The entertainment press

‘Something is happening here, but you don’t know what it is’: the Music and Entertainment Press, 1900-2018.’

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Introduction

> Coleman joined the *Melody Maker* at their Fleet Street office in 1960, and at first found it hard to adjust to a different style of showbiz journalism. He couldn't see what was ‘newsworthy’ about a string of Cliff Richard tour dates and preferred to stir up a row with the BBC or research a heavily angled investigation into the music business. Feeling frustrated, he planned to defect to *the Daily Telegraph*. Then he encountered a classic put-down from a *Telegraph* executive at his job interview. Asked where he worked, he replied: ‘The *Melody Maker*.’ And before that? ‘*The Manchester Evening News*.’ After a long pause, the executive inquired icily: ‘Tell me, Mr Coleman, why did you leave journalism?’

The anecdote, taken from Roy Coleman’s obituary (*Independent* 13 September 1996) reveals a common preconception about the entertainment press: it was a journalistic backwater, a place for fanatics and second-rate journalists, where publishers made easy money. The view misses the significance of a medium where the entertainment industry and the public came together to discuss the creative practices, performances and commercial products of artistes. These journalistic and publishing practices were not performed in isolation: the entertainment press, often implicitly but also knowingly, constructed and represented broader understandings of society, politics and culture.

The term ‘entertainment press’ describes journals, papers, magazines and web pages that cover music, theatre, film, vaudeville, variety performance, comedy, television and radio. With the growth of commercial publishing markets from the late-eighteenth century, publishers created journals covering entertainment that grew to command a significant audience in the nineteenth century. Numerous entertainment papers allowed the public to find and attend live performances and added critical judgements so ‘discerning’ people could find something that suited their tastes (there was, however, already rumblings of discontent about the ethics of reviewing and coverage). This chapter covers the twentieth century and analyses *Sight & Sound*, a film magazine formed in 1932, and *Melody Maker*, a

music paper formed in 1926, as representatives of the wider entertainment press. These publications are of particular interest because *Sight & Sound* was, soon after its establishment, taken over by the British Film Institute (BFI), therefore it served the film industry, rather than simply profiting from it. *Melody Maker* provides a counterpoint, it informally represented the music industry and was considered by its publisher to be a 'trade periodical,' but, like *Sight & Sound*, it had a dual mission as a *de facto* mass market entertainment publication. Both publications arguably offer a point where the entertainment industry and public intermingled in a way that might not be as clear in papers more focussed upon gossip.

Despite value in analyses of publications that ignored professional and institutional perspectives, when sketching out the general characteristics of the entertainment press the chosen publications afford a useful overview of what shaped the field. One of these is geography, as the papers emanated from the centre of London, a space that historians such as Frank Mort (2001) and Matt Houlbrook (2005), for instance, have demonstrated had a disproportionate impact on British culture and society. Another is class and social identity: both publications were, typically, written and edited by middle class white men. The publications provided space for resistance and alternative perspectives, but the results of inequality and market considerations frequently shaped reporting and decisions about newsworthiness. Using the methodologies outlined by Adrian Bingham (2004: 16), who argues that the press is an arena for debate that constructs social meanings which inform the public, and Stuart Hall's (1993: 107-110) strategy for considering texts along with their production and reception, the entertainment press can provide a window into twentieth-century discourses on class, race and gender, politics and social mores, that underpinned understandings of entertainment, leisure, art and criticism.

Sight & Sound

The first issue of *Sight & Sound* was published in Spring 1932 from an office in Bedford Square, Bloomsbury. Edited by R.W. Dickinson, the paper was, at first, a 'quarterly review of modern aids to learning' published by the British Institute of Adult Education. It focused upon film-makers and those who might use film or sound recordings in a professional setting particularly educators. The new technologies covered had provoked laughter in

Parliament a year before, but the magazine argued that the emerging methods of capturing, editing and screening sounds and images simultaneously to audiences would profoundly change education.

The paper was not the first publication geared towards filmmakers, cinema managers and cinema-goers. *Optical Magic Lantern and Photographic Enlarger* (*OMLPE*) was (launched in 1889 by E.T. Heron for those interested in projecting images from still) transparencies and found at 'all Newsvendors, Railway News Stalls or by subscription' (*OMLPE* January 1896). When cinema presented the opportunity to write about moving images it became *Cinematographic Journal* (1900) and *Kine Weekly* (1907). It grew to be *the* publication for British cinema managers who, around the time of the Great War, were treated to 200 pages of densely-packed information. The paper catered for the industry more than *Sight & Sound* which, in spite of being on the side of filmmakers, published articles that appealed more to the interests of an informed member of the public. *Sight & Sound* was, nonetheless, less accessible than publications such as *Picturegoer*, which was aimed at fans and provided news and gossip about stars alongside reviews of new films.

Unlike its competitors, that were typically established by an entrepreneur and ran as independent magazines, the British Film Institute (BFI) took over the paper in 1934 (concurrently launching *Monthly Film Bulletin* [*MFB*]). The BFI, in keeping with the terms of its Royal Charter and the magazine's remit, faithfully continued to champion film as an educational tool from which *Sight & Sound* benefitted financially as educational institutions were a significant market for firms that made 16mm projectors and audio-visual equipment and paid for advertisements (Nowell-Smith 2012: 237). In Spring 1935, after the paper told the story of a reel of film that was hurried to Kenya to aid a surgeon in 'saving a man's life', the editorial board argued that 'there is no branch of knowledge in which the film can act as a greater benefactor to mankind.'

Despite representing the film industry, *Sight & Sound* was frequently critical of domestic popular cinema. The paper, for instance, prefaced its quarterly review of new films in the 1935 issue containing the feature on medical film with a sardonic account of the artifice and patchy results of the growing domestic commercial film industry. Alistair Cooke, a Salfordian journalist who had replaced Oliver Baldwin (Stanley Baldwin's son) as the BBC's film critic, wrote, 'the growing confidence and volume of British publicity agents is something that Wardour Street may look upon with pleasure.' When he visited the cinema,

however, he now found himself, 'fighting through excited mobs, alert policemen, scathing arc lights, rows of boiled shirts … and for what? For, usually, just and ordinarily banal opus [which] encourages a critic to dislike it more than he should.' Cooke then disparaged Hollywood's populist filmmaking revealing an elitist scorn for films made as mass entertainment.

In the 1930s and 1940s, the paper reproduced writings from Paul Rotha, a celebrated documentary film-maker, László Moholy-Nagy, a professor at the Bauhaus and visual artist, the directors Alfred Hitchcock and Sergei Eisenstein – individuals at the cutting edge of their fields. Hitchcock (*Sight & Sound* Summer 1937) enthusiastically observed the public's burgeoning acceptance of filmmakers blending drama and comedy, while Eisenstein (*Sight & Sound* Spring 1946) praised 'His Highness' Charlie Chaplin. Yet these men, with their social, cinematic and artistic clout, could too be dismissive of popular cinema: Moholy-Nagy's (*Sight & Sound* Summer 1934) 'open letter to the film industry' began: 'shall we look on while the film, this wonderful instrument, is being destroyed before our eyes by stupidity and dull-witted amateurism?'

In winter 1935, a *Sight & Sound* editorial reconsidered the importance of the 'entertainment film' after Simon Rowson published the findings of his 'Statistical Survey of the Cinema Industry in Great Britain in 1934' in *The Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*. Rowson, as the editorial put it, provided 'striking evidence of the vast scope of the industry and justified the description of the cinema as one of the sociological wonders of the world.' Despite being a 'wonder' in sociological terms (as Annette Kuhn [2002] has demonstrated, cinema-going was and essential aspect of 1930s' society), the BFI argued that the cinema needed to 'cater more than they do for those filmgoers who not only expect better films, but who wish to discriminate between the films that they go to see.' The entertainment film was 'a problem,' and the editorial suggested that British cinema could be adapted, according to their professional criteria of value, through an accreditation scheme, founding specialist and repertory cinemas outside of London, and by adding worthy films to the National Film Library.

After the Second World War, during which the magazine's length had been limited by paper restrictions, *Sight & Sound* was challenged by a new publication, *Sequence*. Consequently, Denis Foreman relaunched *Sight & Sound* in an attempt to attract '*New Statesman* readers' (Foreman 1997: 24) – in some part due to a pro-Labour and

internationalist editorial position, *New Statesman* had increased its circulation from 13,000 copies sold weekly in the early 1930s to around 70,000 readers per issue by 1945. The paper recruited *Sequence*'s writers, who were influential members of the British Free Cinema movement: Peter Ericsson, Lindsay Anderson, Penelope Houston, Gavin Lambert and Karel Reisz. In April 1950, during the brief period (1950-1952) that the paper was a monthly publication, Frank Enley exemplified the paper's critical approach and aesthetic values when reviewing *The Blue Lamp* (1950), the film that introduced the hero of the long-running television series, *Dixon of Dock Green*. Enley denounced *The Blue Lamp* as 'a peculiarly specious brand of mediocrity which, to put it mildly, is having a fine run for its money.' Enley argued that the film was a crass expression of British cultural chauvinism that cast certain characteristics – bravery, for instance – as intrinsically 'British' to provide easy myths for the public.

In October 1953, *Sight & Sounds* asked critics and filmmakers 'to clear the ground as to the relations between critics and film-makers' in the name of solidarity. The questionnaire, completed by seven filmmakers and ten critics, asked whether the 'freedom of the critic' was 'reality' or 'illusion'? The journalists concluded 'reality' but their responses revealed some telling limitations: they acknowledged the 'unconscious pressure' placed on critics to fall in line with the public's reception of films; and Freda Bruce Lockland admitted to being 'ticked off' by her editor for devoting two pages of an unnamed paper to films produced by a studio that did not advertise. The article explained how the critics felt a 'double responsibility' to both the films reviewed and the public. It explained how many critics were wary of developing friendships with filmmakers to preserve 'critical judgement.' Filmmakers, on the other hand, saw critics in a positive light and implied that the journalists might not have been entirely honest about their social interactions with filmmakers. Sir Michael Balcon admitted that they had 'put him through every mood in the calendar from triumphant to suicidal', had 'the tendency to wisecrack unfairly' and often failed to strike a constructive balance between criticism and gossip, but like his colleagues considered their writing helpful.

The debate over the role of the critic continued throughout the 1950s and onwards. Lindsay Anderson (*Sight & Sound* Autumn 1956) reconsidered the principles underpinning film criticism. He described his preference for the rough but meaningful over the polished yet superficial and argued that film should be judged according to its success in defending

'moral, social, poetic' ideals 'with intelligence as well as emotion.' When considering 'The Critical Question' four years later, Penelope Houston (*Sight & Sound* Autumn 1960) remarked that, 'Mr Anderson was welcomed rather like a bowler caught throwing in a test match.' The questions of 'commitment,' that Anderson, brought up, Houston admitted, remained fundamental to critical discussions of film but suggested that critics follow a pseudo-objective style. She also argued against the 'perverted' approach of 'the new critical school' who saw no bad subjects, no chances for affirmation, no social significance, no sympathetic characters nor any reason for narrative.

Sight & Sound offered perceptive responses to the varied and sometimes challenging films of the 1960s. David Wilson (1982:18) recalled, 'the 1962 London Film Festival … included films by Renoir, Bertolucci, Satyajit Ray, Ozu, Bruñel, Polanski, Kurosawa, Wadja, Bresson and Godard. *Sight & Sound*, making a broad church rather than a narrow cult of the cinema, could respond to all of them.' This cosmopolitanism was attractive to certain types of reader. Norton, who came of age and attended university during the 1960s (one of *Sight & Sounds*' typical readers and a respondent to the UCL/AHRC Cultural Memory and British Cinema-going of the 1960s survey), for instance, remembered reading the magazine: 'for info and for the cultural experience – it made me feel cool.' He became a Francophile who idolised Truffaut and Godard because their films were 'intensely personal'; when he mentioned that the Nouvelle Vague '"spoke to me" socio-culturally,' he used language and concepts to explain his cinema experiences that could have come straight from the pages of the magazine.

The new forms of international cinema that were popular in the 1960s often challenged *Sight & Sound*'s journalists, particularly ones who descried themselves as 'humanistic.' An article by Gabriel Pearson and Eric Rhode (*Sight & Sound* Autumn 1961) described the transitions between sequences, mood swings and lack of obvious coherence in Godard's *Breathless* and Truffaut's *Shoot the Pianist* as 'like a cat teasing a ball of wool, the thread of a tale may be arbitrarily picked up, played with, and just suddenly dropped.' They considered the film as either amoral or the fruit of an unpredictable moral compass that followed an 'alien logic.' As representatives of the 'humanist critic' rather than the New Wave, they noted a difference in ontologies, between their search for a 'stable reality' and others who believed 'none such now holds.' In response, they provided a list of

‘assumptions of the humanist critic’ with a criteria for the conditions in which ‘great art’ could be created.

During the 1970s, *Sight & Sound* moved from the BFI’s offices to Dean Street in Soho and began to publish longer and more detailed articles afforded by, of 1971, an expanded format. At the turn of the 1970s and under the editorial stewardship of Penelope Houston (who held the role until 1990), *Sight & Sound* had a circulation of 30,000 and could ill-afford to alienate its readership by becoming a journal for the growing discipline of Film Studies. There was, however, some overlap: in Autumn 1976, for instance, the paper found space for writings by Stuart Hall, the Marxist sociologist, on television. He concluded that television made ‘real the utopian slogan that appeared in May 1968 adorning the walls of the Sorbonne. “Art is dead, let us make everyday life.”’

In light of current controversies regarding sexual abuse in the entertainment industry and the particular scrutiny on the film industry, it is notable that *Sight & Sound* ignored Roman Polanski’s flight from legal action following the alleged rape of a thirteen-year-old girl, Samantha-Jane Gailey, at Jack Nicholson’s home in Los Angeles. *Sight & Sound* was cautious when reporting upon the private lives of celebrities. In Autumn 1962, for instance, a front-page editorial reflected on the deaths of Marilyn Monroe and James Dean: it argued that the pair had been exploited and the division public lives and personal personae blurred. The decision that the Polanski case was not newsworthy, however, sided with the exploiter and hints at a close link between the paper and industry that likely resulted in abuses of power going unchallenged. In Summer 1978, the year that he fled bail, he was mentioned once in a paragraph explaining how he had attended the Łódź Film School with Jerzy Skolimowski. When Polanski’s film *Tess* (1981) – an adaptation of Thomas Hardy’s novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* which featured a scene depicting the rape of ‘Tess’ (played by 17-year-old Nastassja Kinski) – was released in UK cinemas, the magazine did not review it. Indeed, they mentioned Polanski sparingly over the next decade: 64 articles mentioned Polanski in the 1960s and the 1970s, but only 16 in the 1980s. Despite the selection criteria that promoted criticism over personal matters, the decision not to report on the Polanski affair was a considerable oversight that conceivably contributed to a culture that emboldened sexually abusive men in the film industry.

Sight & Sound’s circulation began to fall at the beginning of the 1990s. This was common across the entertainment press as writing migrated online and, since the 1980s, as

Mort (1996: 19) argues, developments in printing 'disciplines and technologies,' changes in retail and distribution, alongside the rise in free papers and postal subscriptions 'radically reshaped the expectations of many consumers.' The declining in interest in 'art-film culture' was seen as a specific concern to *Sight & Sound* (Nowell-Smith 2012: 249) along with new titles entering the market such as *Empire* (1989) and *Total Film* (1997). Houston stepped down and was replaced by Colin McCabe who merged the magazine with MFB, made it a monthly publication and revoked the immediate subscription privileges that came with BFI membership. He was replaced by Philip Dodd shortly afterwards. Dodd adapted the paper to include VHS releases and as Nowell-Smith (2012: 250) notes, 'Queer cinema, body-horror, cyber-punk, topics that the old *Sight & Sound* would have treated gingerly if at all, made it to the front pages of the magazine and even on to the front cover.'

Nick James took over as editor in 1997, launched a website and returned the magazine to something more closely resembling the paper before Dodd's changes. In 2001, however, its monthly readership was 23,249 and by 2010 it had further declined to 19,137. James was, at first, bullish: in July 2006, after a conversation over dinner with two unnamed newspaper reviewers at the Cannes Film Festival, he wrote how newspapers were afflicted by 'desperate short termism' in the face of the internet and new media overtaking them as recipients of advertising revenue. He asked: 'Surely, a confident newspaper would want the reader to be able to trust the ratings and opinions of its reviewers? Surely, that's what they pay their reviewers for?' James' *sangfroid* did not last, in October 2008, he wrote an emotionally-charged article asking 'who needs critics?' in the age of the internet 2.0 (meaning user-generated content). He argued that bloggers, who often wrote for free and without professional responsibilities, undermined the public's demand for professional critics. In defence of criticism, James printed excerpts Anderson's essay 'Stand Up! Stand Up!', Cooke's 'Letter from America,' Houston's review of *Last Year in Marianbad* alongside contemporary film writing from critics. Mark Fisher, the Marxist theorist and author of the K-Punk blog, countered:

> A measure of (justified) frustration with the old media is no doubt a motivating force in much blogging, just as it was in the case of fanzines in the 1970s. But many successful bloggers also write for print publications and their most effective writing is still often to be found on their own sites, where they are able to pursue their own

agendas free from the pressure of word counts and independent of the commodity-time of consumer capitalism.

Melody Maker

Lawrence Wright, a composer, founded *Melody Maker* 1926 from 8 Denmark Street and it was first edited by Edgar Jackson, who led a big band orchestra. Denmark Street, or 'Tin Pan Alley', was the heart of London's commercial music industry, which, at the time, mainly sold sheet music and promoted live music. While only five minutes' walk from *Sight & Sound*'s offices in Bedford Square, the two settings were very different: Bedford Square's Georgian architecture and well-tended garden made it clearly part of Bloomsbury, whereas Denmark Street, on the cusp of Soho was cramped and significantly less upmarket.

In the first fifteen years, *Melody Maker*'s survived on revenue from selling advertising and copies of the paper by covering the dance band scene. From the first issue onwards (January 1926), *Melody Maker*'s editor, Wright, interviewed himself (under the *nom de plume* Horatio Nicholls) to discuss his personal compositions. Despite the paper's sometimes dubious ethics, its writers were obliged to have a level of musical knowledge: *Melody Maker* only hired journalists who could read sheet music – a stipulation that survived into the 1970s. The dance band scene was buoyant, there were multiple dance halls in most towns and cities: in July 1931, the Locarno in Streatham averaged over 1,500 attendees per month and similar crowds were reported in cities across Britain (Nott 2015: 25).

There were, however as Roberta Freund Schwartz (2016: 2-3) notes, a number of styles and genres competing for the public's interest: British bands had been recording American-influenced styles such as 'ragtime' since 1889, the year phonographs and cylinders became more widely available; syncopated dance bands emerged around the time of the first world war and by 1918 'jass' reached the public. From the late-1920s into the 1930s, the public's interest in jazz grew, but *Melody Maker* struggled to cover the music meaningfully. Jim Godbolt (1984: 271), a jazz historian, considered Jackson 'ill-informed' but accepted that it was 'hardly surprising, since Jackson has no discographies, histories or biographies to consult, and the musicians concerned were 3,000 miles away.' Jazz papers began to compete with *Melody Maker* and better their coverage: *Rhythm*, which featured

Spike Hughes' writings, was formed in 1929, followed by *Hot News* and *Swing Music* in the 1930s.

New forms of jazz – or, for that matter, the people who invented, recorded and performed the new musics – sometimes concerned *Melody Maker*'s writers. Derek B. Scott (2003: 88) and George McKay (2005) have noted Edgar Jackson's prejudice towards black people. Jackson, like others in music industry, considered a moral code as an element of musicians' professional standards which, in this case, were informed by ideas of white supremacy. In 1926, for instance, John Souter's painting 'The Breakdown' – picturing a black jazz musician sat playing saxophone for a naked white woman – compelled Jackson (quoted in Godbolt 1984: 28) to write:

> We demand that the habit of associating our music with the primitive and barbarous negro deviation shall conclude forthwith … 'Breakdown' … lacks the respect due to the chastity and morality of the younger generation but in the degradation it implies to modern white women there is a subversive danger to the community and the best thing that could happen to it is to have it… Burnt!

Jackson's words demonstrate a common belief about music influencing young people. The musical profession, as a consequence of this idea, made efforts to control the people permitted to make music in public and, therefore, the messages and sounds transmitted. *Melody Maker* gave voice to concerns about people, behaviours, sounds or ideas that might be deemed transgressive and would therefore, threaten the music industry. Jazz from the U.S., composed and performed by predominantly black men, did, nevertheless, gain a footing in which forced the music press to adapt. Spike Hughes, now regularly contributing to the *Melody Maker* under the pen-name 'Mike', used his authority as a performer who understood the European musical tradition to create sympathetic criteria for analysing jazz and conferring relative standing within the genre (Arvidsson 2011) – Matt Brennan (2013) argued that a similar shift in rationale was required to justify rock 'n' roll. Hughes, as Alf Arvidsson (2011: 259) argued, contributed to the perception 'that the African-American musician was the primary source of jazz's inherent and defining qualities.'

Melody Maker survived the Second World War despite bomb damage prompting a move to 19 Denmark Street. The paper was still scorned by jazz enthusiasts as it had been

before the war. In the *PL Yearbook of Jazz* (1946: 28), Albert McCarthy wrote that *Melody Maker* was: 'A newspaper of wretched aspect designed for the British dance-band musician and those who make their money out of dance music in this country' adding 'the reviews of Edgar Jackson are of no interest whatsoever to the genuine jazz enthusiast.' McCarthy ran *Jazz Forum* which started in June 1946 and specialised in, as Godbolt (1984: 271) put it, 'esoteric features', but such was the success of *Melody Maker* – which at this point, had an average weekly circulation of 44,136 – McCarthy's writers contributed frequently to its rival.

In 1955 Jack Hutton, a trad jazz trumpeter who, before serving in the RAF, had worked on children's comics, replaced Edgar Jackson as the editor of *Melody Maker*. Jackson left the paper with a growing circulation that in the opening six months of 1955 averaged over 100,000 copies per week. In some respects, this was due to enthusiasm for the new rock 'n' roll craze attracting young people with greater disposable income and steady employment. It was not all rock 'n' roll though, as Hutton brought in jazz writers who would loom large in the music press for the next decades like Max Jones, Laurie Henshaw, Chris Hayes and Bob Dawbawn. He also added a voice for modern jazz, Bob Houston, and Diz Disley – a banjoist in thrall to Django Reinhart. Chris Welch, who went on to write for the *Melody Maker*, remembered the paper of the 1950s fondly. He told Paul Gorman (2001: 19) that 'the *Melody Maker* seemed incredibly hip. There was no television to speak of in those days, but it carried weekly coverage of this almost underground music scene, which made you feel like part of a secret society.'

Of course, Welch was in a position to romanticise the paper and the scenes it covered, but the paper of the late-1950s and 1960s was *the* place to follow and, through classifieds and concert listings, participate in, popular music. The paper was dominated by jazz and stars like Count Basie, the big band swing jazz pianist, were treated with reverence. In the 12 October 1957 issue, *Melody Maker* announced that Basie was voted the 'world's top jazzman' and lauded as 'sensational' when invited to re-open the Royal Festival Hall (RFH) – performing to members of the Royal Family. Over the next few years, jazz luminaries from the U.S. such as Louis Armstrong and Thelonius Monk, along with British jazz artists including Humphrey Lyttelton, George Melly and Ronnie Scott, all performed at the RFH – next door to the British Film Institute's National Film Theatre, no less. In 1961, the paper's tagline remained 'the best in jazz' and, later that year, the *Melody Maker*'s (8 June 1961)

festival in Blackpool 'rocked' but rock 'n' roll and skiffle performers were given secondary billing to the trad jazz stars.

Melody Maker's cosy relationship with jazz meant that it and it lost out to the *New Musical Express* (*NME*) when the Beatles' became wildly popular in 1964. Maurice Kinn, a Soho man-about-town and publishing entrepreneur, bought the *NME* in 1957 and, in a move that was anathema to the *Melody Maker*'s staff, decided who was covered in his paper according to the top 30 of the singles chart – which *Record Mirror* had begun to publish from July 1956. By tapping into the beat trend, the *NME*'s circulation rose from 88,839 copies per week in 1957 to 306,881 in 1964. *Melody Maker* did not have a close relationship with the Beatles, whereas Alan Smith at the *NME*, *Disc*'s June Harris and Keith Altham who, at the time, wrote for *Fabulous!* did. From 1958 the general trend with *Melody Maker*'s circulation was decline.

The paper was more successful from 1967 in which it managed to balance its interest in the jazz, folk and blues scenes, with popular progressive and underground rock. *Melody Maker* described the nascent rock scenes as justifiable alongside other established musics by valorising the musicians' technicality and knowledge of prior musical canons (particularly the blues) alongside their role in representing youth, a changing society and politics (Glen: 2018). *Melody Maker* gave journalists and musicians space to be outspoken, within certain limits. Since employing Ray Coleman, *Melody Maker* had picked fights with the BBC over radio regulation and censorship and dug into their affairs of the music industry. *Melody Maker* was outspoken in its defence of the Rolling Stones, for instance, after they were arrested for the possession of drugs in 1967 (Glen 2018: ch. 2). The paper survived Jack Hutton leaving in 1969 to form *Sounds* – 'a left-wing *Melody Maker*' – and revitalised the paper with young writers recruited from local newspapers: Chris Charlesworth, Richard Williams, Roy Hollingsworth and Michael Watts. In the late-1960s and into the 1970s that fans really invested in *Melody Maker*'s writings. Mark Ellen (2014: 31), who would go on to be a music journalist, remembered,

> I taped a picture of Julie Driscoll to my school folder. There were female pop stars but only two girls in British rock, the low-lidded Christine Perfect of shadowy blues-wailers Chicken Shack and the smouldering Driscoll with the whirling chart hit 'This Wheel's on Fire'. I went for Driscoll, a panda-eyed siren with a shaved head and

> polka dots. This was partly out of loyalty to what *Melody Maker* called our 'home-grown rock scene.'

In 1972, the *National Readership Survey* presented a snapshot of the *Melody Maker*'s readership. While it did not keep readers-per-copy figures like its competitor *NME* which had the relatively high level of 9 readers per copy, later in the decade the paper was read by around 6 people per copy and therefore reached about 1,200,000 people every week. If other titles are considered – *Sounds* and *Record Mirror* along with specialist or single-genre papers, the music press's total readership was easily over 3,000,000 every week during the 1970s. The gender split of readers was biased towards men – only 38% of its readers were women – most readers (48%) lived in the South East, and the vast majority were under 24 years-old (68%). Likely due to its more eclectic coverage and force of habit, more over-35 readers read the *Melody Maker* than the *NME*, however. The dominance of London and the South East did mean that music-making in other regions was largely overlooked; this discrepancy caused, for instance, the formation of the Manchester Music Force. The local musicians' collective incorporated so the *Melody* Maker 'knew' the 'character of the new north west, working class, radical musicians against the establishment' (Lee 2002 : 94).

Melody Maker adapted well to the so-called 'Golden Age of Rock Writing' and led the field – in terms of circulation – during the first half of the 1970s. Journalists drew inspiration from the New Journalistic writing of Tom Wolfe, Lester Bangs and Hunter S. Thompson found in U.S. publications like *Rolling Stone* and *Creem* to bring the subjective experiences of experiencing music and the stories behind the sounds to the page. The much mythologised music journalist on tour with a band and ensconced in various hijinks and debauchery emerged in this period. *Melody Maker* gave readers a taste of the world, and particularly America: Hollingsworth (*Melody Maker* 21 December 1972) wrote, during his stay in *Melody Maker*'s Manhattan apartment, evocatively about seeing Suicide for the first time in New York and Charlesworth (*Melody Maker* 2 February 1974) brought Georgia to life when visiting Capricorn Records, for instance.

As Britain's punk scene emerged in 1976, *Melody Maker* gave Caroline Coon a place to cover the new scene in a sociological with reflections on class and subculture. This perspective was powerful, and the interest in young, working class punks resulted in music papers having to carefully navigate moral panic and re-evaluate, through a sometimes

patrician lens, their duty of care towards readers – now young participants in a subcultural scene rather than fans who passively consumed a cultural product. The paper recruited Ian Birch, Jon Savage, Vivien Goldman, Mary Harron and Simon Frith to provide more punk coverage. Around this time, *Melody Maker* dropped its prerequisite that journalists read music and, according to Birch, when Jon Savage was recruited on the back of his *London's Outrage* fanzine, he could hardly use a typewriter. The paper was, to some extent, at odds with the music, fans and musicians who purported to challenge the music industry and society. Coon, for instance, was reprimanded by Coleman for giving a self-released 7" the coveted title 'single of the week' over a single released by a record label that paid for advertising. With its 'Street Heat' feature, however, the paper made some effort to report on scenes outside of London.

With the music industry's complicity in cases of sexual abuse, it would be remiss to mention the paper's part in turning a blind eye to abusive behaviour. *Melody Maker*, along with its competitors, had an often reductive and sometimes toxic way of describing women, and many instances of physical and workplace abuse also went unreported and rarely challenged. Mick Farren, who had contributed to *Melody Maker* in the early-1970s (striking up a dialogue with Tony Benn over music and politics) but is better remembered as the editor of *International Times* and as an *NME* writer, recalled members of Led Zeppelin being 'brought' underage women. He explained that reporting this would contravene the *espirit de corps* of the tour group, engender hardships on the road and prevent future access to artistes. Chris Charlesworth noted how Jimmy Savile, the Radio One DJ and serial sexual abuser, would take out expensive legal action in response to any bad press.

Women working for music papers ran into difficulties due to gender prejudice. Val Wilmer (1989: xii) recalled how, in the 1960s, an editor prohibited the publication of a photograph of her sitting next Little Brother Montgomery, a black blues pianist. As more women began to write in the music press towards the end of the 1970s, the gender dynamic in the workplace led Caroline Coon to hold women's discussion sessions. Indeed, sexism led some feminist musicians of the late-1970s and 1980s to be reticent to discuss sexual politics in music papers, a subject that they would more openly discuss in fanzines.

The early-1980s proved difficult for *Melody Maker*. In 1979 Ray Coleman was moved into a publishing role as editor-in-chief and replaced by Richard Williams, returning from a few years at *Time Out.* Williams redesigned the paper and appointed Simon Frith as features

editor but opposition from Coleman and a six-month strike – in which Coleman tried to put out a 'strike-breaking issue' and Williams resigned in protest – ended with IPC (the publishing company that owned *Melody Maker*) making the *Melody Maker*'s journalists redundant. Allan Jones respond by throwing a type writer through a window and Mike Oldfield was made editor. As Jones put it (Gorman 2001: 275), 'we had sales of 60,000 a week, a third of which were probably only interested in the bass-player ads at the back.' Compounding the internal struggles, the music press was fragmenting as several titles launched: *Smash Hits*, *The Face*, *The Wire*, *Select, Kerrang!*, *Vox*, *Mojo* and *Q. Smash Hits*, a biweekly pop paper, hit circulation levels unprecedented since the *NME* during Beatlemania. Changes in publishing technologies made new glossy papers cheaper to produce and more refined market research found consumer niches to exploit.

After Oldfield left the paper, Jones became editor and the paper moved towards the style and tone that would endure until it was merged with the *NME* in 1999. Having missed out on post-punk and new romantic coverage to the NME, and street punk along with the new wave of British heavy metal to *Sounds*, the paper began to establish a new identity. During the mid-to-late-1980s and 1990s, the paper changed its logo and layout as new journalists, including Simon Reynolds and David Stubbs, reinvigorated the paper's writing but ultimately failed to arrest its declining circulation. The paper was, perhaps, too focused on esoteric musicians and failed to capitalise on the popularity of hip hop and dance music. *Melody Maker* (2 April 1989) put the Butthole Surfers on the cover, for instance: the Austin band are adored by some but could be rather alienating to those who prefer their musicians not to perform while tripping on acid and setting fire to their instruments. The Butthole Surfers cover is, however, testament to how the paper provided significant coverage of the American DIY underground's forms of avant-garde rock music, its UK and European equivalents. These bands were, however, reticent with the press and rarely had the major label backing that would attract broad audiences and higher circulation for the *Melody Maker*. Despite this scene's valorisation by 'grunge' musicians and Nirvana's success temporarily helping sales, as did the Britpop, the paper's circulation halved during the 1990s to 32,206.

On 14 December 2000, *NME.com* announced that *Melody Maker* would merge with the *NME*. The *NME* took *Melody Maker*'s classified section – that helped the Stranglers, Killing Joke and Kajagoogoo complete their line-ups – and folded the paper. The *NME*'s

circulation was declining, however, as it struggled – in some part also due to the dire editorial guidance of Conor McNicholas – to compete with bloggers and websites like *The Quietus*, *Pitchfork*, *Stereogum*, and *Drowned in Sound*. From 2008, there was also a marked decline in readers' disposable income and employment prospects. The advent of illegal MP3 downloads in the late 1990s and viable online streaming sites in the 2000s meant that the music industry's physical sales fell sharply and music could be found for free online. A gatekeeper was no longer vital and advertising revenues fell. *NME* ultimately tried to move into *Loud & Quiet*'s territory as a free music paper, but as of Friday 9th March 2018 its print edition was withdrawn.

Conclusion

The entertainment press reached millions every week, providing news, criticism about entertainment and the arts while also providing a window into British culture and society. The messages and images presented to the entertainment press's readers were shaped by institutional pressures and commercial concerns, demanded by changing levels of circulation and advertising revenue, but remained beguiling because they could reveal what Lawrence Grossberg (1994: 98) called 'maps of identification and belonging.' Even if a journalist or editor didn't get it (they often did), a reader might find someone who did through a review, an offhand comment in an article or an advertisement – and perhaps there lies the entertainment press's cultural power. There was certainly an autodidactic culture, which grew with the expansion of higher education from the 1960s, within which the entertainment press was influential. In spite of the frequent compromises made by papers forced to provide a commercial product or represent – either formally or informally – an industry, the entertainment press offered the chance for readers to absorb the results of others' imaginations: new images, sounds, texts, understandings, ideas, ideologies, chances for radicalism, resistance and social change. The entertainment press led people to spaces of enjoyment beyond the everyday, articulated desire and emotions. It was the first place of reference before going *out*.

The ideas of critical freedom that journalist held, and the examples of how they were sometimes curtailed by editors, demonstrates how broader social and cultural trends – in this case determined by free market capitalism – shaped the entertainment press. But it is

only one of several ways in which the entertainment press reveals impressions of British society and culture. Papers and magazines articulated the concerns of young people more often from the 1960s, but also shaped their publications according to politics, social norms and values. The entertainment press is, similarly, a mine for media representations of class, gender, sexuality and race.

The author interviewed Keith Altham, Ian Birch, Chris Charlesworth, Caroline Coon, Mick Farren, Paul Rambali, Jon Savage and Richard Williams.

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