Band, early Colyer times. Jazz and poetry developed too. Michael Horowitz on the Soho Fairs, he knows about that. I remember a New Departures gig with Horowitz on kazoo, me on cornet, and Dick Heckstall-Smith on sax.

Hornsey Art College sit in or occupation had free jazz concerts so jazz and politics link still evident in the 1960s (Kim Howell, now Labour MP, was involved)

We were a precursor to the underground, though we didn't have a name for our movement, and we didn't know at the time something really big was going to come afterwards.

By the mid 1960s, I wanted out of the underground—I didn't like the commercialism, nor rock and roll, so I moved to Norwich. Also I liked, wanted to play, acoustic music.

By the late 1960s we were into freer jazz than trad, Mingus, that sort of thing.

Chris Macdonald: Dougie, Tony and third brother, Vincent Gray (Harwell scientist?—soprano sax) were the nucleus of the group known as The Massed Alberts who had the dubious honour of appearing on the opening (I think) of BBC2 TV. They also had a show at the Comedy Theatre in London called 'An Evening of British Rubbish', with Ivor Cutler and Bruce Lacey—I took part in these chaotic, partially improvised performances for about a month in 1962.

Steve Lane: Yes I remember the Alberts—Dougie Gray played tuba in my band for a time later, you see. A great laugh. Very mad. They're still around I think—some of the brothers live in an old vicarage in Norfolk. The Alberts did a concert at the Albert Hall once, I remember. Part of the act was them coming on stage and destroying the grand piano. It takes time to do something like that. Half an hour of effort and wild applause. The curtain came down, there were calls for an encore. They came on with *another* grand and did it all again for the encore.