Granada TV, Johnny Hamp and *The Blues and Gospel Train*

'Masters of Reality'

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History is written for many different reasons; because history is intrinsic to developing and creating a sense of identity, we use history to confirm our own partialities. Such predilections shape the choices we make in selecting historical materials, and our own personal identity constructions then determine what we 'make' of them. Keith Jenkins (1991) informs us that history is composed of epistemologies, methodologies and ideologies. Such epistemologies display to us that we never really get to know the past; that the gap between the past and the discipline of history is in point of fact ontological, i.e. that the very nature of our being can never be fully recorded by history (history is therefore partial in the sense that it is incomplete). So, history should always be viewed as a contested discourse – it is a terrain upon which echelons and hierarchies deliberately construct interpretations of the past effectively to please themselves (history, therefore, is partial in a second sense: in that it is never impartial). History is therefore kinetic and propped-up by innumerable methodologies, which are, in turn, supported by countless ideologies. One definite history does not exist, and a myth of consensus only emerges when one authoritarian voice silences another. Consequently, many notable *ad hoc* histories often exist partially hidden from view because, by springing up often as one result of individual initiatives, in gaps and silences ignored by deterministic histories, they challenge authoritative narratives.

Since at least the 1930s the BBC has consciously produced a wealth of sound and film recordings of great historical interest, contributing along the way to the growth of what might be described as 'non-elite' oral history (Seldon and Pappworth, 1983). However, when one looks at the BBC's more recent 'authoritative' programme outputs concerning post war Britain (e.g. *What Has Become of Us?* 1995, *My Generation* 1999, *The History of Modern Britain*, 2009 and the 'Britannia' series of popular culture history programmes such as *Soul Britannia*, *Folk Britannia*, *Games Britannia*, etc), it appears that some voices have been all-but silenced. The Corporation's various attempts to diminish certain forms of media outputs as genuine representations of British post WWII histories (for example the significance of both ITV and Radio Luxembourg) are,

for the popular music historian troublesome. This silencing has occurred, one presumes, not only with the intention of establishing a singular 'truth' concerning British society in the post-WWII era, but also to establish a singular 'voice' (because we 'believe in' the folk neutrality of the BBC). An 'approved' past is pitched somewhat against popular memory thus effacing 'our' seemingly half-baked popular constructions. The great irony of this is that such popular memories contain several strengths and alternative readings, which at times are necessary to consider at variance with such over-arching narratives.

One perhaps ironic example of popular memory that remains un-eradicated by the centrality of such singular narratives of Britain's popular past can be illustrated by the case of my own late father. As a telly addict, he informed me on several occasions that he never really liked watching the BBC, feeling rather patronised by the output of the Corporation. Until the end of the 1960s, there were little-no regular afternoon TV schedules (apart from schools programmes and a little sport) but, after returning home from his rounds as a van salesman in the mid-afternoon, my father would turn on the BBC to see if there might be a little horse racing or cricket – ostensibly so that he could enjoy what he described as 'forty winks'. After waking up later in the afternoon, he would switch off the TV, but towards teatime **always** reverted to Granada for the ITN and local news and, as a serious smoker, to relish the cigarette adverts. As such, for my older sister and I, there was never any difficulty persuading him to watch ITV pop programmes such as *Thank Your Lucky Stars* and (when it was broadcast at various times in our region) *Ready Steady Go*. However, convincing him of the substance of *Top of the Pops* was more of a problem. It was only after the BBC began broadcasting *The Man from Uncle* (which both he and my mother liked) from the mid-1960s onwards immediately following the pop programme did he accede to our demands. One might even assume that, as a Liverpool FC supporter Dad would have welcomed with open arms *Match of the Day* on BBC2 in August 1964. However, although both he and I actually attended that Liverpool v Arsenal match – the very first *Match of the Day* – (a birthday treat) he did not capitulate to renting a set suitable for BBC2 until much later in the decade; he hated what he described as the 'toffy-nosed' voice of Kenneth Wolstenholme and preferred, instead, the Granada football highlights presented by Gerald Sinstadt of a Sunday afternoon.

I mention this little vignette because it is fair to state, I think, that we must always beware formalised histories and recognise the problems of broadcast documentary narratives. Such documentary material contains much information that **reports** events, but the fact that the reporting is undertaken primarily for internal action rather than internal record must always be taken into account. Such narratives are produced by groups of historians-cum-presenters who take their positions within vertically integrated systems personally: their values, positions, and ideological perspectives are supported by epistemological presuppositions (mostly that they are assiduously 'correct').These mind-sets are not necessarily held consciously but are instead refracted though a range of perceptions within which they exist (in this case) 'by and through' the BBC. Neutrality in BBC TV programmes about the past (especially a past which also involves competitors to the BBC) does not exist. Knowledge will always be related to power, and it is within such vertical power formations that specific kinds of legitimised knowledge are distributed. So, as historians we have to accept that such 'broadcast-based' histories are what broadcast historians make, that they are often assembled via slender evidence, that they are inevitably interpretive, that in the case of the BBC while they present apparent neutrality, they do so only according to certain matrixes. There are, of course, myriad sides to any synchronic event and by looking at the past as a series of diachronic threads (rather than colourful TV episodes) we can bring pressure to bear upon over-powering discourses. We do so by suggesting that histories dominate, while they also marginalise. One result could be that we are then reminded that history is always there to represent **someone**. Perhaps (in its shifting, problematic way) this particular diachronic historical investigation is a symbol for my father.

Granada

The Granada Television Company is the United Kingdom ITV contractor for North West England and more recently the Isle of Man. It is the only one of the original four ITA franchisees from 1954 that has endured into the 21st century as a franchise-holder. In 1954, the Independent Television Authority (ITA) awarded Granada the North of England contract for Monday to Friday (with ABPC's fledgling company, ABC, serving

the same area at the weekend). To facilitate this, the company used the Winter Hill and Emley Moor transmitters of the ITA. Broadcasting began on 3 May 1956, with the company originally holding the North of England weekday franchise, which also covered most of Yorkshire. The original contract initially served a vast area stretching from Liverpool and Blackpool on the west coast of England to Kingston-Upon-Hull on the east coast, covering counties such as Lancashire and the West and East Ridings of Yorkshire, and taking in major conurbations such as Manchester, Leeds, Bradford, Sheffield and Doncaster. Reception could also be reached in parts of northern Lincolnshire. In 1968, this broadcast region was divided into two area monopolies, with Granada holding the North West England franchise on all days.

Granada's early development, away from television, was typical of the entrepreneurial activities associated with cinema growth in the inter-war period. During the 1930s, Cecil and Sidney Bernstein created a cinema chain in the south of England called Granada Theatres Limited, following a visit to the area of Granada in Spain by Cecil in 1926. Some twenty years later, at the dawn of commercial television, the Bernsteins decided to bid for a franchise in the new independent television industry: a visible competitor to their own cinema chains. This approach, while bold, was similar in nature to that of the Associated British Picture Corporation (ABPC), who also, it seems, recognised that independent TV, perhaps unlike the 'Reithian' one nation BBC, could efficiently take the cultural pulse of the country. At least from this historical distance, BBC television seemed less interested in popular music than one might imagine. The Corporation undoubtedly fostered an anti-American stance at a time when the USA was charged with cultural colonization of the UK entertainment industries. When the BBC eventually introduced the TV programme *Hit Parade* in 1952, it tottered along that well-trodden pathway of presenting resident singers and bandleaders working their way through a demographically-apprised mainstream taste culture (indeed famous bandleader Joe Loss was still recording such programmes for BBC radio right through the 1960s).

The Bernstein brothers selected the North of England for its strong pre-existing sense of regional identity and locality. Other possible franchises available to Granada

included the London area, which was not selected, for fear of the quantity and quality of other candidates - and the Midlands franchise, which was considered by the Bernsteins too challenging: the region embracing many disparate regional identities. It was also thought that a TV franchise in the north of England would not have any detrimental effects on their own largely southern-based cinema chain – which of course continued to trade, as normal. Eighteen months elapsed between the award of the franchise and the start of transmission; in this time Granada built a brand-new TV studio complex on Quay Street, Manchester on bomb clearance land close to the River Irwell. This complex of studios proved to be revolutionary. The three other new ITV franchises tended to build production offices in London with regional offices in their constituencies (this was the strategy used by both ABC and ATV and similar to present day ITV). However, Granada wanted to be at the epicentre of their adopted area and so built its main base in the centre of Manchester. Granada was the first British television company to create facilities purpose-built for television production. Before this (and for some time after), companies converted former film studios, cinemas or other large buildings. This Manchester base actually pre-dates the BBC Television Centre by four years. To embellish the scale, studios were eccentrically numbered with even numbers only. For example, 'Studio 10' was not even part of the Manchester complex at all, but actually the Chelsea Palace Theatre in London. This beautiful theatre was owned by the Bernsteins and used by Granada for recording comedies and variety shows when acts were not always willing and/or able to travel to Manchester.

The culture of Granada was distinctly more politically left of centre than not only the BBC but also other more conservative ITV franchises. The Bernsteins were known to be 'entrepreneurial socialists' – if that's not a contradiction in terms - and felt that Granada TV would only succeed if their adopted area recognised an authenticity in the company. The Bernstein brothers certainly appeared to understand issues of homology at the heart of local broadcasting; there had to be some kind of embodiment of and by the people of the north of England in Granada's visual images. This embodiment also, it was felt, had to contrast sharply with the forms of 'one nation' cultural capital preferred by the BBC.

The Bernsteins, therefore sanctioned hard-hitting documentary series, most famously the contentious, multi-award-winning weekly series *World in Action* beginning in 1963 and also *Seven Up!* which dealt with the aspirations of children growing up in the post war era and how this was linked to their class and economic status.
Gritty dramas such as *A Family at War* (1970-72) were also seen as part of Granada's mandate. Indeed, the classic soap opera *Coronation Street*, which started a 13-week, two-episodes-a-week regional run on 9th December 1960, was very much a part of the legacy of the 'kitchen sink' social realism engendered by such 'northern' plays as *A Taste of Honey* (Shelagh Delaney 1958, later a film shot at Salford and Blackpool in 1962). In 1958 ABC began *Armchair Theatre* and Granada made important contributions, helping to commission writers such as Alun Owen (later screenwriter for *A Hard Day's Night*), Ted Willis, and Harold Pinter. Granada also set up a unique experiment in 1968, employing actors to work in both television and theatre on the same contract: The Stables Theatre Company directed by Gordon McDougall.

There were key individuals: a young Jeremy Isaacs was involved with developing a significant portion of Granada's factual programming while Granada also produced a whole generation of major British TV executives from John Birt to Gus Macdonald (fellow *World in Action* producers), as well as regional news alumni such as Michael Parkinson, Mike Scott, Gay Byrne, Tony Wilson, and Brian Trueman. Although remaining of great significance to the region, it could be argued that Granada TV News is now merely one rather standardised ITV regional news programme amongst many. Certainly, the days of the post-structuralist Tony Wilson subverting in 1976 his employers' news agendas with what he considered more important items concerning popular music and (more specifically) punk rock, now appear long ago and far away. So, it could be argued that, by at least the early-mid 1960s, the milieu of the Granada Television Company perhaps reflected few of the attitudes and interests of their BBC counterparts. The company did not have to be 'all things to all people' and did not have to dwell on issues concerning the 'one nation-ism' that so dogged the rather upper-class hierarchy at the BBC. During the late-1960s and early-1970s Granada's specifically regional items, such as *This Is Your Right* (presented by Liberal MP Dr Michael Winstanley) openly criticised central government for its neglect of the region.

Vertical integration slows down capacity for change, and when an integrated system also draws its recruits largely from a rarefied atmosphere such as at Oxford and Cambridge universities, the social mores of its recruits are not only re-presented but ratified. Thus, according to Robert Hewison, the post-WWII BBC displayed: "the greatest potential for producing a homogenous, middlebrow society and in the middle 1950s seemed to have turned the social solidarity of wartime into a respectful deference for authority and tradition" (Hewison, 1988:209). The BBC did tolerate a modicum of dissent and modest debate, but it seemed at least to my father that only those who had been socially 'sanctioned' were allowed to contribute to such programmes. Granada, on the other hand, refused to walk around making programmes that might have been considered 'controversial' according to the BBC's somewhat paternalistic matrix. As a consequence, Granada was seen almost immediately by its (especially north-western) public as being somewhat instinctive, less prescriptive and patronising, and far more adventurous and opinionated than not only its state-controlled opposition, but also some of its ITA co-conspirators.

It is perhaps interesting to note, however, that Granada did not engage wholeheartedly in their own regional pop music programme until the early-mid 1970s (mostly produced by Mike Mansfield and Muriel Young), but were instead content to network programmes such as *Oh Boy!* and *Boy Meets Girl* (and later for the younger audience, *5 O'clock Club*). One might suggest that this was due to an all-too-common attitude towards popular music at this time: a consideration of pop music as 'for the kids': a transient and ephemeral product. However, the Granada cinema chain was already renowned in the south of England for promoting popular music and was immersed in the appeal of all things popular. During the 1950s such diverse popular music artists as Frank Sinatra, Winifred Atwell, Cliff Richard and the Shadows, among many, many others appeared at Granada cinemas in the Home Counties. One former employee enlightened this writer that a kind of reverse 'informed' opinion appeared to be prevalent in Manchester. He recalled asking why in the late '50s Granada didn't have its own pop show at Quay Street and was told that if they "could do something as good as Jack Good was doing it well then, go ahead!" To paraphrase, it then occurred to him that he was looking at it from the wrong way. *Oh Boy!* could not have

been surpassed at that stage – by anybody. This was further confirmed to me by Liverpudlian rock 'n' roll fan and BBC Radio Merseyside contributor Mick O'Toole who gladly stated:

> *Oh Boy!* was a brilliant piece of television and could never have been made by the BBC. *Six-five Special* was pathetic: Boxer Freddie Mills trying to do a comedy routine with a brush in his hand? Dance band singer for the mums and dads Dennis Lotis in vain trying to appeal to teenagers? It was terrible [...], patronising in the extreme and it was rightly put to the sword by *Oh Boy!* I don't think the BBC had a clue about rock 'n roll. *Oh Boy!* wiped the floor with *Six-Five Special*. (O'Toole to Brocken, 2009)

These testimonies, expressed to this writer in interviews conducted many years later, suggest that, at the very least, a commercial indulgence of popular culture existed at the ITA at a time when it was seen as ephemeral and patronised by the BBC ("*Oh Boy!* wiped the floor with *Six-Five Special"*). Granada's probing, thoughtful and perceptive local news service, which sought to develop a cultural fit between broadcasters, news items and the populace of the region, was similarly absorbed and attentive.

For example, although based in Manchester, Granada TV showed great interest in the cultural goings-on in Liverpool and, in 1962 recorded the Beatles at the Cavern in August just as Ringo Starr was making his Cavern debut with the group. That performance by the Beatles resulted in not only abuse hurled at the new drummer, but also a black eye for guitarist George Harrison (something it seems that Harrison never forgot). By its vigilance Granada had (perhaps inadvertently) captured a seminal moment in popular music history: as the Beatles could be seen bursting into the song 'Some Other Guy', a Cave-dweller was audible shouting at the group 'we want Pete'. The later transmission of this information to the region brought to attention not only the regional activity and unifying potential of popular music in 'Granada-land', but also the poverty of discourses that previously surrounded rock 'n' roll music and its effect on the youth of the UK. It was quite evident to those watching that something was happening, that this was a 'serious' music, and that there carried with it a profusion of commentaries. The man largely responsible for keeping such a watchful eye on the region's youth culture was producer, director and, later, presenter Johnny Hamp.

Johnny Hamp

The vibrant television career of producer Johnnie Hamp - with Granada TV for over 30 years, (much of that time as Head of Light Entertainment) - displays an impressive range of associations, from the aforementioned early days of the Beatles to the later days of *The Comedians,* and *Wheeltappers' and Shunters' Club*. Hamp trained as a Granada cinema manager in Kingston-on-Thames, moving to the group's flagship venue at Tooting for the seminal 1953 Frank Sinatra tour. Hamp's successful relocation to Tooting was followed by his pioneering of Granada's policy of promoting one-night-stand tours, featuring just about all the popular performers of the decade. Retaining responsibilities for film publicity and stage show management, Hamp was in at the beginning of Granada's TV activity in 1956, finding celebrities for the panel game *My Wildest Dream* (ITV, 1956-57) and guest stars for the London-based variety showcase *Chelsea at Nine* (ITV, 1957-60 – see 'Studio 10', back). Granada chairman Sidney Bernstein soon saw Hamp's potential as a producer, and persuaded him to work on programmes such as *Make Up Your Mind* (a guess-the-item's-value game; ITV, 1956-58), *Spot the Tune* (a music quiz with singer Marion Ryan; ITV, 1956-63), and *Criss Cross Quiz* (a noughts and crosses game; ITV, 1957-67). It was via Hamp's encouragement that a Granada TV crew was sent to Liverpool to check out the Beatles in 1962 for the 'People and Places' news magazine programme. He was also the man responsible for bringing the Beatles over to Manchester for their first regional performance 'proper' in October 1962. He then worked directly from Granada's Manchester headquarters, co-producing the by then re-named news magazine programme 'Scene at 6.30' (Granada TV, 1963-66).

Between 1963 and 1965, Hamp produced what has now become a legendary 'series' of American jazz, blues, gospel, pop, and rock 'n' roll-based TV specials: *Sarah Sings and Basie Swings* (ITV, tx. 2/10/1963), with Sarah Vaughan and Count Basie, *I Hear the Blues* (ITV, tx. 18/12/1963), featuring Memphis Slim, Muddy Waters, Sonny Boy Williamson, and Willie Dixon, *It's Little Richard* (ITV, tx. 8/1/1964), *The Blues and Gospel Train* (ITV, tx.19/8/1964) – which will be discussed here - featuring Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Muddy Waters, Sonny Terry & Brownie McGhee, and Cousin Joe

Pleasant, and *A Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On* (ITV, tx. 30/9/1964), with Jerry Lee Lewis, Gene Vincent, the Animals and the Nashville Teens. Hamp continued his popular culture series during 1965 with Woody Allen (ITV, tx. 10/2/1965), the American comedian's second appearance on British television; *The Bacharach Sound* (ITV, tx. 14/4/1965), celebrating the work of composer-songwriter Burt Bacharach; and *The Music of Lennon and McCartney* (London ITV, tx. 16/12/1965, network ITV, tx. 17/12/1965), a 45-minute montage of Beatles music performed by various artists from Cilla Black to Peter Sellers.

It must be emphasised that none of the above were BBC productions, and all programmes were broadcast by Independent Television only. In underlining this point this writer is attempting to draw to the reader's attention the self-publicising aspect of the BBCs historical vision of itself – which at times seems to place the Corporation at the centre of youth activity during the 1960s. US academic Paige McGinley in her paper "Cottonopoli – The Blues and Gospel Train arrives in Chorltonville" some years ago drew attention to the significance of *The Blues and Gospel Train* programme, but was still attracted to the proposal that this was a BBC, rather than an ITA, transmission, and while Dr CP Lee's excellent November 2008 BBC Radio 4 documentary concerning the broadcast certainly redressed this imbalance, its' very existence did tend to leave the impression that the BBC both 'recognised' and 'encouraged' such youth-based activity in the 1960s. From Mick O'Toole's perspective, that of a blues and country-loving twenty-something in the Liverpool of the 1960s, "nothing could be further from the truth: throughout the entire decade, the 'Beeb' was usually playing a game of catch-up with its leaner competitors such as Granada". (O'Toole to Brocken, 2009)

Hamp's articulatory comprehension of the popularity of such artists in Britain was to eventually mark a significant sea change in the dissemination and appreciation of disparate genres in the UK in the mid '60s. The inclusion of what might be described as a 'listening component' into television programme-making was not a common feature of television schedules at this time. While there might have been ITV pop shows such as *Thank Your Lucky Stars* (an Associated Rediffusion pop programme

broadcast from Birmingham) which included trendy young typecasts Janice Nichols and Billy Butler, not to mention the typically 'top down' ("and singularly awful" – Joe Flannery, see on) approach of BBC's *Juke Box Jury* where BBC 'stalwart' David Jacobs invited celebrity guests to mostly patronise popular tastes, there was little-no acknowledgement concerning how listeners were 'constructing' tunes, rhythms, genres, etc and were holding in mind different musical validations (while also linking these to anticipate the future).

Johnny Hamp, however, represented an understanding of the almost 'Presbyterian' nature of popular culture, from the 'bottom up', as it were, and alongside his colleagues perhaps understood that it was his duty to underwrite Granada TV's responsibilities: acknowledging and representing the authenticities of its public – whether that be via footballers such as Manchester United's George Best or Everton's 'Golden Vision' Alex Young (documentaries were made about both players), or blues musicians such as Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee (featured in *The Blues and Gospel Train*). Liverpool rock group manager and confidante of the young Beatles Joe Flannery recalls how:

> Johnny Hamp was just an amazing man to meet – he knew what you were all about without you having to explain yourself. Imagine that in early '60s Britain! I recall discussing this with Brian [Epstein] and we were both amazed at how different he was from the BBC people at Oxford Road [Manchester]. Hamp was genuinely 'show-business', whereas those at the BBC in Manchester seemed more-or-less like civil servants in white lab coats. We felt that in Hamp we had a kind of expressway to the business, I suppose; [...] and that Granada had **our** interests at heart. It was all very exciting. (Flannery to Brocken, 2009)

Blues, Folk, R&B

By 1963 jazz, blues, folk, and R&B acolytes were already 'constructing' themselves into clubs and societies with their own networks, journals (*Blues Unlimited* began in May 1963), promoters and even occasional record labels (Esquire, Tempo, Topic, for example) creating events, venues and 'scenes' in order to hear such sounds simultaneously, enabling fans to develop a perceived unity.

There had been at least three routes into the appreciation of the blues that were seldom taken into account by most British broadcasters at the time. One was via jazz: conceivably how the older enthusiasts discovered the music; another was via skiffle and/or rock 'n' roll and yet another was through the burgeoning folk scene which at that stage still accommodated blues and gospel music. Mike Rowe states: "against this musical backcloth a small Fifth Column of Blues fans were growing and pursuing this underground culture. It was like being a member of a secret society." (Rowe, 2007:4)

These sounds obviously constituted a language, a communication with a structural resonance between the sounds and the receivers. This language was evidently generative and held, for some, a far deeper embodiment that the surface-based syntagma of, say, *Thank Your Lucky Stars'* Billy Butler, who might one-dimensionally remark that that a track had a 'good beat' (this is not a criticism of Butler, who went on to deejay at the Cavern and has remained a seminal tastemaker on Merseyside for almost half a century), or Janice Nichols' rather circular argument which declared that a record would be hit because she liked it and she liked it because it was good ('Oil give it foive'). It could be argued that by 1964, many television producers were attempting to deliver an unambiguous message about popularity and a singular visage of youth culture. This can be seen as a somewhat derisive idea, especially when the pleasures of the musical text involved real, repeatable, ambiguously enjoyable, and individual musical experiences. By 1963 listeners and viewers were, in fact, becoming increasingly and actively discriminatory. Programme evidence suggests to us that Johnny Hamp in his championing of the blues realised this. He also realised the power of television: everyone within earshot of a TV would hear it and although people may not listen intently, several would also direct their eyes differently towards the same screen, in the same room, at the same time.

Therefore, such partially hidden diachrony can help us to some extent to appreciate how *The Blues and Gospel Train* actually came about. One might also examine another particular diachronic strand to further broaden our mode of enquiry. By retracing our steps two years to Sunday 21st October 1962 and the goings-on at Manchester's Free Trade Hall, we can perhaps begin to comprehend how blues music was contributing

to changing identities among young people. While, 30 miles up the East Lancs Road, the Beatles were playing a Sunday night booking at the Cavern to promote their first single for Parlophone 'Love Me Do', the seeds of the UK blues & folk boom were being further cultivated in Manchester's rain-soaked city centre, as the city played host to the touring American Folk Blues Festival. It was to be a seminal moment in its own right: the only UK date of a successful European tour and introducing to avid British fans for the very first time John Lee Hooker, Willie Dixon and T-Bone Walker. Blues fans, including John Mayall, plus a scouting party from London which had amongst others, Mick Jagger, Bill Wyman and Brian Jones (not to mention Paul Pond – later 'Jones'), travelled far and wide to taste the authenticity. This European tour had been conceived by German blues and jazz enthusiasts Horst Lippmann & Fritz Rau and was promoted by Stockport-based Paddy MacKiernan under the 'Jazz Unlimited' moniker. It was not the first time that blues aficionados had been able get close to their heroes. Tours by Big Bill Broonzy, Muddy Waters, and others had already introduced this important music to many British fans. But it was perhaps a more notable occasion because not only the aforementioned blues axis but also Memphis Slim, Sonny Terry & Brownie McGhee, Helen Humes, Jump Jackson and 'Shakey' Jake Harris could perform in front of two thousand or more British fans at once. A 19-year-old photographer, Brian Smith actually caught it all on camera and recollected to bluesologist Neil Henderson:

> I went along as I'd heard T-Bone Walker played like Chuck Berry - I didn't realise it was the other way around! He was such a showman, playing guitar one handed, on his back or behind his head! When John Lee Hooker came out, he looked very cool, the crowd stood up and started clapping wildly; he seemed rather chuffed by his reception! (Smith to Henderson, 2006)

The following year 1963 saw a return of this European Blues tour to the UK with an equally impressive line-up, headlined by Muddy Waters, Sonny Boy Williamson, Otis Spann and Memphis Slim. Granada TV's 25-year old director Philip Casson and producer Johnny Hamp approached Sidney Bernstein with the idea of filming the 1963 tour as a one-off studio special. By not only being fans themselves, but also realising the musical and historical significance of African American artists gaining such

recognition in the UK, they helped Granada TV to emerge as a directly influential cultural institution in its own right. Johnny Hamp much later informed Neil Henderson:

> It was a groundbreaking time [...] We had all sorts of ideas for what we then called 'light entertainment', they [the Granada management] were very receptive, we got away with murder, really. (Hamp to Henderson, 2006)

The programme was given the go-ahead and *I Hear the Blues* was broadcast by Granada TV on 18th December 1963. The setting was what might be described as 'down home' with a bare wooden stage and a studio audience very close to the performers – from the outset Casson and Hamp were fascinated by creating what they saw as appropriate ambience to match the genre of music. This was something that would become a feature of Hamp's work right up to and beyond the afore-mentioned *Wheeltappers' and Shunters' Club* working-men's club-cum-cabaret-style programmes of the 1970s.

By 1963 these blues tours organised by the aforementioned German blues fanatics Horst Lippman and Fritz Rau had contributed greatly to, not only the developing profile of blues music across Europe and the UK, but also the social, political and economic plight of African Americans. Blues music became for some a catalyst for such investigations as a living issue. That 1963 American Folk Blues Festival tour proved to be a boon for the fledgling *Blues Unlimited* magazine, founded in April 1963 by Mike Leadbitter and Simon Napier-Bell. Contributor to *Blues Unlimited*, John Broven later informed bluesologist Rob Bowman that "we were part of that generation that saw Blacks as oppressed. So, there was that kind of moralistic approach to it. We felt that by supporting the blues, we were supporting the civil rights movement. There was that romantic side to it". (Broven to Bowman, 2003:16) Bowman even states in the same article that the American Folk Blues Festival had played a such a significant historical part in UK popular music history that it contributed to a "transition of public consciousness" (*ibid*:18). Arguably Granada TV also contributed to such a shift in consciousness by expanding upon a discourse concerning the possibilities for consumers of popular music to become communal producers.

As the music presented by Johnny Hamp's 'specials' came to affect Granada's viewers, so they became more interested in particular genres of music. Such audiences then perhaps began to characterize themselves (or be defined by others) as connoisseurs, aficionados, and the like – using the music with other likeminded people. This, as we can see from those attending the 1962 American Folk Blues Festival, is but a short step away from actually making music.

Unquestionably, for a while it seemed as if almost every other British teenager was interested in the blues: either by listening, attempting to play, or researching the music. Throughout July 1964 in the lower reaches of the pop singles charts could be found Howlin' Wolf's 'Smokestack Lightning'. John Lee Hooker's 'Dimples' spent ten weeks on the lists, peaking at 23. Jimmy Reed's 'Shame Shame Shame' also spent a week or two on the singles charts that September. Chess LP compilations entered the album charts and during May 1964 Chuck Berry's 'No Particular Place to Go' peaked at number three on the singles charts, while throughout the year Pye's R&B International eps of Chess material sold in abundance. The Rolling Stones somewhat flippantly released their cover of Howlin' Wolf's recording of 'Little Red Rooster' as their fifth UK single towards the end of 1964 (just as the 'Folk Blues Festival' was heading for home); this Willie Dixon song reached the top of the singles charts.

By the end of 1964 the Beatles had been long gone from both the Cavern and from Liverpool and for a while there were probably more R&B bands than 'beat' or rock 'n' roll groups playing in Liverpool. R&B bands such as Almost Blues, The Hideaways, TLs Bluesicians were vying for attention and Cavern deejay Bob Wooler, having spotted this new trend, had already signed most of them to a management deal – despite his own lack of interest in blues music. Bob informed this writer some years ago that he:

> Wasn't really a fan of the music; I found it rather dour. But I could see that after the success of the Rolling Stones, there was a surge of interest in Chicago-style blues – so I went along with it because there was something of a musical hiatus at the Cavern by 1964 and I wanted to keep the place going. It actually attracted a different type of music-lover to the Cavern – they were more 'beatnik' and, at times, it was probably more like the '50s days when the Cavern was a jazz club. (Wooler to Brocken, 1997)

Jim Ireland, who owned the Mardi Gras and Downbeat clubs in Liverpool, and also managed several of these 'later' R&B-inclined groups, informed this writer in the 1990s that by 1964 he too had noticed that listening practices were changing. For him it was recorded R&B and soul music: portable, repeatable, and relatively affordable, that was beginning to make inroads into all live music in Liverpool.

Jim stated that record requests became increasingly important in his clubs, and the cult of personality began to embrace, not simply the groups, but the deejays spinning the (often Motown or early Stax) soul discs in-between sets. Indeed, Jim informed this writer that groups were in direct competition with R&B and soul records by 1965. It was also by 1964 that the British 'inkies', previously devoted to other forms of popular music (such as in the case of *Disc*, pop and *Melody Maker*, jazz), began to cover these mushrooming blues, soul and rhythm & blues pursuits; furthermore, alongside magazines such as *Blues Unlimited*, jazz magazines such as *Jazz News* also broadened their scope, genre-wise, into coverage of more blues-based activities.

Two major blues tours had been scheduled for 1964: The American Folk Blues and Gospel Caravan which toured in April-May, and the American Folk Blues Festival which toured in October. The latter of these two was considered that year by aficionados to be the key event, headlined as it was by Howlin' Wolf and Sonny Boy Williamson and featuring Texas blues supremo Lightnin' Hopkins, but it was the first of these two events that Johnny Hamp felt he could capture for Granada because of the proximity of the touring artists to Manchester that May. This he did on 7th May 1964 when he produced the musical television special entitled *The Blues and Gospel Train* – later broadcast on 19th August 1964.

This 40-odd minute programme was directed by Philip Casson and producer Hamp, and featured the notable set-design of Michael Bailey, and performances from Muddy Waters, Cousin Joe Pleasant, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee with backing by Otis Spann, Little Willie Smith and Ranson Knowling. According to the ticket, Reverend Gary Davis was scheduled to appear that evening, but no evidence exists of him on the surviving film.

Meaning

Several popular music studies and media studies writers have suggested that musical meaning has long been tied to the visual. Mundy (1999), for example has explored the embedded relationship of music with society via the visual in cinema, TV and video. Specifically regarding British popular music cinema of the late-1950s and early-1960s, Mundy notes that the "structural barriers that are part of the British social formation, class, gender, age and economics dissolve with the construction of an imagined community, reified through [The Young Ones]" (Mundy, 1999:169). Mundy argues that, by inventing this imagined community via a recognisable discourse of generational politics and a happy ending, both Cliff Richard films of the early 1960s - *The Young Ones* and *Summer Holiday* - convey and verify Cliff as an authentic mainstream British entertainer. Cliff's social rite of passage is acted out on screen: his recognition and re-evaluation by the older generations featured in these movies 'officially' certify his membership of British society. In a similar, yet actually **inverse**, manner *The Blues and Gospel Train* transformed Blues music from a little known 'troublesome' (i.e. 'racialized') musical area of activity into the aforesaid "public consciousness" of those watching. In this case, an imagined community was offered as an opposition that could be assimilated. This was in contrast with the Cliff Richard presentation of society effectively 'shaking hands with itself'.

All of Johnny Hamp's popular music 'specials', but particularly his blues works, set in motion visible acknowledgements of peripherals and oppositions, while at the same time allowed viewers to acknowledge and confirm 'idealised' (racialized) types and sounds. Such programmes are representations of how non-institutional stereotypes, representing strategies of 'otherness', can cut against the conventional narrative values of 'entertainment' in the imagined sense (as represented by Cliff Richard's movies). As a result, *The Blues and Gospel Train* suggested that the received notion that all popular music was pre-digested and interchangeable could be challenged. One might even go so far as to say that such works are precursors to popular music studies as an academic discipline, so significant are they in suggesting to the consumer that there are 'idealised' types of different cultural forms, where core aspects facilitate a

discourse of authenticity between consumers. This begins a process whereby stereotypes are acknowledged, but then perhaps refuted; where the specifics of the musical content, within a specific context, can be acknowledged in its own right.

The linking together of such aural and visual images are therefore, as Longhurst (2007) suggests, inextricably "entwined" with context. Longhurst also cites Kaplan (1987), in her discussion of music video, where she argues that many videos of the 1980s abandon traditional narrative devices and that by doing so are intrinsically self-reflexive. By this she means that many videos of that era presented narratives that fractured conventional linear expectations concerning world view 'received' causes and effects. Video visual and aural affects were therefore created to present a specifically synchronic authenticity that existed in a state of realism in and of itself. This realism exists 'in situ', as it were, so that each spectator, by bringing his/her own ideas to the text, can draw random or serialised flows of meanings by and through their own knowledge (or lack thereof) of diachronic threads. So, our expectations can be potentially confirmed or relatively disrupted. Kaplan therefore suggests that music videos can self-consciously expose the processes of their own constructions and directions, thus questioning the realisms of immediately preceding or even contemporaneous conformative film and TV presentations that deal in the currency of accepted 'causes and consequences' narratives – Mundy's "structural barriers", perhaps.

However, while Kaplan correctly identifies these potentially 'post-structural' effects of 1980s video culture, she perhaps ignores important historical analogous significations transmitted across such early-mid '60s British TV presentations by independent programme makers Johnny Hamp and Granada TV. In such Hamp-produced programmes (as listed above) this important alliance devoted time, space, place (and cost) to produce synchronic musical and visually linked moments to cater for a specialised yet emergent music taste culture in the UK. By doing so, established conventions of the British broadcast media at that time were confronted and contested, for example those which affirmed conventional oppositions concerning what constituted intelligent, original music (in comparison with the novel and standardised). Indeed, Hamp not only produced visual and aural imagery of immense

synchronic significance, but also left a lasting diachronic impression with such programmes. One might also broaden this discussion to include such notable non-Hamp ITV programmes as *Ready Steady Go*, in which the subtitle 'The Weekend Starts Here' pronounced a more or less 'formal' break in the realities of weekly rituals, and corroborated a fissure within TV schedules by its presence, while also subscribing to a language of a sub-culture that was at once both liberal and elitist – i.e. Mod.

In a similar way, *The Blues and Gospel Train* programme also employed a sub-cultural narrative. An intricate *mise en scène* of a make-believe American South (bales of cotton, broken farm equipment, washtubs of laundry, etc.) was openly presented via the set design and such props were set against a real, but disused, train platform in Manchester. This narrative was, therefore, synchronically challenging and self-reflexive. Such self-reflexive, expressive and 'truthful' imagery can be seen to have worked on a number of levels, turning the locus of the viewer's attention increasingly towards the emotions presented by the artistes as the programme proceeded. In the first instance, to turn the station into a scene from the Deep South, with shutters attached to windows and a huge platform sign bearing the words "Chorltonville and all stations South" pronounced a somewhat critical stance. If the blues was, according to John Broven, something that exposed a "kind of moralistic approach", then for these evangelists the very presence of sacks, crates, 'wanted' posters and even a few chickens and goats added not only to the effect, but also to the effect of inequality. Michael Bailey's props were not presented on a surface level alone - these visual signifiers were deeply set into the text.

If we also consider the object of the exercise was, on the one hand, to capture the popularity of the blues at this important moment in time amongst British youth, while, on the other, to ensure that these artistes were not presented as caricatures (rather, to display the inherent dignity of this music), then Johnny Hamp and his team had to be careful that the set, while presenting an image of the sources did not slip into tasteless stereotypes. One might argue that Casson, Hamp and Bailey were able to re-present and re-construct forms of the blues that juxtaposed and questioned rather than blithely offering-up cultural and genre stereotypes; by doing so they suggested

a solidarity together with the variegated possibilities of the blues, and transmitted both messages across to Granada's viewers – this was no mean feat in mid-1960s Britain (one might argue that ultimately it was the props, rather than the performers, that were the stereotypes). Each artiste represented quite different genre-based sources for their blues and gospel music. Muddy Waters played his 12/8 electric Chicago blues, Joe Pleasant displayed his New Orleans-style bordello piano blues, Sister Sharpe presented her electrified gospel sound, and Sonny and Brownie offered their eclectic softly sung roadhouse folk-blues interlaced with a howling harmonica. This material not only constituted a different code with an unquestionable history of separateness and autonomous musical development (even though, as Tagg, 1989, suggests, we can trace a process of interrelatedness between this and other 'white' forms of music), it also displayed its own internal cultural geography and genre-based 'otherness' to the viewers (an 'otherness' that was also recognised by the youth of Manchester that evening).

For example, one performance-related paradigm of such immediate authenticity illustrates this well. Joe Pleasant's routine at the piano (upon which was balanced a cage holding chickens, rather crudely representing his spirited song 'Fried Chicken Blues') is captured by the cameras in great detail and it thus sincerely implanted into the entire structure of the transmission. Joe begins rather nervously, but then soon realises that this young audience are in full support of his aesthetic. His smile lights up the TV screen as he realises that he is among friends and appreciative listeners. He moves into his customary 'blues' position at the piano and settles into a thoroughly assured performance (reflecting his perhaps surprise popularity on the 'Gospel Caravan' tour itself). Following this, his part-time MC role displays a relaxed communality. At the end of his own brief set, he assists Sister Rosetta Tharpe from her horse drawn buggy at the side of the platform and 'cake-walks' the bold sister to centre stage (see on), where she then begins her performance. Joe then leaves the platform by the waiting room door at the rear. However, whether by direction or inspiration (it matters little to the viewer either way), he shortly afterwards re-joins Sister Sharpe back on the platform/stage to merely sit and listen in an old rocking chair while she continues – a wonderful moment of organic unity and relaxed self-confidence, and nothing to do with 'Uncle Tom' typecasting.

Audience

As for this audience, they consisted of those lucky few who were invited or able to obtain the limited run of tickets for the 'Hallelujah' train (so titled for the day: the steam locomotive used in the event was an Ivatt Class 2MT 2-6-0 engine fitted with an 'authentic' cowcatcher and a lamp on top of the smoke box) and the rest who picked up their more standard tickets from Granada's Quay Street offices. No admittance fee was charged, but special tickets were printed for the invited train travellers (largely made-up of camera-friendly young local blues and jazz fans of note, known to the director and producer). These perhaps more privileged fans were requested to muster at Manchester Central Station (now the GMEX) by 7.30 pm where they would be taken to Wilbraham Road by the train. Some judicious editing takes place to effectively make this work for the cameras, and the young people are seen disembarking during Muddy Waters' opening riffs. The movement of the train and the physicality of the surge of young fans attempting to find a remaining place on the bench-terracing, laid out on the platform, creates an atmosphere and sets a scene. Those who were not part of the 'select' group on the train were informed to make their own way to the disused station with instructions to "come early!" So the photogenic train-travelling specialists were forced to fight for a seat already occupied by those who were not selected for the train journey – this melee further enhances the growing atmosphere. Brian Smith's surviving ticket shows that the show was supposed to begin at 7.30pm, but that the invited train passengers were to gather at Central Station at the same time. This was to enable the crowd at Wilbraham Road to fill the bench-seating as the train steamed into the station – visually exciting for all concerned.

It was on the arrival of the train that the evening's events truly began. One illuminating comment on the extant ticket indicates the dress code: "Casual gear essential: Denims, Sweaters" – very 'trendy, very 'with it', one suspects, and *de facto* 'relaxed'. A rather cool and decidedly damp evening also dictated that many duffle coasts could be seen, perhaps representing a more middle-class demographic. This class issue with regards to the blues (and clothing, of course) continues to be of interest to all popular

music historians, for it does tend to appear that the youthful middle classes were often the repository for such sounds. In some respects, this is disproved by my own memories of watching the show on TV – my family at this time were probably 'upper working-class'. I was, however, also a choir boy in suburban West Derby, and my older sister was about to go to Liverpool Institute for Girls on a scholarship, which perhaps tempered my working-class roots.

One side of the railway track was converted into a stage, while, as suggested above, the other side was terraced to seat this audience of enthusiastic (white) blues fans. *South Manchester Reporter* columnist James Chapman-Kelly was just 16 at the time; he had gone to the event with friends and he later remarked to his fellow reporter Gareth Tidman:

> It was incredible because we loved these Blues players in those days. My mates were all Mods and the Blues were the key to the new scene that was springing up around us - even the Rolling Stones were still playing blues then. People only heard about the concert through word of mouth but there was a huge crowd and it inspired people to go off and make their own music. Not many people know about it. It is like a piece of forgotten history. (Chapman-Kelly to Tidman, *South Manchester Reporter* 9/11/06)

This was undoubtedly an issue of cultural capital: how informal knowledge could be passed amongst those with an understanding of the language of the music in Manchester, and visual imagery on the screen. Indeed, *The Blues and Gospel Train* used essentially two distinct types of signifiers to support the cultural capital of the occasion in particular ways. Firstly, via visual 'access' signs, erected so that those viewers with a cultural investment with the genre could recognise those entering this station and endorse the set as a domain of authenticity, activity and participation. This was at least partially accomplished via the titles sequence cutting between young fans 'travelling' to the event on the train and the blues artistes 'travelling' on a perhaps a more well-appointed motor coach. The blues artistes were seen as arriving as any professional artist might (but of course they were Black). The excited blues fans were also seen as 'arriving' at Chorlton, as many fans might (but they were white). So, the compliant fan/artist dichotomy supported by conventional narratives was indeed

presented, but it was immediately undercut via issue concerning race, issues that would perhaps be recognised as important connotations for the blues aficionado watching at home.

Secondly, 'discovery' signs were presented in the programme and these were also of great significance. Such signs attempted to draw pictures for the relatively uninitiated. There were visual encodings, for example, of cultural marginalization via the poverty suggested in the set, but these stereotypes were contrasted with the connotations attached to the evidently upwardly mobile artistes. Sister Rosetta Tharpe's very presence signified her own and also (Black) female upward mobility in a (Black and white) male world; modes of dress and musicianship (e.g. the coat worn by Sister Rosetta Tharpe and her use of a Gibson electric guitar) signified at a deep level; she was most certainly not the stereotypical woman to be looked at by men, or indeed the typecast Black woman of 'double jeopardy'. Sister Tharpe had already garnered a formidable reputation as a gospel diva *par excellence* before her arrival in the UK. Perhaps in true Mancunian fashion, the heavens opened as the show got underway (apparently prompting Sister Rosetta Tharpe to switch her song at the last minute to 'Didn't It Rain') and by the time she entered the performance platform in a horse and buggy her appearance was taking on almost regal proportions. However, the ironies associated with such an entrance were not lost on either Sister Tharpe, the director of the programme, or indeed the concertgoers, as double meanings connected with African American *signifyin'* practices were made visible.

For example, as an ironic Sister Tharpe was helped down from the 'surrey with a fringe on top' by an equally ironic Joe Pleasant, it was at that moment when the (aforementioned) symbolic Cakewalk began. The implications of this walk/dance remain vast: The Cakewalk was a celebratory dance often performed by 19th century Black Americans as an acerbic comment on the dancing proprieties of 'elevated' white society, with a cake sometimes awarded to the most 'ridiculous'. Those involved here were well aware of the connotations such displays involved and were willing to use such symbols as *signifyin'* double utterance evidence to all concerned that they were self-aware and also self-reflexive and ironic. Furthermore, Sister Tharpe's performance

included a thunderous guitar solo. 'Pretty good for a woman, ain't it?' she quipped as one song came to an end. A review in the Manchester-based Twisted Wheel club's magazine *R&B Scene* the following week stated, "Her guitar playing was a real **shock [my emphasis]** and the audience loved every note." Sister Sharpe also played her famous Gibson SG with a thumb pick (just like Muddy Waters) and in her highly fashionable overcoat, encrusted with sequins, she presented an amazing juxtaposition against the stereotypes often proscribed on Black (female) Americans. This evidently expensive coat with the equally expensive SG slung over it was certainly in sharp contrast with those platform adornments.

This dichotomy was also pursued further by Joe Pleasant and Sonny and Brownie who (probably because of the inclement weather) were heavily 'suited and booted' for the occasion. The overall affect was one of self-consciously questioning the 'prop' stereotypes via the more urbane (nay 'sophisticated') clothing – a visual opportunity not lost on Casson and Hamp in presenting what they saw as the 'real' sounds and images of African American society in comparison with the conventional received wisdom concerning the same, while at the same time not completely invalidating them – placing them perhaps into a critical, historical relief. Such clarity of distinctions in these visuals is central when, not only musical but also social differences are illuminated in relation to viewers' predispositions towards music and race. For example, at the beginning of the programme Muddy Waters could be found on the 'audience' (rather than the 'performance') platform. He was surrounded by a group of happy and excited blues-mad youngsters as they exited the incoming train onto the platform while Muddy played his electric Fender Telecaster guitar. For a brief moment the stereotype of the solo Black man playing on a station platform, as if busking, is presented to us (not that to this writer's knowledge Muddy Waters ever seriously busked). But this was not the usual pigeonhole where people passed-by, ignoring the singer – quite the reverse, in fact. Every one of these white youngsters surrounded Muddy, some hanging upon his every note, others clapping along to the boogie. His hat was not on the floor, but was firmly on his head as, still in his overcoat, he proceeded to utterly engage this station audience. Perhaps Casson and Hamp were

articulating that the Black musician at the railway station was on this occasion **far** from 'invisible'.

Conceivably, by also being intrinsic to and produced by commercial television (rather than the BBC) – with a break for advertising in the middle - these musical and visual distinctions culturally resonated as realistic. Far from being 'sidelined' within a commercial context (as might have been the accusation at the time) the advertising perhaps made them hyper-realistic in a tele-visual sense. Such exposure is far more vivid on commercial TV because Granada neither patronised performers nor the viewers, as the BBC had a tendency so to do. The programme did not include an accompanying 'ethnomusicological' discourse or an older patronising UK MC 'getting down with the kids'; one might even argue that the advertising acknowledged the programme as a living issue in context, rather than an abstract lecture-like presentation so redolent of the BBC at that time (this was fun!). This is the 'listening component' discussed earlier; rather than 'po-faced', imposed, and patronising value systems at the heart of the show, we witness presence **as** affect and are allowed to work things out for ourselves.

This is further confirmed by the 'stage right' performance of Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee (coded for us by being seated at the other end of the platform from Sister Tharpe's grand entrance, as if waiting for the last train home). Already well known and respected by many British folk and blues lovers of that era, by 1964 Sonny and Brownie were almost an integral part of the UK folk and blues scenes. Their magnum opus was 'Walking Blues' aka 'Walk On' which, here, was performed with such delicate precision that it came, in effect, to 'bookend' the entire evening. 'Walking Blues' was the physical and sonic encapsulation of an already-known repertoire, for many at Chorlton that evening knew that this was Sonny and Brownie's 'signature tune' – an interesting refraction of the standard entertainment model: one always ends with the song that the people have been waiting for. And while there was a reprise via all of the singers belting-out a version of 'He's Got the Whole World In is Hands' – perhaps a final recognisable 'pop' sign (via knowledge of Laurie London's 1957 hit) for the

previously uninitiated – it was Sonny and Brownie's relaxed, distinguished blues that truly signalled the end of the programme.

Therefore, these sounds and images are 'historical' in perhaps the purest sense – it is a contested discourse, an embattled terrain in which we are asked to consider various blues and gospel sounds not only as representations of 'struggle' but also as 'entertainment'. Interpretations could be constructed by viewers concerning their own pasts and the present, and their attitudes towards preconceived ideas concerning music and race.

The images and sounds suggest diachronic, rather than definitive, history; in this programme the history of African American struggle could be viewed as a shifting signifier without *a priori* certainties. When one adds-in the entertainment factor, this creates an interesting issue: these stories exist synchronically, of the moment (for they are very 'entertaining' in their own right). *The Blues and Gospel Train* informs us that in any culture nothing is certain. The images of these African Americans on the railway platform, then, were not absolutes; they deconstructed and made arbitrary and pragmatic the connections that had previously been made between the 'common sense' of persistent, habitual homilies concerning truth and certainty surrounding race and society.

After all these years Muddy Waters 'alone' on that platform yet 'surrounded' by young people still suggests that we are partners with uncertainty. Do the fans acknowledge Muddy as a cultural icon? an entertainer? both? This TV programme, therefore, endures not only in a practical sense as a representation of important social and musical conjunctures in a very significant year for the exposure of African American genres in Britain, but also as a theoretical deconstruction of the myth of origin and truth – this programme is a fact not a truth. It is for these reasons that *The Blues and Gospel Train* should be regarded as something of a seminal moment, not only in the history of the blues, but also in the history of British commercial television.

Imagery, locality

But that railway station location also pursued other forms of imagery. In contrast with not only the theatres that the 'Caravan' tour was actually playing, but also the clubs from which much of this music emanated in the US, the evocative and theatrical *mise en scène* produced, additionally, a theatrical, narrative flow concerning issues at the roots of all blues enquiries, such as migrations and returns, arrivals and farewells. And while one might argue that dressing the platform simply made for better television, the choice of the train platform as a stage is intensely rooted in webs of authenticity with the blues: travelling, railroads and rail yards, and the circulatory nature of blues and African American internal migration. Further, it confirms to the television audience Manchester's status via its affinity with such visual imagery and how this area of the north of England was, for Granada Television, a place of authenticity in its own right (somewhat run-down, but vibrant). After all, railway stations - whether occupied or disused – are curiously very authentic places to be: they are what they appear to be – openly transient, openly discursive.

Perhaps also in the wake of the 'Beeching' British Rail cutbacks of the early 1960s (the closure of Wilbraham Road station actually preceded these stringent cuts), the railway platform location was also speaking to those disaffected by the Establishment. The blues, in effect was not simply an authentic signifier for its place in American society, but came to represent an authenticity within **this** city, **this** region of England, also subject to several social and cultural stereotypes. The young people present at Wilbraham Road station that May evening in 1964 might or might not have been the sons and daughters of upper middle-class power brokers. But their presence that evening was evidence of a discourse concerning sacred cows, moral vacuums and popular prejudices. So, the very locality of the programme is of great historical significance for it has become clear that authenticity also surrounds cities and within cities, places and spaces that can be identified as authentic. Manchester by 1964 had a growing musical authenticity; not only as the somewhat 'hidden' part of the adjacent Merseybeat scene, from which several bands such as the Dakotas, Herman's Hermits, and the Hollies emerged, but also because of the importance of institutions such as

the Halle Orchestra at the Free Trade Hall which promoted classical music for all. Such dialogues both complemented and contrasted with the visual communications presented by Granada's *Coronation Street* (massively successful across the country by 1964), which offered Salford and Manchester as cities of great working-class authenticity (and poverty).

It had always been assumed that the old Chorlton-cum-Hardy station next to where Morrison's Supermarket is today was used for the show. However, Dr CP Lee, (of Alberto y Lost Trios Paranoios fame and now a lecturer at Salford University) presented an excellent documentary on BBC Radio 4 in November 2008 and later, on his website, stated that following a recent showing of the *Blues and Gospel Train* film in Manchester: "As always at the Q&A the question arose, wasn't the site at the current Morrison's on Wilbraham Road in Chorlton? ... No, it wasn't!! […] the recording was at the disused Wilbraham Road Railway Station accessed at the end of Atholl Road" (www.cplee.co.uk).

Therefore, a station situated adjacent to Princess Parkway and Wilbraham Road was actually used. This was not even named 'Chorlton Station', as such. That moniker was probably used by Granada because it sounded better than 'Wilbraham Road Station'. This hitherto incorrect identification of the venue most likely occurred because Hamp changed the name of the station to "Chorltonville" which sounded a little like a Southern whistle-stop station. So, the venue was in fact on the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway line (later Grand Central line) from Manchester Central **via** Chorlton to Fairfield and Guide Bridge – once known as the Fallowfield Loop. The station, itself, was near the junction of Alexandra Road South with Mauldeth Road West and the old Railway House is still there, next to allotments on Alexandra Road. The station, originally 'Alexandra Road Station', was re-named as Wilbraham Road (about 250 yards away) in 1923 to avoid possible confusion with the north London suburb of Alexandra Park. The line was closed to passenger traffic in July 1958 but open to freight until it finally closed in October 1988. It has now been converted into the Fallowfield Loop cycle track. Such a locality, then, is very significant when we consider the routes that popular music takes. Not only was this setting important from

a tele-visual point of view, but also via the suggested reality of the location – as with the music, the station was obscure. But whereas the music was taken onto another level of popularity, the station remained shadowy until CP Lee's radio documentary of 2008.

This contemporary use of TV, therefore, served up self-reflexive images and sounds that reproduced the significance of blues and gospel music as communal, less individualistic, less needful of verbal explanation; perhaps, given Sister Tharpe's performance as a thoroughly committed Christian, even less uptight about the body. Further complicating the analysis of the event was the nature of the programme as a televised concert that employed a 'studio' audience, comprising real young Mancunians (even a few children are in evidence). Granada TV not only contributed to the authenticity of word-of-mouth blues culture, by offering up TV as a contributor to the already accepted multi and inter-textuality of blues appreciation in 1964, but also contributed to both Manchester's and Granada's growing authenticity across the region, and to a general debate about regionality, decline and control. So while we must agree with Kaplan when she identifies self-representation and coded signification concerning the immanence of video, such reflexivity can also be detected in independently-produced TV programmes of decades previous to the one she discusses. Johnny Hamp was willing to explore cultural stereotypes in the immediacy of tele-visual presentations that, while being held together by significant diachrony, were also willing to visually explore such issues surrounding music and its interactions with race, localities and authenticities literally 'there and then'.

Johnny Hamp continued

Hamp returned to the quiz show briefly (*Criss Cross Quiz* and *Junior Criss Cross Quiz* during 1966-67) before taking over Granada's highly influential film magazine *Cinema* (ITV, 1964-75) in 1969, presented at various times by Michael Parkinson and Chris Kelly. Hamp's successes with Granada Television as its Light Entertainment chief reached its peak when he produced *The Comedians* (ITV, 1971-85; 1992), an amazingly accurate reflection of the significance of the cabaret and comedy circuit in

the north-west of England at that time. So significant is cabaret to record that evidence of such activity even helps us to measure the cultural climate of the northwest of England. Despite the authority of agency in the day-to-day running of the cabaret circuit, no single opinion or identity, no singular musical genre, nor sound or instrumentation (despite the pervading 'keyboard' stereotypes) can be associated with cabaret. We can usually only gauge the success of cabaret by its immanence (it has not left us with much recorded material – and even this is largely unrepresentative). But Hamp's interest in the cabaret circuit has left us with a fascinating insight into yet another partially hidden discourse from the popular-past.

Hamp's *The Comedians* not only presented us with a non-stop torrent of stand-up jokes performed by cabaret club circuit comedians - Frank Carson, Ken Goodwin, Bernard Manning, Charlie Williams, and Mike Reid among them - many of whom went on to successful careers in their own right, but also awards us an insight into an underlying premise of a cabaret circuit: cabaret clubs shared common interests, facing, in the process common musical goals and enemies, yet such commonalities were by no means universal. Rather, the profile of each comedian presented by Hamp provides us with many questions concerning the venues, agents, performers, the role/s of MCs or concert secretaries etc. from which each comedian emerged. Cabaret in the north of England was most certainly made up from a *bricolage* of overlapping alliances and was not one circumscribable by a singular essentialist definition or tradition. Via *The Comedians* (and like *The Blues and Gospel Train*) Hamp suggested to us that one might best speak of cabaret in the plural, use-value sense.

The Comedians spun off into other Hamp-produced specials: *It's Ken Goodwin* (ITV, tx. 27/12/1971), *It's Charlie Williams* (ITV, tx. 22/7/1972), and *It's Mike Reid* (ITV, tx. 9/8/1973). He then followed with a sequel: *The Wheeltappers and Shunters Social Club* (ITV, 1974-77) which perhaps like *The Blues and Gospel Train* of ten years previously was able to preserve the ambience and the spirit of the times – the *zeitgeist*. A northern working man's club was constructed and featuring Colin Crompton as the club chairman and Bernard Manning as compere, the series was, as one critic happily observed 'the most convivial phenomenon of an un-convivial period'. Developed by

those who made their livings booking and touring, music in such a cabaret setting had always been produced and distributed within a contemporary context, whether that context was local or national. The progress of cabaret clubs in the north of England was therefore measured and constructed though the work of agents, club-owners, concert secretaries and artists, who attempted to produce a commercial form of music that could reach and relate to a growing audience. Johnny Hamp was able to represent this image both realistically and ironically. Furthermore, as cabaret activity in the post-WWII era in the UK became increasingly layered with alliances around universally-shared interests and identities, he recognised that the cabaret circuit authentically identified the diversity of people's entertainment needs and experiences and was an authentic response to new and expanding ideas surrounding post WWII city life and suburbia.

Hamp was even able to book artists that were already touring the cabaret circuits in the UK and so was able to synchronically represent that circuit accurately via his programmes. Artists such as (e.g.) Gene Pitney, the Searchers and Eve Boswell appeared on 'The Wheeltappers' literally because they were playing the cabaret circuit at **that** very moment in time – an inherent presence was once again captured by the inventive Hamp. This ought to attract from historians' investigations surrounding convergence, contingency, social mobility, lifestyles, and class positions. Hamp's representations of cabaret and social clubs in the mid-1970s are distinctive signifiers for consumption and social conventions – how, he asks, could we have ignored this significant creative space for so long? Under Hamp's production, and with Granada's blessing, other popular variety show packages followed: *Paul Daniels' Blackpool Bonanza* (ITV, 1978), before the illusionist was snatched up by BBC TV; *Fully Licensed for Singing and Dancing* (ITV, 1980); *The Video Entertainers* (ITV, 1981-82); and *I Feel Fine* (ITV, 1986-87); there was also broadcast a notable and barely toned-down concert performance by Millie Jackson (ITV, tx. 30/5/1983), long savoured by many soul and disco fans. In 1987, Hamp left Granada and set up his own independent production company, John Hamp Enterprises, to produce programmes for Granada and the cable-satellite 'Superchannel'. He used this post-Granada semi-retirement to take up his love of oil painting, and, like his TV presentations, his works are in great demand.

Summary

That the BBC was able to eventually change its identity to a certain extent – from the stuffy institution it was in the mid-1950s to the more adventurous organisation it became in the late-1960s suggests that such vertically integrated representations of 'the Establishment' can be adaptable. But the BBC changed very slowly and only did so when the far more adventurous Granada TV company (and ITV) came to identify how regionality could be expressed via programme scheduling and that by doing so, how as a Company, they could get far closer to the audience than those at the 'Beeb' could have ever imagined. It was largely independent organisations that responded to new ideas because they were closer to the ground (and had advertising revenue at their disposal). While it could be argued that the BBC, at times, did reflect local and regional concerns, they did not always appear to instigate them in quite the same unswerving way. Producers such as Johnny Hamp were amongst an environment of young writers, artists and journalists who were questioning the role of the Establishment (even though many of them also ended-up being part of it).

It is quite obvious from any examination of partially hidden diachronic threads that the BBC were far less effective as instigators of a popular realization concerning the value of popular culture, and that competition appears to have done the Corporation good, certainly as far as popular music was concerned. By the time of BBC 2's *Disco2*, later superseded by *The Old Grey Whistle Test*, it was clear that the BBC was at least beginning to represent, if not fully understand, popular music genres. But the role of the BBC as a pro-active co-conspirator in the development of a popular music consciousness must always be questioned while their own histories still tend to efface or only reluctantly acknowledge the existence of mavericks such as the Bernstein Brothers and Johnny Hamp.

As for *The Blues and Gospel Train,* it must surely goes down as a seminal moment in British popular music history – not simply because it recognised how diachrony can be brought together in an expression of a significant self-reflexive synchronic moment, but also because only Granada TV (and not the BBC) could have created such an

offering. So, it is an ideal UK example of what Richard Peterson (1992) might describe as the activities of a creative, horizontally integrated business bringing pressure to bear on industrially and culturally vertically integrated monoliths. One can be creative **and** commercial at one and the same time – these expressions are not mutually exclusive.

It is little surprise, then, that my late father saw more value in the outpourings of a company that appeared to be the embodiment of the society that he actually recognised around him. As a working class Liverpudlian he not only revelled in the authenticities presented to him by Granada TV, but also the ambiences and atmospheres of Black American society and the social and cabaret clubs such as those somewhat ironically illustrated by the *Wheeltappers' and Shunter's Club.* He used to say to me "I'm not daft, you know!"

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