

*'I like bananas': Popular songs of the 1920s
and 1930s*

I don't like giggling flappers
I don't like ancient crones
Ah but I like bananas
Because they have no bones

I can't bear tax collectors
Especially one who phones
Ah but I like bananas
Because they have no bones

Alan Breeze & Billy Cotton's Band, 'I Like Bananas
(Because They Have No Bones)'

POPULAR SONG WAS further transformed in the inter-war years as new musical influences from across the Atlantic interacted with older, local popular musical traditions. Over time, the combined influence of mass communication and a highly commercialised, transatlantic music industry gradual led to a greater degree of standardisation and homogenisation in popular music. But the boundaries of popular music remain as elusive as ever. In an age which tried to distinguish between "high-brow," "middle-brow" and "low-brow," was McCormack singing 'Che Gelida Manina' "highbrow" while McCormack singing "Danny Boy" "low brow?" Put another way, should Peter Dawson be excluded, despite the undoubted success of his "Floral Dance?" And what of Paul Robeson? The starting point for the analysis in this chapter is just under 300 songs, comprising the 182 identified in Nott's *Music for the*

People, and a further 107 included to address the limitations he notes.¹ In addition, the chapter considers communal songs in general and Irish songs in particular, based on an analysis of published community song-books.

The BBC *Yearbook* noted in 1931 ‘in these days ... songs are only written in the first instance as dance music, and the lyrics added after.’² Many new popular ‘songs,’ particularly in the 1920s, were little more than vocal refrains included in essentially instrumental pieces. This changed, in part, with the development of the microphone in the 1920s, which made possible a new style of singing, the controversial crooning. Singers such as Al Bowlly and ‘Whispering’ Jack Smith became recognized figures and songs became important in their own right. The impact of American composers, lyricists and performers, discernible in the Edwardian era, became even more pronounced, though there was something of a push-back from the mid-1930s. This in turn impacted on song content. From the hit songs of musical theatre and film to the product of Tin Pan Alley, romance was a major theme. The extent of ‘moon and June’ lyrics can be overstated, but there was a reaction against the more didactic elements of pre-war popular song. Similarly, the psychological and physical impact of the Great War undermined the appeal of the gung-ho jingoistic song. There were also significant elements of continuity in popular song. Pre-1914 music hall survived and adapted in a way that American vaudeville did not. Other traditions, notably choral singing, continued. Community singing, as a movement may have been short-lived, but communal singing in pubs and clubs as well as at home remained important.

The songs that were written in the 1920s and 1930s were the product of a changing society, one that was yet more urbanised and increasingly suburbanised, somewhat less undemocratic, somewhat less patriarchal; but also, a society that was conservative, adjusting slowly, conceding a little to the new to preserve much of the old. The relationship between the two was not straightforward. Popular songs were not, despite claims to the contrary, a-political entities, existing in a world of entertainment divorced from the harsh world of economics and politics, but neither were they direct, let alone coherent, responses to and commentaries on contemporary conditions.

Popular culture developed in and contributed to contemporary debates but reflected a range of different perspectives.

Love and marriage

The largest single category of popular song in the inter-war years comprised love songs, with their emphasis on companionship, happiness and marriage within a context in which marriage remained central and gender roles recognisably patriarchal. These songs were created and consumed at a time of anxious debate about gender roles and relationships. Old fears about the disruption of the 'natural' (patriarchal) society and the collapse of the institution of marriage re-emerged and collided with newer ideas and expectations, and, more importantly, with the newer realities of the socio-economic and political position of women. The tensions between a desire to return to the status quo ante bellum and a wish to create a better new world played out in different spheres, including the cultural.

Most love songs in the period, abounding with 'moons' and 'Junes' (and even the occasional 'mellow cello'), evoked positive images of happiness and personal satisfaction. Love transformed life: 'What a difference a day makes' and joy was in the air as 'Zing went the strings of my heart.' Declarations of love were ubiquitous: 'I'll be loving you – always.' Mutual love was praised: 'Sweetheart we need each other.' Parted lovers wistfully pined for each other in 'When It's Springtime in the Rockies' and 'Roll Along Prairie Moon.' For all the exuberance of an Al Jolson or Eddie Cantor, reminding us that 'Yes Sir, that's my baby,' there was no doubt that marriage was in sight as 'we walk up to the preacher.' Women fell for men 'so charming, strong and tall,' while men praised the charms of their beloved, though at times in language that struggled to combine modernity with old-fashioned romance: 'Susie' was 'classy ... a fair lassie' but 'Holy Moses! What a chassis!'³

In a minority of songs yearning was replaced by sorrow as love faded. There were remembrances of past love ('I'll See You in My Dreams' and 'Deep in a Dream'), solitariness ('If You Hadn't Gone Away' and 'Dancing With My Shadow') and the sadness of promises unfulfilled ('You Forgot to Remember'). The sadness behind the façade of happiness, evoked in songs such as 'Laugh, Clown, Laugh,' brought male emotion into

popular song in a way, perhaps more so in America, that provoked fears that traditional, stiff-upper-lip masculinity was being undermined.

Variations on the basic theme were played. The lure of the exotic could be achieved by changing the location to 'Sunny Havana,' 'Hindustan,' or simply 'South of the Border;' or by adding a character such as 'South American Joe' to a rumba tune. Similarly, Henry Hall's 'Play to Me Gypsy' used the still somewhat shocking tango, combining images of caravans and vagabonds, to add a sense of mystery to the lyrics. Some took a more light-hearted view of sexual encounters, such as 'Paddlin' Madeleine Home,' and 'Ma, He's Making Eyes at Me.' Others were melodramatically threatening, especially 'No! No! A Thousand Times No' and 'The Great Big Saw Came Nearer and Nearer,' in which dastardly villains were duly thwarted by heroic males. Some hinted at bawdy. 'Around the Corner and Under the Tree,' which survives as a children's song today, has more in common with the folksong, 'Gentleman Soldier,' in its evocation of casual sex. Worse was Roy Leslie's heroine, in 'She Was Only A Postmaster's Daughter,' who 'knew how to handle a mail.' Her various exploits guaranteed that the song was not played on the BBC.⁴ A very few songs laughed at the conventions of female beauty, though in a way that would be unacceptable today.⁵ In contrast to pre-war music hall, there were fewer warnings sounded about marriage, though dangers were highlighted in 'Seven Years With The Wrong Woman' and 'You'd Better Think Twice.' The cheerfulness of the opening verse of 'Makin' Whoopee' ('Another bride, another June/ Another sunny honeymoon') soon disappears as the happy couple are trapped, suspicious and non-communicative, though the emphasis was more on the problems of the husband, forced to wash and sew. In contrast, 'A Good Man Is Hard to Find,' for all its exhortation to 'treat your good man right,' stresses a woman's sadness and regret at being caught in an unhappy marriage.

The narrow 'love and marriage' focus was also reflected in a relative decline in the number of songs glorifying 'mother.' Sentimental songs from the immediate pre-war years, such as 'I Want A Girl Just Like the Girl That Married Dear Old Dad' and 'Daddy Has a Sweetheart (Mother Is Her Name),'

continued to be sung and the saccharine treatment continued in the immediate post-war period with 'That Old-Fashioned Mother of Mine,' 'Missouri Waltz' and 'Pal of My Cradle Days,' but such songs became increasingly rare thereafter.⁶

Feel-good and comedy songs

There was a more general feel-good approach to life in the songs. In the immediate post-war years, audiences were encouraged to 'Look For the Silver Lining,' but the depression years of the early 1930s saw a flood of optimistic songs. People were exhorted to count your blessings for 'The Best Things In Life Are Free,' to look adversity in the face and 'Pick Yourself Up,' and to be positive and direct your feet to 'The Sunny Side of the Street' because the grim days will soon be over, as there are 'Blue Skies Just Around the Corner.' The significance of these songs went beyond simply morale-boosting. There was a cross-class, conservative appeal to 'The Clouds Will Soon Roll By,' recorded by Ambrose and his orchestra and heard by a wider radio audience. In times of hardship and social division, there was an appeal for social cohesion. Importantly, there was no criticism of the economic status quo and the solution, and the responsibility for finding that solution, rested with the individual.⁷ There were exceptions. The lyrics of 'I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles,' were wistful. 'Fortune's always hiding' and bubbles might 'reach the sky' but 'like my dreams they fade and die.' But overall people were encouraged to believe that 'Happy Days Are Here Again.'⁸

The effects of feel-good songs were reinforced by a plethora of comic and novelty songs. Tongue-twister songs, such as 'Who Takes Care of the Caretaker's Daughter?' and 'I Miss My Swiss' would have been familiar to a pre-war audience. Nor would Harry Fay, singing 'I've Never Wronged an Onion,' sold as a comedy song foxtrot, have been out of place on the Edwardian music-hall.⁹ Many comedy songs, such as 'Did Tosti Raise His Bowler Hat' and 'Follow the Swallow' were essentially instrumental novelties. 'The Ogo Pogo,' marketed as 'The Funny Fox Trot,' was one of a number of 'songs' that cashed in on a variety of dance crazes, from 'The Charleston' and 'I'm Going to Charleston Back to Charleston,' both from 1935, to 'Booms A Daisy' in 1939.¹⁰

Comedy songs ranged over a variety of topics. Animals of varying degrees of cuteness featured frequently, from 'The Red, Red Robin' to 'Ferdinand the Bull.' Various vocalists exhorted their audiences, 'Let's All Sing Like the Birdies Sing,' and the Edwardian music-hall artist, Sam Mayo, found the answer to his earlier question of 'Where Do Flies Go in Winter?'¹¹ There were toys, ('The Toy Drum Major' and 'The General's Fast Asleep'); and fruit, particularly the once exotic banana. 'Yes We Have No Bananas' was determinedly pushed, not only by the popular music composer and publisher, Lawrence Wright, but also by Elders and Fyffes, the firm of banana importers, whose business had been hit by adverse weather in Jamaica and disruptions in London docks.¹² Numerous singers (not just Shirley Temple) sang of the delights of 'The Good Ship Lollipop.' At the same time, George Formby, having failed as a tribute act to his father, and with a little help from his wife, discovered the ukulele and a new comic persona that had him 'Leaning on a Lamp Post,' 'Cleaning Windows' and even in a Chinese laundry with Mr Woo, in a manner that showed seaside humour was flourishing.

Social and political comment

In comparison with pre-war music-hall, there was little social and political comment. Policeman occasionally appeared. 'P.C. 49,' a song written in 1913 but performed during and after the Great War, depicted the unfortunate officer as a victim. On his first day 'the kids threw mud and spoiled my clothes/A dozen navvies looked at me, then punched me on the nose.' The police were still to be gently mocked, especially following the establishment of the Police College at Hendon: 'A p'liceman's the latest profession/For which one must get a degree. They're putting out feelers/For gentlemen peelers.'¹³ The policeman as jovial, comic figure was more prominent. Harking back to Stan Stennett's Keystone Cops and Charles Austin's 'Parker P.C.,' Charles Penrose recorded 'The Laughing Policeman' in 1922, around whom he developed a series of sketches, which owed more to the laughing songs associated with 'Jolly' Jack Nash in the nineteenth century. The policeman as rogue all but disappeared. George Lashwood recorded 'Send for a Policeman' before the war but retained it in his later

repertoire. The main thrust of the song was clear. Sending for a bobby was 'the best thing you can do.' The most positive image was to be found in Ernest Longstaffe's 1928 song, 'What's the Matter With P.C. Brown?' to which the resounding answer was 'NOTHING!' Two important changes – the advent of the female police officer and the automobile – were reflected in song. The two were brought together in 'Gertie, The Girl with the Gong' by both Harry Roy and Ambrose with their respective orchestras in 1935. The tone was light-hearted – 'If you do more than thirty, then Gertie gets shirty' – and there was little sympathy for the law which limited speeding.¹⁴

Excepting the inane 'Lloyd George Knew My Father,' politicians did not feature in the popular songs of the inter-war years. Baldwin may have been more successful than Disraeli, but he was hardly charismatic. More dashing were film or recording stars. The cult of celebrity was to be seen in 'They Needed A Songbird in Heaven' and 'There's A New Star in Heaven Tonight,' which followed the deaths of Caruso and Valentino, respectively. In 1930, the feats of Amy ('Wonderful Amy') Johnson were celebrated in a specially written and much recorded song, following her heroic solo flight to Australia. Equally striking by its absence was the patriotic song, perhaps reflecting a reaction against the horrors of war and an (easily exaggerated) anti-war sentiment in the country. With the collapse of appeasement at the end of the 1930s, patriotic songs reappeared, though the tone varied. There was defiance: 'There'll Always Be An England' and the loyalist 'Gentlemen! The King.' There was pride in the armed services, old and new, in 'Wings Over the Navy' and 'Lords of the Air.' There was pathos, 'Wish Me Luck As You Wave Me Goodbye' and humour, 'We're Going to Hang out the Washing on the Siegfried Line.' And there was an opportunity to refashion a modest success by a simple change of lyrics. 'Run, Adolf Run' ensured that the unlikely 'Run, Rabbit Run' would become one of the most popular songs of World War II.

As English sales figures made clear, American music was very popular. Its novelty – cleverly written lyrics and catchy tunes – explains much of its attraction, but the new culture also resonated in the different context of interwar England. It was less constrained, less hierarchical, more open to all and

more optimistic. As such it appealed to those men and women whose horizons had been broadened during the war years, who wanted a better future and had no desire to return to the hidebound Edwardian days. The meaning of being a man or woman was being negotiated as much in popular music and popular literature as in “high-brow” literature and academic discourses. While traditionalists fear that masculinity was being undermined and feminised, there was greater opportunity for men to escape the mental constraints of Edwardian ‘imperial’ masculinity and to celebrate their joys and sorrows. Sentimental love songs, with their emphasis on shared joy in a companionate marriage – however unrealistic in practice – appealed to many women who wished to escape both the drudgery and subordination of married life. The lyrics may well have been banal but that did not mean that they did not serve a purpose. Similarly, the naïve optimism of ‘Ain’t We Got Fun’ or ‘Keep Your Sunny Side Up,’ which seems so incongruous in hindsight, provided both a positive vision and an escape from the harshness of everyday life. In a different way, comic songs brought a laugh that lightened an otherwise humdrum existence. They also point to the fusion of old and new. What could be more modern than an animated cartoon, especially one starring the jazz-age flapper, Betty Boop? But ‘No, No, A Thousand Times No’ was an old-fashioned melodrama that would not have been out of place in the 1890s.¹⁵

Pubs, clubs and community singing

Attendance at variety shows, record sales and the numbers listening to the BBC’s output of light music are important indicators of change but there was a substantial world of popular music, encompassing pubs, clubs and home, that cannot be measured. Yet any discussion of popular music between the wars would be incomplete without some consideration of it. Rowntree’s second survey of York, *Poverty and Progress* provides an insight into the continuing importance of pub and club-based music, even at a time the numbers listening to the radio or attending the cinemas in the city had increased significantly. The same was true of *Worktown* (Bolton), the subject of *Mass Observation*’s enquiry, which noted, not only that ‘Worktown people love music [and] singing’ but also, and

more perceptively, that 'there is nowhere else where they may sing the songs of their own choosing.'¹⁶ According to *MO* observers, 'sentimental and old-fashioned songs go much the best ... [and] the sad sort of Irish songs are popular.' However, 'mostly jazz songs are played and sung [but] the evening nearly always finishes with old-fashioned ones.'¹⁷

More visible, though short-lived, was the community singing movement of the mid-1920s.¹⁸ It was part of a broader trend, dating back to the late-Victorian years and continuing into the reign of Elizabeth. At a time when 'cultural nationalism' was a matter of serious concern in many parts of Europe, not least within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Carl Engel, noted in 1886 that 'it seems rather singular that England should not possess any printed collection of songs ... while almost every other European country possesses several comprehensive works of this kind.'¹⁹ There followed a lengthy debate about national songs, which for the most part, were seen to be synonymous with folk songs.²⁰ This was fiercely rejected by the indomitable Cecil Sharp who rejected the notion that a song with a known composer, no matter how popular over time, could be called a folk song. Notwithstanding this public and acrimonious spat, a growing number of people started to compile collections of 'national' songs intended to foster both patriotism and virtues such as self-reliance and constancy. The perceived need for an appropriate collection of songs for schools, and specifically boys, intensified in the immediate aftermath of the problematic second Boer War. In 1902 Cecil Sharp published his *British Songs for Home and School* and the following year saw the appearance of S Nicholson's *British Songs for British Boys* and W H Hadow's *Songs of the British Islands*.²¹ The latter had a significant impact on the most influential publication, namely C V Stanford's *New National Song Book*, which in subsequent years was distributed to all but the remotest of schools. The intention of its advocates can be established with relative ease. More problematic is the extent to which these songs (and their sentiments) were taken up in schools and the wider population. In the light of later reminiscences, it is not implausible to argue that there was, at least, a core of songs that were widely known and sung before and after the Great War.

The New National Song Book subtitled 'A Complete Collection

of the Folk-Songs, Carols and Rounds suggested by the Board of Education,' contained only 30 carols and rounds out of a total of 202 pieces. 168 folk-songs were presented by nation – 50 English, 50 Irish, 35 Welsh and 33 Scotch – and four songs, 'The Land of My Fathers,' 'Auld Lang Syne,' 'Rule, Britannia' and 'God Save the King,' standing alone. Some songs were less well known – for example, 'Lady Nairn's 'The Auld Hoose' or 'Weep Not I Pray' – but there is an identifiable core of songs, most reprinted in other collections, that were more widely known. These include, among the English songs, 'Come Lasses and Lads,' 'Heart of Oak,' 'The Bailiff's Daughter of Islington' and 'The Roast Beef of Old England' as well as 'The British Grenadiers,' among the Scotch songs, 'The Bluebells of Scotland,' 'The Campbells Are Coming,' 'Charlie Is My Darling' and 'Auld Lang Syne;' among the Irish songs, 'The Minstrel Boy,' 'The Harp That Once Thro' Tara's Hall' and 'The Meeting of the Waters;' and among the Welsh songs, 'All Through the Night,' 'Men of Harlech' and 'David of the White Rock' as well as 'Land of My Fathers.'²² Stanford's song collection, and others like it, was in part a narrow reaction against commercial popular music, but it was also a more general reaction to ever-increasing urbanization, seen particularly in the English 'rural idyll' song. It was also a response to the perceived challenge to Empire through the assertion of plucky patriotism. Above all, in these collections there was an attempt to conjure up a sense of shared community which encompassed the four nations of the United Kingdom.

The community singing movement of the mid-1920s was a continuation of this trend and for its advocates there was a clear determination to create a sense of a unified, patriotic community.²³ For some, the impact of the Great War, the severe loss of life in the immediate post-war years, the severe economic slump of the early 1920s and the social tensions that culminated in the General Strike made yet more imperative the need for communal activity. At the height of the community singing movement, there was a corpus of songs that were sufficiently well known to be sung with gusto at a variety of events across the country, of which the cup final was the best known. Community singing as a movement was short-lived but communal singing continued, not just through the 1920s and 1930s and the war years but well into the 1950s, and

in private as well as in public. The two most important song collections, the *News Chronicle Song Book* and the *Daily Express Community Song Book* were substantial, hard-back collections of over 200 songs, though there were cheaper, word-only versions. In addition, various publishers produced smaller but cheaper collections. One of the earliest was Hawkes & Son, *More Than Twice 55 Community Songs* (there were 115 songs in total, though eight were words only) for 6d., while Francis, Day and Hunter brought out six albums, four with thirty-two songs, two with thirty, also for 6d., in the early 1930s.

Russell talks of 'a specific "community song" genre' which denied that 'popular modernity had arrived in the musical sphere' by ignoring 'British commercial popular song of both the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and their frequently American or American-influenced counterparts of the present day.'²⁴ The "community song" genre, he argues, comprised national songs, such as John Peel's and 'All Through the Night,' a smaller number of music-hall songs specifically related to the Great War, notably 'Tipperary,' and then a variety of carols and hymns, of which 'Abide With Me' was the most popular. While these broad contours are largely correct, some modification is required. Francis, Day & Hunter included very few carols and rounds (c.5 per cent) whereas for the *News Chronicle* and Hawkes & Son the figure was about 25 per cent. There were more songs from England than from the rest of the United Kingdom, especially in the *News Chronicle* selection. American songs were a small part of the *Daily Express* collection but were twice as common in others. Music-hall songs associated with the Great War were a distinctive feature of the *Daily Express* collection, which was unique in identifying war songs. Music-hall songs featured not at all in the *Daily Express* and *News Chronicle* collections but favourites such as 'Daisy Bell,' 'Ask a P'liceman,' 'The Blind Boy' and 'Where Did You Get That Hat,' accounted for 25 per cent of the songs in the Francis, Day & Hunter song books, and the very cheap, *Everybody's Sing-Song Book* published by Herman Darewski was overwhelmingly made up of music-hall songs including 'Any Old Iron' and 'Arf a Pint of Ale.' By the mid-1930s some publishers, aware of consumer demand, were including 'modern' songs in their community song collections. Francis,

Day & Hunters' *Community Song Book*, volume 7, published in 1935, contained Wendell Hall's 1920 hit, 'It Ain't Gonna Rain No Mo'" and the Gracie Field hit, 'Sing As We Go,' from the 1934 film of the same name. Volume 8 contained three recent novelty songs: 'I Lift Up My Finger (And I Say Tweet, Tweet),' 'And the Great Big Saw Came Nearer and Nearer (to Poor Little Vera),' and 'Olga Pulloffski, the Beautiful Spy.'

Nonetheless, an analysis of the community song collections published from the mid-1920s to the late-1930s, reveals a core of some forty songs that can be categorised as follows: national songs ('Rule Britannia' and 'The British Grenadier'); English songs ('John Peel' and 'Come Lasses and Lads'); nautical songs ('The Bay of Biscay' and 'Shenandoah'); Scottish songs ('The Blue Bells of Scotland' and 'Loch Lomond'); Welsh songs ('Men of Harlech' and 'All Through the Night'); Irish songs ('The Minstrel Boy' and 'Cockles and Mussels'); but also American songs ('Marching Thro' Georgia' and 'Old Folks at Home). There is a striking degree of continuity between the pre- and post-war core songs, with the partial exception of Irish songs and the complete (and obvious) exception of American songs which did not feature at all in Stanford.²⁵ By featuring songs from all parts of the United Kingdom, the community song books of the inter-war years continued the notion of a shared community that embraced country and class. However, the greater emphasis on English songs strengthened the 'English' values that had been praised in Stanford: a pugnacious, if not warlike, island people but in an idyllic rural setting.

Irish songs

A further feature of these years, perhaps indicative of the need for publishers of sheet music to find new markets, were the attempts to provide more focussed collections, particularly of Irish songs. Francis, Day & Hunter had been producing specifically Irish song books since before the Great War and continued to do so thereafter. Their 1935 *Community Book of Irish Songs* contained 30 songs, of which 24 (80 per cent) had appeared in a similar publication of 1904.²⁶ The enduring songs ranged from the romantic ('The Gentle Maiden' and 'The Rose of Tralee'), through the romanticised Ireland ('Dear Little Shamrock' and 'Oh! Arranmore') to émigré laments ('Come Back to Erin' and

'The Irish Emigrant'). Predictably, there were comic songs, such as 'Paddy McGinty's Goat' and 'At Finnegan's Ball,' and there were a small number of patriotic songs, notably 'Rory O'More' and 'The Wearin' of the Green.'

The publication of Irish song collections is a reminder of the importance of the Irish diaspora, particularly in the cities and large towns; but Irish songs appealed to a wider audience. The recordings and radio appearances of John McCormack, of 'the strolling vagabond,' Cavan O'Connor, and even of Peter Dawson, with his 'Kerry Dance' and 'Off to Philadelphia in the Morning,' brought a range of songs, not least those of Thomas Moore, to a wider audience. In so doing, they created a particular image of Ireland. The Irishman as a jovial, if somewhat comic figure comes across in 'Off to Philadelphia,' 'At Finnegan's Ball' and 'Paddy McGinty's Goat.' The Irish 'colleen' as an innocent beauty appears in 'The Garden Where the Praties Grow' and 'The Gentle Maiden,' while an idyllic Ireland is captured in 'Dear Little Shamrock,' 'Killarney' and 'Oh! Arranmore.' It is a non-threatening image of Ireland and the Irish, one more acceptable to the non-Irish majority, especially in England but it may also be a retreat into a romanticised, if at times heroic though unsuccessful past, into which some second-generation Irish were prepared to buy.²⁷ Francis, Day & Hunter did include 'The Wearing of the Green,' with its references to 'the most distressful country that ever yet was seen' and 'England's cruel red' but the song ends with Ireland's sons leaving 'the dear ould isle' for a better land across the sea. There is none of the defiance and threat of 'The West's Awake,' 'A Nation Once Again' or 'God Save Ireland.' While it is true that 'the minstrel boy to the war is gone,' he fell, leaving only 'songs ... for the pure and free [that] shall never sound in slavery.'²⁸

Some concluding observations

Within a generation, from the eve of the first world war to the eve of the second world war, popular song became less parochial and more commercialised. Most striking, was the impact of Tin Pan Alley. Its music could be heard on stage, on radio and record, and at the cinema. It found a ready market, notwithstanding the attempts to resist the American

invasion. Fears of ‘Americanization’ proved to be exaggerated. The older music hall tradition, showed itself to be resilient and adaptable, notably in the 1930s. Once again, there was a fusion of old and new, amply demonstrated by Gracie Fields and George Formby, whose careers embraced the stage, the recording studio and the cinema and whose repertoire ranged from the recognisably modern, sentimental love song, to the old-fashioned comic song.

Endnotes

- 1 J Nott, *Music for the People: Popular Music and Dance in Interwar Britain*, Oxford University Press, 2002, Appendix, pp.236-44
- 2 *BBC Yearbook* 1931, p.207 cited in A Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*, volume 2, Oxford University Press, 1995, p.79
- 3 ‘If you knew Susie, like I know Susie’ was a 1925 song. She also wears ‘long tresses and nice tight dresses.’
- 4 Other verses featured ‘a magistrate’s daughter [who] knew what to do on the bench’
- 5 O Katharina. O Katharina/To keep my love you must be leaner
There’s so much of you/Two could love you
Learn to swim/Join a gym/Eat Farina, O Katharina
- 6 ‘Me and the Old Folks at Home’ (1935) is one of the few exceptions.
‘His Majesty the Baby’ (1935) was a novelty song poking gentle fun at the centrality of the new addition to the family.
- 7 D B Scott, ‘Incongruity and Predictability in British Dance Band Music,’ *Musical Quarterly*, 78(2), 1994, pp.290-315 at p.296
- 8 The song took on particular significance in America when F D Roosevelt adopted it as his campaign tune.
- 9 Fay can be heard at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DFW3kJjVxY0>
- 10 Other titles include ‘Tiger Rag,’ ‘Do Wacha Doo’ and ‘La Cucaracha’ as well as better-known standards, such as ‘Fascinating Rhythm’ and ‘Sweet Georgia Brown.’
- 11 They went home in search of Christmas pudding!
- 12 Following the publication of ‘I’ve Never Seen a Straight Banana,’ Wright also offered a prize of £1000 if such a specimen could be produced.
- 13 C Pulling, *They Were Singing*, George & Harrap, London, 1952, p. 103.
- 14 For a fuller discussion of motoring and the law see K Laybourn and D Taylor, *Policing in England and Wales, 1918-39*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2011, chapter 7.
- 15 ‘No, No a Thousand Times No’ was best known as a Betty Boop cartoon.
See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hS4_qDTd-WY

- 16 *Mass Observation: The Pub and the People. A Worktown Study*, 1943, reprinted London, Faber & Faber, 2009, p.259
- 17 *The Pub and the People*, p.261, Richard Hoggart, writing of the 1950s, makes a similar point about the intermingling of old and new songs. R Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life*, 1st published 1957, reprinted Penguin, London, 2009, pp.135-144.
- 18 D Russell, 'Abiding Memories: The Community Singing Movement and English Social Life in the 1920s,' *Popular Music*, 27(1), 2008, pp.117-33.
- 19 C Engel, *An Introduction to the Study of National Music*, London, Longman, 1866, p.32 cited in S Roud, *Folk Song in England*, London, Faber & Faber, 2017, p.116.
- 20 G Cox, 'Towards the National Song Book: The History of an Idea,' *British Journal of Musical Education*, 9, 1992, pp.239-53
- 21 Hadow's collection was unusual in that it was divided into section titled, elementary, intermediate, and advanced as well as duets and choruses and melodies (without words). When rearranged in line with Stanford's collection the degree of overlap is striking.
- 22 Although there is a strong element of subjectivity in identifying 'core' songs, the following list is predicated on the assumption, backed up by scattered anecdotal evidence, that a large number of people knew at least the chorus and probably the opening verse of the following. As well as the four self-standing songs noted above, the full list of core songs is as follows. English: 'The Keel Row,' 'John Peel,' 'The Bailiff's Daughter of Islington,' 'The British Grenadiers,' 'The Roast beef of Old England,' 'A-hunting We Will Go,' 'Come Lasses and Lads,' 'Begone Dull Care,' 'Drink to Me Only,' 'Early One Morning,' 'The Mermaid,' 'The Bay of Biscay,' 'Tom Bowling,' 'The Golden Vanity,' 'The Girl I Left Behind Me,' 'Heart of Oak,' 'Golden Slumbers' and 'The Lass of Richmond Hill.' Scotch: 'The Bluebells of Scotland,' 'Afton Waters,' 'Annie Laurie,' 'Charlie Is My Darling,' 'Scots Wha Hae,' 'The Campbells Are Coming,' 'Bonnie Dundee,' 'Robin Adair,' 'The Hundred Pipers,' 'Ye Banks and Braes of Bonnie Doon' and 'Caller Herrin'.' Irish: 'The Minstrel Boy,' 'The Harp that Once Thro' Tara's Hall,' 'The Meeting of the Waters' and 'Derby Kelly.' Welsh: 'All Through the Night,' 'The Ash Grove,' 'Men of Harlech,' 'David of the White Rock' and 'The Blackbird.'
- 23 Russell, 'Abiding Memories,' p.126
- 24 'Russell, 'Abiding Memories,' p128 & p.129
- 25 Of six core English songs in the 1920s/30s only 'Lincolnshire Poacher' did not feature before the war. Among eight Scottish core songs only 'Loch Lomond' and 'The Last Rose of Summer' did not feature in the pre-war list, while all five core Welsh songs were to be found among the pre-1914 core songs
- 26 Most of the songs considered popular enough for publication in 1904 that did not survive were comedy numbers that had dated badly, such as the so-called Irish coon song, 'Bedelia.' Of those that were not to be found in the pre-war collection, two at least are surprising – 'The Last Rose of Summer' and 'The Minstrel Boy,' both Thomas Moore songs.
- 27 More detailed research is required on this. My observation relies heavily on anecdotal evidence from older family members for whom a London-Irish

- identity involved emphasising the sentimental and the comic. But see M Leonard, 'Performing Identities: music and dance in the Irish communities of Coventry and Liverpool,' *Social & Cultural Geography*, 6(4), 2006, pp.515-29
- 28 T M Love, 'Gender and the Nationalistic Ballad: Thomas Davis, Thomas Moore, and Their Song,' *New Hibernia Review*, 21(1), 2017, pp.69-85, S B Kress, 'The Music of the Sentimental Nationalist Heart: Thomas Moore and Seamus Heaney,' *New Hibernia Review*, 15(1), 2011, pp.123-37 and R Parfitt, 'Oh what matter when for Erin dear we fall,' *Irish Studies Review*, 23, 2015, pp.480-94.