

Television and Pop The Case of the 1950s

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While the Postmaster General (PMG) may seem an unlikely candidate for a place in the history of rock'n'roll he did, nonetheless, make a small but important contribution to its advance in the 1950s. Under the terms of the Television Act of 1954, which had paved the way for commercial television, the PMG was responsible for the allocation of television hours. Up until 1957, the most striking consequence of this arrangement was the closed period on television between 6–7 pm. Known colloquially as the 'toddler's truce', it was designed to allow parents to put their children to bed free of the distractions of television. When ITV was launched in September 1955, the commercial companies had complied with this requirement but, in the face of financial losses the following summer, had petitioned the then PMG, Charles Hill, for the ban's removal. Hill, who felt 'it was the responsibility of parents, not the State, to put their children to bed at the right time', was sympathetic and persuaded the Government to agree to a change, with the result that the 'toddler's truce' on Mondays to Saturdays was formally ended on Saturday 16 February 1957.¹ At 6 pm that evening, the BBC broadcast a five-minute news bulletin, followed by a new programme aimed at young people and featuring live music. *Six-Five Special* was born and a small piece of both television and rock'n'roll history was made.

Although *Six-Five Special* is often regarded as a watershed in television's treatment of pop music it was not, of course, without precursors. The growth of the record industry during the 1950s and the compilation of the charts on the basis of record sales, rather than sales of sheet music, had already aroused television interest. The BBC itself had launched its own version of the US TV show, *Hit Parade* in 1952 and revived it in October 1955. This consisted of a selection of songs from those currently featuring in the Top Twenty as well as one 'standard'. The songs were not performed by the original artists, however, but by a team of residents, led by Petula Clark and Dennis Lotis, who not only sang, but also acted out the songs in an appropriate setting ('dramatic, humorous, tearful or sentimental').² *Hit Parade*'s producer, Francis Essex, was also responsible for the BBC's *Off the Record* launched in May 1955. This attempted to deal with various aspects of the record industry, providing news, 'behind the scenes' interviews and even small features (such as a 'Life of a Disc' profile recorded at EMI). The bulk of the show, however, was devoted to a varying roster of singers and bands performing in the studio, introduced by the veteran bandleader Jack Payne.

These included, in the first show, Max Bygraves, the Four Aces (then in the charts with their version of 'Stranger in Paradise'), Ronnie Hilton and Alma Cogan (performing her subsequent No. 1, 'Dreamboat'). As these performers and titles suggest, both shows, although linked to the charts, were showbiz in orientation and tied to the popular music traditions of Tin Pan Alley.³

This was also true of ITV's first venture into the field, ABC TV Music Shop, which appeared on their third day of transmission. This too consisted of current recording stars performing in the studio, although with more of an emphasis on US performers than in *Off the Record* (Teddy Johnson, Pearl Carr and Josh White, for example, all put in an early appearance). The bias of these shows, however, was hardly surprising. Although Bill Haley and the Comets had entered the British charts as early as January 1955 with 'Shake, Rattle and Roll', it was not until relatively late the following year that rock'n'roll was to make major inroads into the British Top Twenty. As a result, it was not until the end of 1956 (December 31, in fact) that the first show to register this musical shift appeared.

Made for Associated-Rediffusion, *Cool for Cats* was initially only to be seen in the London region, first on Mondays at 7.15 pm and then on Thursdays. The idea for the programme belonged to the Fleet Street journalist, Ker Robertson, who not only selected the records to be played, but also presented the opening shows. However, the fact that he was 'balding, bespectacled and middle-aged' was not, perhaps, the ideal qualification for the host of 'a teenage disc show' and by the end of the first month he had handed over to the marginally more youthful Kent Walton (aged thirty-eight).⁴ The show itself was short – only fifteen minutes – and consisted of the presenter's comments on the discs plus visual interpretations of the music, devised and directed by Joan Kemp-Welch. These usually consisted of dance sequences, employing a regular troupe of dancers choreographed by Douglas Squires, but they could also be more abstract in nature. 'Sometimes I'll use just hands miming', Kemp-Welch told the *TV Times*, 'or close-ups of bowls of flowers for a sentimental number.'⁵ The show proved sufficiently successful to be nationally networked twice a week in June 1957 and continued to run, in one form or another, until December 1959.

Cool for Cats' lead in the televising of pop was, however, short-lived. *Six-Five Special* followed it only six weeks later and quickly established itself with an audience of between six and seven million. Although the programme soon became a corner-stone of the BBC's Saturday evening schedule, its appearance was largely fortuitous. The Corporation had actively opposed the ending of the 'toddler's truce' and, when it became clear that the ban would end anyway, sought to delay its implementation. Failing to do so, their response was to look for stop-gap programmes which could be mounted both quickly and cheaply. Thus, *Six-Five Special* was intended to run for only six weeks (on a budget of £1,000 per show), and was still at a relatively early stage of planning at the end of January 1957. *Tonight*, the news magazine programme called upon to fill the gap on Mondays to Fridays, was still without a title a week before its launch.⁶

The benefit of this haste, however, was that it not only created openings for young programme-makers (Jack Good, the co-producer of *Six-Five Special* was only twenty-six while *Tonight's* producer, Alasdair Milne, was twenty-seven), but

also allowed them a relative freedom to experiment with new programme ideas. It was thus with some surprise that both programmes were greeted by the press. 'Yes, it was BBC, not ITV', observed one review of *Six-Five Special*, 'just the kind of thing, in fact, you might have expected from ITV.'⁷ The irony, in this case, was that ITV had shown none of the same enterprise and had opted instead for an episode of *The Adventures of Sir Lancelot* followed by a repeat of a short play, *The Stolen Pearl*. That the BBC had apparently stolen a march on their commercial rival, however, was less the result of competitive vigour, at a time of falling audience figures, than the unexpected by-product of an initial reluctance to change.

But, while the association of pop on television with six o'clock on Saturday was largely coincidental, it did have a significant influence on the way televised pop developed in the 1950s. The ending of the 'toddler's truce' had forced broadcasters to anticipate the kind of viewer who might watch at this hour. Thus, the magazine format of *Tonight* was orientated towards those returning home from work and who might be expected to 'switch on at any time'. This would not be the case on a Saturday and here a programme aimed at young people seemed the natural choice to fill the gap between children's television in the late afternoon and proper 'grown-ups' TV in the evening.

However, it was also unlikely that only teenagers would be watching at this hour and any programme occupying this slot could not afford to be too exclusive in its appeal, especially given the importance of the hour for 'catching' the audience for the evening (one of the possible titles for *Six-Five Special* was, in fact, 'Start the Night Right').⁸ In the cinema, 'teenpics' could be successfully targeted at the increasingly important youth audience, but television, with only two channels, had to make more of an allowance for the domestic and familial context in which it was received and hence the more heterogeneous nature of its audience.⁹ This was especially true, perhaps, of what the press had dubbed 'tea-time TV', with its implied image of the family gathered around the television set while eating. With the launch of *Six-Five Special*, it was also Saturday tea-time when pop music was most likely to be seen on TV in the years which immediately followed. As a result, the programmes called upon to fill this slot were engaged in a balancing act, attempting to satisfy a specifically teenage audience on the one hand, and a more generally adult one on the other. It was thus with some pride that the BBC were able to report in their annual handbook that while 'primarily designed for a teen-aged audience', *Six-Five Special* had become, nevertheless, 'a national institution equally enjoyed by the parents'.¹⁰

This desire to cater to both young and old was already implicit in the show's early billing as the 'bright "new look" programme' aimed not simply at young people but 'the young in spirit of all ages'.¹¹ It was also evident in the show's format, which was much more of a mix than is commonly remembered. This took the form of a cross between a variety show and a magazine programme, in which musical acts, of various kinds, were interspersed with comic turns and special items. This mixture was designed not only to broaden the show's appeal, but also to temper, in the appropriate Reithian manner, the programme's offerings of entertainment with small doses of information and education. The pro-

gramme's design, in this respect, is often regarded as something of a compromise between the show's main inspiration and co-producer, Jack Good, and the BBC. Whereas Good wished to bring the excitement and energy of rock'n'roll to television, the BBC management were clearly reluctant simply to indulge what it still regarded as no more than a passing fad. Only a month after the programme's start, for example, the Assistant Head of Light Entertainment, Tom Sloan, was anticipating rock'n'roll's demise and warning the show's producers that, 'as Rock and Roll diminishes it is important to introduce . . . more items of general interest'.¹²

The nature of this compromise was well illustrated by the very first show. This was presented by Pete Murray and the show's co-producer, Josephine Douglas. Like so many pop programmes before and after, both hosts, and especially Douglas, were too 'old' and too obviously 'professional' to be entirely convincing to a teenage audience. 'Several viewers . . . suggested that neither was really suitable, either in age or personality, for this particular job', the BBC's Audience Research Department subsequently reported. 'In their opinion a programme for teenagers should be introduced by teenagers.'¹³ However, Douglas, middle class and smartly dressed, did provide the show with a sensible presence, reassuring older viewers that they were not excluded from the programme and that it was unlikely to get out of hand. Her role, in this respect, was well brought out by her opening exchange with Murray, in which the programme's twin forms of address were clearly presented:

Pete: Hi there, welcome aboard the Six-Five Special. We've got almost a hundred cats jumping here, some real cool characters to give us the gas, so just get with it and have a ball.

Jo: Well I'm just a square it seems, but for all the other squares with us, roughly translated what Peter Murray just said was, we've got some lively musicians and personalities mingling with us here, so just relax and catch the mood from us. . . .¹⁴

This judicious balancing of young and old, the entertaining and educational, was also apparent in the show which followed. The musical numbers, for example, were deliberately varied and designed to provide a balance of pace and style. Kenny Baker and his jazz band played the show in and out, while the singer Michael Holliday contributed a couple of ballads. The rock'n'roll meanwhile was provided by Bobbie and Rudy and the King Brothers. The most unexpected musical item, however, was undoubtedly the appearance of the classical pianist, Pouishnoff, performing a selection from Beethoven and Chopin. Although a member of the audience was enlisted to voice her approval ('It doesn't matter what sort it is . . . if the music's good I like it'), it was evident that, whatever the desire of the programme to provide musical uplift, classical music did not really fit the bill. The programme persevered with a classical item for a few more weeks, but then it was quietly dropped.

Other regular features were also begun. There was a film extract (Little Richard in *Don't Knock the Rock*) and a 'Star Spotlight' featuring a light-hearted

interview with the film actress Lisa Gastoni. More unusually, the boxer Freddie Mills was recruited to present a sports item featuring lesser-known activities. This began somewhat comically with a demonstration by two Hungarian musclemen, the Herculean Balancers. 'If you're going to rock'n'roll properly you need to have your muscles in pretty good shape', Freddie Mills explained, after he had been carried in by the two Hungarian heavyweights.

Finally, the programme included a filmed feature profiling the Brady Boys' Youth Club choir, who performed a selection of folk songs. Along with the sports spot (which subsequently featured judo, swimming and boxing), it was the filmed feature (usually narrated by Josephine Douglas) which was most characteristically dedicated to educating the audience or encouraging them to more active and sensible pursuits. These could, however, give the impression of being rather artificially grafted on to the show. In one edition (31 August 1957), for example, the bandleader Ray Anthony was encouraged to demonstrate the new 'American dance sensation', the Bunny Hop. This he proceeded to do before leading his fellow dancers in a conga-like bunny hop around the studio. No sooner had this rather bizarre activity been concluded, however, than the programme was off to Wales to join a climbing expedition.

It was, however, the music which was the show's most important feature. Although this was varied, four main types of music tended to predominate: rock'n'roll, skiffle, traditional jazz and ballads. The show, in fact, developed a particularly strong association with skiffle – its eventual theme tune was performed by the Bud Cort skiffle group, Lonnie Donegan, Chas McDevitt and Willie McCormick all made regular appearances and the show even launched its own skiffle competition – but it was its links with rock'n'roll for which the programme became most famous. It was only a few months before the start of the programme that rock'n'roll had really arrived in Britain. Elvis Presley had enjoyed his first British hit with 'Heartbreak Hotel' in May 1956, *Rock Around the Clock* had reached the cinemas in September, while Britain's first native rock'n'roller (and an early guest on *Six-Five Special*), Tommy Steele, had entered the charts for the first time with 'Rock Around the Cavemen' in October. And, it was precisely because rock'n'roll was so new in Britain that *Six-Five Special* was able to play such an important role in its growth.

This was evident both in the programme's ability to influence record sales (The Diamonds' 'Little Darlin', for example, was an early beneficiary) and to provide an important stepping-stone to success for individual artists. Partly because of the show's budget and partly because so few American rock'n'rollers were visiting Britain (Presley refused to come at all), the show was heavily dependent on British talent. As, at this stage, few enough British rock'n'roll acts existed, or were established, the show became an important launching-pad for new discoveries. The programme's power, in this regard, was quickly demonstrated by the case of the hapless Terry Dene, Britain's first rock'n'roll star after Steele but also its earliest casualty.¹⁵ Appearing on *Six-Five Special* in April, he entered the charts shortly afterwards with his cover of Marty Robbins' 'A White Sports Coat'. More hits and even a film, very loosely based on his career, *The Golden Disc*, were to follow. Other singers were also to benefit. Jim Dale, who

subsequently became the show's presenter, and Marty Wilde were two of the best known, but there was also a string of *Six-Five* regulars, such as the King Brothers, the Mudlarks and Don Lang, who were to achieve chart success as a result of appearing on the show.

However, for at least one reviewer it was not these performers but the teenage audience who were 'the real stars of the show'.¹⁶ For central to the show's conception, and an important part of its appeal, was not just the live music but the dancing in the studio. This idea was not entirely new. In Philadelphia, *Bandstand* (subsequently *American Bandstand*) had already used teenage dancing to good effect.¹⁷ However, in the context of British television the innovation was striking and, if Palmer is to be believed, the source of some consternation at the BBC who initially opposed Good's plans for scenes of 'wild abandon'.¹⁸ If this was the case, the objections quickly dissolved and by the time of the programme's anniversary the Controller of Programmes, Kenneth Adam, was even lamenting the loss of time devoted to watching the audience, the very feature, he observed, which had 'put the programme on the map in the first place'.¹⁹

The appeal of the studio audience, in this respect, was not just their contribution to the informal party atmosphere enjoyed by many viewers, but also their role as unofficial guides to the latest fashions in clothes, haircuts and, above all, dancing. The programme encouraged this last interest, in particular, by running dance competitions (offering LP vouchers to the couple who could 'cut the coolest capers' in the first show) and recruiting 'experts' to demonstrate the latest dance crazes (or, as in one show, the difference between 'rock'n'roll' and 'jive dancing'). Dancing was also integral to the show's presentation of the music. The bands generally performed on slightly raised rostra while the audience danced in front. During musical numbers the cameras would cut between the performers and the dancers, who were usually shot either from above or by cameras roving the studio floor. Singers would also join the dancers and occasionally perform surrounded by members of the audience while having, as one viewer put it, to 'fight their way towards the cameras'.²⁰

In order to maintain the energy levels of such scenes, rehearsals for the show were kept to a minimum. There would be a band-call on Friday morning but, apart from that, all the rehearsal took place on the Saturday. The various acts would be rehearsed during the day, followed by a preliminary session – 'more of a try-out than a run through' – at 3 pm.²¹ A final run through then took place at 4.30 pm, leaving half an hour to spare before the actual show. This schedule became even more exhausting once the show began touring. The programme's normal home was Lime Grove, subsequently the Riverside studios, in London, but the programme also took to the road at an early stage, broadcasting a special, for example, from Glasgow in May 1957.

The most famous of the programme's outside broadcasts, however, was undoubtedly its trip to the 'birthplace' of British rock'n'roll, The Two I's Coffee Bar in Old Compton Street on 16 November. With cameras placed both upstairs and in the basement, performers, audience and crew cheerfully jostled for position. Owner Paul Lincoln dutifully defended rock'n'roll against its detractors, Terry Dene was seen in a clip from *The Golden Disc* and teenagers hand-jived

happily. Meanwhile, an assortment of *Six-Five* regulars and Two I's residents belted out a succession of numbers, culminating in a version of 'Rockin' at the Two I's' by the unlikely combination of Two I's favourite, Wee Willie Harris, the King Brothers and Mike and Bernie Winters. Even the Deputy Director, Cecil McGivern, was aroused. 'This edition', he wrote the following Monday, 'was not only extraordinary but extraordinarily good. It was first class television as well as first class entertainment.'²²

Ironically, this show was also destined to be one of Jack Good's last. Good and the BBC had never seemed entirely at ease with each other and it was possible that the arrival of a new co-producer, Dennis Main Wilson, in November (following the decision of Josephine Douglas to go freelance) had been the source of some friction. The immediate cause of Good's departure, however, appears to have been his decision to proceed with a *Six-Five Special* stage show against the wishes of the BBC, and, on 9 January 1958, the Corporation announced that it was not renewing Good's contract. Duncan Wood was brought in to replace him and share production duties with Main Wilson. Billy Cotton Jr joined them later.

The BBC's attitude towards Good's departure was surprisingly complacent. Only days after Good's dismissal, the Controller of Programmes, Kenneth Adam, announced that he had been concerned about the way in which the programme had been developing anyway, mentioning, in particular, its excessive reliance on rock'n'roll, and called for a review of the programme's policy.²³ Once this was completed, he felt happy that the change in producers had been made 'only just in time'.²⁴ Subsequent events, however, were to prove him badly wrong. Once Good had left, the show never regained its full momentum, despite (or perhaps, because of) a succession of changes in personnel and format. More importantly, Good himself was subsequently to join the opposition and it was his new show, *Oh Boy!* which was finally to deal a death-blow to the programme he had once created.

Oh Boy! was made for ABC and began with a trial run in the Midlands in June 1958 (not long after *The Crickets* had enjoyed a three month run in the charts with the song 'Oh Boy'). It was nationally networked from 12 September and scheduled in direct competition with *Six-Five Special* at 6-6.30 pm. The programme represented, in some regards, what Good had wanted all along. Apart from the occasional piece of comic knockabout courtesy of the show's two hosts, Tony Hall and Jimmy Henney, *Oh Boy!* discarded all of *Six-Five Special*'s variety acts and magazine features in favour of non-stop music. The programme was broadcast live each week from the Hackney Empire and, whereas *Six-Five Special* had tried to recreate a party atmosphere, *Oh Boy!* sought to generate the excitement of a live stage show. Its central tactic, in this regard, was speed. Billed in the *TV Times* as 'an explosion of beat music', the programme aimed to pack as many musical numbers into each show as possible (managing seventeen in twenty-six minutes in the very last one) and nothing was allowed to interrupt the flow.

This was particularly noticeable in the case of the presenters, who were allowed none of the limelight enjoyed by Pete Murray and Josephine Douglas in *Six-Five Special*. They generally appeared at the beginning and end of the show

but were otherwise kept out of sight. Their introductions to the acts, if they existed at all, were simply heard. Instead, the cameras cut, without pause, from one act to the next, or a singer would just appear and take over the microphone before the previous song was barely completed. This rapid succession of numbers also left no time to dwell on the audience, who rarely appeared in front of the cameras as they had in *Six-Five Special*. A shot of a group in the balcony was used to accompany the opening titles, but after that, bar the very occasional view from the stage, the audience remained unseen. They were, however, heard. A constant barrage of applause and screaming carried on throughout the programme and did much to add to the overall sense of frenzy.

The music itself was provided by a mix of guests and resident performers. The residents were led by the show's musical director, Harry Robinson, and his band. Lord Rockingham's XI (whose constant appearances on the show helped them to a No.1 hit with the novelty number, 'Hoots Mon'); The Vernons Girls, a song and dance troupe originally recruited from employees of the pools company; and The Dallas Boys (in fact, a five-piece from Leicester) also provided regular support. Although the show, like *Six-Five Special*, was obliged to make the odd concession to musical variety (the occasional ballad, comic number or song and dance routine), the emphasis was firmly on rock'n'roll. *Six-Five* veteran Marty Wilde was also a resident and many of the new acts with which the show became

Six-Five Special, 1957: Don Lang and the Frantic Five take a break in rehearsal.



associated – Billy Fury, Dickey Pride, Vince Eager, Cuddly Dudley – were drawn, like Wilde, from the Larry Parnes stable of rock'n'rollers.

The show's greatest discovery, however, was undoubtedly Cliff Richard. He appeared on the very first show and within two weeks had entered the charts with 'Move It'. He joined the show as a regular and quickly moved to top billing in the *TV Times*, originally having come last. Good himself took a keen interest in the youngster and reputedly helped to groom him for stardom.²⁵ But, important as the show was in breaking individual acts, it was in its ensemble playing that it really excelled. The resident musicians not only performed their own numbers, but also played together and with most of the guests (the groups were the usual exception). Guests, moreover, were not merely provided with backing, but were also incorporated into productions involving other members of the cast. This was particularly true of the show's opening number, or medley, which would characteristically begin as a solo but end as a rousing ensemble.

The drama of such numbers was increased by an appropriately striking visual style. Although broadcast live, the programme aimed to do more than simulate the appearance of a live concert and staged its numbers and conceived of its effects specifically in terms of the television cameras. The casual camerawork and general air of informality which had been a feature of *Six-Five Special* was thus dispensed with and replaced by a carefully choreographed and visually arresting use of cutting, light and composition in depth. The design of the stage itself was kept simple, with the band to the right, steps and rostra at the back and a central microphone at the front. It was usually only at the end of the big ensemble numbers, however, that the camera would pull back to reveal the whole set and most of the performers were shot in either close-ups or mid-shots.

A typical number would, therefore, begin with shots of a singer at the microphone before the rest of the performers were revealed on both sides of the rostra behind. This would be done either by cutting directly between different parts of the set or, more strikingly, by cutting to a new shot of the original singer (usually a slightly angled mid-shot) to enable the artists who were behind to be seen. The same effect could also be achieved by a movement of the camera or, more commonly, a change of lighting. Without any resort to cutting, singers could be dramatically brought into view through the introduction of light. They could then, just as readily, be plunged back into darkness or transformed into silhouettes. And while most of the numbers relied on a combination of quick cutting and lighting changes, the show could also dispense with both and present a whole song (usually a slow number) in one simple and unbroken close-up. It was a striking and visually accomplished achievement which the press was quick to acknowledge. 'The three-dimensional sets, clever lighting and fast, exciting atmosphere of *Oh Boy!*', observed the *Daily Herald*, have 'confirmed Jack Good as ITV's most imaginative producer of "pop" shows.' The BBC, on the other hand, would 'have a nerve to show *Six-Five* again'.²⁶

The BBC had, in fact, been aware of preparations for *Oh Boy!* as early as July and had attempted to meet its challenge. Despite his confidence in the changes made to the show in January, Kenneth Adam now led the call for 'a new look, a new noise (and) new faces'.²⁷ Russell Turner was brought in to take over produc-

tion and have a revamped show ready for *Oh Boy!*'s launch in September. His recipe for the show, however, consisted less of a 'new look' than a reversion to the old showbiz tradition of *Off the Record*. Described in the press as for 'adults only', the programme was primarily aimed at an older audience and practically dispensed with rock'n'roll altogether. In its place, Turner inaugurated a 'big band policy', involving two resident big bands (Tony Osborne and Tito Burns), as well as a regular big band guest (such as Ted Heath or Eric Delaney).

But, despite this dramatic expansion of the cast list, it was clear that the new show was no match for its ITV rival. The press quickly declared 'the battle of the TV programmes' in ITV's favour and although the BBC bravely declared that it was maintaining its audience, doubts were soon to emerge. 'I have been making enquiries among the younger generation about the interest in *Oh Boy!* and *Six-Five Special*', Adam informed the Head of Light Entertainment in early November, 'and there is no doubt the former is preferred. At this I am not surprised. Its formula is better, more punchy, its camera work simpler and faster than ours.'²⁸ His view was reinforced not long after by Cecil McGivern: 'This programme (*Six-Five Special*, Saturday, 22nd November) was another reminder of the sad present of this once excellent programme', he observed. 'The content was poor, the presentation and camera work very poor and the whole thing had no reason for its existence on our screen.'²⁹

By some peculiar historical twist, this edition is one of only two that the BBC now hold. Looking at it again, it is not difficult to see how the show had lost its way and become entirely disconnected from teenage tastes and attitudes. The music, the audience and the atmosphere, which had originally been the basis of the show's success, had all changed in character. In line with the programme's new policy of abandoning the teenage audience, the programme was broadcast from an American air-base. Most of the dancers were well past their teens and in uniform and a group of officers and their wives sat awkwardly to the side watching the proceedings with an air of parental indulgence. Nearly all of the performers were kitted out in evening dress (including the two hostesses whom Turner had added to the show in the interests of 'glamour') and delivered a style of music to match: big band numbers, ballads, novelty numbers and, when things got really lively, the cha cha. Unlike the early days, the show now consisted almost entirely of music but, in comparison to *Oh Boy!*, the proceedings were slow, visually dull (Lita Roza on a forklift truck notwithstanding) and entirely lacking in energy and drive.

It was inevitable, therefore, that the programme would fold soon after. The Head of Light Entertainment, Eric Maschwitz, agreed with McGivern that the show's formula was now 'exhausted' and unveiled plans for a new show to be produced by light entertainment veteran, Francis Essex. Although Essex's original idea was for a cross between *Six-Five Special*, *Off the Record* and *These Wonderful Shows*, it was evident that the new programme was going to try and emulate the example of *Oh Boy!*, especially its speed and ensemble playing. 'The idea is to get as much life, movement and noise out of a simple presentation', Maschwitz informed Adam, 'without cluttering up the studio with juvenile delinquents.'³⁰

Entitled *Dig This!*, the new show retained its predecessor's 6.05 pm start time but, as a means of injecting pace, was trimmed to half *Six-Five Special's* length. Launched on 3 January 1959, the *Radio Times* underlined the show's determination to be fast. It will be 'a swift moving, up-to-the-minute show', it promised, 'with all the latest pop music presented in a new streamlined manner'.³¹ Like *Oh Boy!*, the show also employed a regular troupe of musicians. These were led by Bob Miller and his seventeen-piece band, the Millermen, who, in addition to accompanying most of the numbers, were required to jump off high platforms and generally maintain an urgent sense of activity. Ex-serviceman and Sandhurst graduate, Gary Marshall, was recruited to act as the show's presenter and did his best to give conviction to the show's immortal lines of welcome: 'Hi, Kids! Dig This!' It was clear, however, that despite the show's efforts, it was unable to stem the tide of falling audience figures. Cast changes were made in February before the show was finally dropped at the end of March.

At this point, the BBC conceded defeat in the battle for the six o'clock audience and scheduled the programme's replacement, *Drumbeat*, at 6.30 pm. The popular American Western series, *Wells Fargo*, was brought forward to fill the gap. Although a new, and more youthful, producer, Stewart Morris, was put in charge of the show and the programme itself was described as 'the first of the new "beat" programmes', all the evidence suggests that *Drumbeat*, like *Dig This!* before it, was still in awe of *Oh Boy!*'s accomplishment and could do no better than imitate it.³²

The show retained the services of Bob Miller and his band but added a new line-up of regulars, including a second resident band, the John Barry Seven, the seventeen-year-old Sylvia Sands, former *Oh Boy!* star Vince Eager and the show's main discovery, Adam Faith. Faith was, in fact, a former protégé of Jack Good's, who had opened the famous *Six-Five Special* Two I's show with his skiffle group, The Worried Men. Despite Good's efforts to groom him as a 'singing James Dean', success had eluded him until his appearances on *Drumbeat*. By the end of the year these had helped him to a No.1 hit with 'What Do You Want'. Like *Oh Boy!*, the show aimed to be fast-moving and pack in as many artists as possible. According to Adam Faith, the music demanded a good twenty arrangements and, in a clear example of the programme's indebtedness to its rival, a further seventy changes of lighting.³³ Morris was soon claiming to have more viewers than *Oh Boy!* and, while this was unlikely, the programme did well enough to justify an extension of its initial run. Although this was only a matter of months it was, in fact, just long enough to outlive its great rival.

The reasons for the ending of *Oh Boy!* are not entirely clear. The last edition was broadcast on 30 May 1959 and, although it displayed an end of term exuberance, the show's hosts still expected to be back the following September. The fact that the BBC had now stolen the show's formula, however, appears to have prompted the idea for a replacement, while ABC's wish to vacate the Hackney Empire and use studios in Manchester probably made the decision inevitable. The result was a new show, *Boy Meets Girls*, on 12 September 1959, at the new time of 6.30-7 pm. Many of the *Oh Boy!* regulars were still involved. Marty Wilde was the 'Boy' in question while the Vernons provided the 'Girls'. The

organist Cherry Wainer and saxophonist Red Price also retained their roles as residents. The actual conception of the show, however, appears to have altered.

In a self-conscious retreat from the freneticism of *Oh Boy!*, the idea was to feature more ballads and quieter numbers as well as introduce a greater variety (the Vernons Girls, for example, were to figure much more prominently). This 'soft-pedal technique', as it was described in the *TV Times*, suggested that Good may have come under some pressure to tone his show down. Certainly, his comments at the time were unpromising: '*Oh Boy!* taught me that there is no substitute for personality in entertainment . . . We shall use an occasional, wild number but the accent is on friendliness and the programme is aimed at a wider audience. We are out to capture the elder brothers and sisters of the teenagers. And the mums and dads too.'³⁴ Ironically, this dilution of the original formula appears only to have lessened the show's appeal without appreciably expanding its following among adults. This seems to have been recognised and the show made efforts to liven up the proceedings by importing some major American acts. Eddie Cochran made his UK television debut on the show, as did Gene Vincent, whose appearance as a 'malformed Richard III' has been lovingly recalled by more than one commentator.³⁵ Cochran and Vincent even shared the same bill, along with Billy Fury, Adam Faith and Jess Conrad, no less, but by this time it was too late to save the show and it ended two weeks later.

The Jack Good team, however, were back the following month with a replacement. Billed as 'a fistful of songs', *Wham!* attempted to return to the quickfire style of *Oh Boy!* with a mixture of guests and regulars led by the Vernons Girls, Billy Fury, Jess Conrad and Joe Brown (whom Good had discovered amongst the backing musicians on *Oh Boy!*). Keith Fordyce, subsequently to front *Ready, Steady, Go!*, acted as compère. The time, however, no longer seemed right and the show came to a rapid end, lasting only eight editions. With it, Good's contribution to British television also came to a halt. He went on to produce an updated version of *Oh Boy!*, *Shindig!* for ABC in the United States in 1964, while *Oh Boy!* itself was revived for British television in 1979 with Good as executive producer. By this time, however, the programme had lost all sense of immediacy, and, in an era of punk, was relegated to the ranks of comfortable nostalgia.

The demise of both *Boy Meets Girls* and *Wham!* had also been precipitated by an unexpected resurgence of the BBC's fortunes in the battle for the tea-time audience. Their answer to *Oh Boy!*, *Drumbeat*, eventually came to an end on 29 August 1959 when it was immediately replaced, at a slightly later time, by *Juke Box Jury*. Based on an American idea and produced by Russell Turner (this time hitting gold), *Juke Box Jury* had originally begun in June on Mondays at 7.30 pm. Switched to an earlier time on Saturdays, it seemed to provide the perfect formula for combining teen appeal with entertainment for all the family. 'When it made its début in this country there were many criticisms', observed one writer, 'but a successful format was quickly found and soon caught the imagination of viewers from 4 to 94!'³⁶ It was a format which was also exceptionally simple (not to mention cheap).

A resident dee-jay, the avuncular David Jacobs, sat next to a fake juke-box,

introducing excerpts from the week's latest record releases. A guest panel of four and a studio audience of young people sat and listened, while the cameras recorded their reactions. The panel were then invited to give their opinions on each record and vote it a hit or a miss. Should the vote be a tie, a teenage panel, chosen from the studio audience, would be called upon to decide. One of the artists whose record was featured in the show would make a guest appearance, remaining out of view until the panel had voted (in many cases, declaring the guest's record a miss). A simple formula it may have been, but it was one which was to prove immensely popular. The show quickly acquired a regular following of nine million viewers, rising to twelve million by early 1962, and, even more obviously than *Six-Five Special*, became something of a 'national institution'.

More so, perhaps, than any of its predecessors, the show appeared to have fulfilled the schedulers' requirements for a successful match of teenage tastes and adult interest. The role of the panel, in this respect, was crucial. The programme had initially begun with a panel loosely connected to the world of popular music. The very first show, for example, had featured the two singers Alma Cogan and Gary Miller, former *Six-Five Special* presenter, Pete Murray, and the youthful Susan Stranks, whom the *Radio Times* assured its readers represented 'a typical teenager'.³⁷ It was not long, however, before the panel acquired an increasingly showbiz flavour involving guests, such as Eric Sykes or Diana Dors, with only the most tenuous of links with the music business or, indeed, teenagers.

The result, and presumably part of the appeal for that section of the audience who didn't care for the music in the first place, was an increasing emphasis on the personalities of the guests at the expense of the show's musical content (a whole record, for example, was never played). This was a tendency that also led to one of the most regularly voiced criticisms of the show: that a panel consisting of comics, film-stars and crooners were hardly well-qualified to pass judgement on pop music (or, indeed, predict its commercial potential). Lack of familiarity with the music was certainly a regular feature of the show. In one edition (29 October 1960), for example, the journalist Nancy Spain confused Lloyd Price with Frank Lloyd Wright, while singer Carmen McCrae, on hearing Roy Orbison's 'Blue Angel', announced that she detested 'this type of music', but thought that because it was so 'terrible', it would be a hit. However, it was precisely this type of ignorance which also served the show so well.

For the guests on the show not only enticed the parents to watch, but also came out with the comments on pop music that parents themselves might be expected to make in the living room ('terrible', 'what a noise' and so on).³⁸ While this could undoubtedly be irksome to younger viewers, it could also add to the show's appeal. For teenagers did not necessarily want the guests (any more than their parents) to like the music; indeed part of the pleasure of the show undoubtedly lay in its confirmation that pop music was not generally understood or appreciated by adults. The art of *Juke Box Jury*, in this respect, was to have it both ways, both confirming adult and youthful prejudices at the same time. Iain Chambers, for example, describes David Jacobs' 'smirk' as he pressed the hooter for a 'miss' as 'a rather irritating reminder of a sober-suited, short-haired, responsible, adult "No"!'³⁹ But, while this adult put-down may have been enjoyed by

the parents, it did, as the quote suggests, irritate other sections of the audience, who not only came to expect it but also, given how long the show survived, to enjoy it themselves. A large part of the pleasure was, indeed, the irritation and many of the show's most famous moments depended on this, such as when Johnny Mathis appeared and criticised *all* the records.

By the same token, when the tables were turned and the Rolling Stones replaced the usual assortment of showbiz worthies on the panel, the parents may have been outraged, but for many others the pleasure derived from the Stones' refusal to conform to the show's normally stuffy conventions. As Lawrence Grossberg observes: 'Different audiences may watch the same program but interpret it differently, not only because of their own history and relations to rock and roll, but also because of the use to which they put particular images in the larger context of their cultural lives and rock and roll fandom.'⁴⁰ *Juke Box Jury*'s success, in this regard, lay precisely in its ability to generate these different, and even opposing, responses and interpretations.

Juke Box Jury is, nonetheless, conventionally regarded as marking the end of an era. 'In less than four years rock'n'roll television had flourished and died,' writes Bob Woffinden. 'Like rock'n'roll *per se*, it had arrived boldly but was soon emasculated and re-cycled as family entertainment.' *Juke Box Jury*, in this respect, is singled out for rebuke because, 'unlike *Six-Five Special*', it 'was meant to appeal to the whole family'.⁴¹ In fact, the history of rock'n'roll on television was more complicated than this argument suggests. In part, due to historical accident (the ending of the 'toddler's truce') and, in part, because television, with only two channels, could not afford to target its programmes too narrowly, rock'n'roll television had been involved from the beginning in winning over the family audience.

This was as true of *Six-Five Special* as it was of *Juke Box Jury*, although there were, of course, variations in the degree to which programmes were prepared to make concessions to the adult audience. If *Oh Boy!* made the least, then *Juke Box Jury* undoubtedly made the most and it was only with the arrival of *Ready, Steady, Go!* in 1963, on a Friday evening rather than at Saturday tea-time, that the pendulum swung back in favour of the youth audience. With its mix of music, dancing and competitions and successful creation of an informal party atmosphere, in which the audience were as much the stars as the musicians, *Ready, Steady, Go!* was also the first of many subsequent television pop programmes (including *Top of the Pops*, *The Tube* and even the dubious *Club X*) to demonstrate the lasting influence of the *Six-Five Special* format.⁴²

This is not, of course, to imply that the pop programmes of the 50s did no more than make rock'n'roll safe for family consumption. Unlike so many subsequent musical trends, television, in this case, was not simply catching up with rock'n'roll, but actively involved in its promotion. British rock'n'roll was still at an embryonic stage of development when *Six-Five Special* first appeared and television not only provided the music with a national platform (providing access to the Two I's, for example, to those who would not otherwise have expected to go there), but also advanced the careers of numerous rock'n'roll singers. British rock'n'roll, in this respect, was far more dependent upon television for its success

than American rock'n'roll (which in Britain, was more commonly heard on the radio – on Radio Luxembourg rather than the BBC – or seen in the cinemas) or, indeed, subsequent British pop movements (whose origins have tended to be rather more 'spontaneous').

This did mean, of course, that television, and television producers such as Jack Good, played an important part in the presentation and packaging of British rock'n'rollers. While this could lead to attempts to make them more acceptable to a family audience (the BBC, for example, attempted to stop Marty Wilde 'belly-swinging'), this was not necessarily so.⁴³ Indeed, in the case of performers such as Wee Willie Harris and Gene Vincent, Jack Good seems to have attempted to exaggerate, rather than play down, the apparent grotesquerie of their performances. Television undoubtedly paved the way for a more general acceptance of many of the early rock'n'rollers by incorporating them into traditional showbiz variety shows (*Sunday Night at the London Palladium*, *Saturday Spectacular*, *Billy Cotton Band Show*). However, on the rock'n'roll shows themselves the best of British rock'n'roll (the early Cliff, Billy Fury, Johnny Kidd and the Pirates) could be seen on television with only the minimum of cosmetic tinkering and often to better advantage than in the cinema, where the constraints should in some ways have been less.

Notes

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1. Lord Hill of Luton, *Both Sides of the Hill* (London: Heinemann, 1964), p. 170. The ban on Sunday broadcasting at this time was to continue until March 1958 when programmes of a religious nature were permitted to be broadcast. For a survey of the debates over television hours, see Bernard Sendall, *Independent Television in Britain Volume I: Origin and Foundation, 1946–62* (London: Macmillan, 1982).
2. Anon., 'At the Top of the List', *Radio Times*, 14 October 1955, p. 21.
3. *Off the Record*, which carried on until 1958, did begin to include some rock'n'rollers, although these were introduced with some disgruntlement by Payne. With respect to vocabulary, I am using the term 'popular music' to refer to the Tin Pan Alley tradition of 'light' music and the term 'pop music' to refer generally to the new styles and techniques of youth-orientated music which first began to emerge in the 1950s. In this respect, I am using 'rock'n'roll' in its specific sense (as a species of 'pop' music) rather than as a general category synonymous with 'rock'.
4. David Griffiths, 'Ker's no Kitten – But He's Real Cool', *TV Times*, 14 June 1957, p. 27.
5. *Ibid.*
6. For details, see Gordon Watkins (ed.), *Tonight* (London: British Film Institute, 1982).
7. *Birmingham Mail*, 18 February 1957.

8. Other titles considered included 'Hi There', 'Live It Up', 'Take It Easy' and 'Don't Look Now'. 'Six-Five Special' was preferred because of the popularity of allusions to trains in 'jazz-parlance'. Memo from Josephine Douglas to Assistant Head of Light Entertainment, Tom Sloan, 2 January 1957, BBC Written Archives Centre (WAC), File index number T12/360/3.
9. The importance of television's 'familial' viewer is discussed in more theoretical terms by John Ellis, *Visible Fictions* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982) and Jane Feuer, 'The Concept of Live Television: Ontology as Ideology' in E.A. Kaplan (ed.), *Regarding Television* (Los Angeles: American Film Institute/University Publications of America, 1983). Simon Frith's discussion of the importance of 'hearth and home' to radio light entertainment also suggests a parallel; see 'The Pleasures of the Hearth: The making of BBC light entertainment', in *Formations of Pleasure* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983).
10. *BBC Handbook* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1959), p. 99.
11. *Radio Times*, 22 February 1957, p. 4.
12. Memo to Josephine Douglas and Jack Good, 18 March 1957, WAC T12/360/3.
13. Audience Research Report on *Six-Five Special*, 5 April 1957, WAC T12/360/6.
14. As no copy of this particular edition appears to have survived, this quote is taken from the script for the show held at the BBC Written Archives Centre. Despite the programme's reputation for apparent spontaneity, the show was rigid in its adherence to a script and it is unlikely that the broadcast show deviated significantly from the agreed script (and Pete Murray's speech is, in fact, quoted as it appears in the script in the *Sunday Times* review of 17 February 1957). All subsequent quotes, from this edition only, also derive from the script.
15. The rise and fall of Terry Dene is eloquently recalled in Nik Cohn, *Awopbopaloobopaloopbamboom: Pop from the Beginning* (London: Paladin, 1970).
16. *Punch*, 3 April 1957.
17. Unlike *Six-Five Special*, however, most of the performances on *Bandstand* were mimed. For the details of the programme, see Michael Shore (with Dick Clark), *The History of American Bandstand* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985). This famous American show is not, of course, to be confused with the half-hour jazz programme, *Bandstand*, launched by ITV in September 1959.
18. According to Tony Palmer, Good was obliged to resort to subterfuge for the first show and had 'a set constructed for the show that looked harmless and was approved by management'. The set, however, was on wheels and, during rehearsals, 'the entire set was quickly moved around so that the audience for the show was in front of the cameras as Good had planned'. See, *All You Need Is Love: The Story of Popular Music* (London: Futura, 1976), p. 215. Internal BBC memos, however, suggest that the BBC management were less distressed by the show than this story implies. The Head of Light Entertainment, Ronald Waldman, for example, wrote to Douglas and Good following the second programme and praised them for 'a good show'. His concern was less with the studio audience than the contrivance of the star spotlight interview, the over-exposure of Josephine Douglas and the rough and ready nature of some of the camera work. (Memo, 25 February 1957, WAC T12/360/3.) The Deputy Director of Television Broadcasting, Cecil McGivern, wrote, in turn, to Waldman about the seventh show, an 'exuberant programme' which he apparently enjoyed. Once again, he was unhappy about the camera-work but was mostly put out by Ian Carmichael's use of a 'chamber pot' in a comedy sketch. (Memo, 1 April 1957, WAC T12/360/7). The issue of the audience did arise later in the year when the Television House Manager complained about their 'generally rude and aggressive behaviour'. (Memo to Light

- Entertainment Organiser, Television, 25 September 1957, WAC T12/360/3). This complaint was referred to Good and Douglas, who were informed by the Assistant Head of Light Entertainment, Tom Sloan, that 'the actual nature of this programme' could not be regarded as an 'excuse for bad manners on the part of the audience'. (Memo, 25 September 1957, WAC T12/360/3).
19. Memo to Head of Light Entertainment, 7 February 1958, WAC T12/360/4.
 20. Cited in BBC Audience Research Report on *Six-Five Special*, 1 January 1958, WAC T12/360/12.
 21. Rowan Ayers, 'The Studio Was Jumpin'. *Radio Times*, 5 April 1957.
 22. Memo to Head of Light Entertainment, 18 November 1957, WAC T12/360/9.
 23. Memo to Assistant Head of Light Entertainment, 13 January 1958, WAC T12/360/4.
 24. Memo to Head of Light Entertainment, 7 February 1958, WAC T12/360/4.
 25. George Melly, indeed, blames Good for turning Cliff into 'acceptable family entertainment' by removing his guitar and sideburns and suggesting a new repertoire of arm, leg and hip movements: see *Revolt into Style, The Pop Arts* (New York: Anchor, 1971), p. 56 (Orig. London: Penguin, 1970). This is undoubtedly overstated. Good did make changes to Cliff's image but, as his appearance on the final *Oh Boy!* indicates, these were not designed to make him appear wholesome so much as to add an air of insolent, if somewhat studied, sexuality. Indeed, according to Chris Welch, Cliff was attacked for 'obscurity' after appearing on the show in December. See 'Rock '58', *The History of Rock*, No. 11, (Orbis, 1982), p. 205.
 26. Mike Nevard, *Daily Herald*, 15 September 1958.
 27. Memo to Head of Light Entertainment, 1 July 1958, WAC T12/360/4.
 28. Memo, 4 November 1958, WAC T12/360/4.
 29. Memo to Adam, 24 November 1958, WAC T12/360/4.
 30. Memo, 25 November 1958, WAC T12/360/4.
 31. *Radio Times*, 19 December 1958, p. 11. Despite this emphasis on speed, it was also clear that the BBC did not want to embrace entirely *Oh Boy!*'s freneticism. As Essex explained to the press, the show was to be 'good clean fun with no hysteria', *Swindon Evening Advertiser*, 3 January 1959.
 32. *Radio Times*, 27 March 1959, p. 4.
 33. Adam Faith, *Poor Me* (London: Four Square, 1961), p. 44. Jack Good's conception of Faith as a 'singing James Dean' is described on p. 26.
 34. *tv Times*, 25 September 1959, p. 16.
 35. The most detailed account is provided by Ian Whitcomb, *After the Ball: Pop Music from Rag to Rock* (London: Penguin, 1973). It is, perhaps, of some concern, however, that Good's insistence that Vincent exaggerate his limp has been recorded with nothing other than admiration by all those who have described it.
 36. Ken and Sylvia Ferguson (eds.), *Television Show Book* (London: Parnell, 1964), p. 102.
 37. *Radio Times*, 29 May 1959, p. 13.
 38. This phenomenon was already noted by the BBC Audience Research Department in its report on the very first edition of *Six-Five Special*. A 'teenage Mill Tester' is reported as commenting on the programme: 'This is what many of us have wanted for a long time and I just cannot say how much I enjoy it. But my dad was grumbling all the time. He said it was "just a lot of noise."' (7 March 1957, WAC T12/360/5).
 39. Iain Chambers, *Urban Rhythms: Pop Music and Popular Culture* (London: Macmillan, 1985), p. 53.
 40. Lawrence Grossberg, 'MTV: Swinging on the (Postmodern) Star' in Ian Angus and Sut Jhally (eds.), *Cultural Politics in Contemporary America* (London: Routledge, 1989), p.

258. My argument is, of course, that the characteristics of *Juke Box Jury* facilitated different responses, not simply that different audiences could interpret the programme in whatever way they liked.
41. Bob Woffinden, 'Hit or Miss?', *The History of Rock*, No. 19, (Orbis, 1982), p. 380. Woffinden's somewhat doubtful use of the term 'emasculatation' echoes similar remarks made by George Melly concerning 'the castration of the first British pop explosion' in *Revolt Into Style*, p. 56. Their resort to such terms, however, is not entirely unexpected insofar as it has been one of the more problematic features of pop music, from rock'n'roll to rap, that its rebelliousness has characteristically been encoded in the language and style of male aggression.
 42. Ironically, the best and most exciting of the 50s shows, *Oh Boy!*, set an example that television was unable to repeat. This was due not simply to the absence of a successor to Jack Good, but the changing character of British pop. *Oh Boy!* was a supreme example of television d'auteur in which individual performers were subordinated to the programme's overall concept and design. As the emphasis of pop shifted from solo performers to groups, and pop stars acquired a growing sense of their own artistic self-importance (including the writing of their own material), the possibilities for the carefully drilled ensemble playing which characterised *Oh Boy!* diminished accordingly.
 43. The Controller of Programmes, Kenneth Adam, wrote to the Assistant Head of Light Entertainment, Tom Sloan, in January 1958 complaining that he had found the number of 'Presley-type "bellyswingers"' on *Six-Five Special* 'offensive'. (Memo, 13 January 1958, WAC T12/360/4). The 'main offender' was identified as Marty Wilde and Tom Sloan threatened to drop him from the show (Memo to Controller of Programmes, 13 January 1958, WAC T12/360/4). A concern of a slightly different kind was aired later in the year by Cecil McGivern, the Deputy Director of Television: 'Apart from the general chaos, there was another fault in this programme which is unacceptable. That was the number of girls who wore very abbreviated skirts, and several who wore practically no skirts at all, and one, I think, who seemed to be wearing simply a pair of black pants. I know how kids feel and act and I sympathise with them but they must not be allowed complete licence. If this is a tendency in *Six-Five Special*, it must stop.' (Memo to Dennis Main Wilson, 8 April 1958, WAC T12/360/4).